

## Books and Things

NOBODY is wider awake than Mr. Raymond Macdonald Alden, professor of English at Leland Stanford, to the difficulty of writing a book that shall live up or down to such a title as Tennyson: How to Know Him (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. \$1.50 net). "It is a commonplace," Mr. Alden says in his preface, "that Tennyson does not require a guide-book in the same sense as Browning or many another writer. Indeed it would have been somewhat easier to write this book if he had been essentially eccentric, irregular or obscure: the critic would have had a more agreeable sense of being indispensable." Nothing could be truer. Tennyson is almost everywhere easy to understand. But he is not easy to appreciate. It was Mark Pattison, I believe, who said that appreciation of Milton was the reward of consummate scholarship. An ideal reader of Tennyson would be somebody who had lived long in England, in the country and near the sea, who had studied the trees and birds and flowers and seasons and waters of England with loving and accurate eyes; somebody, too, who was familiar enough with the classical poets to hear the Greek and Latin echoes in Tennyson's voice, and to whom these echoes were dear. No handbook, no matter how hard it tries, can conceivably be anything but a very inferior substitute for this experience, for the long years in which Time has patiently ripened the fruits of reading and observation. Mr. Alden is too wise to attempt this impossible. The manner of his book, as he himself says so modestly and pleasantly, is "the manner of one who should read aloud from the poet to a company gathered by the evening fire, supplying such preliminary information and criticism as might be helpful to the listeners."

But the ideal reader of Tennyson, if we take for our ideal the reader who would get the greatest possible enjoyment from his poetry, is even more exceptional than this. He has other qualifications than those I have mentioned. The ideas of Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, although familiar to him, have become familiar so recently that he is still capable of surprise at finding these ideas used, and of pleasure at finding them used after a rather decorative fashion, by a poet. He believes that somehow good shall be the final goal of ill, and he believes this in a spirit of pious and docile acquiescence. He is in no great hurry to take off his coat and accelerate the inevitable cosmic processes. He is almost as patient as God. Fear of losing the good that we have slows up his pursuit of the good that we have not. No great radical, this ideal reader. Kings and queens, if English, are dear to him. When you tell him that obedience is the courtesy due to kings he feels no temptation to smile, for he is certain that we needs must love the highest when we see it. His occasional doubts exist in order that they may be slain by his faith. From the great central doubts he is serenely free. He is no more capable of doubting that God exists and means well by humanity than of doubting that Queen Victoria existed and meant well by England and the colonies. This ideal reader's God is a very little like the Empress of India and a good deal like some far-off divine Headmaster. In an Annunciation, if this ideal reader of Tennyson painted it, the Virgin would slightly resemble Victoria, and the Angel Gabriel would slightly resemble Dr. Howley, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was sent, more than willing, to tell the young princess that she was queen. In other words, the ideal reader of Tennyson is extinct.

It is also true that he never existed. Who, at the present moment, can be put in his empty and never-occupied place? That is the question which Mr. Alden must have asked himself, and to which, whether he asked it or not, he has given a discerning and persuasive answer. His estimate of Tennyson is very different from our ideal reader's. To Mr. Alden Tennyson is "neither a dramatist nor an imaginative psychologist of much complexity or depth"; he was not highly creative either in the field of thought or in the field of character; he was, like many another Victorian, "rather over-fond of death-beds"; his King Arthur, when he says goodbye to Guinevere, "comes dangerously near, even in his heroic proportions, giving the impression of being a prig or a cad," and Tennyson's style "tends always toward a beautiful circumlocution." A teacher who renounces much of Tennyson, and whose admiration of what is left is strong and contagious—such is Mr. Alden. In one or two respects only do I wish that he had seen his problem a little differently. He says, for example, that Tennyson's blank verse "is a traditional form, passing as rhythmically current coinage at any time between Shakespeare's and ours, but it now seems to many persons to have lost a part of its value merely because it has been current for so long. New rhythms, new speech, for new men and women—so runs our thought." This passage is addressed to a few narrow sectaries, who think all blank verse obsolete, and whose opinions upon this point do not seem to me of the slightest importance. The readers worth helping are those who love blank verse, who read Shakespeare's and Milton's and Shelley's again and again, but who are irritated by Tennyson's. Was it an Oxford or a Dublin undergraduate who made the famous parody?

And in those days he bought a pair of dogs,  
Caesar and Pompey, each so like to each  
That not one single man in the whole world  
Could tell the difference. And he made a song  
And sang it; strangely could he make and sing.

The wrong audience, it seems to me, is again before Mr. Alden when he attributes present-day depreciation of Tennyson to our tendency to "reject as unpoetical that which is laden with serious thought on moral problems." Surely nobody who is not an idiot objects nowadays to a poet's interest in morals. The question I wish Mr. Alden had answered is more special. Why have the years done more harm to the moralist in Tennyson than to the moralist in Browning or Matthew Arnold or Clough? Why do so many readers, not a bit more intelligent than the men and women who worshipped Tennyson's moralities fifty years ago, find him so poor in moral insight? Why do his moral ideas strike them as almost always either obvious or banal or exasperating? Or, if you agree with me in preferring to put the question the other way, how came any of his contemporaries, many of them persons of high intelligence, to think Tennyson's strength lay where his greatest weakness lies, in his moral judgments? Only after this admission is made, only after we have denied Tennyson as a moralist and thinker, are we ready to give him precisely the admiration he deserves as an observer of nature, a musician and a painter. For us, although he had an indoor spirit, and although the flavor of wild life is not in him, he is still one of the flawless decorative artists, making pictures that are beautifully exact in spite of their rather suave smoothness, working in lacquer and melody, perhaps too studied and bland a concentrator, but a concentrator with few rivals in English.

P. L.

## An English Radicalism

*Your Part in Poverty*, by George Lansbury. New York: B. W. Huebsch. \$1.00.

NO one who wishes to understand the labor movement in England can afford to miss this book; few who read it can fail to be captivated by its charm. It is not a program; it is not a treatise. It is simply the expression of an attitude to life which is growing rapidly in importance in every section of the English working classes. Its author is himself a significant political figure. At one time a member of the House of Commons, the editor of the most brilliant labor newspaper in England today, not the least effective inspiration in the famous Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, he has a singularly varied ability. He has been the friend and opponent of such diverse figures as Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Hugh Cecil. He was primarily responsible for the Marconi inquiry. He battled relentlessly for the suffrage cause in the House of Commons and out of it. The poor law school at Shenfield for which he is responsible is a remarkable example of what humanity can do for a complex administrative problem. You will find him as greatly respected among the intellectuals of London as he is worshipped among the workmen of Bromley-by-Bow. He is an aggressive antagonist of the present English political system without being an adherent of the theory of relentless class warfare. He is one of the few remaining English socialists who, in the heat of the battle, have not yet forgotten that idea of a joyous life they learned from William Morris in the far-off days of Hammersmith communism. More and more there is gathering about him a band of able men, trade-unionists, poets, critics, dons, who find in the strength of his personality and the vigorous nobility of his ideas a real hope for the future. He belongs to no political party, and he retains the eager respect of them all. There have been few men since John Bright to occupy quite the same place in English life.

The whole starting-point of Mr. Lansbury's idea is the conviction that the only question which matters is what Disraeli called the Condition-of-England question. He is clear that poverty is preventable. He is urgent that nothing else is at all adequately worth while until that supreme problem has been handled. But he is also clear that the approach to it involves not merely a reform but rather a revolution in the English way of life. It involves a new theory of the state. It involves a total reorganization of the industrial system. It involves the re-interpretation of the class-structure of society in terms of service from ability instead of profits to ability. Mr. Lansbury's attitude is in no sense born of theoretic speculation. I doubt seriously whether most of the academic names one could mention in this context are so much as known to him. The material for his thought has come from his thirty years' experience on town-councils and poor-law boards and trade-union committees. His attitude is an induction from a leadership in strikes, a membership of the House of Commons, an acceptance of Anglican Christianity which has involved an intimate acquaintance with the social power it exerts. A distinguished French syndicalist once remarked that Mr. Lansbury's life made him doubt very seriously the rightness of his contempt for religion; and it is not difficult to understand the grounds of that realization.

He will take help from whoever can help him. You will find the newest Oxford don stroll out of his office

as the last trade-union leader (with fierce suspicion of the intellectuals) goes into it. The staff of his newspaper includes a brilliant English poet and a member of the London Dockers' Union. Mr. Nevinson, Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Webb all write for it on occasion; and there is evidence enough that Mr. Wells feels its criticisms more deeply than any others in England. Not that Mr. Lansbury is convinced that the regeneration of the working-class must come from above. The thousands of workingmen and women who are enrolled in his Herald League are to work out their own salvation; and they work it out by the organization of the industries to which they belong. The real burden of his effort is the intellectual supplementing of the trade-union movement, the insistence that only by the alliance between sober learning and native intelligence can the victory be eventually won. It is Mr. Lansbury's readers who buy Everyman's Library and the volumes in the Home University series. No one searches the London bookstalls with more care than they do. They are the élite of the Workers' Educational Association. They are the radical wing of the Labor Party. They do not believe, like your Marxian socialist, that the slow, sure Marxian catastrophe comes pitilessly on. They are Fabian enough to be reformist. They are intelligent enough to perceive that if politics is grounded upon economics, assuredly an economic movement cannot do without political effort. So they support every measure that may ameliorate the condition of the people. They want shorter hours of labor, provision of meals for the underfed, better wages, better factory inspection, better education.

But, above all, they demand the control of industry. They have come to see that everything else is merely a chimera so long as that supreme weapon is out of their hands. That is not to say that they are state-socialists. I suppose few people are more suspicious of the state than Mr. Lansbury, for the good and sufficient reason that few people have had so deep an experience of its workings. The kind of industrial future to which they look forward is one of economic federalism and the way lies partly in the coöperative system, as the great English society practised it in the famous Dublin strike, and partly in the continuous democratization of factory conditions. They want—they will get—compulsory unionism; and on its basis they will demand factory appointments from below instead of above. They believe whole-heartedly in strikes, partly, as the French believe in them, as a moral influence, and partly from their strategic value where they are wisely begun. They believe in the solidarity of labor, and where one element in its strength is attacked they are insistent that the whole of labor's strength must be directed to its defense. They know the weaknesses of labor, its suspicions, its overlapping, its till recently fatal neglect of the unskilled worker; and it is significant in this regard that two of Mr. Lansbury's closest friends, Mr. Robert Williams and Mr. Tillett, were responsible for the import federation of the transport unions of England, of which the present benefit has already been so great that the future significance is almost inestimable. They realize that the economic strand runs close into the texture of life and outside their work as in it, they coöperate for their mutual enrichment.

Of course it is inevitable that such a movement should have its defects. It is a little shrill. It tends a little naïvely to value rebellion for its own sake, to mistake a gesture for a deed. It rather fatally tends to minimize the strength of the opposition to itself and to fail to realize