

Books

Santayana's Philosophy

Scepticism and Animal Faith. By George Santayana. Charles Scribner and Sons. \$3.50.

THIS book is particularly recommended to those—and they are many—who persist in regarding Mr. Santayana as a litterateur rather than as a philosopher. If by metaphysics we mean a sustained and consistent inquiry into the ultimate nature of Being, then no more thoroughly metaphysical book has been written in this generation. Nor will this statement frighten off those who know from previous experience that it is impossible for Mr. Santayana to touch any subject, however abstruse, without transmuting it into poetry and music. In this, his latest volume, he attempts to clear up for himself and his readers those bases and presumptions of his thought which have lain half implied and half expressed in his "Life of Reason." The latter might be described as a comprehensive philosophy of life from the standpoint of the empirical and naturalistic observer. "Scepticism and Animal Faith" seeks to reveal the sources of the instinctive compulsions which make those very beliefs in nature and experience inescapable.

Mr. Santayana's inquiry centers around the question, "How far may skepticism be carried, and what is it impossible not to disbelieve?" He is not engaged in the facile foolery of proving that chairs and tables do not really exist, that the coffee we drink and the music we hear, the landscapes we love and the people we hate are illusions. He is seriously trying to find out what in honest human experience we can and must assume, what it is that logic compels us to question and that life forces us to believe.

A good part of the book, therefore, though perhaps the least original and interesting part, is spent in clearing away the ground, in pruning away gratuitous presumptions and vulnerable faiths. One may with all the logical sanction in the world, as Santayana shows, doubt self-consciousness, change, the very fact of existence itself. "For all an ultimate skepticism may show, . . . there may be no facts at all, and perhaps nothing has ever existed."

Upon the ruins created by a candid, and somewhat playful, logic, Santayana proceeds to erect a surer scaffolding of indubitable realms of Being. Descartes begins with the Ego. This twentieth-century skeptic, having seen the wreck of many young solipsisms, is too wary for that. He begins to rebuild his world with nothing less fragile than the purely logical character of essences or terms. These cannot be doubted, for no claim is made that they exist. One may doubt all the various furniture of experience, and call every item in it a deceit and an illusion. But those illusions have each of them a precise logical quality and character, and each of those phantoms and deceits is its own indefeasible self. "Each will appear in its own world and shining by its own light, however brief may be my glimpse of it; no date will be written upon it; no frame of full or empty time will shut it in; nothing in it will be addressed to me or suggestive of any spectator. It will seem in no world, an incident in no experience. The quality of it will have ceased to exist. It will be an Essence."

The only irrefragable element in Being, therefore, turns out to be this eternal infinitude of *reinlogisch* characters, like the letters of an alphabet that may never have been used to make words. It includes all that is known and thought and apprehended, and an infinitude that never has been and never will be. "It is the sum of mentionable objects, of terms about which and in which something might be said." This realm of logical characters is certainly not much to start with. It is certainly not the full-bodied nature which we commonly have to deal with and which we commonly have to believe. But this infinite and inalienable realm of essence, thin though it be, is alone immune to the shatterings of logic. For it is implied

in the very logic by which that shattering is performed, and in that shattering itself. If life requires for its continuance further belief, that is a matter of vital adventure, of human risk, of animal faith.

It is this career and complication of animal faith that Santayana traces. The bodiless being of Essence may involve no other existence nor any belief. But the intuition or beholding of essences does. "By the mere consideration of the way in which essence presents itself, we snatch from the jaws of skepticism one more belief, belief in discourse or in mind thinking." And granting the existence of mind, we are led sensibly and certainly to belief in experience, in substance, in nature, in other minds, and in the implied and eternal being of truth. And not least are we led to believe in the reality of spirit, that fine flame, generated by nature, expressive of it, and incarnate in it, the flame by the light of which nature is valued and understood.

There is nothing logically compulsive about any of these beliefs. We are welcome to doubt all the observable and malleable features of the world in which we go on living. They are simply instinctive presumptions, animal faiths. They may well be suspect in refinements of speculation, and condemned from the standpoint of a free and poetic spirit as trivial, accidental, and absurd. But this so solid world by which we live, and in the understanding of which we control our fortunes, is not solely a matter for refined dialectic or sportive poetry. It is a construction of an adventurous instinct and a risking reason. In the bright clarity of our logic we may doubt everything save the logical forms of the phantoms which we doubt. But in the very act of living we go further. We take long leaps in the interests of that animal psyche out of which doubt springs, and of which reason and spirit are the instruments and the fruit.

No one at all interested in current winds of doctrine can afford to miss this adroit and honest book. It comes to grips with the deeper issues over the surfaces of which contemporary thought has been glibly skipping. Santayana has provided an Introduction to Realms of Being that probes to the depths of reality without forsaking the light of common sense.

IRWIN EDMAN

Romantic Ireland

Castle Conquer. By Padraic Colum. Macmillan. \$2.

THOSE who have followed the work of Padraic Colum from its beginnings in "Wild Earth" have always looked forward to the novel which one felt he could and would write. That anticipation is not disappointed in "Castle Conquer." In spite of the years that have slipped by since he gave us that first book of poems, since "The Land," "The Fiddler's House," and "Thomas Muskerry" established him in an unassailable position in the Irish Theater, this book betrays nothing of the changed life, the varied activities that have since been his. "Castle Conquer" belongs to the period preceding his hegira, and the perfume of Irish earth clings about it as unmistakably as it breathed out of every page of his early plays and poems. This prose has all the simple charm, the fresh tang that made the poetry of "Wild Earth" irresistible.

The story centers about Francis Gillick, the returned student from the Irish College in Salamanca, who has given up his studies for the priesthood and come to settle down among his own people. As a "spoilt priest" he is too greatly handicapped in the immediate circle of his own friends and relatives, so he goes to another part of the country to work on the farm of Honor Paralon, whose daughters Oona and Brighid befriend him, until inevitably both girls are more deeply involved by their affections than mere friendship. It is to Brighid that Francis pledges himself, and their love is drawn by the author in scenes of a whispered and passionate intensity which contrast curiously with the mawkish sentimentality, on the one

hand, and the pathological realism, on the other, which are an essential feature of the average novel of today. In the relations of these two there is a tender shyness, charmingly rendered, which is as characteristic, in its way, as the brutalities of James Joyce, who, too, has described one phase of the Irish attitude in matters of sex. But Colum shows how this idyll, like so many other normal human impulses, is overshadowed in Ireland by the figure of Kathleen ni Houlihan, into whose mouth W. B. Yeats has put words that are not forgotten: "It is hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-checked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries . . . and for all that they will think they are well paid."

In such service Francis Gillick gradually finds himself enrolled and in his adventures we watch the beginning of the Land War in Ireland, and see how inevitably the land and the nation became identical in the eyes of many generations. The evolution of Gillick, the pressure of innumerable little circumstances which transform him into a "rebel" in the eyes of the British authorities, and finally, the accusation which lands him in jail—all these elements inseparable from the life of the period are skilfully woven into Mr. Colum's narrative. His great skill lies in the unostentatious way in which he develops this main theme, without ever insisting upon it. This is not just the story of a young Irishman's revolt, for the individual hero is merely the focusing-point of an era and a people. "Castle Conquer" is a true microcosm of Irish country life, the Ascendancy minority, harsh, always insecure and baffled, with its servants drawn from the people, and then the people themselves, with their own life and traditions, sustained by a definite hope and the will to survive. Padraic Colum knows the Irish countryside, its physical aspects at all seasons, the customs and beliefs of the peasantry, the striking characters who may be found by those who know how to seek them: Michael Philabeen, the weaver; Honor Paralon, young Maelshaughlinn, whose adventure at the fair is one of the most perfect incidents in the book, equaled only by the weaver's story of how he took to the roads with young Owen Paralon—vignettes complete in themselves and having the authentic ring of folk stories.

One lays down a book of this caliber with a regret for all the cheap sentimentalities and trivial humor which make up the usual popular novel of Irish life, against which one wishes to set a "Castle Conquer," or such a work as Seumas O'Kelly's "The Weaver's Grave." The manner of the telling is a delight in itself, a style full of poetry and tenderness and color, touched with laughter which does not depend upon verbal caricature, that great stock in trade of the manufacturers of "Irish" fiction for export. With his first novel Padraic Colum has enhanced the distinction of his already valuable contribution to Anglo-Irish literature, his work as poet and dramatist.

ERNEST BOYD

Modern Histories of German Literature

Die Deutsche Literatur Unserer Zeit. Von Kurt Martens. Munich: Rösl & Cie.

Deutsche Literaturgeschichte in Einer Stunde. Von Klabund. Leipzig: Dürr & Weber.

Das Grosse Bestiarium der Modernen Literatur. Von Franz Blei. Berlin: Ernst Rowohlt.

Das Bücher-Dekameron. Von Kasimir Edschmid. Berlin: Erich Reiss.

OF the making of German histories of German literature there is no end. The Germans themselves are conscious of their weakness for systematic presentations of literature; they seem to be ashamed of it, too, but they cannot quit the habit. It was a German who characterized the English as practical, the French as artistic, and the Germans as critical. This is their only excuse: they cannot help it; it is the nature of the

beast. And so they continue to excuse themselves and to write histories of German literature. To be sure, there still are scholars who are unashamed. Several "regular" histories of German literature have appeared recently, without excuse, by the well-known scholars Oskar Walzel, Friedrich von der Leyen, Adolf Bartels, Karl Borinski, O. E. Lessing, Julius Wiegand. But more interesting, although not so "solid," are the histories written by non-professional historians. And the serious student of German literature may perhaps take it as a hopeful sign that these historians are all men of letters, writers of ability and imagination. The student will remember that the chief reason for the existence of such an excellent literature of translations in the German language is that men with literary ability have not hesitated to translate the masterpieces of other languages. The German unlike the English man of letters considers translating a good school of training for the young writer; the English writer considers it as hack work. The result is that we have, for example, no Goethe in English. If Shelley had not restricted himself to just two scenes of Faust, we probably should have an English Goethe comparable to the German version of Shakespeare. It was this different attitude that gave to the Germans such translators as Schlegel, Tieck, Schiller, Voss, Fulda, Stefan George, Rilke, Morgenstern, and many others. If literary men are now writing histories of literature, may we not hope for interesting results?

The "literary" historian likes to emphasize the non-academic character and purpose of his writing; he is writing not for the student but for the *Volk*, the people. Kurt Martens, whom the academic historian calls the novelist of the *decadence*, says in the preface of his "Contemporary German Literature" that he does not wish to write for the professional student of literature but for all classes of the "folk." He does succeed in his combination of anthology and history in giving samples, characterizations, and classifications of about three hundred modern German writers in a manner to attract many different tastes to many different dishes. It is even a good book for academic use. The reviewer knows of at least one class in an American college that used it as a textbook.

Klabund, whose bourgeois name is Alfred Henschke, is placed by Martens among the "Expressionists and related poets of radical progress." He writes lyrical poems and novels, and now he has written a "History of German Literature in One Hour." (He has also written a "History of Universal Literature in One Hour.") It took the reviewer two hours to travel, under the guidance of Klabund, from the "Wessobrunner Prayer," 800 A.D., to Friedrich Schnack's lyrical poetry, 1922 A.D.—and it was a pleasant trip. The perspective, the most difficult thing in a brief history, is well preserved by Klabund. He devotes seven pages to Goethe, three-fourths of a page to Hauptmann, and four lines to himself. His style is picturesque, clear, and terse. Men and movements are characterized in a language that is the poet's rather than the scholar's—a language rich in metaphors. It is a beautiful brief presentation of a large subject to the general reader, but it is still more valuable and interesting to one who is already fairly well posted. It would probably shock the poet-author to know this: he has written an excellent and interesting final review for the college student majoring in German.

Those who are most ashamed deny their activity by camouflaging their products under fantastic forms. Franz Blei, whose collected works in six volumes comprise the drama, novel, sketches, essays, and criticisms, directly denies the existence of a German literature with a history. He says: "The less money a man has, the more does he speak of money. No people speaks so much in so many histories of literature of its own literature as the German." And still he cannot help writing about it. He writes a descriptive catalogue, which he calls "The Great Bestiary of Modern Literature." In the manner of the medieval bestiaries and by the methods of comparative physiognomy he tries to determine the character and traits of