

Books and Things

AS such things go, *la Grande Revue's* *Enquête mondiale sur l'avenir de la littérature*, or so much of it as I've seen, is a pretty good one. It satisfies the two requirements of such a symposium, as we used to call an affair of this kind: the prophets are modest without being evasive or playing too safe. It avoids the worst of possibilities: agreement among the prophets. The war will result in a great love of peace, a desire for friendly human intercourse, a greedy thirst for whatever may be learned from spiritual and essential and elementary things, like love, friendship, the eternal problem—such is M. Pio Baroja's opinion. Contrast it with M. Emile Boutroux's, who is afraid we may be nearing a purely industrial society, where no demand will be made upon art except that it cure us, when our day's work is over, of that tired feeling. Yet in M. Boutroux's fear there are brighter threads of hope. He looks for a return to classicism, by which he means a certain intellectual and moral discipline. M. Blasco Ibañez expects a relaxation of that exclusive attention which certain meticulous artists have paid to form. He thinks the novel will keep after the war the predominance that it had before. Mr. Anstey Guthrie inclines to put the novel in third place, poetry in second, plays first.

Closing *la Grande Revue*, I try to remember what I've been reading. Three remarks stick in my head. First, F. Anstey's upon the impossibility of writing, for some time to come, a novel of contemporary life without somehow or other bringing in the war. Second, something a young French officer said to Remy de Gourmont, about four years ago: "If the literature of the near future is sincere it will be cynical, like war itself. Men who have been through the war won't be able to handle anything with gloves. They'll know human nature down to the ground." It is M. Louis Dumur who quotes this young officer, and from M. Dumur's own contribution I take this third observation: "Un peuple humilié ne connaîtra pas de Pindare, pas plus qu'une nation victorieuse n'admettra de Jérémie."

One drawback to an inquiry like the *Grande Revue's* is that you cannot read it without being tempted to make a guess of your own. Here is mine:

The literature of the near future will consist (a) of longer and (b) of shorter books than we have been used to.

Of longer books, because our curiosity about process, growth, change, is still unappeased. For example, novelists haven't yet done much with the contrast between an experience as it looks to the man who is living it and the same experience as it looks to the same man when he looks back. Fiction has strangely misrepresented our gift of forgetting and of remembering wrong. The man who forgets or misstates has been too like a comic figure or a villain or a hypocrite. The new literature will represent him as you and me and everybody.

For novelists the whole field of our unconscious is still "practically virgin" soil, in spite of some notable beginnings like this, over explicit, as nearly always with Tolstoi: "On getting home from his journey, Prince Andrey made up his mind to go to Petersburg in the autumn, and began inventing all sorts of reasons for this decision. A whole chain of sensible, logical reasons, making it essential for him to visit Petersburg, and even to reenter the service, was at every moment ready at his disposal." A new writer is coming who will master what Freud and Freud's successors have to teach him, who will not find the new knowledge too unfamiliar to be kept in its place, who has lived through a war in which sex's competitors for attention have been at

their fiercest. Books will be longer because man, still as curious about himself as the nineteenth century made him, has discovered in the twentieth a new way of seeing himself.

Longer than ever when they satisfy curiosity by narrating and exploring growth and change, books will be shorter than ever when they express crises, and by crisis I mean of course not only the hour which the Fates have double-charged and double-shotted, but any moment worth asking to stay and take the form of art—a choice, a mood, something seen. As the patient narrators will admit nothing insignificant, so the concentrators will leave nothing significant out. The concentrator's problem, as I see it, will be how to make the songs of experience as brief as the songs of innocence. After all, sudden light is sudden light, you know, whether it reveal a monotonous flat country, or a land of gorges, cataracts, beakèd promontories, high crags, or that other land that is very far off.

When I began this last paragraph I expected to justify its forecast by deductions from the war. These deductions, my witnesses, refuse to appear now that they are called. Their absence doesn't matter. As prophets, most of us only foretell the coming of young writers whose books we fancy we should love or hate to read, and such reasons as we may offer in commendation of our prophesying are no more than afterthoughts, concocted to hide its want of roots in any soil except preference and hope and fear. Which reminds me of another belief I owe to my wishes, namely, that an English book is about to be written which will express twentieth-century feeling and thought in eighteenth-century sentence forms and seventeenth-century words.

Drape himself as best he may with reasons, the maker of this last forecast stands none the less exposed as a naked victim of the will to believe, and the will to believe, I like to think, has had its innings. Some of the new writers will hammer and knock it back where it belongs. They will distinguish between its defect, its excess and its virtuous or useful mean. They have been young through the credulous years of war, they have seen how almost everybody, in every civilized nation, without examining evidence or at all caring to learn truth, has given credence to whatever he pleased and whatever pleased him, and they will revolt against this wide-spread, deep-laid unwillingness to see things as they are.

Perhaps it is foolish to prophesy unless you know, but it is less foolish when circumstances are favorable, as in this case, where the only person likely to remember your prophesy, yourself, will be dead before its absurdity can be proved. And nothing is against your being right except antecedent probability and the fact that I dissent.

To be sure, it's true that I have made mistakes in my times, some of them in previous existences. In Athens, at the end of the Peloponnesian war, I predicted that the fourth century would improve upon those attempts at tragedy which the fifth century had made. Later, in Italy, while watching the young Dante go up and down the streets of Florence, and listening to his words, I said he would fail as a poet, and would modestly ask to have this line cut on his tomb—"Of Heaven and Hell I have no power to sing." At the end of the French revolution, looking ahead through years of peace in Europe, didn't I foresee the high glories of French poetry between that date and 1830?

But no one remembers these things against me. No one remembers my foretelling, a hundred years ago, that American literature, in the middle of the nineteenth century, would represent the passion of love with imaginative ardor. And no one will remember anybody's guess about the great war's influence on either verse or prose. P. L.

What to Read

IF war is ever to cease it will not be simply because it is inexpedient. Men must become generally convinced that it is itself a filthy and indefensible procedure, and it is to soldiers we must go for this verdict rather than politicians, editorial writers, clergymen or diplomats. Soldiers differ on the subject, too, but the men who wish to league against war as a thing evil in itself will be interested in a little book just published by Allen & Unwin, 40 Museum street, London. Arthur Graeme West, the present witness in the case of *People vs. War*, can never appear in person. He was at Balliol when the war broke out. He enlisted as a private, got to be an officer, was killed in France in 1917. His comment on war is offered now as *The Diary of a Dead Officer*. He began enthusiastic for the war. Before he was killed he changed his whole view. He became an atheist and a pacifist, and he bitterly regretted that he had ever returned to France the second time. His diary will be interpreted by any number as the revelation of an inferior nature, a nature inadequate to the strain and test of war. Another interpretation is rather more valid. Here was a man who rebelled against the bullies and cads and louts whom he was forced to endure in training camp. Once disillusioned, he never recovered the morale that alone makes wars possible. He could crucify his will to the end but the whole experience seemed to him an indecent mockery of all the fancy pretensions of mankind. He wasn't scared to death, he was disgusted and bored and befouled, and he saw war as intrinsically filthy. Was this what Sherman really meant when he said that war was hell? This diary, however, is not polemical. It is a perfectly simple revelation of horror and disgust. Far from being censored in England, it has recently been given the leading review in the *London Times*.

The price of books goes bounding up. Every week now the *Publishers' Weekly* takes pain, and gives pain, to record that certain books already on the market have been advanced in price, and of course new books have been scaled up all along the line. The single volume *Collected Poems of John Masefield*, for example, is issued at \$2.75. It must be noted, however, that there are 521 pages in this volume, printed on a well-chosen paper. Not only this but the publishers have followed the excellent rule of beginning poems at the top of the page in many cases where an inch or two of paper had to be sacrificed. Such great-heartedness ought to be celebrated. The book should be known as *Collected Poems of John Masefield, 1919*, because in a few years in all likelihood this collection will be as incomplete as the collected editions of W. B. Yeats now are. But the edition deserves to be looked at, especially because of its appearance. Publishers still exist who have less typographical respect for a collected edition than Sears Roebuck & Co. have for the subject matter of their catalogue. They do not understand that poetry should be surrounded by white space, even when printed in wholesale lots. Mr. Masefield's poetry all the more demands a pleasant form because there is so much of it. His lengthy romances are open to serious criticism on the score of diffuseness. "He had been scared that first time, daunted, thrilled"—there is too much elaboration of this sort. But the narratives have that adventurer's imaginativeness which sweeps like clean wind through all of Masefield.

I read Fremont Older's autobiography as it came out serially in the *San Francisco Call*—and waited for succes-

sive installments much as in the nineties, sometimes, I waited for a twenty-five cent paper bound copy of *Treasure Island*, ordered after reading the opening chapters, published as bait, in a "mail order magazine." Older is not the wary, cultivated master of chiseled narrative, but it is doubtful if he has been excelled in American literature for native dramatic quality in the telling of a tale. *My Own Story* is issued by The Call Publishing Company in San Francisco, and proves that momentarily good things can be printed at some distance from Manhattan.

It was handsome of Colonel Roosevelt to give the commander of the Russian Women's Battalion of Death \$1,000 of his Nobel Peace Prize Fund. It was also somewhat ironic. The ironic deity, indeed, seems to preside over the fate of the Nobel "peace" prize. Rudyard Kipling, for instance, was not exactly the person whom you would expect peace-lovers to choose. There probably has never been an author who could get up so good a hate as Kipling. Hatred has meant more to him than it meant even to Milton or Dante. The same could not be said of Theodore Roosevelt, though his award leads one to expect that M. Clemenceau may be chosen over Woodrow Wilson. The likeliest literary choice among the writers of English is undoubtedly H. G. Wells. His work circulates in the Scandinavian countries in popular translations that resemble the admirable Nelson popular editions of English novels. Mr. Wells would be an understandable selection, but it is a matter for real regret that the award has never been made to William Dean Howells.

George Sylvester Viereck is circulating a postcard that reproduces a message from G. B. Shaw concerning the Authors' League of America. The Authors' League, it may be remembered, expelled Mr. Viereck in July, 1918, on the ground that he was disloyal and treasonable. Mr. Shaw's comment is this: "If the Authors' League or the Poetry Society or any other organization expels a member because of his political opinions, it thereby constitutes itself a political body and violates whatever literary charter it may have. Literature, art and science are free of frontiers and those who exploit them politically are traitors to the greatest republic in the world: the Republic of Art and Science." It will be interesting to see what answer, if any, Mr. Ellis Parker Butler and Mrs. Gertrude Atherton can make to Mr. Shaw. Had they any constitutional justification for the action they set on foot, or were they simply applying tar and feathers to a loathsome personality? Who were the worse traitors, Mr. Viereck or the Authors' League? And will the Authors' League accept Mr. Shaw's principle, expel Mr. Butler and Mrs. Atherton for betraying the Republic of Letters, and reinstate the objectionable Mr. Viereck?

Interesting books just published:

American edition of Siegfried Sassoon's *Counter-Attack*, (Dutton).

Memoir of Edith Sichel and a collection of her articles, called *New and Old*, (Dutton).

Maria Botchkareva's autobiography, entitled *Yashka*, (Stokes).

Songs of a Miner, James C. Welsh, (Putnam).

Collection of *Indian Tales*, *Kutenai Tales*, by Franz Boas, (Smithsonian Institute).

Second volume of the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, (Putnam).

Hugh Walpole's novel, *The Secret City*, (Doran).

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