

Books

Hot Lovers and Hot Haters

Washington and the Riddle of Peace. By H. G. Wells. The Macmillan Company. \$3.50.

THE New York *World* undoubtedly made a clever stroke in journalism when it engaged Mr. Wells to report the Washington Conference. Perhaps no modern writer is able to reach such a large and miscellaneous public. He arrests the attention of the Philistine, entertains the Liberal, and by sheer irritation of the ear forces the Radical to listen. It is probably true, as Mr. G. B. Shaw remarked, that anyone with a little knowledge of modern imperialism and diplomacy could have reported the Conference as well from London as from Washington, but then all people are not as happy in their own homes as Mr. Shaw is in his. Moreover Mr. Wells is a good traveler and he combines a high missionary tension with a zeal for impressive and successful literary enterprises.

As we all expected, Mr. Wells preached a good deal from day to day, and much of his preaching is sound and wholesome. Like all humane men and women, he is pained beyond measure at the waste, folly, and misery of modern wars. He frankly says that he is not so much disturbed by the thought of the death and destruction wrought by war as by the waste and stupidity of it—the potential powers for great and noble work blasted by it. He refuses to be frightened by Mr. Irwin and his Next War. He is enamored of the good life, the splendid life, the life in which all fine creative energies are used for high ends. Hence he is disgusted with war just as one is disgusted with any loathesome scene.

In the course of his discursive reflections on many things, Mr. Wells is occasionally very emphatic. He thinks it a bit absurd for a grand international conference to attempt to settle the world's estate without hearing from the Germans and the Russians. He points out that there are quite a few of them in the world and that the latter at least really have vital interests in the Far East. He gently suggests that Russian contributions to science, literature, and music will compare favorably with those of the United States. Mr. Wells is equally emphatic in dwelling upon the economics of the peace business—assuming that it is more than a gesture. "If there is to be a real end to war and disarmament there has to be release of China to free Chinese control and that means a self-denying ordinance from all the great Powers." But strange to say he adds that this would be "easy" for the United States. Mr. Wells is also in a serious mood when he discourses on propaganda, a modern game more deadly than gas and submarine warfare. With a more than serious air he assures us that war between the United States and Great Britain is impossible. "The British people have been sleeping happily upon the belief that war with America is impossible. And for them it is impossible." This would be very reassuring, if peoples as such had any part in creating imperial friction points, playing the diplomatic game, and launching campaigns for open doors, equal rights, commercial freedom, and all the rest of it. In fact, Mr. Wells is very innocent in many things. For instance, he is deficient in historical knowledge, English as well as French.

On this account he is unduly harsh in dealing with the French. He has the astounding courage to claim that it was "for France" that "the British Empire lost a million dead." We thought at our last reckoning that it was "for Belgium." Mr. Wells even goes on to say that after England, Russia, Italy, and America came to the rescue of France. This is probably as correct as the statement of Colonel Gautier that France lost 1,500,000 men and her soil was ravaged "to assure British supremacy on the sea." At all events Mr. Wells speaks of M. Briand's discourse "that insultingly ignored Great Britain." He complains that none of the spirit of Anatole France came to the Washington Conference, "but only an impenitent apologist for three years

of sin against the peace of the world, an apologist for national aggression posturing as fear and reckless greed disguised as discretion."

He bids us look with sorrow and horror on the wicked France that disturbed the happy family just when England and the United States, forgetting problems of national defense and trade, sat down to make love before the world. Now, is this quite fair? Great Britain, like all other nations, must look to defense and trade. She gave up absolutely nothing at the Peace Conference. She knew that by 1926 at least the United States would surpass her on the sea and she accepted with a magnanimous gesture equality with America. The United States, having fearful warnings of impending troubles in the East, sought to dissolve the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and received more than a *quid pro quo* for the surrender of her potential sea-power supremacy. All of which was very good.

Now as to France. Mr. Wells is indignant that France should want submarines to defend her coasts against England. That was the criminal insult that M. Briand committed in Washington. If Mr. Wells will read Mahan on the sea power and review again the history of two hundred years of warfare between England and France for supremacy in Asia, Africa, and the New World, he will recover his balance. Mr. Wells is not a professed student of history, but he is a man of some years and possesses a memory. Surely it runs back as far as 1898. That year found the present reviewer settled down in England and taking his first general course in the constant reading of English newspapers. That was the year of the Fashoda affair. France and England were on the verge of war over a clash in Africa. At the very beginning of the argument, England's Mediterranean squadron took up its position between Malta and Gibraltar, ready to blockade and bombard Toulon and to protect the landing at Bizerta of troops that were all ready for action. At the same time her Channel squadron steamed down to take up its position before Gibraltar to prevent the union of the French squadrons of the North and South. The English newspapers of the right were filled with abuse of the "insolent" French with their "insolent" pretensions in Africa. The Northcliffe (Harmsworth) press could hardly find words harsh enough for the occasion. In 1899 a Harmsworth editor wrote: "The French have succeeded in persuading John Bull that they are his inveterate enemies. England has long hesitated between France and Germany, but she has always respected German character while she has come to have contempt for France. A cordial understanding cannot exist between England and her nearest neighbor. We have had enough of France; she has neither courage nor political sense." But the German specter was on the horizon and the Fashoda affair was settled diplomatically.

If Mr. Wells will read ten selected books by informed French writers on the history of Anglo-French imperial wars from the age of Louis XIV to the age of Bonaparte, on the history of Anglo-French diplomacy for five hundred years, on the rivalry of the two countries in the economic sphere—if he will honestly try to put himself in the position of any Frenchman as solicitous for national defense and national economic strength as he is, himself, he will discover why France wants "safeguards" and pursues "vigorous foreign policies." Let him glance through a very bitter book by Colonel Gautier, just from the press ("*L'Angleterre et Nous*"), and he will see why France does not join without reservations in his specially prepared love feast.

Now this is not defense of France. Neither is it any criticism of England. Those persons who set out to love one country and those who set out to hate another are equally unfitted for correct and informed thinking in matters international. Moreover, they are usually found shifting their affections with the currents of affairs. They are hot lovers one day and hot haters the next, and in deadly peril of becoming a nuisance all the time. It is the man who gets religion the hardest who backslides the hardest. Especially is this loving and hating

business dangerous to the intelligent pursuit of our own national interests.

It is therefore unfortunate that Mr. Wells should have marred his many pages of wisdom and suggestive comment by rather savage attacks upon the motives of France. Nobody knows when the next war for liberty and democracy will have to be fought, and the fewer angry things we say about any one of our neighbors the better for all, and for that great cause—international cooperation. It is one thing to assail M. Poincaré; it is another thing to indict a nation.

CHARLES A. BEARD

Platonism to the Rescue

The Religion of Plato. By Paul Elmer More. Princeton University Press. \$2.50.

IT becomes even more evident in this second volume of his projected series of four studies on "The Greek Tradition" that Mr. More regards Platonism as the characteristic expression of the Hellenic spirit and advocates the Christian tradition based upon it as the gospel by which alone the world today may be saved from gross materialism. Plato's religion is treated with ardor and with that fulness of insight which only the combination of sympathy with intellectual acumen and painstaking scholarship can give. The essence of Plato's religion, as Mr. More views it, is found in the effort to transcend the dualism of man's nature by uniting him with the divine, and to view the world and its processes "sub specie aeternitatis."

There is a vast pathos in this spectacle of the human being, cast up by the flotsam and jetsam of the cosmic urge, setting about the task of making friends with the heedless universe, seeking for and asserting a fundamental kinship between it and him, however often his overtures may be met by an unrecognizing stare or a flat denial. Platonism probably is the most heroic and most persistent of all efforts at cosmic fellowship, as is evidenced by the survival of the Platonic tradition through all of the spiritual cataclysms of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and its continuance as a living force up to the present time. We may not agree with Mr. More in regarding the tradition as the essential faith which thus far has saved and alone will save this grossly flippant and materialistic age, but we cannot question the vital relation between the Platonic and the medieval Christian tradition as interpreted by him. The mythological accessories of the two differ and vary from age to age. But both have as their primary root the passion for the eternal which, they hold, lies beyond this changing world and alone can give it significance. Both distrust the natural and feel that the forces by which it must be controlled are essentially alien and are derived from a changeless ideal world.

In its early historic expressions this point of view has dignity. One cannot withhold admiration from the magnificent arrogance of the gesture with which a Plato or a Parmenides or a St. Augustine raises his hand before the irresistible onward movement of life and says: "Here shall thy proud waves be stayed." But the untimely effort of men like Mr. More to make such a paralyzing dualism effective in the modern world reminds one of nothing so much as of the priests who in volcanic eruptions set sacred images from the churches before oncoming floods of lava to stay their flow.

Platonism was inevitable in its own generation. If neither Plato nor Socrates had lived, an idealistic philosophy of essentially the same type would have been born, though, perhaps, not in so eloquent or beautiful an embodiment. For the need of the human spirit which begot Platonism was as deep as that which begets ancestor worship or imitative magic among primitive peoples. Ancient idealism was a protective armor, a shelter built to defend men from the storms and vicissitudes of rapidly changing conditions of life. Mr. More invites the adventurous youth of our scientific age to take refuge with him in the venerable and majestic ruins of this philosophic

temple, to temper their passionate ardors and eager impulses by its principles of control, and to seek in this retreat a peace and a beauty that will not die.

This invitation has in it an appeal that, like the lure of the lotus and the siren, seems well-nigh irresistible to some who have wandered long and homeless in strange lands. But for the modern world it is the lure of death, not of life, of fear, not of courage, as is evidenced by the spiritual anemia which almost invariably appears in Plato's most devoted disciples, though not in him.

It was richly worth while to separate from the body of Plato's work the portions which deal definitely with the religious aspect of his thought, and to present them in felicitous translation—more than one-fourth of Mr. More's work is devoted to direct quotations from Plato—supplemented by illuminating comment on the meaning of the text. It will also be worth while to trace, in the competent way foreshadowed in the present volume, the later history of the Platonic tradition, with its varied and intricate relations to Christian thought.

But as a piece of historic interpretation of Plato himself Mr. More's entire method and procedure seem to the reviewer so faulty as to make detailed discussion of specific points of agreement or disagreement valueless. For the accurate scholarship and wealth of learning of the author are made ineffective by the constant intrusion of his propagandist purpose to strengthen the Platonic element in the Christian tradition, losing which "so far as I can see, we are in peril of sinking back into barbarism." Moreover, to identify "The Greek Tradition" with Platonism is particularly unfortunate when the emphasis is placed upon the religious and metaphysical aspects of Plato's thought rather than upon his vastly more valuable political, ethical, and educational ideas. It is true that accidents of history led to the assimilation of Plato's metaphysics by Christianity, and the consequent over-emphasis of it in subsequent thought, but Hellenism has profoundly influenced the modern world through other and more significant channels. Finally, no serious attempt is made by Mr. More to define or interpret Plato's relation to his own day. He is treated as if he had sprung, like Athena, full grown from the head of Zeus, and had been set down in an alien world to save it from destruction, by enunciating a message which, in essentially unchanged form, should be "valid for all time."

CLARA M. SMERTENKO

Tongues of Men

Language. An Introduction to the Study of Speech. By Edward Sapir. Harcourt, Brace and Company. \$2.

THIS book of Mr. Sapir's distinguishes itself from other general treatments of the problems of linguistics by its power to stimulate thought about the subject. There is nothing trite or matter-of-fact between its covers. The discussions spring from an unusually wide acquaintance with language in all its varieties and a scholarly understanding of the principles of psychology underlying expression. But more than by its learning the book impresses us by its quick insight and acute analysis. A capital illustration is the treatment of the problem of classifying languages. Recognizing, as other students have done, the unsatisfactoriness of distinguishing languages as isolating, agglutinative, inflectional, and incorporating, Mr. Sapir suggests and ingeniously works out a scheme which takes into account the particular character with reference to which classification is desired. The traditional terms, for example, do not provide a consistent criterion for distinguishing between languages on the basis of their typical method of expressing root ideas, which is done in Chinese without the admixture of any idea of the relation of the word to other words in the sentence, while in most languages the root idea is combined in varying degrees of closeness with other elements having grammatical import. Making this his fundamental test, Mr. Sapir then