

The Elusive Middle Class

The English Middle Class, by R. H. Gretton. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$3.50.

MR. GRETTON has embarked upon a novel kind of investigation in this book, and the result is both of interest and importance. Nothing is more necessary, especially in such times as these, than clear thought upon the essentials of social structure. Its traditional classification is significantly asserted and denied in behalf of every sort of political hypothesis. Revolution in America is declared to be impossible because of the solid qualities of the middle-class. The Russian Revolution divorces itself at the outset from association with middle-class traditions. Yet nothing is more clear than the fact that no two people would accept the same definition either of its extent or of its limits. Is it a matter of income? A Detroit millionaire is psychologically middle-class. Is it a question of birth? It has been stoutly denied that the English aristocracy regarded Queen Victoria as one of themselves. Does membership of a particular church contribute to it? We all at least know that there is a tasteful dignity about an Episcopal bishop which does not belong to a Methodist. If a machinist at Hog Island bought a Packard and became a member of the I. W. W., by what criteria would his class be estimated? Clearly there are here materials for fascinating reflection.

Mr. Gretton's book treats of distinctively English experience and his conclusions are set forth in historical terms. Broadly, he argues that the middle-class is "that portion of the community to which money is the primary condition and the primary instrument of life"; and he endeavors to substantiate its truth by tracing its history from the twelfth century, where, roughly speaking, it may be said to emerge, to the nineteenth century, where the development of the credit system makes it no longer possible to treat the problem in terms of the definition. For the middle-class, in short, money is something more than a token marking the potentiality of service. It is not the means to life, but a part of life itself; and the standard of values we are accustomed to term middle-class accordingly takes its rise from that fundamental assumption. Mr. Gretton has no difficulty in showing that there is much to be said for this definition; and things like the subordination of the earlier farming system to the growing needs of the woolen industry lend it vivid illustration. Nor is it less characteristic of the fifteenth century than of our own day that the middle-class should refuse all responsibility save that which tends to its own profit.

Yet it is tolerably certain that the problem is far more complex than Mr. Gretton's definition would seem to make it. Undoubtedly he is right in his insistence that the emergence of a monetary system is the main element in the rise of the middle-class. Where he leaves room for question is in his attempt to define its nature only in those terms. From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century there were many things that made an Englishman middle-class besides his financial position and methods. Birth contributes many elements of vital importance. No one has heard of the Cecils of the fourteenth century, but every one has heard of the Cecils of the nineteenth. Religion is often of decisive importance also. A Nonconformist who, even today, owns an estate say in Suffolk, will not be regarded as one of themselves by his Anglican neighbors. You can avoid the middle-class by psychological means. If a cotton merchant sent his son to Eton and Christ Church, the faults of his ancestry might well be compensated by the

virtues of his training. Membership of Parliament has, since 1832, done much to make the barriers between classes distinctly psychological in character; and it would be an interesting speculation to inquire where a syndicalist like Mr. Bertrand Russell, who has escaped a dukedom only by happy accident, is to be placed in the social scale. The truth surely is that the origin of the middle-class is to be traced not so much to their use of money as to the fact that their power was drawn from a different medium from that of the governing class of their time. They do not, on any large scale, begin to get land until the Industrial Revolution of which the fundamental illustration is the fact that the peer sends his second son into the city. The middle-class never wanted money for its own sake. It wanted power; and land, the original source of its possession, was already pre-empted. So it was reduced to the accumulation of what, in fact, was a far more useful instrument than the land it could not possess. Land became subjugated to the new forms of wealth commerce called into being. With the harnessing of steam to industry the middle-class became the dominant power in the state.

Mr. Gretton does not tell us by what criteria he would distinguish the different classes of England at the present time, and it is obvious that his definition would be inapplicable. Indeed, it may well be argued that the English middle class of today is less an entity than a state of mind. In one sense the upper class looks to the past; the middle-class is occupied with the present and the working-class with the future; so much, at least, may be reasonably insisted where the problem is considered in terms of the present control of the state. Birth counts for much, though wealth, as Lord Northcliffe has shown, may compensate for its absence. Religion is less and less significant, though in agrarian England it is still better to be church than chapel. The place where you are educated is fundamental; it is a mistake to avoid the public schools, and rightly fatal to avoid the older universities. In a sense, indeed, England is divided today by a line which is of a psychological kind that only an "insider" can understand. It is a line drawn differently in different places, and there are many who are permanently capable of immediate classification. It is a line between the best people and the others. The best people are known to all of us where they live in London. They are photographed for our delectation in the Sketch and the Tatler. They patronize the opera to preserve the music of the world. They give superb balls lest charity should die out from among us. They organize bazaars for the French wounded. They patronize men of letters and attend seances of strange, new religions. They are either genuinely and fabulously wealthy or able to compel the tradespeople to wait for their bills. They are never Nonconformists, and they never sympathize with trade-unions. They regard the House of Commons as the annex to a terrace upon which it is possible to have tea. They never get up until twelve because every one is so dull in the morning. They do not dare to love their own husbands, or, if they do, they boast of it as a phenomenon. They have to be in Scotland at definite parts of the year, and they dare not be in London in the summer. They always attend the opening of Parliament, whether it is held at Ascot or Newmarket. They read the Times or the Morning Post; and their political ideas are either finely Tory or so decently Liberal as to be indistinguishable from their opponents. These are the upper class of modern England whom Mr. Masterman has happily termed the conquerors. The rest of London is middle-class, though there is no aristocrat, be it noted, the half so formidable as

the President of the Costers' Union in Whitechapel. Here, as elsewhere, the extremes are compelled to meet. It is from the city and the stage that the peerage selects its recruits.

No task would be more fascinating than a similar analysis of American society. The absence of hereditary titles has led to curious results; and as early as 1750 De Chastellux noted that precedence in Philadelphia was strictly determined by wealth. The fact of birth had, at some stage, to enter in; and, broadly speaking, it seems true to say of America that its upper class consists of those who have been rich sufficiently long for most of us to forget the character of their ancestors. America differs from England in that religion is unimportant. Locality clearly counts. No one from Nevada could ever enter the sacred circles of Philadelphia or Boston save by the doubtful virtue of marriage; and if you come from Ohio it is clear that no excuse would be accepted. Education no longer is significant. Harvard has yielded to the Middle West; and the struggle of Yale and Princeton is clearly fruitless. Indeed, it is difficult to know how, save by the character of one's work, the American middle-class can be known. It might be all those who are not either sufficiently rich not to educate their daughters or sufficiently poor to join a trade-union. Professors are clearly middle-class. So are bank cashiers and commercial travellers. A graduate student who had been passed by an insurance company would have in this field a noble opportunity for the exercise of his talents.

H. J. L.

More Mythology

The Mythology of All Races, Vol. III: Celtic, by John Arnott Macculloch; Slavic, by Jan Máchal. Boston: Marshall Jones Co. \$6.00.

TONGUE-TWISTERS of the hackneyed "She sells seashells by the seashore" brand are hopelessly distanced, nay, even such monstrosities as the German "Konstantinopolitanischer Dudelsackpfeifenmachermeister" are put to shame by the villainous assemblages of sounds that meet the eye and defy the lip as one turns the pages of this latest publication in the mythological series. Human speech harbors many surprises for the uninitiate. Aborigines there are in Utah and Nevada who whisper part of a word and suggest the rest by closing the glottis. The Bushman clacks his tongue to say "Good morning" and fillips its tip from the roof of the palate to express the idea of transubstantiation.

Since the days of Przemysl even European languages have proved their latent possibilities. Accordingly we willingly swallow the names of Medb and Skrzatek and balk not even at Bodhmhall. These may be lacking in euphony, but they transcend not the powers of the human tongue. What, however, can be said on behalf of Cualnge or Gwrnach or Caledwylch? Never were these meant for mortal voice. Perhaps they were devised to be transmitted by telepathy or to be bandied about by the subtler organs of some fourth-dimensional order of beings. Or, most probable of all, they served as passwords at some esoteric witches' Sabbath of phoneticians ordained by the hero of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion.

Of course, no living being is responsible for the vagaries of Celtic and Polish phonology, and if we are left floundering amidst the former some kind soul has at least thrown us a life preserver in the

form of a key for the Slavic symbols. But enough of phonetics!

Three scholars have contributed to this volume, for Dr. Louis H. Gray, who banishes his name from the title page by way of editorial modesty, was obliged to supply the last section himself on account of the uncertainties of trans-Atlantic communication with his Czech correspondent. Naturally there is some diversity in the mode of approach of the several authors, but this may be occasioned as much by the varying character of the accessible material as by the writers' individuality.

Of the data presented the Celtic mythology savors least of the soil. Dr. Macculloch is fully aware of it and enlarges on the encroachments of Christianity and pseudo-historical sophistication. Primitive remnants abound, nevertheless, here as everywhere, but there is a distinct trend toward Byzantine grandioseness. Lady Bebhionn wears finger-rings as thick as three ox-goads, while Fergus has the strength of seven hundred men and satisfies his hunger with seven hogs and kine for a single meal. On the whole, the atmosphere is redolent of the medieval court at that highly interesting transitional period when the older cults were clashing with the new faith. The juxtaposition of the two civilizations is not lacking in some grotesque features, as when King Loegaire repudiates Christianity unless Cúchulainn be summoned from hell. When St. Patrick has accomplished the miracle, the pagan hero implores the king to become a Christian and the saint to admit him to Paradise, which devoutly wished-for consummation is duly effected.

From a literary point of view, Dr. Macculloch's treatise leaves much to be desired. It is both scholarly and sane,

TIFFANY & Co.

JEWELRY SILVERWARE WATCHES CLOCKS
BRONZES CHINA GLASS STATIONERY

DISTINCTIVE MERIT

THE MAIL SERVICE GIVES PROMPT ATTENTION

FIFTH AVENUE & 37TH STREET
NEW YORK