

Holy Poverty

The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists, by Robert Wells. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. \$1.25 net.

A BOOK like "The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists" reveals rather startlingly the class-bound nature of our English literature. We have no Zola, and we have practically nothing similar to that interesting autobiographical proletarian literature which one finds in France and Germany. It needs the strong, rank odor of a book like this to show us how incorrigibly "genteel" our fictional writing is, and how impossible it is for an Englishman, except at the risk of vitiating sentimentality, to interpret the life of other social classes than his own.

This book, written with the bitterness of relentless realism by a socialist house-painter in an English city, who himself struggled to the inevitable bitter end, bears in every line the stamp of autobiographical exactness. It is a little history of a short campaign in the eternal conflict between needy labor and shoddy capitalism. The wolfish competition of the workmen, the constant terror of unemployment, the petty tyranny of the foreman, the cringing servility to the employers, the secret betrayals, the speeding-up, the mean little frauds, the skimping of work—all are pictured with a remorseless veracity that is actually appalling.

The bitterness of mood in which such a book must have been written by a man who saw so intelligently the stupidities of the life around him and yet was completely unable to find any other milieu, produces fierce touches of satire. But like all good satire, its exaggerations are really searing truths. Neither his irony, nor his bitterness blinded the writer to seeing the world as it really was. That the book is veracious in atmosphere and expression, no one who has seen the deplorable frowziness of English proletarian life, or tasted that peculiar quality which makes British squalor the filthiest in the world, can doubt. This is no book for the squeamish. And yet the coarseness of British working-class life is sketched in broad strokes and outlines, rather than plastered on the canvas in the manner of a Zola; and there is a British silence as to sexuality.

If the book is not for the squeamish, it is not for the tender-hearted either. From an artistic standpoint or view, the absence of sentimentality is one of the most admirable features, but those who are accustomed to have their literature of poverty and misfortune sugared with pity and sentiment will find this unadorned veracity repulsive. The book must therefore depress and then outrage our comfortable classes. We are not accustomed to see the life of the workingman from his own point of view. Our literature is carefully insulated from the economic interpretation of life, with its sense of the bestial struggle for existence and its slow and interminable fight against filth and disease. It must make our comfortable class uneasy to see the whole remorseless mechanism of shoddy capitalism so unsparingly revealed, and to see men so palpably the victims of economic forces. Even the most woolen-headed of our reactionaries can hardly fail to feel the ironic sting of the phrase, "ragged-trousered philanthropists."

Such a story is a scathing critique of the whole of British civilization, and incidentally of our own individualistic and plutocratic democracy. He must indeed be a tough Englishman who can eat a good dinner after finishing it. For the insistent fact remains that the Englishman is a creature of his class, and that his class is the cause of his poverty and misery.

gence and personal idealism of her directing classes, her free government and humanitarian religion, has failed to secure for more than a minority of her people anything more than a filthy caricature of human life. Up through the beauty of park and palace rises the stench of proletarian poverty.

It is a very good thing for the world to smell that stench. For if our directing classes and our democracy can only once feel that evilness strongly enough, they will begin to find it intolerable, as they have found it in Germany, that classes should exist below a minimum standard of life. And if we once find it intolerable we shall set to work to make it unnecessary.

R. S. B.

Self-Defense and Self-Delusion

Des Deutschen Reiches Schicksalsstunde, by H. Frobenius, Berlin: Karl Curtius.

FROBENIUS'S little book, "The Illusion of Self-Defense," published many months before the outbreak of war, reveals that curious and terrible state of mind of Europe, and especially of Germany, which made war and will again make war inevitable. It is not a great book nor even a good book. It is not original, nor brilliant, nor profound. It is not in the fullest sense even truthful. But it does portray, without, perhaps, intending it, the convictions, sentiments and ideas which were last year in the minds of Europe's ruling classes and are this year in the minds of the peoples of all the belligerent nations. The book is an appeal to fear. And fear, as has been said, is an endemic latent in every heart, which sometimes rises to an epidemic. It is fear more than any other passion which drives peoples into war.

It was long believed that our great modern democratic peoples could not desire war. Emperors and financiers might be ever so belligerent, since whichever way the battle went their skins remained whole. But the ordinary run of people, the men who starved and froze in the trenches, the women who bore the undistinguished millions, and were bereft and beggared by war, what were glory and conquest to these? How much fighting was Morocco worth to the Paris cabby, or Serbia to the Silesian peasant? What interest had the Leipzig bricklayer in German acquisitions in Europe or Africa? Yet if anything is certain about the war of 1914, it is that the impulse came from the peoples. Each nation was willing to fight because it believed that it fought in self-defense.

It is this persistent illusion that people are fighting only for their hearth which converts peace-loving populations to the most aggressive campaigns. Even pacifists usually believe in a man's protecting his own home. So vague, however, is the boundary between defense and aggression, so subtle and unconscious are our national preconceptions and prejudices, that the plea of self-defense is stretched until it covers the most trivial pretexts and justifies punitive expeditions and the sending of armies to conquer distant lands. The Germans honestly believed that to defend their own German homes they had to lay waste Belgium. The English believed that a war against Germany was necessary to the defense of British villages and homes. Self-defense becomes constructive self-defense, and between this and naked aggression it is difficult to draw a line.

A part of this universal illusion of self-defense is the belief that the nation is surrounded by envious and treacherous enemies. Serbia fears that Austria will swallow her

bitious Germany is encompassing her ruin, while the Germans, not merely the Bernhardis and the Moltkes and the Falkenheyns, but quiet, industrious, amiable Germans over their morning coffee, are entirely convinced that all nations are plotting against the Fatherland. Even the four and a half million Germans who vote the Socialist ticket—quite unrevolutionary Germans, be it said, at once disputatious and law-abiding—are easy converts to this belief of a peaceful nation in a world of enemies.

How could it be otherwise so long as our customary modes of patriotism are so inveterately reactionary? We believe everything good of our own nation and everything evil of other nations. We are all taught that our special people is the chosen people, that we are superior to all other breeds. Our men are more valiant, our women more beautiful, our morals more pure, our wit more trenchant. One Yankee is equal to a thousand "greasers"; one beef-fed Britisher to ten Frenchies; one Frenchman to a dozen Prussians; one German to a hundred Cockneys. In all stupid sincerity we believe that other nations envy us because of our superiority.

No nation is free from this national obsession. Yet I believe it is more general in Germany than elsewhere. This whole book of Frobenius is based on the thesis that Germany's neighbors hate her and plot her destruction. No one, thinks Frobenius, was pleased when in 1871 Germany emerged full-armed among the nations. The sword of the German Siegfried clove the anvil, while the envious dwarfs of Europe gnashed their teeth. Inevitably this alien hatred grew, for Germany in achieving success had committed the unforgivable sin. Petulant France forgot Waterloo and Fashoda to revenge Sedan and Metz; the chaffering trader, England, withdrew her fleets from the Mediterranean to strike a stealthy blow at German warships in the North Sea; Russia, the lumbering bear of the North, coveted the Balkans and Constantinople, and planned to destroy Germany, the guardian of those treasures. Nor did the Triple Entente include all of Germany's enemies. Brutal Serbia was willing to wound and not afraid to strike; Belgium also was a treacherous foe, ready to open her door to France and close it to Germany. Finally there was Denmark, sullen because of Schleswig-Holstein, waiting for the day when she could safely lend her ports to an English attack. All the world was in league against Germany.

I can well understand how a patriotic Germany, reading this book of Frobenius, might be stampeded by the fear of Europe into a war against Europe. Nothing is so ruthless as fear, and all the stories, true and false, distilled into German ears for months past had been exactly calculated to produce this result—fear, and a war to avert a war. The German was asked why France was reintroducing her three years' service; why Russia was enormously increasing her military and naval budgets; why Serbia and other Balkan nations were carrying on a campaign for the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, the only loyal ally of Germany. The aggressive plans of the Allies, the German was told, would be completed by 1916. Is it a wonder that the thought occurred, "Let us meet this danger by striking the first blow. Attack is the only true defense."

There are, of course, men like Frobenius who belong to other nations, and in England, France and America also the cry is "Arm! The enemy is at our gates." But it is of the essence of this illusion of self-defense that by its own action it ceases to be an illusion, and the cry of danger adds to danger. To defend herself against

own military forces on the German frontier. Fear leads to force and force to fear.

It has been maintained that no melodrama could outlast the first act if the hero would but write a postal-card to the heroine explaining his real situation and his real motives. And one is forced to the conclusion that a little more frankness, a little more downrightness, and a great deal more publicity in our diplomatic exchanges might do away with at least a part of the mutual fear which runs through the European populations. How much of the irreconcilable race purposes that we read about, how much of the lust of dominion, manifest destiny, Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism and what not—how much of all this is but the result of pretentious stupidities and the super-solemn discretions of the ignorant men who rule the world? Might it not be possible to make all diplomacy public, and for that matter even mobilization plans and cannon designs? Would not a little mutual confidence, even between enemies, relieve fear and therefore enmity?

It would be well if in each country books could be written advising the nation against its own aggressiveness, teaching the simple truth that the enemy of peace lies always this side of the frontier. For all these books of warning are false. Even were Frobenius's book true in what it states, it would still be abysmally false in what it suppresses. Did Germany fear France, and France not fear Germany? Did not England dread a German invasion as much as Germany dreaded a British attack in the North Sea? Until the balance is held even between the home and the foreign state, all books written to warn one nation against the other are evil. Such books create a state of mind which, given an incident like the murder of an archduke, sets a continent in flames. It is not, however, the fault of authors alone. So long as our patriotism remains crude, provincial and intolerant, so long as nations meet each other in the dark, where every half-discerned figure is a deadly foe, so long shall we have our Frobeniuses, honest and dishonest, and nations, believing that they live in a world of enemies, will be stampeded this way.

W. E. W.

Peace Through Insurance

War and Insurance, by Josiah Royce. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.00.

IF Professor Royce had known as little about anything else as he knows about insurance, would he have used that object of non-knowledge as a panacea for war? Probably not. And yet, such is the luck of philosophers, he has contributed a general scheme of ideas more fruitful to the pacifist than we are likely to get from the most specialized student of war.

It is proposed in "War and Insurance" to create a system of international mutual insurance against calamities afflicting whole nations, like pestilence and earthquakes; against certain of the incidents of war; and, ultimately, against war itself. In such a project, objections crowd upon the mind. How could we secure stability, with so large a proportion of the risks concentrated within the narrow territories of Europe, where war at one point is always likely to grow into a general conflagration? How could premiums be kept at an endurable level in the case of such notoriously bad risks as Serbia and Belgium, and how could we induce such good risks as Norway and Switzerland to enter the scheme at all? How prevent a conquering nation from exacting exaggerated indemnity in view of an expected in-