

Books and Things

WHEN was the right moment to advertise one's liking for "The Way of All Flesh"? Shaw's preface to "Major Barbara" was not published until 1907. The second English edition of Butler's novel was not published until 1908, and in the next year or so a few copies found their way to this country. These were still so few by 1910 or '11 that if you talked big about Butler people were not impressed. Nevertheless, there must have been a golden moment when the observers of "The Way of All Flesh" were still few enough to be distinguished and already many enough to make themselves heard. This moment has gone. We are to-day that next generation whom Butler wrote for, and we find his novel easy to understand and a little old-fashioned and immensely stimulating. Here is the first American edition, published by Messrs. E. P. Dutton & Company, well printed, price a dollar and a half, a book to buy, to read, to keep and not to lend.

On the paper cover which protects the blue cloth binding there is a quotation from Arnold Bennett, to whom Mr. Robert H. Davis had said: "Do you know a novel called 'The Way of All Flesh'?" And Mr. Bennett answered: "I do. It is one of the great novels of the world." Such praise is useful because coming from Mr. Bennett it makes people want to read. Such praise is harmless because Butler is so lively that after you have read a few pages you stop wondering why Mr. Bennett dragged greatness in. You forget that Butler's novel is unlike what you were led by Mr. Bennett's praise to expect. It is unlike any other novel either great or small. It is like a wise selection from the Note-Books of Samuel Butler, arranged at first as a Pontifex family history and at the end as a biography of Ernest Pontifex.

These Pontifexes, who started in a small way, rise into a higher air of public school, Cambridge, fixed incomes and holy orders. Most of the dramatis personae look safe enough if you judge them by their labels, but you soon discover that the labels do not mean to Butler what they meant to most English novelists in 1880. His school teachers like teaching because it is tyranny made easy, and not for any other reason. His young men take holy orders reluctantly, because they have not courage enough and imagination enough to resist family pressure. His husbands and wives, who normally have married without love, endure each another well or ill, as the case may be. Parents dislike their children and never acknowledge to themselves that this dislike exists and controls their decisions. Children are slow to acknowledge how sincerely they detest their parents. Small incomes look up admiringly to large incomes, and large incomes respect one another. Rare is the man who has the eye to perceive or the realism to own what he genuinely feels.

Ernest Pontifex's career is a shock to his self-deceiving people. It begins in the ordinary way, it follows the ordinary routine through public school and Cambridge to holy orders, for which he has no turn. But after taking holy orders Ernest does and suffers strange things. He goes to prison for six months because, in the words of the judge who sentences him: "It is not likely that in the healthy atmosphere of such a school as Roughborough you can have come across contaminating influences; you were probably, I may say certainly, impressed at school with the heinousness of any attempt to depart from the strictest chastity until such time as you had entered into a state of matrimony. . . . For the last four or five months you

have been a clergyman, and if a single impure thought had still remained within your mind, ordination should have removed it; nevertheless, not only does it appear that your mind is as impure as though none of the influences to which I have referred had been brought to bear upon it, but it seems as though their only result had been this—that you have not even the common sense to be able to distinguish between a respectable girl and a prostitute." Soon after getting out of prison Ernest marries a prostitute named Ellen, who used to be his mother's maid, and with her sets up a small second-hand clothing shop. He is in despair when he learns that Ellen is a drunkard, and overjoyed when he learns that she has a husband living. When the novel closes Ernest is in possession of a fortune, he knows what he likes and what he dislikes, and he gives himself to the writing of unpopular books which a later generation will appreciate. But this happy ending is not arbitrary, for we have known since page 168 that Ernest would come into a fortune at twenty-eight.

This story is told and commented upon by an active-minded somebody who is Butler himself, who has Butler's humor and wit, his power of shrewd contentious observation, his surprising first hand common sense. This narrator is the partisan of one point of view, Samuel Butler's own. To his habit of observing with his own eyes he owes his discovery that life is absolutely unlike what the romanticists and sentimentalists have told him about it, and his attention becomes the slave of this discovery. He literally cannot pay attention to any motive or any act or any feeling which might weaken his faith. For the romantic and the sentimental illusion he has substituted a hard-headed illusion of his own. He has the keenest nose for evidence that strengthens his case, and in the presence of any other kind of evidence he loses his sense of smell. No other novelist with a mind has such an unpliant mind. Life can no longer either astonish or puzzle him. It never contradicts itself. It is always the good dependable raw material for comment delivered in a voice quietly and uniformly nipping.

Butler has excluded from his novel all those isolated mountain-top feelings which first gave the romanticists the tip for their convention that the levels are like the high spots. He has excluded everything indistinct. He does incline, to be sure, to the view "that it is our less conscious thoughts and our less conscious actions which mainly mould our lives, and the lives of those who spring from us." I am not familiar enough with his other writings to know what this view did to his thinking, but it has done almost nothing to "The Way of All Flesh," where there is neither darkness nor dimness nor sudden light, where the same light falls equally upon all parts of a world as clear as one would be which contained only conscious actions and conscious thoughts.

And yet, although Butler's self-made dissent from conventional beliefs does rather monotonously dictate to him, does keep him out of the class of perfectly free observers, the details of his dissent are endlessly amusing and original. Every now and then his observation sounds forced, but even if it never had been, and even if he had lived in a world about which nobody had ever told him any lies, he would still have acquired the belief in which "The Way of All Flesh" is rooted. This belief, as valid for the real confusing world as for Butler's simplified world, is a belief that hardly anybody knows what he likes and how he feels, and that for everybody the beginning of wisdom is to find out.

P. L.

The Hope of Democracy

Democracy and Education, by John Dewey. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.40.

IT is impossible to read this book quickly, not because it is unclear but because it evokes a constant activity on the part of the reader. As in Meredith's poetry or in Santayana's prose each word is heavily freighted with an unuttered context of meanings. The reader has to supply that context. The moment he relaxes and reads words rather than meanings he is lost. There are none of those merciful padded spaces in which the reader is able to become passive and still retain a comfortable glow of understanding. Each clause is a tightly packed and organized statement. Mr. Dewey supplies nothing that he thinks the reader might supply himself. He starts a train of thought, and instead of developing its implication himself, he passes on as soon as he thinks the reader is capable of going it alone. He has a very high opinion of his readers. It is a book of four hundred closely printed pages full of that impatience which great minds have—the impatience which concentrates entirely on the difficult points, which slips past the easier parts, never labors a platitude or a facile argument and always seeks out the arduous problem. The result is not information or propaganda but a book which is the mature wisdom of the finest and most powerful intellect devoted to the future of American civilization.

The theme of the book is the place and method and aim of education in a society which is exploring the possibilities of democracy. The background against which Mr. Dewey works out his own conception is the school inherited from a society in which there was a sharp division of social classes, in which culture was the property of leisure and drudgery the fate of ordinary men, in which commands came from on high, that is, from God through the rich, in which obedience was a greater virtue than self-direction, intellect was devoted chiefly to the justification of whatever is established or to verbal idleness, and science had not yet come to break down exclusiveness and offer endless hope to mankind.

The school which Mr. Dewey offers to the imagination exists already in isolated experiments, in the aspiration of modern educators, and the need of democracy. He has not invented a fad. He has done what all fertile thinkers on social subjects must do; has extracted a philosophy out of the possibilities which exist in our world. It is not a new curriculum to be imposed upon an overworked school system. It is an attitude towards schooling which expresses the meaning and the hope of a society struggling to master its own destiny. The future lies in the possibilities which the present offers: creative statecraft in education, industry or politics consists in disentangling the hopeful possibilities and in making them the deliberate purposes of teachers, politicians and workers.

This is what Mr. Dewey has done with an inexhaustible faculty of effective analysis. No one, I think, can read it with understanding and fail to find fresh significance in all his human relationships. It is an abundant book which will light the future for every one who lives with it. It is rich in that wisdom which democracies need, the common wisdom which must lie beneath the diverse activities of all the professions. It is a great book because it expresses more deeply and more comprehensively than any other that could be named the best hope of liberal men.

W. L.

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A Wrong Kind of Text-book

Introduction to the Study of Organized Labor. By George Gorham Groat. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.75 net.

NOW that the American labor movement has become of sufficient importance to be deemed worthy of a place in the economics curriculum of our universities, it has of course become essential that it should be treated in a text-book. Professor Groat's volume is a typical example of this kind of work. There can be no doubt that he is eminently well informed, thoroughly conscientious, admirably painstaking. He knows that he is dealing with a delicate subject, since there are colleges in America the trustees of which do not desire too close an intimacy on the part of their students with labor problems, and he is therefore splendidly impartial. His book is exactly what one would have expected under the conditions. It is ponderous, it is dull, and I am afraid that it cannot be called illuminating. As a handbook it undoubtedly manages to crowd an enormous number of facts into its four hundred and eighty pages. It gives solid masses of statistics. It is packed with definitions. Like the true text-book, it does not deflect the reader's attention by the presence of footnotes. It will be admirable for the purpose of the class-room "quiz" and the sessional examination. But when these merits have been emphasized its value is exhausted.

For it is essentially an unattractive book, and that although it deals with one of the most absorbing problems of our time. The future of American labor, is, after all, the basic question with which we have to deal. It is at a