

"It Was Proposed"

Damaged Souls, by Gamaliel Bradford. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company. \$3.00.

IT is an open question whether books written to a program must not always have the weakness of their type. Mr. Gamaliel Bradford confesses, as the *raison d'être* of *Damaged Souls* that "it was proposed" that he should write a series for Harper's Magazine. "Our idea would be to go through our national history, and select prominent figures who have loomed over-large in their own day . . . Of course, in dealing with such a gallery we should expect you to proceed ruthlessly and with scant deference to tradition." Mr. Bradford replied that the invitation made a "fascinating appeal to the worst elements" of his nature, but that, after all, he was not quite an iconoclast and did not want to overthrow or destroy even the things that deserve such a fate. Yet instead of refusing forthwith he made a counter-proposal "to deal with a group of somewhat discredited figures, though not to deal ruthlessly with them," and suggested that instead of "iconoclastic portraits," which put the burden of iconoclasm on him, the series be called "damaged or patched souls," which put the responsibility for the damage either on fate or on the gentlemen themselves.

It would be interesting to have Mr. Bradford turn his critical eye on himself in a consecutive statement. The essay might properly be printed as an addendum to *American Portraits*, instead of occurring hither and yon throughout his pages as it does now. For Mr. Bradford is to a high degree self-conscious. In general he regards himself as a rather startling liberal,—“Oh, what fun it is to be a rebel!”—though he is only a follower in the ranks, and even at that an intermittent one: “Some of us occasionally like to think new thoughts and step out of the beaten track, and we like one who makes us do these things.” He likes also to be mildly shocked at divagations from the open road, which he is willing to witness but not to record: “I wish I could embellish these decorous pages with the gay adventures of the fair Madame D. in the crowded inn at Rotterdam.” His scruples are less fine than those of Mr. Howells at the “Elizabethan breadth of parlance” in Mark Twain's letters, which he could not bear to burn though he could not bear to look at them again, for Mr. Bradford acknowledges a covert pleasure in reminiscences which he has not the courage to share. And all the while his self-consciousness is blighted with the false modesty which can lead him to call himself “an insignificant, impertinent, treacherous biographer.” These few casually selected but quite typical confessions lead to an evaluation of Mr. Bradford as a biographer. In his lack of the “simplicity and almost child-like candor” which he attributes to all his *Damaged Souls* except John Randolph, he raises a question as to the pertinence and significance of his portraits; and he challenges inquiry, too, as to his knowledge of life, his opinions about it, and the clarity of his mental processes.

When he exclaims, “Oh, what fun it is to be a rebel!” he implies that he has had some experience at this diversion; but as he goes on to characterize a rebel in the abstract he shows that he has never been one or intimately known one. It is a straw man he sets up. His rebel is the mischief-maker of history. Rebellion is a huge practical joke. It is boisterous, destructive, humorless jollity, and the rebel is the thick-skinned convention-smasher who

can go his way “untroubled by the criticism and abuse of spite and malice, indeed rather stimulated by them.” This is a fancy picture which has almost no relation to actual rebels. The iconoclasts one knows have been moved to utterance and action by conditions they could not endure. They have soberly undertaken to set them right. Sensitive as Shylock at the expression of public scorn, they have been goaded to extravagance by criticism and abuse, and have suffered the tortures which come with being damned. Mr. Bradford says that Satan and Prometheus are “the great ideal rebels.” Yet even they, as I recall them, do not seem to have reveled in the cheery irresponsibility which he ascribes to all their kind. Mr. Bradford was thinking of cynics, sceptics, journalistic radicals. He was writing with Tom Paine in mind, but he used a term which should apply equally to Paine and Washington and John Brown. When he wrote “Oh, what fun it is to be a rebel!” he actually meant, “Oh, what fun it is to write biographical sketches for the readers of Harper's Magazine!” A defensible proposition based on experience.

When Mr. Bradford declares further that “some of us occasionally like to think new thoughts and step out of the beaten track,” he suggests again that he is speaking out of his experience. But a careful reading forces the conviction that he is writing tolerantly from observation. There is no trace of new thought—in the sense of original or even independent thought—about family or school or market or church or state in all his pages. The canons of a Victorian America are finalities for him. He quotes Aaron Burr and requotes him: “On full investigation it will be discovered that there is scarcely a departure from order but leads to or is indissolubly connected with a departure from morality.” This harmonizes happily with his statement, apropos of Randolph of Roanoke, that it “is the essence of conservatism to hate change, to love quiet, to seek repose.” Of “our Constitution” he declares that the most important element is “the original principle of state vitality.” It is a broad thesis. Does he really think so, or is he merely saying one of the things echoed by those who hate change, even of their habitual platitudes? One suspects the latter.

The basic challenge to Mr. Bradford's work is as to his lack of method. He alludes to himself as an “impertinent biographer.” One is ready enough to decry this self-accusation, but equally ready to indict him for frequent unpertinence. He is loose and inconsecutive, so assured that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds that he is not haunted by it even throughout the course of a single chapter. Of course he does not write a study of several thousand words at a single sitting, but coming to it in changing moods he writes with a zest that again and again carries him quite away from what he seems to believe is his main thesis.

The sketch of Paine is an example. Paine is a rebel, and a rebel delights in destruction. Yet, he says, Paine preached nationality, coordination, cooperation, federal control. He espoused many of the reforms “which are now so accepted that we cannot imagine the world without them.” This does not seem to be very destructive, so Mr. Bradford returns to his charge. He was disrespectful to George Washington,—and to God. Yet “he affirmed and reaffirmed, with obvious honesty, his belief in God, and his abiding and comforting hope of a future life;” and “no one can question Paine's sincere interest to inspire in his fellow-men a spirit of trust, confidence,

and consolation in his creator. Once again the ship has gone on the wrong tack, so Mr. Bradford brings it about with the flat statements that Paine felt no awe and no reverence, and had "not an atom of religion in him." There is little use in pursuing the point. An author's only comment on such inconsistencies could be Charles Sumner's, that if at such and such a time he made such and such an assertion, that was doubtless what at that moment he believed. But though such discrepancies may have been written at intervals they are read, it must be remembered, at a single sitting.

Now this last non sequitur about Tom Paine, that there was "not an atom of religion in him," leads us to another broad defect in Mr. Bradford's writing—his non-discrimination in the use of words. This is surprising in view of his oft-declared respect for words. A common gift of all the Damaged Souls was their "facility, if not felicity, with words." Barnum "made words serve his purpose." Butler was "a master of words." "Words with something behind them make the man who prevails." Yet Mr. Bradford's carelessness in diction is, as he might say, "curious."

Let us follow the commentary on Paine's lack of religion a little farther. There was "no longing, no craving, no aspiration, nothing whatever of the mystic's high emotion and all-absorbing love." Religion, apparently, can exist only in him who is a mystic. Mr. Bradford ignores the varieties of religious experience of which mysticism is only one.

Nor has he any clearer conception of mysticism than he has of religion, as the next four words demonstrate: "Mystery? He abhorred mystery." For the fundamental experience of the mystic is not that he is conscious of mystery, but that he is conscious of an ineffably clear perception of the truth. It is not with these words alone that Mr. Bradford is confused, but in many and many an employment of abstract terms. One is tempted, in Mr. Bradford's own phraseology, when he resorts to abstract words, "to regard these insinuating agents with extreme scepticism."

It is with words, however and finally, that Mr. Bradford also shows his strength. It is not unfair to apply to himself what he has written of another:

I do not mean to say that words were the whole of him; . . . but words were the worst and the best, and I think his gifts in this direction accounted largely for what success he had. . . . When you probe his documents to the very bottom you may not find any great coherence or logical form. But for plausibility, for shrewdness, for power of producing just the turn of thought that the occasion required, for touching it with vigor and driving it home . . . his written statements are often remarkable.

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Crucibles of Crime

Crucibles of Crime, by Joseph F. Fishman. New York: Cosmopolis Press. \$2.00.

THE scene changes. The gray outlines of the state prisons—Sing Sing, Trenton, the Eastern Pen. and a score or two others like them—fade from sight and there flashes on the screen the unfamiliar, lurid picture of The American Jail. If it lacks the glamorous features of the

big "stir," with its two-handed gunmen, its master minds, its "four horsemen," its yellow paint and sunshine cures and its romantic revolts and breaks for freedom, it has, as a picture, its compensating advantages. For the thrills of its romantic rival, which are, after all, forgotten when one gets out into the sunlight, it substitutes creeps which keep one awake all night. And then, too, as every one knows—as every one, at least, who reads *Crucibles of Crime* will know—where the prison slays its thousands the jail slays its tens of thousands.

Not that the story of the local jail is a new one. It was graphically set forth by one John Howard, an Englishman of some note, a hundred and fifty years ago, and since his day it has been told again and again in countless reports of grand juries and prison associations and official boards in this country as well as in England. As recently as the year 1910 it was repeated with stinging emphasis by another distinguished Englishman who visited this country in connection with the International Prison Congress held in the city of Washington in that year. This visitor, who was Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, Chairman of the Prison Commission for England and Wales, along with much undeserved praise of our penitentiary system, felt impelled to call the attention of the American people to the deplorable condition of their jails, many of which, he declared, continued to perpetuate most of the evils of the English and continental jails which had excited the indignation of John Howard in the eighteenth century. But never before, never at least since Howard's epoch-making report was laid before the House of Commons in 1774, has the picture of the county jail been put before the public with the vividness and fulness of detail that it now has in Mr. Fishman's book.

There can be no question as to the author's competence for the task he has performed. With keen powers of observation and reportorial skill he combines a unique experience, that of federal inspector of prisons for fourteen years. The investigations whose results are set forth in this volume were made by him not as a prison reformer but as a public official acting under a sense of professional responsibility. It was his duty to ascertain and to advise the successive attorneys-general under whom he served whether the several jails and penitentiaries of the country, national, state and local, were or were not fit for the reception and detention of federal prisoners. It will be no surprise to any one who is familiar with our prison system that Mr. Fishman found the vast majority of these institutions scandalously unfit to be the habitations of human beings.

Crucibles of Crime is not a systematic study of the jail such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb's recent admirable work, *English Prisons under Local Government*. Neither is it a finished literary performance like G. B. Shaw's brilliant introductory essay to the Webbs' book. It is rather a broadside, frankly a piece of propaganda, but that happens to be just the thing that is needed. Its appeal is not to students of penology—though such students cannot afford to do without it—but to the ignorant, indifferent public which needs to be shocked out of its complacency by a clear presentation of the facts in a vivid, colorful style. All that we have a right to demand of such a book is that it shall be true to life, and that this work unquestionably is. Mr. Fishman has rendered a conspicuous public service in thus giving a new impetus to John Howard's uncompleted task.

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