

The Bolshevik Coup

Ten Days That Shook the World. By John Reed. New York: Boni and Liveright.

MR. REED'S new book is a detailed and illuminating chronicle of events immediately preceding and following the Bolshevik coup in November, 1917. The author was in Petrograd at that time, and his observations are the more valuable because he was familiar with many leading actors of the great historical drama enacted in Russia. But even more important than the author's personal observations, which might conceivably be influenced by his enthusiastic and unconcealed admiration for the Bolsheviks, are the numerous proclamations, appeals, speeches, and newspaper articles both by Bolsheviks and their opponents, with which the book fairly abounds. These will give the thoughtful reader a better understanding of the state of mind of Russia in those hectic days than many volumes of profound or superficial analysis.

One is greatly impressed with the formidable opposition the Bolsheviks had to contend against. Not only the bourgeois classes but nearly all the socialist parties, the democratic organizations, the army committees, and the official labor bodies were opposed to them. Fought, resisted, boycotted, and hindered in every conceivable way, the Bolsheviks seized power, and have retained it for eighteen months in the face of the enmity of the entire world. It is obvious that neither the popular theory of their being German agents nor the oft-repeated charge of rule by tyranny "worse than the Czar's" offers a satisfactory explanation for their success.

By his choice of quotations and by his own remarks Mr. Reed leads the reader to believe that the so-called Bolshevik movement was a natural reaction of the Russian masses against their own weak and irresolute leaders, who were afraid to follow to its logical conclusion the great Russian Revolution which they themselves had helped to bring about. The Provisional Government restored capital punishment on the front when the armies, freed from the oppressive discipline of the lash and the bayonet, had refused to continue to shed their blood in a cause in which they did not believe. It ordered the imprisonment of peasant land committees when the latter attempted to carry out the programme of land distribution which Kerensky's own party had preached for many years. It insisted upon a coalition with parties which were frankly monarchist in their political beliefs and vigorously opposed to such measures as land distribution and workmen's control over industries. The consequence was that the people, war-weary, hungry, and cold, seized upon the Bolshevik solution, "All power to the Soviets!" as the only one capable of insuring their just demands for peace, land, and bread.

Mr. Reed's account of the capture of the Winter Palace, that last bulwark of the Provisional Government, an event which he witnessed, gives an interesting sidelight on the psychology of the Russian revolutionists. When the invaders showed a tendency to loot there were cries: "Comrades! Don't touch anything! Don't take anything! This is the property of the people!" Everybody was ordered out of the building.

"Two Red Guards, a soldier and an officer, stood with revolvers in their hands. Another soldier sat at a table behind them, with pen and paper. Shouts of 'All out! All out!' were heard far and near within, and the Army began to pour through the door, jostling, expostulating, arguing. As each man appeared he was seized by the self-appointed committee who went through his pockets and looked under his coat. Everything that was plainly not his property was taken away, the man at the table noted it on his paper, and it was carried into a little room. The most amazing assortment of objects were confiscated: statuettes, bottles of ink, bed-spreads worked with the Imperial monogram, candles, a small oil painting, desk blotters, gold-handled swords, cakes of soap, clothes of every description, blankets. . . . The culprits either sullenly surrendered or pleaded like children. All talking at once, the committee explained that stealing was not

worthy of the people's champions; often those who had been caught turned around and began to help go through the rest of the comrades."

Mr. Reed's personal sketches of leading Bolsheviks scarcely tend to confirm the widespread belief that they are barbarians bent on destruction for its own sake. We learn that Lunatcharski, the "violent" Commissioner of Education (as he is constantly referred to in one of the New York dailies), upon hearing of the bombardment of the Kremlin, broke into tears at the session of the Council of the People's Commissars and rushed from the room crying: "I can not stand it. I can not bear the monstrous destruction of beauty and tradition." He resigned, but withdrew his resignation several days later when he found that the tales of destruction of the artistic treasures of Russia were grossly exaggerated.

The Bolsheviks cannot even be denied the quality of statesmanship, which implies not only knowledge of immediate problems and their solution but also political foresight. In view of the latest development, the possible Allied recognition and support of the Siberian military dictator Kolchak against Soviet Russia, Trotsky's words uttered in November, 1917, seem prophetic: "If Europe continues to be ruled by the Imperialist bourgeoisie, Revolutionary Russia will inevitably be lost. There are only two alternatives: either the Russian Revolution will create a revolutionary movement in Europe or the European Powers will destroy the Russian Revolution."

Comedy

The Emblems of Fidelity. A Comedy in Letters. By James Lane Allen. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company.

The Pelicans. By E. M. Delafield. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
Mockery. A Tale of Deceptions. By Alexander MacFarlan. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company.

IF Mr. James Lane Allen has often seemed deficient in that brisker sense of the incongruous which we Americans identify as humor, he here shows himself by no means a stranger to Meredith's Comic Spirit. "The Emblems of Fidelity" is a lettered comedy as well as a comedy in the form of letters: a playful exercise in one of the lighter and politer fields of fiction. There is little in it to attract the reader who is impatient of the elder and more demure humor of a passing generation, and who is so responsive to "O. Henry" as to be bored by the Howells of "The Mouse-Trap" and "The Albany Depot." It is merely a smiling sort of international socio-literary fantasy. Beverly Sands, a young Kentucky-bred novelist, now a New Yorker, models his careful work on that of an elderly and famous English writer, Edward Blackthorne. He is immensely pleased to get a letter from Blackthorne commending one of his novels. The letter has, to be sure, "a string to it." Blackthorne is a collector of ferns, and asks his disciple to send him some of the rare Kentucky specimens that are somewhat vaguely alluded to in the novel. It happens that Sands has not been in Kentucky for many years, and has made up the forest scene out of his fancy. He knows nothing of ferns. However, this is a chance not to be lost, and he promptly commissions a firm of Kentucky florists to ship an assortment to the great man. The earlier letters between the two novelists are over-literary and patently egotistical. They become considerably simpler and more human when mischance and impatience have nipped their budding friendship. Their estrangement whimsically involves the estrangement of Sands and his betrothed, a "temperamental" young woman. Various amusing complications ensue. The pother between the literary pair is straightened out; but the love-tangle is cut, not solved. In the end we perceive that several lives have been apparently changed in their courses through this in itself idle business of the ferns. "The ironic ferns have had their way with us. But after all has it not been for the best? Have they not even in their irony been the emblems of fidelity?" There is a touch here, we perceive, of the rather obscure mysticism which has

played its part in all of Mr. Allen's later work. It is carried a little further in the closing sentence: "So as we follow the different pathways of our lives which appear to lead toward unfaithfulness to one another, may it not be true that to the Power which sets us all in motion and drives us whither it will all our lives are the Emblems of Fidelity?"

"The Pelicans" is satirical in a more overt way. We cannot feel, with the publisher, that this book represents an advance upon "The War-Workers," far less upon "Zella Sees Herself." One episode is memorable for its unsparing yet not unsympathetic picture of life in an English convent. There was a similar episode, or rather a similar scene, in "Zella Sees Herself," the reader may recall. Frances, being of quite the opposite type, a self-effacing and purely receptive spirit, finds happiness in the life from which Zella recoils. For the rest, the title of the book might well have been "The Egotists," for, with the exception of Frances and one other, every person in the book is primarily concerned with his or her own affairs and importance. One comes to feel that "E. M. Delafield" takes a somewhat monotonous delight in the feline and gallinaceous traits of her own sex. These long conversations between the middle-aged practical Bertha and her dear temperamental friend Nina unnecessarily and tiresomely "rub in" their tendency, quickly established at the outset, to carry on a double monologue of self-praise while darting tooth and claw at each other as frequently and sharply as the pretense of play permits. These are the self-confessed pelicans—those pelicans of myth who fed their young with blood from their own breasts—whose really dominant impulse is to avenge their own loss of youth by tyrannizing over the young who may be in their power. On the whole, the burden of the satire, which in "Zella Sees Herself" rested upon groping youth, is here shifted to the shoulders of obstructive age. The younger generation wins most of the innings, these days! But there is a very modern and Jacques-like school of satirists, or sardonists, who are not to be betrayed into giving a decision for any of the absurd ages of man. The author of "Mockery" is a new practitioner in this kind. His is a "tale of deceptions," deceptions of self and of one's fellows based upon that single-minded pursuit of the main chance, temporal or spiritual, which is variously interpreted, according to the mood and lights of the modern observer, as self-exploitation or self-expression. The main figure, "Mr. Deadly-Earliest Grant," is an eccentric youth of humble origin who is sure of nothing but his own importance. We follow him in his pretentious and unscrupulous stumblings in search of fortune, as religious charlatan, social sponge, and adventurer in the guise of a man of wealth seeking to marry a rich girl, though as far as in him lies he loves a poor one. His creator does not take the trouble to mitigate him in order to engage our sympathy. Whatever his fancies, his conduct is almost invariably determined by the sordid or self-indulgent motive. A bitter comedy is played out between this fellow and the girl he plans to marry for her money. The discovery that she has been playing the same game, fooled by his pretensions to wealth, and that she returns his loathing, gives him at least a momentary glimpse of his paltriness: "He had come through a door suddenly and had met unexpectedly with himself." Only it was on the whole a better version, since the girl had not been so feeble as to deceive herself. She dies, at the end of the strange final scene, a murderess and a suicide, leaving him a legacy of agonized self-realization, in which for the first time he is honest and a man. There is enough of him to love and to be loved, and one perceives a hesitating upward turn to the sardonic smile with which the final sentences of the narrative are spoken: "Somewhere at the foot of the cliffs that mangled counterpart of himself, that almost faithful counterpart whom he had thought of as 'Miss Ward,' was lying at the mercy of the sea. He murmured half to himself: 'My mother was a woman of the people. My father was a wicked tailor. And I—but for the grace of God am there.' . . . That also was true, but Ursula did not understand. To her he had been always perfect. She pressed his hand—reassuringly."

Books in Brief

THE essay as Goldsmith and Lamb knew it—friendly, discursive, accomplished—is well exemplified in John Butler Yeats's "Essays Irish and American" (Macmillan). Robert Louis Stevenson, in spite of his playing the sedulous ape, did not belong to the age of the essay in the way that the writer of this volume belongs to it. John Butler Yeats writes as the Citizen of the World wrote. But he is a Citizen of the World who has taken Blake and Walt Whitman for his scriptures. There are three topics upon which he becomes eloquent—conversation, leisure, and human sympathy. In each of the essays one or two or all three of these topics are brought in. The discussion on the painter Watts and his method brings out this idea: "It seems to me that the genius of portrait-painting is largely a genius for friendship; at any rate I am quite sure that the best portraits will be painted where the relation of the sitter and the painter is one of friendship . . . the technique of portrait-painting is mainly a technique of interpretation." And in his recollections of Samuel Butler he says: "I sometimes think I have lost all my opportunities, the chance of knowing Butler well was one of these. Slowly I have come to feel that affection for human nature which is at the root of all poetry and art, whether the poet be a pessimist or an optimist. Had I stayed much with Butler I should have learnt my lesson almost at once." The fine essay on J. M. Synge glorifies conversation and leisure. "When I used to listen to Synge's conversation, so rare and sudden, as now when I read or listen to what he has written, I can say to myself, 'Here among these peasants is the one spot in the British Islands, the one spot among English-speaking people, where Shakespeare would have found himself a happy guest.'" And again: "Synge's plays, his prefaces to his plays, and his book on the Aran Islands, like his conversation, describe a little community rich in natural poetry, in fancy, in wild humour, and in a wild philosophy; as wild flowers among rocks these qualities spring out of their lives of incessant danger and incessant leisure." Mr. Yeats is modern in his ideas but not advanced in his views. His delightful essays, "Back to the Home" and "The Modern Woman," should leave radicals gasping. But his tone is far from being Victorian when he speaks of art. "If morality frames for our guidance rules of conduct which, if we do not obey, we are to be punished—if it bids us shun temptation and remove temptation from our path and from the paths of all the world—Art, on the contrary, seems to say, with all its strength and with all its voices: 'Seek temptation; run to meet it; we are here to be tempted.'" The leisure that Mr. Yeats praises, the leisure of a conversational and letter-writing age, is in these essays: these thoughts and the way they are stated suggest long reflection. He can make a statement that goes round the subject as the hand goes round the thing it holds. Thus, having told us of the circumstances that have gone to make the English egoists, he shows us the fine thing that has come out of this egoism. Characteristically, he finds the sublimation of the English egoism in good talk. "Cultivated Englishmen talking together are like men sitting in the woods through a long summer's night and listening during the intervals of silence to the noise made by a near-by stream or of a wind among the branches, or to the singing of a nightingale. So always should mortals talk: clamorous and confident argument are the resource of the intellectual half-breed." Mr. Yeats is made a little sorrowful by the appearance of the modern woman, with her "frantic, brand-new egoism," and by the threatened loss of "the world's two most picturesque figures—the master of the house and its mistress." Where, he asks, as Goldsmith might ask if Goldsmith should revisit us and had learned the language of the romantics, where is the three-fold charm of mystery, subtlety, and concealment, under which womanhood was wont to veil its powers? And while so many bow down before this conquering modern woman, where are the poets? Perhaps the women will tell us. Meanwhile, an essayist is grieved.