

pear a deplorable attitude. They will be constitutionally unable to adjust themselves to the angle of vision; they will never understand how much of new and true these crooked people see.

And, of course, if they trouble to say anything at all about it, they will say, "But how *very* personal!" They will resent the implicit impertinence. For it is very impertinent when a single mind grasps the history of a great city as a single thing, as living and mysterious as itself. One little man, not to be distinguished from five hundred others when he sidles down the Strand, dares to regard battles and schisms and the fates of empires as functions of himself. Even prime ministers and newspaper-owners do not go so far: they have a sense, if not of the ridiculous, of what will not be tolerated in them. Yet this little man has the audacity to snip with his scissors at the stuff of history and make himself a suit of clothes. It is terrible. It is more terrible even than this. For the first time certain people begin to notice of what wonderful stuff the suit is made. Suddenly they recognize it as the authentic asbestos, immortally enduring. And naturally they begin to feel that there is something right and true in this use of the vague and faded material; it shines so splendidly now. It must have been waiting for the little man.

The implications of this conclusion are rather awful. That is why the majority of people avoid it. A more real reality is an alarming thing to have about; worse still is the thought that it is reserved for odd people to make contact with it, for people who, abandoning the good old practice of looking things in the face, cock their heads sideways at them and get a glimpse of what is behind. To this dubious race Mr. Forster indisputably belongs. Being a dubious character, he goes off to a dubious city, to that portion of the inhabited world where there is most obviously a bend in the spiritual dimension, to a place that is own brother to that spot on the Windsor Road where Mr. Barnstaple heard the sound, "sharp like the snapping of a lute-string," which was the music to his entry into Utopia—to a tense and exciting "field" (as the physicists would call it) where the atmosphere is preternaturally keen and there is a lucid confusion of the categories. At this point a spinning eddy marks the convergence of two worlds, and in its vortex contradictories are reconciled. It is nothing less than a crack in the human universe. Mr. Forster wanders off to put his ear to it. He finds Mr. Cavafy already engaged in the enterprise. So they listen together. They hear the defunctive music which attended Mark Antony to his last triumph, the words which were whispered by the priest of Ammon to the son of God, and the Bedouin singing "tunes to his camel that he can only sing to the camel, because in his mind the tune and the camel are the same thing."

There is a vortex in Alexandria, and Mr. Forster, being sensitive to such disturbances, was drawn into it inevitably. That is how we would explain this book and the glittering, shimmering magic that dances in and out of its pages. You may suggest, if you are interested in these inquiries, that if Mr. Forster were put anywhere else on the earth's surface, he would be found behaving oddly and glancing sideways at creation. Certainly he has shown an inclination that way before. That is why we remember his former books. They were not exactly good books, sometimes they were almost childish books, but they were in parts peculiar. But *Pharos and Pharillon*—except for one essay which recalls Mr. Lytton Strachey—is wholly peculiar and wholly good. Therefore we conclude that in

Alexandria Mr. Forster found his spiritual home; the queer fish found it easier to breathe in those suspiciously crystalline waters. Whether he knew what had befallen him the moment he arrived there, or whether it was his encounter with Mr. Cavafy and his recognition in him of a fellow-exile from the world of things which simply are what they are called—no matter which of these encouraged him to expand his own idiosyncrasy in the favoring air, it is certain that Mr. Forster has never yet been so convincingly himself or so manifestly different from his fellow-writers.

Yes, we must look for the cause in Alexandria. For we can detect the same magic, scent the same emanation from the antique and king-trodden earth, in the poetry of Mr. Cavafy which Mr. Forster quotes.

When at the hour of midnight
an invisible choir is suddenly heard passing
with exquisite music, with voices—
Do not lament your fortune that at last subsides,
your life's work that has failed, your schemes that have
proved illusions.

But like a man prepared, like a brave man,
bid farewell to her, to Alexandria who is passing . . .

And we have further evidence. Does not Mr. Forster himself invoke the city to explain the hopes of Clement of Alexandria that the great opposites, Greek naturalism and Christian supernaturalism, might be reconciled?

He lived in a period of transition, and in Alexandria. And in that curious city, which had never been young and hoped never to grow old, conciliation must have seemed more possible than elsewhere, and the graciousness of Greece not quite incompatible with the grace of God.

In that same curious city, we feel, Mr. Forster first gained the courage of his own vision and first dared to venture himself wholly into a "field" that is by right his own. Let us also have courage to compare small things with great, and say that Mr. Forster, like the young king he finds "more lovable" for the vision, "has caught by the unintellectual way a glimpse of something great, if dangerous, and that the glimpse came to him first"—if not "in the recesses of the Siwan oasis"—in the streets of the great city north of it.

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY.

George Santayana

Scepticism and Animal Faith, An Introduction to Realms of Being, by George Santayana. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$3.50.

MR. SANTAYANA has been known to readers, professional and lay, as a critical commentator of life, as a moralist in the true sense of the word. His insight and notation have been so genial and direct that some readers, professional as well as lay, have classed him as without philosophy, as without continuous logic, an utterer of aperçus, interesting to those whom they interested but without logical coherence and foundation. This view is a tribute to the art of Mr. Santayana and the consummate skill with which he kept his long logic subordinate to his vision and expression of the facts of life of the good or happy life. Speaking of this dullsighted class of critics Josiah Royce once remarked that Mr. Santayana had a definite philosophy from which he never

departed: the radical and complete separation of existence and essence.

In his new book the rôle of morals and metaphysics (Mr. Santayana himself uses the latter word in a different and disparaging sense) is reversed. Its theme is the separation of existence and essence, the beauty of essence and the indignity of existence. Essence is doubly beautiful; it is the subject-matter of the poet's vision; every soul that sees the world simply and candidly without the sophistication of dogma—which is much the same as without the sophistication of practical ambitions—is poetic. It is also, under Mr. Santayana's hands, a thing of beauty for the philosopher for it enables him, when it is rightly envisaged, to become a complete and thorough sceptic as to direct knowledge of existence while it also opens to him an unshakable "cognitive certitude"—the being of essences which are the only thing worth knowing. For, as the acute reader of Mr. Santayana's moral writings is aware, existence is to him inherently ridiculous, for the physical basis and origin of ideal goods (and of course essence is ideal) is comically disparate to its ideal fruits. All existence is physical or is matter, and since essence is ideal and its generation by existence is adventitious and its maintenance accidental, existence is meaningless. And what can be more comic than existence which is meaningless, aimless and mechanical, and yet is the sole author and support of the only things worth while, the ideal forms that fill consciousness? And so the moral—for Mr. Santayana cannot even as an overt dialectician wholly cease being a moralist—is to enjoy the contemplation of essence. Moreover by perceiving and enjoying the spectacle of the total irrelevance of existence to essence, we may escape from the tragedy of existence. For tragedy has its source in expectation—in expecting existence to do something for us, in being interested, as we are interested, in meanings, goods. Thus complete scepticism as to existence saves us from expectation, which is practical, egoistic, the tragic illusion of the man who takes material affairs seriously instead of taking essences poetically. Mr. Santayana's sympathy with Greek thought has always been familiar to his readers. His present work reveals—and I think the revelation will come to others beside myself as a surprise—a congeniality with Indian Brahman thought: the insignificant character of the whole world of existence.

As Mr. Santayana is aware there are points in his doctrine that are dangerously similar to types of philosophy for which he has only abhorrence. One of the most illuminatingly direct chapters—and Mr. Santayana's discourse is much less direct than his perceptions—warns the reader against misinterpretations of the doctrine to which the history of thought shows the mind is prone. The Platonists are conspicuous for their discovery of essences, but they give them not only existence but prerogative existence. Essences are not models nor causes, nor intrinsically good. Every bad thing illustrates an essence as fully as things that are excellent. The idealist also misconceives essence; he is so overpowered by its discovery that he holds that it is the only existence, so that matter does not exist. The right conclusion, however, is that matter is the only thing that does *exist*, that works, that is causal and efficient. It is never known immediately, but only symbolically through the essences that it fortuitously causes to vegetate in the mind.

Mr. Santayana has nothing but scorn for those who

doubt the existence and omnipotence of matter. The more sceptical we are of the existence of anything given, the greater the practical assurance of things which are not given to mind. Essences are only poetic, aesthetic, objects of immediate contemplation. But besides consciousness, which holds and enjoys these essences, perception and intuition, man is primarily a living body striving to make its way in a world of other bodies that have no interest in its success and failure. To have survived at all in an adventitious world means that the animal body has acquired some degree of adaptation to the material medium which determines its destiny. In the realm of essences the mind is purely contemplative and at play. But the body has to work to live; it has to meet and adjust itself to hard circumstance. The organized structure of the body in its achieved adaptation to physical surroundings or what are usually called instincts, reveals to us such attachments to the world of existence as essences may possess. These instinctive adaptations are common sense, or as Mr. Santayana calls them, animal faith. And as it is by poetry and the imagination that we live in the world of essence, so it is by animal faith that we ascertain that some of these essences are symbolic of material things since they serve us in judging the material environment, in securing meat and drink, and averting for a time disease and death. Essences are present and timeless; but the perpetuation of the body depends upon memory, prudence, foresight, upon concern with what is not given, with what alters and is in time. It is this concern with time, this need for readiness to deal with things not given, not present in sensation or imagination, which selects those essences that are significant of something beyond themselves, which constitutes them transcendent, or cognitive of things beyond themselves. As with Spinoza, essence is mind, existence is matter.

Essences remain essences, the proper and rewarding objects of aesthetic contemplation and the free play of mind. But their adventitious conjunction with the needs of the animal body gives some of them practical intent and makes truth and error possible as they are used rightly or wrongly to signify some feared or hoped for object. Science changes the style of essences which are employed, because science has to meet larger, more public and remote needs and conditions. But it springs from the same wedding of essences to animal requirement and its objects differ from the essences of mythology only in that they are kept closer to the tests of existence applied to the determination of a living creature to go on living. "External objects interest man for what they do, not for what they are; and knowledge of them is significant, not for the essence it displays to intuition (beautiful as this may be) but for the events it expresses or foreshadows. It matters little if the very existence of external things is vouched for only by animal faith and presumption, so long as this faith posits existence where existence is, and this presumption expresses a prophetic preadaptation of animal existence to the forces of the environment." The practice of the arts is our most reasonable assurance of the existence of things beyond mind and perception.

It is impossible to render an adequate account of Mr. Santayana's new book. I have confined myself too closely and literally to such phases of it as may illustrate merely its title. If Mr. Santayana desired revenge upon those who have assumed that because he subordinated dialectic to expression, he lacked logic, he has it in this

book. For continuity and subtlety of dialectic the book, though couched in a radically different philosophy, is worthy of Mr. F. H. Bradley, the master of living dialecticians. Indeed, it is so closely wrought and so sustained that it is to be feared that those who did not find coherent system in his earlier writings will not discover it here. Mr. Santayana promises a sequel; I shall make no adverse criticism of this book beyond saying that the sequel is badly needed. It is a delicate enterprise to discount practical intent and the busy life of man in behalf of aesthetic essences and their contemplation, and then to rely upon the practical needs, acts and sufferings of man to make sure of the existence of anything, and to render essences applicable to things and expressive of their careers. A priori one would say that both things cannot be done, and that having surrendered so much to a naturalistic pragmatism Mr. Santayana must surrender more. But succeed or fail, the enterprise is technically one of the most exciting undertaken by any contemporary philosopher. And those who are not excited by the technique of a virtuoso will as always be rewarded in reading Mr. Santayana by the felicitous insight and the genial irony that find incidental expression on every page.

JOHN DEWEY.

The Guild of St. Luke

Vincent van Gogh: A Biographical Study, by Julius Meier-Graefe; translated by John Holroyd Reece; with one hundred and two illustrations after the works of the Artist. Two volumes. Boston: The Medici Society Limited. \$17.50.

THE nineteenth century will perhaps be remembered as an age when the dwarfs and the giants banished the gods; when the Bismarcks and the Watts lived long in the land, whilst the finer spirits, the Nietzsches and Ruskins and van Goghs, perished in lonely madness. Dr. Max Nordau was not wrong when he characterized the spectacle as one of degeneration; his treacherous failure lay in his inability to see that the degeneration had taken place in society, rather than in those who were at odds with it. The madmen were the developed types, the music-makers; and they were overwhelmed by debased and crippled people—the lamed Vulcans of one mythology, or the vicious, dwarfish smiths and metallurgists of another. In the biographies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Vincent van Gogh we read the tragic story of two men whose quest for a life abundant ran flat against the spirit of the age, which was in search of a mere abundance of material goods and of the sleek parasitism that was its final destination and fulfillment.

Vincent van Gogh was born in 1853 and died in 1890. He was born mid the meadows and orchards of Brabant, in the Lowlands, and he grew up in the midst of a rural society where men still turned over the earth and scattered the seed in the furrows, punctuating each beat in the rhythm of nature with an appropriate deed. Shy, humble, withdrawn, he accepted the lot in life belonging to a family with mercantile connections, and at sixteen, without any definite inclinations towards art, he found himself an apprenticed picture dealer in the Goupil Galleries, first at the Hague, and then in Paris and London. At this trade Vincent lost none of his gnarled, deep-rooted intelligence; on the contrary, he acquired convictions about

art which were not always in harmony with fashion; and presently we find Vincent leaving the business of art to his life-long friend and comrade, his brother Theo.

Vincent's father was a minister, and the Bible had seared Vincent's heart with that peculiar intensity which it exercises over the lonely Protestant in northern lands, where virtue envelops the soul like a fog, and cuts one off from the sanity of fellowship with any other being than one's God. Vincent entered the service of the church as a lay preacher, among the miners of La Borinage, in Belgium. He preached; he taught; he visited the sick; he shared the miserable existence of these crude, honest folk; and, as Herr Meier-Graefe tells us in his biography, "he gave away his money, his clothes, and at last even his bed." Perhaps he sympathized with these miners, too, when they went on strike; at any rate, he took the precepts of Christ a little too seriously for the perfectly bourgeois directors of his church; and he was dismissed.

These strained and searching months at La Borinage were not wasted. In the muck and disease and starvation of this mining town, Vincent found himself; the seamed and knotted faces of his companions in misery awakened the artist in him, and slowly, the man who had wandered about, idle, seeking, as he might have put it, God's word and God's work, began to draw and paint. During the next ten years or so of his life his spirit was in continual travail; and out of it his pictures came forth.

The technical development of van Gogh's art does not concern us here; one merely notes in passing his first debt to the painters of his own country, his awakening to color among the impressionists at Paris, and finally, emerging out of this, the brilliant palette, and the firm, slashing strokes of van Gogh's mature art, equally clear and impassioned, whether it touched a few articles of furniture, a cypress in an open field, or a man's head. One understands his art better by its many contrasts with that of Gauguin, that stanch boulevardier who sought the primitive in the South Sea Isles, where one might find it in a musical comedy, instead of seeing that it was a quality of life, which one might discover in the plowed fields of one's native countryside. Gauguin, it is true, knew the life of culture better than van Gogh, and he saw that art might find a habitation in our buildings once more, in the flat tones of decoration. Van Gogh, however, had a fund of spiritual energy which Gauguin lacked: he sympathized where Gauguin only saw, with the result that there is an intensity of experience in some of his pictures which in Gauguin, one sometimes feels, is only a firmness of intention.

It comes to this: van Gogh was not merely a painter of tremendous force and originality; he was above all things a man who thought and suffered, and out of the biting ecstasy of his life he created pictures which seem to tell us what a vivid world we might find if only, like Vincent himself, we would leave behind what we call our centres of civilization, and renew once more our contact with real landscapes and real people, instead of drifting through the pall of shadowed buildings and shadowy lives that now overwhelm us. In one of his letters van Gogh says of Christ: "He lived serenely as an artist, as a greater artist than any other; for he despised marble, clay, and the palette, and worked upon living flesh. That is to say, this marvellous artist, who eludes the grasp of that coarse instrument, the neurotic and confused brain of modern man—created neither statues nor pictures nor even books.