

BOOKS ABROAD

A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, by G. D. H. Cole. Vol. I. 1789-1848. London: Allen and Unwin. 6s.

[H. J. L. in the *Manchester Guardian*]

THIS is the first of two volumes in which Mr. Cole proposes to write the history of the British Labor movement in all its varied aspects, from its real origins in the Industrial Revolution down to the present time. The book will mainly interest those who are beginning the study of the subject rather than those who are already acquainted with its outlines. Like all that Mr. Cole writes, it has the great merits of clarity, a firm control of the material, and a definite and consistent point of view. It is not, of course, original; it is built upon the classic work of Mr. and Mrs. Webb, of Max Beer, and of Mr. and Mrs. Hammond. But its materials are freshly handled, and it reads throughout like the book of a writer fully equipped to write in terms of the sources themselves.

Mr. Cole has been so anxious to make his book a system of wide generalizations that it loses a good deal of the play of personality. His figures tend to become the sport of blind, economic forces, and to lose, in consequence, that sense of pungency which gives to history so much of its light and shade. He would doubtless reply that the economic forces have a cumulative effect far greater than personality can hope to achieve. That is, in the main, true. Yet it is important to remember that the men who make movements in their turn also fashion their substance. Not a little of the failure of Chartism was due to the fact that it never produced a single leader of real competence. Mr. Cole has a horror of the tactical skill of Francis Place, the Schnadhorst of his generation; yet the guess may be hazarded that one Place in a political campaign will take it further than fifty men like Orator Hunt or Vincent or even so noble a figure as William Lovett.

It is a pity that Mr. Cole did not devote a little more space to the examination of the political and economic doctrines of the time. His method of separating the Labor movement from other phases of the national life gives it a sense of separateness from the rest of the national life which it did not, in fact, possess. Few of its doctrinaires had a sharp-cut philosophy of their own; and it is significant that then, as now, their intellectual leaders mainly came from a class out-

side them. Mr. Cole, moreover, does not mention Bentham. It would not be difficult to show that not the least of his many great services to the cause of social reform was to devise criteria of social good which, in the hands of the philosophers of labor, were far more destructive of the existing order than the abstract metaphysics of natural right. And nothing shows more forcibly the power of his doctrine than the speeches of men like Brougham and Macaulay. So, too, Mr. Cole discusses some of Disraeli's notions, but has no place for Dickens. Yet it could be argued with justice that the latter did as much as anyone in his time to bring home to men the reasons why amelioration was essential.

Memories and Melodies, by Nellie Melba.
London: Thornton Butterworth. 2s.

[*The Nation and the Athenæum*]

IT would not be difficult to make Melba's life into a fairy story — how there was a poor goose-girl who took a kitchen shovel in her hands and struck open a gold mine in the cabbage patch, and great kings paid her homage, and she lived in silks and finery happily ever afterward. It is true that the facts are slightly less romantic — Melba's father was the son of a Scotch farmer, and came to Melbourne with a pound in his pocket and made a fortune. But it is also true that his daughter was so short of funds when she took lessons from Marchesi in Paris that she had only one dress, which she wore week in, week out, in spite of Marchesi's protests.

Then suddenly the mine was discovered — the bottomless gold mine in Melba's throat. In an incredibly short time she was appearing in Brussels, singing to an incredulous, silent, finally uproarious house, and waking next day to find herself, soberly and solidly, famous throughout Europe. Indeed, every door was open to a woman with that voice; every city in the world clamored to hear it. But the golden voice was lodged, as such voices often are, in a shrewd, businesslike body. She did not penetrate to strange places, nor sing strange songs. 'Home, Sweet Home' rang out almost incessantly in the palaces of kings and millionaires. But once at least the prosperous pilgrimage was interrupted, and she stooped over Sarah Bernhardt on her deathbed. The great actress whispered, 'Ah, Melba . . . my golden voice needs me no longer, for I am

dying!' And when Melba got out into the street her friend stared at her. Her face was daubed with the dying Bernhardt's rouge.

Melba's own make-up was always extremely efficient. She brought her father's business temperament on to the stage. No sacrifice of time or food was too great in the cause of her work, and she prided herself upon singing exactly what the composer wrote. Only once, apparently, did she fail, when she sang Brunhild in *Siegfried*. 'The music was too much for me. . . . I had a sensation almost of suffocation, of battling with some immense monster' — and she never sang Wagner again. But the crown was not without its thorns. She has been accused of having no roof to her mouth, of eating three raw eggs before each act of *La Bohème*, and finally half London believed that Melba had to give up singing because of her passion for eating mice. The real culprit was a magpie; for birds and beasts, scents and ices, have all been named after her; but even so, there are compensations.

Plays: Sixth Series, by John Galsworthy. London: Duckworth. 7s.

[*Times Literary Supplement*]

THERE are three plays in Mr. Galsworthy's new book — *The Forest*; *Old English*; and *The Show*; and the only one of the three that is artistically just is the play in writing which Mr. Galsworthy did not care twopence about any right or wrong except that of dramatic art. In *The Forest* he set out, perhaps from his story-teller's delight in those thrilling adventures, those violent displays of raw character in the South African wilds. He told them well. But he allowed another consideration to cut across his delight in the good yarn; and that was his dislike, which all share, of the soft-bodied, hard-hearted creatures that sit in armchairs in offices, preying upon brave men to feed their lust of money or of power; his dislike, also, of cranks and fanatics who allow themselves to be humbugged by their own dreams. There was no reason why the two themes should not have been welded together. The reason why they are not welded together, and why the play is not one thing but two things, feebly joined, is Mr. Galsworthy's failure to bring his moral feeling under subjection to his artistic rectitude. When he ought to have thought of nothing but the right and wrong of dramatic art, he was thinking partly of another sort of right and wrong. In *The Show* he thought almost wholly of the wrong of two instruments of social life that every intelligent

person knows to be inevitably clumsy — the Law and the Press.

His story-teller's cap lay in a draw while he brooded over the clumsiness and the inevitable pain, and he patched up a one-sided tale that must rely for drama largely upon the old tricks of surprise and coincidence; a made-up thing which, just because it is dramatically lifeless, sets the reader or hearer eagerly picking holes in the argument and determined to see only the good in two social powers that he instinctively mistrusts. But the cap was firmly on when Mr. Galsworthy wrote *Old English*. And this, we believe, is the play which, of all three, has been most severely criticized by sticklers for the dramatic conventions. It is a short story spun out, a one-act play stretched into three acts, and so forth. It may be so, but it does not matter. When he wrote it, the author was thinking of no kind of right and wrong except the artistic. 'The grand old fightin' gentleman! The great old sinner he was!' *Old English* was a sinner, no doubt; but we are not concerned with morals. The point of the pretty housemaid's lament lies in the other words: grand, fighting, gentleman, great. To read or to see this play, *Old English*, is to 'experience,' in Clutton-Brock's phrase, a work of art; something real and alive that was not before and now is. To read or to see *The Show*, and all of *The Forest* except some parts of the adventure scenes, is to experience nothing.

I Heard a Sailor, by Wilfrid Gibson. London and New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.00.

[*Adelphi*]

MR. GIBSON'S talent is essentially dramatic; and his concern is the human tragedy. His style is very simple, yet surprises by its flexibility. He is never 'transcendental.' The poems 'Others' are the best he has written. He has adopted the milieu, and something of the manner, of Mr. Hardy with success. He deals in rustic, primitive passions; and from their eternal sameness extracts again and again the 'element of surprise.' 'Beauty for Ashes' is almost as good, but slightly more vague, less inevitable. Scarcely a page of this book has not a revealing flash of beauty.

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BOOKS MENTIONED

BONN, MORITZ J. *The Crisis of European Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925. \$1.25.

OUR OWN BOOKSHELF

The Romantic '90's, by Richard Le Gallienne. Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1925. \$2.50.

THE trouble with the nineties is that they have not been dead and buried long enough to acquire the savor of antiquity. In his closing paragraph Mr. Le Gallienne says that they 'emphasized the modern determination to escape from the deadening thralldom of materialism and outworn conventions, and to live life significantly — keenly and beautifully, personally and, if need be, daringly.' Yet even those of us who find this attitude *vieux jeu* and tiresome will be entertained by these thoroughly charming reminiscences. The author tells us about Swinburne almost as well as Max Beerbohm did in his perfect essay, 'No. 2, The Pines.' He has a good deal to say about Oscar Wilde, and lesser celebrities get their share. Mr. Le Gallienne may be inclined to go off at half cock over the genius of Mrs. Meynell and George Meredith, but it is this very enthusiasm that gives the book personality and makes it thoroughly readable from cover to cover.

Vainglory, by Ronald Firbank. New York: Brentano's, 1925. \$2.00.

MR. FIRBANK is one of those horrid people who have had such an unfortunate influence on Carl Van Vechten since he forsook Cedar Rapids and even the Chicago stockyards to lead the *Higher Life* in New York. *Vainglory* succeeds in doing what Mr. Van Vechten has so persistently failed to achieve. It is futile, delightful, witty, and bizarre. It has flavor and, though artificial to the last degree, is quite as realistic in its own way as anything by Anderson or Dreiser. To be sure, it does not deal with the complexes of sensitive yokels; it tries to mirror the activities of a silly group of seedy aristocrats — a much more subtle and difficult job. Our chief criticism of Mr. Firbank is that in his recent rewriting of this work he has still left his characters completely indistinguishable from each other, although each one is brilliantly characterized when first introduced to the reader. Also it is a little difficult to tell just what is going on. However, as a character in another book by the same author says, 'Life 's like that.'

Carlyle on Cromwell and Others, by D. A. Wilson. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1925. \$5.00.

THIS is the third volume of the new *Life* of Carlyle. It covers the period from 1837 to 1848, during part of which time Carlyle's work on Oliver Cromwell was written, and, quite apart from the ample treatment which the central figure receives, much light is shed on the great literary and social notables of the time. The very fullness of Mr. Wilson's treatment necessitates a somewhat disjointed method of writing; at the same time it means that little of importance has been passed by. The volume contains five excellent portraits.

South Africa, by W. H. Dawson. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1925. \$5.50.

THIS is neither travel-book nor textbook, but a compendium of information about South Africa, gained from recent first-hand experience. Here is all that the most particular prospective settler might wish to know about the country, its possibilities and problems. The question of the color bar is faced with no attempt at evasion, and no aspect of the problem is left without a real effort to propose a constructive solution. The style, even when aided by many excellent illustrations, cannot be called attractive, but any reader who wants to understand South African problems will not regret reading this volume.

The Road, by Hilaire Belloc. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925. \$3.00.

WITH attractive erudition, Belloc traces the five great epochs in the development of the road — delightful even when historic and economic learning is in the forefront of his discussion. There is a fascination even to the most untutored about a Roman road, but when the why and wherefore of it and its neighbors are clearly revealed the itch for exploration becomes irresistible. Now that we stand at the beginning of a sixth epoch, Belloc's ideas on the future of the road repay attention. The charming drawings, the maps, and the admirable printing, make this a most attractive little book.