

this is another matter. If American comedy never gets beyond this type of play that comes to us by way of Mr. Cohan and is much the same always whoever the dramatist may be, it will still have something. It will have a sort of drama that is energetic, clean, journalistic, migratory, that is interesting even, so long as the mind can act without getting into ideas, can engage in pure action, as it were, in something transferred from the legs to the brain, without shading, without thought. This kind of comedy has also a very real and not to be underrated talent for popularity. It has something superficially indigenous, something of the American surface, of the people's heart, ears, eyes and mouths. From the very start it reassures an American audience by its confident air of success. As a play it keeps within the picture; it has the gift for keeping everything so so only. It is as sure as baseball, and almost as close to it, in fact, as it is to art. It follows a tried model in a tried region. But there is something in its guarantee of popular mediocrity that stops it short. Such a drama as this cannot with profit go to school, it is already complete in itself. It is good and very good as far as it goes and it can go no further. Its limits are cultural; it has no mind, it has only stock ideas and catchwords, brisk technical fibre, and energy.

But if a Cohan production is so hale a commodity that it needs no tavern bush to proclaim it, a play like Mr. Kelly's has more call for friends. The chances are at least even that this comedy could have gone on to something important. Wherever the author has been able to judge according to his own and not the footlights he has seen something actual and related it humorously to society. Whatever hope there may be for him will lie in the fact that his art will follow his matter. His matter and content therefore, his quality, his technique, his importance, in sum, will depend on his development in taste, in perception, in horizon, in his personal philosophy, his sincerity, flexibility and lively and gracious mindedness. How far this particular Mr. Kelly can go remains to be seen; his direction at least is hopeful. But obviously the hope for a future in our comedy depends also on the existence of a society and an audience that can understand a fine comic eminence and can respond to a luminous and just and smiling description of itself. Such a society perhaps would, when the time came, call out such a comedy. "Thou wert not born," Epictetus said, "when thou chooseth, but when the world had need of thee."

STARK YOUNG.

## C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

[The New Republic welcomes communications from its readers in regard to subjects of current interest, and especially concerning articles which have appeared in its columns. Those of 300 words or less are necessarily more available for publication than longer letters.]

### India and the Empire

SIR: Your recent editorial, India and the Empire, and my recollection of other criticisms of the British régime in India that have appeared in your pages, prompt me to comment on the peculiarity of your viewpoint on this subject. One's first impression on reading almost anything in The New Republic in which British relations with India are concerned is that you are possessed of an implacable hatred of Great Britain and everything British. It is only because The New Republic has the reputation of being a "liberal" organ of by no means immature intellectual capacity that one hesitates to dismiss your articles and comments on India as merely the offspring of malevolence.

You must be aware of the essential facts. The spiritual development of the Indians has not been stayed by the advent of stable government along approximately Western lines. Even Gandhi does not say this, whatever he may have to say about Western civilization with its wealth of production with which Americans are above all peoples so familiar. Religious freedom in India is absolute, nor is culture fed to the people compulsorily in any way.

With regard to material welfare, the facts are against you. India has progressed materially under British influence. Indeed a prosperous India, paying its way governmentally and expanding its consuming capacity, is plainly most desirable to the country responsible for the one and catering to the other.

If one examines the administrative accomplishment of the British in India one is conscious of a matter for congratulation and pride rather than dejection and ill temper. The work of the British in India in this respect, judged by the standards of human experience, has been a great one.

It is surely elementary that any intelligent discussion of British rule in India must take into account not only the ideal with which the student is inspired as to that great country, but also the condition of the people, spiritually, economically and politically, and their position in relation to the other peoples of the world. It must take into account the fact that India is on the planet, and therefore surrounded by peoples possessing human characteris-

tics some of which are undesirable, and which have been known to occur even in the United States. To be specific on this point, India would in any case have been seized, occupied, protected or exploited—whatever you will—by one or another of the more "enterprising" peoples of the world if it had not been drawn into the British Commonwealth. At best it might have been in the condition that China is in today. At worst it might have been in a military strait-jacket such as that of the German African colonies before the war. As it is, India under Great Britain has been secure in territorial integrity, and is growing rapidly in knowledge of that "good government" which in the present state of our knowledge is so necessary for the safety and well-being of any country.

At the present moment an immense and bold experiment is under way in India. Those who are taking part in this experiment ask for encouragement and help, not the disheartening criticism of your pages. You need a new spirit if you wish to maintain a reputation for liberality and intellectual capacity. You contribute nothing to India or the British Empire when you allow your pages to be discolored with gratuitous and irrelevant insults to the Prince of Wales, who is a man respected and loved by many millions of people throughout the world—for reasons sufficient to them if not to you—and to Lord Reading, of whose great qualities not even you can be in doubt.

ALGERNON F. M. GREIG.

New York.

### A Year's Subscription for Mr. Belloc

SIR: I have just finished reading Hilaire Belloc's recent book, *The Jews*, and was amused to find among the many interesting-if-true statements by its apocalyptic author the following choice bit:

"A very marked example of it [i.e. Jewish anonymity in the American press] is a journal called The New Republic, which, though it has but a small proportion of Jewish writers upon it, and though its capital is (I believe) not Jewish, is yet to all intents and purposes the organ of the Jewish intellectuals, always joins in the boycott of any news unfavorable to European Jews, always joins in the clamor for anything favorable to them, and, in general, adheres to the Jewish side, like the *Humanité* in Paris, or, let us say, The New Statesman in England."

How about a year's subscription to Mr. Belloc as a reward for this remarkable revelation?

J. TREIMAN.

St. Louis, Missouri.

## Mr. Punch's Humor

*Mr. Punch's History of Modern England*, by Charles L. Graves. In four volumes; vols. III and IV. 1874—1914. New York: The Frederick A. Stokes Co. \$10.00.

THE last two volumes of Mr. Punch's History carry us from 1874 to the outbreak of the war. We witness the passing of Disraeli, the waxing of the labor movement, the flurry of fin de siècle aestheticism, the confirmation of the Victorian compromise in the alliance of the landed aristocracy and the new industrial peerage; and, finally, we see England passing from a series of minor conquests in Africa and India to their inevitable culmination in the Great War. We see all these things as educated, middle-class people in England saw them—people who were blessed with prudent solicitors, who enjoyed the sort of humor that arises from the pleasant digestion of food and who had ready for every occasion a whole dustbin of classical tags which were carried over from their days at Oxford or Cambridge.

The humor of these nice, middle-class people was not the thrust of the rapier, which we call wit: it was rather the nudge of the elbow. Mr. Punch is, in fact, a master of the dig: he readily catches a disparity between one's pretensions and one's position, between a tradition and an innovation; and he points to it—broadly. By turns he digs at the Lords, at the Laborites, and at the L'art-pour-l'artistes. If his humor has none of the tart unkindness of a *Simplicissimus*, it is often not a little obtuse. In playing for a safe mediocrity Mr. Punch is sometimes as stupid as Aristophanes: he is rarely as devastating as Swift or Shaw. The sort of wit that stabs and wounds and cauterizes with laughter is not to be found in the pages of Punch.

If one is not financially capable of supporting a solicitor, or if one's digestive tract is out of order or if one likes to see a situation freshly without looking at it through Dr. Dryasdust's classical spectacles, Mr. Punch is very often an irritating bore—for the reason that the success of a sally depends upon certain common assumptions, and if one does not, for example, happen to believe that all socialists are envious marauders, the sort of joke that implies this belief is a frost. Indeed, the main fascination of these volumes lies not in their comic values—which are, as I shall show presently, important—but in their allusions: here one sees a thousand things that have taken place during the last century embedded in the thick matrix of affairs from which the historian draws them.

In his very defects, Mr. Punch does justice to the social milieu out of which his philistine attitude and his philosophy have grown. This fact comes out clearly in Mr. Punch's relation to foreign affairs. Although in the early days of the paper there was a tradition of Cobdenite pacificism, the imperial development of the second half-century under Disraeli and Salisbury caused Mr. Punch to look anxiously to the armament of the British state; and with a persistent seriousness, in which there is not a gleam of satire and criticism, Mr. Punch approves of every step that strengthens England's military position, screams raucously when England's defences appear to be weakened, and urges forward the campaign of preparedness in the days that followed the Boer War. On top of all this, Mr. Graves urbanely tells us that on the eve of the Great War, Mr. Punch, like the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen, neither expected nor desired war. It is impossible to contemplate this muddle-headedness without a touch of

exasperation. A paper which attempts criticism—and that is the capital function of such a sheet as Punch—should have a better sense of its bearings. In this respect, as in many others, Punch's loyalty to middle-class standards turns the paper into a solemn jackass.

I am rather harsh in criticism of Punch because it seems to me that the unfamiliarity of English life to American readers causes people to accept as humor what is only novelty. A great many Englishmen think that *Life* is a more interesting paper than Punch, and they make this mistake—for it is a mistake—under the same delusion that causes us to overvalue its foreign prototype. With the field that Punch has to work in—the sharp crotchetyness of British characters; the salt of the daily common life in farm and mine and city; the thick, personal humus of the British soil—it needs but a certain sympathy and a habit of observation to create a humorous magazine whose excellence will arise from its reflection of the temper of a thoroughly humorous people.

The thing that keeps Mr. Punch from being finer and sharper and saltier than he is, is the dead weight of middle-class tradition, increased by all that is stale and dull in the classical discipline of the universities. Mr. Punch's real jokes arise from a contemplation of the common daily life, with its quirks and humors; his terrible dullnesses derive from allusions to Richard III, or to King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid, illustrated by pictures that are even more stereotyped than the labels themselves. When Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Asquith during the budget crisis are represented as hatters stocking their store-windows with coronets, cheap, the allusion is inspired; when three radical cabinet members are depicted as the three witches in *Macbeth*, putting the constitution in a melting pot and murmuring incantations over it, the result is not a shock of surprise but a shrug of indifference: the three witches might just as well have been the Three Graces, for all the point that the allusion had.

These characteristics of Mr. Punch's humor are shown very aptly in the illustrations. There is one tradition in Punch which leans heavily to portraits of robust Brittanias with tridents, and sweet figures of Peace with doves in their bosoms: this tradition has all the heaviness of Royal Academy painting at its worst; it represents a sort of dignified inanity which is neither humor nor art. There is another tradition, that of Du Maurier in "high" society and Phil May among the lower orders, which reflects with a fine and sympathetic fidelity the native British scene—the taproom of an inn, the fireside of a suburban home, the top of an omnibus with a revealing touch of London in the background. Here is subtle draughtsmanship in pen-and-ink; and it is usually associated with an equally high order of humor; so much so that I wish I could make the point clearer with a few relevant illustrations. It is in this second tradition that Mr. Punch achieves his genuine triumphs.

At its best, Mr. Punch's humor has roots and associations; it goes back to Hogarth and "Phiz"; and it does not degenerate easily into the painful mechanical repartee between Spinks and Binks that we are accustomed to in America. These British characters whom Mr. Punch delights to portray are not scarecrow abstractions, manufactured for the occasion: they are such M. P.'s, dukes, fashionable ladies, costers, tavern gossipers and bishops as one might lift directly out of their native habitat, with the perfume of the boudoir or the dung-heap still clinging to their clothes. Even when the cartoonist shows them with the labels "First Tourist" and "Second Tourist" he has