

Books and Things

LAST night I was reading a fascinating little book, *Raleigh in Ireland*. It is not a new book by any means. It was published in 1883, the author Sir John Pope Hennessy, and this summer I bought it second-hand in London.

Sir John Hennessy seems to have undertaken this book as a sort of gentlemanly diversion, and was fortunate enough to have had it printed in pleasant style on fine white water-marked paper. His aim, however, was rather serious. It was to show from Walter Raleigh's letters and the first-hand records of the time how the bold Elizabethan came to Ireland, behaved in it and left it. His investigations into these circumscribed events Sir John refined into a brief and simple narrative, employing few adjectives and no overworked ones, and yet conveying a good deal of history with quietness and charm and sophistication.

Raleigh was one of those English rulers in Ireland who believed in subduing the Irish. He was a military captain long before he was an admiral, and came to Ireland primarily as a fighting man. His first enterprise was to aid the navy in besieging Smerwick Castle, and to slaughter all the men and women who surrendered. Besides the five hundred Irish men and women, Spaniards, Italians and Biscaines whom he put to the sword there were "one Plunkett and an Irish priest." "Their armes and legges were broken" and then they were "hanged upon a gallows."

Having escaped an ambush in Cork by an exploit of superb courage, Raleigh proceeded to carry out his own brusque military policy. Lord and Lady Roche he captured in a neat though treacherous manner. He secured the person of Sir John Fitzgerald, whom he executed in Cork. Not long later he executed Sir John Fitzgerald and then another brother, the Earl of Desmond, the skeleton of the Earl "hanging from the walls of Cork, his head having been sent as 'a goodly gift to Her Highnesse' in London." And there was his "killing by guile."

Raleigh's dealings with paid murderers in Ireland kept pace with "martial law, or rather martial executions without law, in the county of Cork." Lord Burghley, the Treasurer, regarded with horror this latter policy of "putting man, woman and child to death." "The Flemings," he said, "had not such cause to rebel against the oppression of the Spaniards as the Irish against the tyranny of England." But the Lord High Treasurer talked in vain. In Limerick and Cork there were massacres. At Ardara in Connacht there was open fighting. "The number of their fighting men slain and drowned that day we estimated and numbered to be fourteen or fifteen hundred, besides boys, women, churls and children, which could not be so few, as so many more and upwards."

For these activities Raleigh took his reward in the form of great Irish estates. The forests he cleared out and sold, cutting the wood into barrel-staves that were shipped to the wine-growers on the continent. But in the end these adventures prospered neither himself nor England nor Ireland. He who had laid waste the county of Cork was himself despoiled of his acres. He who had denied mercy to his own prisoners was a prisoner with Florence MacCarthy in the Tower. He sickened in prison and in the end died unjustly on the scaffold: and Munster became more Irish than ever.

Today the name of the man executed is not Plunkett. It is Plunkett, in 1916. Today the man who dies in Cork

is not James Fitzgerald. It is, two weeks ago, Michael Fitzgerald. Today the name is not Florence MacCarthy. It is Terence MacSwiney.

When I read this morning that MacSwiney was dead, my mind went to those assassinations practiced against rebels by Walter Raleigh and his peers, and I thought of the assassination of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomas MacCurtain, in March, 1920.

When the Cork Corporation met to elect MacCurtain's successor, the man who proposed MacSwiney was—himself. A member of the Cork Corporation told me that after various names were canvassed MacSwiney rose to his feet and asked that his own election to the vacant chair be made unanimous. "My predecessor was murdered because he was the head of the Volunteers. That was a challenge. Now we must take up the challenge."

It was natural, once this challenge was taken up, that MacSwiney should be arrested and courtmartialled on the first opportunity. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for being in possession of "seditious literature"—namely, a copy of a public resolution that had been printed in the daily papers; for having not in his possession but "under his control" a copy of a cypher used by the police; and for some other equally impressive offence. His real crime was that he was "vehemently suspected of an intention to rebel."

What MacSwiney desired was, in effect, what Florence MacCarthy and James Fitzgerald and Plunkett desired in 1580. And from the present ruling class in England came the answer that came from Raleigh.

MacSwiney, it is clear, could have chosen to submit to imprisonment. He had everything to live for. He had no desire to die. He no more wished to go on a hunger-strike than Tomas MacCurtain wished to be murdered. He took no more joy in his ordeal than experienced soldiers take in the agonies of war. But by submission, by common-sense acquiescence in the power of strong governments, he knew that he paved the way for the re-conquest of his country. He knew that the moment he admitted impotence the strong government would thrust every Volunteer leader under lock and key. By his protest alone he could remind the world of the unchanged cause of Ireland—its struggle against military domination, its rudimentary right to government by the consent of the governed.

Many may feel this and yet regard MacSwiney's sacrifice as needless. This it is only on the easy surface of things. The task MacSwiney took in hand and sustained to death is a task that transcends Ireland and the limits of nationality. He won a triumph for the soul of man. His aim, we may say, was narrow and special. It was the political and national freedom of a small human group, a group in the nature of things intensely self-centred because intensely mal-adjusted and unhappy. But to this narrow and special aim, as the world sees it, he brought something stronger than imperial governments, deeper of root and prouder of blossom. Against him there were ranged all the hosts of conquest, those that of old had surveyed the broken and the tortured captives of Smerwick, the rotting head of Desmond—those triumphant troops leaning on their muskets and gazing at the bodies, six hundred in all, "stripped and laid out upon the sands." Of what avail those crowding hosts of conquest, whether with musket or machine gun! Yesterday came a Plunkett, today a Plunkett. Yesterday a James Fitzgerald, today a Michael Fitzgerald. Yesterday a MacCarthy, today a MacSwiney. He could not yield. He was of the brave men who give lineage to their incorruption. F. H.

The Great Disillusion

Satan the Waster, by Vernon Lee. New York: John Lane.

NO light entertainment is offered by this closely printed and closely reasoned book. It is not the sort of book that is going to furnish conversation for the sophisticated twitterers who lie in wait for the Real Thing—those glittering social birds who get up so early to catch the literary worm. This particular book is not in their line. It talks of Tarde, Trotter, William James, Nietzsche, Durkheim, Wells, Shaw, Freud, Bertrand Russell, Ribot and all the other people whose names the twitterers know. But it does not talk of them with that glib accessibility which is the standard of style in *Heartbreak House*. Vernon Lee has a large set of ideas, a tough adhesion to them, an agglutinative mind. Her book is a remarkable representation of them, and consequently not a parlor toy.

Satan the Waster is called "a philosophic war trilogy with notes and introduction." The notes and introduction are general dissertation in the Shaw manner, pendent on the trilogy. The trilogy is dramatic in form and could, I imagine, be successfully acted. It begins with a Prologue in Hell, leads up to *The Ballet of the Nations* with Death as the ballet master, and ends with a crisp and scathing epilogue of a very amusing kind. Satan, the waster of human virtue, is the manipulator of this war drama. He cooks up the war, "out of good" finding "the means of evil." His collaboration with history and patriotism, with pity and indignation and heroism, sounds allegorical and flat. It is, on the contrary, novel in spirit and substance. Vernon Lee is undeniably sententious in manner, but never has she been less pompous than in *Satan the Waster*. The piquancy of her work, however, is not the thing to dwell on. It is the rich culmination in this volume of all the political and social criticism which for many years she has been maturing.

Vernon Lee is an Englishwoman, "proud to be numbered" among those who "originally opposed the war and afterwards clamored for a peace by negotiation, or at least a statement of war-aims." Into this book, around the allegory of Satan the true adversary of mankind, she has woven a coherent philosophy, a reading of life that takes into account the heroism and patriotism and self-sacrifice of the warring peoples and yet the filthiness and waste of war. The present mind of the civilized world (by which I find myself meaning the little world that reads the serious weeklies) is full of torturing incongruities. It agrees, on the whole, that war is "an incalculable evil, a stupid, obscene, superannuated thing, an artificially kept-up survival from the past, unfit for decent moderns." At the same time it remembers that in America most of the intellectuals did deliberately and proudly will America's participation in the war. This is only one of the haunting incongruities of the moment. Another is more intimate. The popular notion of a Young Crusader may have been sticky with sentiment, but in the service of America from April, 1917, till the denouement at Versailles there were thousands upon thousands of gallant and stalwart youths whose boast was that they were not "too proud to fight." And innumerable fathers and mothers whose god is not Moloch glowed at the thought of the heroism and sacrifice unostentatiously offered in the person of these youths. The present blind support of Cox in the hope that a League of Nations may somehow

be extracted out of the muddle is partly a reflex of this mood. We enlisted our sons in "an incalculable evil, a stupid, obscene, superannuated thing, an artificially kept-up survival from the past, unfit for decent moderns." To keep our self-respect, to preserve our moral continuity, we *must* see decency come out of that indecency, or suffer a horrible disillusion. That is the frame of mind of a great many cultivated Americans at present. And yet from underneath their support of the lip-servant Cox they feel a surging suspicion that perhaps it was not morally profound to have willed participation in the war.

In that suspicion Vernon Lee seeks to confirm them. She thinks that participation in the war was morally shallow. She thinks it was collaboration of an under-educated and under-civilized kind with Satan the waster of human virtue. She thinks it was delusion. And to carry home her consistent idea that it was delusion she has the satisfying intellectual honesty to analyze not only marked-down goods like patriotism and nationalism and imperialism, but also all sorts of moral all-day suckers such as righteousness, chivalry, heroism, self-sacrifice, adventure, unselfishness.

"It is very easy," you may say, "to re-arrange one's ideas after the event. Anyone can be wise now." But these reflections of Vernon Lee's did not spring up since the Big Four met at the Versailles conference. Most of her philosophic comment preceded the armistice, as the dates testify. And her comment is, to the exclusion of all political discussion, philosophical. It proceeded essentially from a dissatisfaction with trial by battle. It starts from a deep conviction that human maladjustments cannot be corrected or even remedied by force. The instrumentality of force, she says in a hundred different ways, has its own inevitable character, as Satan smilingly recognizes. It is the waste of human virtue, if not the consummation of vice. Out of force come certain consequences which prevent and defeat the purposes for which force was invoked. These consequences are not simply broken bodies and anguished souls, bad as such things may be. They are consequences involving passion and delusion, destroying the human compact and accepting the fatherhood of lies. The allegiances that force requires are irreconcilable with intellectual honesty. When war comes in, truth and civil liberty depart, and can never return until the principle of war is abandoned. To ask for civil liberty from a war president or a war government is to ask for a reaping machine that leaves the flowers.

These are trite ideas. Vernon Lee is not trite. Whether she is excavating the soft head of La Gloire or exploding the complacency of self-sacrifice, whether she is denuding the "high-bosomed" and much-corsetted Muse of History or examining the dilated heart of patriotism, she is to an astonishing degree the fresh and vivid exponent of a type of altruism for which most democratic people are persistently groping. Only she insists, as practically no public-spirited American managed to insist during the war, that this altruism means above everything "the importance of the alter, the other of otherness, to the ego." "Altruism takes into consideration the nature, apparent or conceivable, of that alter, and the feelings he is likely to have as well as, and perhaps in opposition to, the feelings we have about him."

Many who read this enormously stimulating and quickening book will, I think, agree as to "the unforeseen consequences of war between modern peoples"—"the hypocrisy, the unfairness, the self-stultification, the sin against Reality,