

## Time: The Present

*Changing Winds, a novel, by St. John G. Ervine. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.60.*

IT only needed a bit of fresh evidence such as *Changing Winds* to confirm one's notion that a definite tendency in modern fiction is now pretty clearly established. It is that Wellsian tendency to use recent news for novels, to represent men and women as plying in the middle and muddle of those unsystematic contemporary processes which always in some measure involve ourselves. The reason for this tendency is perhaps worth enquiring, but first of all there is Mr. Ervine's performance in *Changing Winds*.

This novel is too lengthy and elaborate to be characterized in one crisp sentence. The chief fact about it, perhaps, is the skill with which it places Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Ulster and Ulster-Irish affairs in the middle of a sophisticated world. Mr. Ervine is the first of his generation who has, to my knowledge, successfully woven a plot to and fro between Ulster and London, Dublin and Devon. Other men, C. E. Montague in particular, and of course Bernard Shaw in *John Bull's Other Island*, have tried to get England and Ireland into the same plane, but the contrasts, the divergences, defeated them. If one of their people was clearly and comprehensibly inside the empire he never merged with the Irish, and if he was Irish he never entered into the spirit of the empire. It is Mr. Ervine's triumph that, as a fictional fact, his hero straddles the Irish Sea. Only an Ulster Home Ruler could have done it, but Mr. Ervine depicts him in that noble though uncomfortable posture, and it is something of which any novelist might be proud. The ultimate result is to include the Ireland of the rebellion in the British war-picture, enabling Mr. Ervine to draw on rich Ulster material as well as on Devon and London.

The best figure in *Changing Winds* is perhaps Mr. Quinn, a breezy Irish gentleman, who manages at once to be small landlord and agricultural reformer, Ulster Protestant and fiery lover of Ireland. It is this man's son, Henry Quinn, whose career gives the book its continuity. Mr. Quinn, senior, hates to send his boy to a public school in England where, in spite of efficient teaching, he will acquire the "finicky bleatin'" that is the Ulsterman's characterization of an English accent. At his public school, however, Quinny becomes one of a Heavenly Quartet; later, after graduation from Cambridge, to be the nucleus of the Improved Tories, a group of English youths who go in for plain talking and high thinking and intend to combine an exceedingly stylish radicalism with Great Careers. There is nothing of the Russian or Irish revolutionary about these bright particular youths. They have no heroics. They are anything but goo-goos, they are dead against "slop." Incited by their leader, Gilbert Farrow, they develop certain improved priggish notions which, indefinite as they are, stimulate ambition of the kind not uncommon among university intellectuals—mainly ambition for those forms of social service not debarred by the Social Register.

The inclusion of Quinny in this group is postponed because Mr. Quinn will not allow his son to go to Cambridge, insists on his taking cold storage culture at Trinity College, Dublin. There is nothing national in this for Quinny, but the Gaelic enthusiast who comes to tutor him at Ballymartin opens his eyes to a new Ireland, though the rustic Ireland which would rather dance than study

Gaelic, which only studies Gaelic to escape boredom, is not observed by this ascetic devotee.

In college Quinny buds as a novelist and his father speeds him to London to join his Improved Tory friends. The liveliness of Gilbert Farrow, the simple valuable-ness of Ninian Graham, the dry zeal of Roger, give Mr. Ervine a chance to dramatize interesting characters, especially with the interpolation of Mary Graham, Ninian's sheltered-violet sister, and the thin, statistical girl whom Roger marries, and the acquisitive Lady Cecily Jayne. Quinny first meets the Mary girl when he goes on a shy schoolboy vacation to Devonshire. Then, back among the country-people in Ulster, there is a vivid, red-blooded farmer's girl and a flare of youthful desire that obliterates Mary, and in London Lady Cecily finds him, so to speak, confluent. Being intrinsically vulgar and spoiled, but laughing and sensuous and beautiful, she makes things easy for a youth who is too timid to initiate the experience that he craves. These episodes are incidental to the house-life of the four youths, marked as it is by Gilbert Farrow's precocious exploits as a dramatist and the rest.

We are asked to believe that the Improved Tories attract eminent and semi-eminent men to their house, have Shaw and Wells and Edward Carpenter and others to sit at their table and share their minds. In this part of Mr. Ervine's invention there is distinctly something lacking. Gilbert Farrow is a charming person, thoroughly idiomatic, but in so far as he suggests Rupert Brooke, to whose memory the book is dedicated, he fails signally to suggest the Improved Tory whose faith in the empire as a commonwealth could have enough significance to swing Eminent Ones out of their orbit. The actual existence of the Round Table group in London is suggestive; but Mr. Ervine's engineer and dramatic critic and barrister and novelist are decidedly too callow to give even a suggestion of that influentiaity which he wishes us to accept. In addition they do not talk like, say, the lads in *The New Machiavelli*, much less with the profundity one finds in *Beauchamp's Career*. They have a conventional relation to the class struggle and to government and to society; and when the war comes out of a Europe to which they scarcely advert they are in a simple khaki relation to it. So far, then, as Mr. Ervine has allowed his discipleship to H. G. Wells to lead him into discussing universal military service, factory organization, machine industry, etc., he has been badly bamboozled. You have to be a Meredith or at any rate a Wells to overflow into these creative fictional discussions, and where Mr. Ervine has attempted this he is tin painted to look like steel.

Where he has risen above schoolboy round-talk in London is in the talk about Ireland that is volcanically ejaculated by his father or incanted by the enthusiast Marsh, who suggests Padraic Pearse, or grudgingly squeezed out by Quinny himself. To rid Ireland of priest, publican, politician and poet is Quinny's trite formula, solving the question by begging it, but better than formulæ are the glimpses of Horace Plunkett, George Russell, Connolly, Padraic Pearse, and the Ireland that Quinny sees after he comes to care for Englishmen. The ways of such friendly speculation are cut short by the rebellion of Easter, 1916. As a deprecating spectator Quinny sees Dublin harried by the rebels. For him there is nothing of national redemption, national resurrection, about the *émeute*. Torpid though this may seem to some readers, it is the moderate attitude which is likely to be instructive to outsiders, and Mr. Ervine does include Ulster, England and Ireland in his representation.

The effect of the war on Quinny is more keenly verified than anything else in the book. His father's rage against the recruiting campaign is the first note struck. "Old men sittin' in offices, an' makin' wars, an' then biddin' young men to pay the price of them! By God, that is mean! By God, that 's low!' . . . 'An' these wee bitches with their white feathers,' he went on, 'ought to be well skelped. If I had a daughter, an' she did a thing like that, by God, I'd break her skull for her.'" But old Mr. Quinn succumbs to a war that threatens to take his son from him. Quinny's best friends in England are enlisting—they do not believe in fighting and dying by proxy—and enlistment is uppermost in Quinny's mind. After his father's death he visits the Grahams. His engagement to Mary gives him a fresh excuse for postponing enlistment and finally there is his work. "He would help to construct things, not to destroy them. He was not afraid to go to the war . . . that was not the reason why he was resolving that he would refuse to be a soldier. It was because he could do better, finer work by living for Ireland than by dying for England. People throughout Europe were already perturbed at the waste of potential men in war . . . wondering whether, after all, it was a wise thing to let rare men, men of unique gifts go to war." This, with an intervening fervor for conscription, tides Quinny along, but at last he is forced to realize that his is a case of funk. About this, and Mary's reception of it, Mr. Ervine is illuminating.

The utilization of contemporary personages and contemporary events gives *Changing Winds* an excitingness that has a sort of suggestion of genius. There are certain tricks about the book, however, that impair this impression. Mr. Ervine did not of course suppose that anyone would fail to see how frankly he had borrowed his Irish rebellion incidents from James Stephens's book on the rebellion, but the knowledge that these episodes and phrases are not native to Quinny breaks the spell of fictional illusion. The spell is also broken when Mr. Ervine brings in F. E. Smith after utilizing him for F. E. Robinson, and in the same way doubles Minnelly and Connolly, Ernest Harper and George Russell, John Marsh and Padraic Pearse. One identifies these persons as clearly as one identifies Tom Arthurs with Thomas Andrews, the *Gigantic* with the *Titanic*. Mr. Ervine knows that we will identify the *Gigantic* with the *Titanic*. How can he suppose that a flimsy alibi will disguise the use he has made of well known men? These are ugly flaws in his *Changing Winds*.

It is still impossible not to be engaged by the novel if only because it is a news-novel, if only because it dramatizes the life we are living. The symbols that are common property are no longer, exclusively, deities and daisies, suns and seas, "the glimmer of stars on moorland meres." Steam, rapid transit, wood pulp, the rotary press, telegraphy, stenography—these touches of artifice make the whole world kin and are responsible for the new way of writing fiction. The machine-process has so altered the subject-matter of our actions and thoughts and feelings that it is no wonder we have journalistic novels written from the standpoint not of the historian or the embalmer but of the participant, the eye-witness. Though not written in the first person, *Changing Winds* is hot from first-hand experience, an empiric version of reality, and it follows H. G. Wells quite closely in its aim to collect this epoch at a focus. Where the novel portrays the father, the winning personality of Gilbert, the introspection of Quinny, it is richest in inspiration as well as material. It

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has quick Scottish sentiment, and sanity and generosity. Its transmission of the epoch is not so distinguished. Mr. Ervine, in fact, is not deeply distinguished, if by that one means clearly differentiated by virtue of temperament, purity of feeling and sharpness of vision. So far as Ulster is concerned, however, he has done more than any pamphleteer. Wartime among young intellectuals he has made vivid, and the resources that alert minds and daring spirits and metropolitan issues afforded him he has managed in a fashion that would be quite amazing but for the example of Mr. Wells.

F. H.

## What We Are Fighting For

*American World Policies*, by Walter E. Weyl. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$2.25.

**S**LOWLY, reluctantly, we have drifted into war, but as a nation we are not yet of one mind as to what we are fighting for. This dangerous confusion Dr. Weyl attempts to dispel. His earlier book, *The New Democracy*, was a penetrating analysis of the undercurrents of American public opinion, of the forces that are shaping our internal policy. His present book is an equally keen analysis of the world forces to which our domestic policy must be adjusted if we are to keep our national integrity and play an effective part in shaping international affairs. It is an essay in clarification, an attempt to give the American layman the facts upon which to base an intelligent foreign policy.