

Books

Changing England

England After War. By Charles F. G. Masterman. Harcourt, Brace & Company. \$2.

IT is not necessary to possess the detachment of the foreign observer to become aware of the changes that are passing over English life. In certain respects, indeed, the native has the best opportunity of estimating them. While some of these changes are written so large on the very face of the country that the tourist of a day can discern them, there are others, and those not the least significant, that scarcely reveal themselves except to an Englishman whose intimate and detailed knowledge of national affairs affords him precise data for comparisons. Mr. Masterman is exceptionally well qualified for the role of a social and political cicerone. He has supplemented his early experiences as a social worker—there was a period of nine years when he lived in a verminous block dwelling in a London slum—by a distinguished political career as a member of Parliament and a minister of the Crown. His work, too, as a journalist, has brought him in close touch with the life of the people at many points. He has a background, moreover, of scientific, literary, and historical studies which enables him to connect events with their true causes and saves him from being misled by the superficial aspects of passing phenomena.

Mr. Masterman's credentials are enhanced by the reminder that he realized how things were tending long before the catastrophe broke. His book on "The Condition of England," published fourteen years ago, was pronounced by the critics to be too pessimistic. In one of its chapters, *The Illusion of Security*, he expressed his own amazement at the familiar optimism which then dominated the country. The justification his warnings have since received entitles him to be listened to with the more attention today when he attempts to sum up and analyze the differences the war has made.

In the first place, there is the passing of feudalism. Mr. Masterman follows up an admirable description of the merits and failings of the English aristocracy by a graphic account of what he calls "the greatest change which has ever occurred in the history of the land of England since the days of the Norman Conquest, with the possible exception of the gigantic robberies of the Reformation." This is being effected not by confiscation but by enormous taxation. In his opinion, one of the permanent results of this "squeeze" will be the collapse of British agriculture. Rural England is destined to become, in Kingsley's famous words, "the yard where the gentlemen play." Mr. Masterman does not, however, countersign Bernard Shaw's prophecy of an England of lodginghouse-keepers and trained guides pointing out to visiting crowds the places where Shakespeare lived or Gladstone died.

The plight of the middle class is the subject of a sympathetic but caustic discussion. Mr. Masterman satirically commends this class for its "political generosity." Alike in dark fortune and in bright it has always voted Tory, though no Tory government has ever given it any help or even seemed to be aware of its existence. Mr. Masterman directs some pointed shafts against the middle-class hostility to labor, which is largely the product of a grotesque misconception of what labor really is. Possibly his forecast is too gloomy when he predicts that suburbia will never break its allegiance to the powers above in order to unite with the powers below. There are surely many signs that the pressure of hard times is helping the professional classes to realize, albeit slowly, that their true economic interests link them with the workingman rather than with the employer. Their traditional snobbishness may yet give way when they discover that cooperation with labor offers the sole means of escape from the fate of being crushed beneath the burden of high prices and increased taxation. The recent by-elections testify that many blind eyes are being opened.

While himself friendly to labor, Mr. Masterman has no illusions about it. He recognizes that economic theories count for little in the working-class mind. The masses of the people do not wish to revolt against "the tyranny of the capitalistic system." They know nothing and care nothing about guild or any other socialism. If they vote for labor candidates it is not from any desire for the nationalization of anything but because they see that the rich have certain of the desirable things of life and they have not got them. They want to get them now even more than they did before the war, because they believe, and rightly, that they did as much to win the war as the rich themselves. Mr. Masterman justly attributes much working-class discontent to the "capitalistic" press, which scatters by the million pictures and articles conveying the impression that the life of the upper classes is nothing but a round of luxury and self-indulgence. For the working population of the great cities, as a whole, he has an intense admiration. He eulogizes their generosity, their good humor, their patience, their comradeship, and sums it all up in the verdict, "What great gentlemen they are!"

Mr. Masterman gives us a penetrating and discriminating analysis of English patriotism. The Englishman hates the state, which represents to him every type of meddling and fussy interference with his own activities. Nor has he the Frenchman's devotion to the soil of his native country. No nationality emigrates voluntarily with so little compunction. Mr. Masterman reaches the conclusion that the Englishman's patriotism is of race and not of soil. He suggests, indeed, the paradox that the only sense of the sacredness of the "land" revealed in the war by the English people was their sense of the sacredness of the sea. "The sea," he says, "is, in reality, the home of the people of this little island." And the unity of the empire is being preserved today, to quote another paradox of a great English poet, by the "unplumbed, salt, estranging sea."

There are further illuminating chapters on such varied topics as the profiteer, the decline of the birth-rate, the effect of scientific invention, the popular indifference to the churches, and the expression of contemporary feeling by such writers as Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, and Shaw. In this volume Mr. Masterman shows himself the master of a more vivid style than that of his earliest books. He writes with a sustained eloquence that does not become tedious, as eloquent writing so often does. And his pages are lit up everywhere with literary and historical parallels and allusions that add greatly to their interest and value.

HERBERT W. HORWILL

Devil's Disciple

Our Mr. Wrenn. The Trail of the Hawk. The Job. By Sinclair Lewis. Harcourt, Brace and Company. \$2 each.
Blackguard. By Maxwell Bodenheim. Covoci-McGee. \$2.

IT was a consuming, cleansing anger which gave force to the now famous works of Sinclair Lewis, and hence these earlier, better tempered novels raise a question: What was it that brought him suddenly to the end of his patience? The Main Street of Gopher Prairie and the Main Street of the metropolis had been long familiar to him. Mr. Wrenn and the heroine of "The Job" move in a world of Babbitts; "The Hawk" sprang from a Gopher Prairie, and yet though there are many touches of the later manner, the first two of these books are optimistic and almost tolerant. Was the last straw laid on when, as a current story had it, one of his fellow-townsmen remarked genially, "Well, Sinclair, I hear you've gone into the printing business—printed two books already they say," or did the well-known market value of sweetness and light have something to do with early optimism? Neither of these explanations seems quite adequate and I suspect that the reason lies deeper.

Take the case of Mr. Wrenn. Mere clerk for a novelty firm though he was, he dreamed; he longed for travel in strange lands; when he saw the brick Gothic of the General Theological

Seminary at the end of a vista of elevated tracks he thrilled, and hence Mr. Lewis, himself a romantic, hugged him to his bosom. He fancied that he had caught there the soul of Main Street and that behind the dull wall of business routine romance was struggling to break through. But disillusion waited around the corner. The more Mr. Lewis saw of the Mr. Wrenns the more he became convinced that in actual life they preferred Morningside apartments to the best Gothic, and that far from rebelling they were quite content with their unregenerate state. And so, though up to that point Mr. Lewis had been half a good American himself, he revolted. Like the good preacher that he is, he abandoned the genial manner suitable in addressing the saved and launched into that denunciation which made, or should have made, the wicked tremble in their pews. The transformation of manner, half accomplished in "The Job," is complete in "Main Street" and "Babbitt." His was the fury of a patient man.

Irritated by the unremitting didacticism of the later books it would be easy for one to say that "Our Mr. Wrenn" with its genial humor, broad sympathy, and lively story interest is the best of the author's books, but it isn't. Its facile compromise with popular philosophy and the conventionality of its fictional form mark it unmistakably for what it is—prentice work. It was not until genuine anger caused him to do what a good writer always does, namely, break the conventional mold and create a form of his own, that Mr. Lewis could say clearly and forcibly what he had to say. Whether or not the form of his two successful books is aesthetically good or bad is not here the question. Beyond a doubt it is a triumph for the author in one way at least, for it is the form perfectly adapted for the expression of his ideas.

The critic of the ideas in current fiction must perforce spend much of his time in discussing merely two questions: What does the hero rebel against and how does he do it? Yet the variety possible between these limits is greater than might be thought. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Bodenheim, for example, have really very little in common, for "Blackguard" has distinction both in content and in manner. It does not attempt to compete in wealth of realistic detail with the daily growing pile of novels which describe the revolt, now mild and now ferocious, of disgruntled youth. It attempts rather to distil the essence of the psychology of the situation, to match in more or less abstract terms the will to poetry against the will to material success, Apollo and Dionysus against the great god of Getting On. And whereas Lewis's rough-and-ready writing sometimes reflects rather too accurately the vulgarity of his scene, Mr. Bodenheim's style is fastidious sometimes to the point of preciousness. He substitutes for the downrightness of Lewis's preaching the supercilious aloofness of a cynic and revels in a fantastic indirectness of phrase which is nearly always intriguing though now and then boresome. Being a poet and hence accustomed to pack every line with meaning, he has carefully wrought and occasionally overwrought every sentence. Phrases rich in significance like the following, "work and sleep, sleep and work—twin brothers of man's inadequacy," abound, and on the whole the successes far outnumber the failures. When, to take two more examples, his parents came to the end of their patience with the hero "they felt that their period of uneasy indulgence had ended, and words trooped from them in righteously redundant regiments," and when the frustrated but self-righteous mother came into conflict with her son's ambition she is described as "a woman whose emotions, garrulously bitter because of the material strait-jackets in which they had writhed for years, were ever determined to exalt their bondage, if only to win relief from pain." Fantastic as such turns of expression are they have an accuracy, a completeness, and a finality which give them all of the elements of a perfect phrase—except perhaps the element of simplicity. There will be many who will quarrel with Mr. Bodenheim on account of the general drift of his ideas, but there can be no doubt that few writers

can give so sustained an exhibition of intellectual dexterity.

The poet-hero, Carl, begins consciously as a devil's disciple. Knowing that whatever the intangible thing he seeks is it has nothing to do with ordinary life either on its ugliest side of money-getting or on the comelier side of family life and affection, he puts fifteen dollars of his father's money in his pocket, calmly assumes for himself the epithet "blackguard," and goes his way. Since society is organized for the benefit of people whose whole aim in life is different from his, and since these people make the rules, he recognizes no obligation to their standards. Transvaluating values, he puts his ego before everything else; good and evil seem to him only "unfair scarecrows that slipped from the huge indifference of his surroundings and demanded an attention which they were unwilling to give in return." For a time Carl works as a laborer and resists the allurements of the flesh, "this wearisome game of advancing and retreating flesh, always trying to lend importance to an essential monotone." Then he publishes poems, engages in several love affairs, and ends in temporary union with a prostitute—a conclusion which may be mystical but which I prefer to take only as a final ironical gesture of futility. It is a mad book and of course it "gets nowhere," but it is full of genuine passion in its frank confronting of the ideals of order and of tumult. The rebel ends in the gutter; his parents he finds "sitting and standing in two of the few postures that life still absentmindedly allowed them—bending over newspaper and frying-pan."

All rebellion is a sort of romanticism and hence Mr. Lewis and Mr. Bodenheim are both romantic, but a great difference lies between the depth of their discontents. There is in the writings of the former nothing but common sense, for his ideal of the good society is a tangible, easily imagined one. He belongs with the sociologists and the propounders of an educational program, whereas Mr. Bodenheim belongs with the poets whose discontent goes deeper than a mere discontent with the present state of culture. Like all absolute idealists he beats against the limitations of the human animal itself, seeking for that absolute beauty and absolute freedom of which any attainable beauty or attainable freedom seems only an unsubstantial shadow. Mr. Lewis's ideal is of a perfectly possible and attainable America, but it has the defect of all possible and attainable things. Mr. Bodenheim's aspirations are of the sort necessarily doomed to all failures except the failure of aspiration and desire. The one seeks a new social order, the other seeks only the chaos within and the dancing star.

J. W. KRUTCH

Stamboul

Constantinople Today: or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople, a Study in Oriental Social Life. Under the direction of Clarence Richard Johnson. The Macmillan Company. \$5.

THIS book describes the results of the first effort ever made to carry out a sociological survey in the city of Constantinople. It consists of eleven chapters, each written by a different author and each giving the data gained in a specialized survey by that author. The work was done during the armistice, beginning October, 1920, and officially closing May 25, 1921.

The first chapter offers a fine and accurate historical sketch of the city, prepared by Fred F. Goodsell, who was generously assisted by Gertrude E. Knox from the department of history at Constantinople Woman's College. The historical setting thus prepared for the succeeding chapters furnishes in itself a valuable result of scholarship and research. Dr. Wm. W. Peet follows with an exhaustive picture of government details drawn from his own rich experience.

Among the remaining chapters is that written by Major C. Clafflin Davis, who was sent here early in the armistice at the head of the American Red Cross activities. Major Davis well describes the efficient means used to straighten out the