

American industries of controls which secure to their management an effective safeguard against the disastrous vicissitudes to which the farmer is exposed. Those controls are according to the Progressives intimately associated with the existing ownership and management of the railroads, and they propose, consequently, as one necessary step in the economic emancipation of the American people some method of railroad nationalization. Mr. Davis does not betray any understanding of these more radical demands, nor does he make the slightest attempt to satisfy them. He clearly believes that the present agricultural distress is a temporary phenomenon, and that the resulting political commotions, like the Populism of the 'nineties, will gradually fade away. It does not call for a cure except in so far as tariff reform and European economic recovery will cure it. It will be enough to soothe the patient while nature is removing the cause of his discomfiture.

In so far then as Mr. Davis's address was prepared as an invitation to Progressive voters it will, except in a few instances, fail of success. Progressivism is beginning to mean an agitation in favor of a revision of American constitutional and social law and a redistribution of economic and political power to which Mr. Davis is either indifferent or opposed. He talks as if the existing legal and economic system is on the whole an embodiment of Jeffersonian Democratic principles which, with a few minor alterations, the Democratic party can make entirely satisfactory both in theory and practice. His motive for making a noise like a "liberal" is that he is campaigning against Mr. Coolidge who is a conservative, and he must establish some distinction in the public mind between his point of view and that of his most formidable competitor. But his "liberalism" consists in proclaiming his adhesion to principles which in his opinion are already embodied, not perfectly but on the whole sufficiently, in our American legal and economic institutions and practice. His progressivism is tempered to appeal to hesitating conservatives. It is equivalent merely to a squeamish conservatism. It is not an active ferment which seeks an individually and socially educational benefit through the conscious clash and mutual adjustment of class activities and ambitions in a background provided by a more humane law and religion. It is a sugar-coated capsule of dope which Mr. Davis out of the goodness of his heart is recommending to his troubled fellow-countrymen. Should it succeed, its success will consist in keeping the insurgent economic groups harmless, dormant and safe for the Democratic party.

The Meaning of Conrad

EXCEPT Thomas Hardy no English man of letters could have given by his death such historic importance to the year 1924 as Joseph Conrad. Born in 1857, a year after Bernard Shaw, Conrad

began his literary career late, in 1895, with *Almayer's Folly*. This was the year of Stevenson's death, and of Hardy's virtual, and almost of Meredith's, retirement from fiction. Shaw had not yet published *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, and Galsworthy, Bennett, and May Sinclair were still below the horizon. Thus Conrad found his predecessors, except for Henry James and George Moore, leaving the stage or already gone, and himself the first of the new generation to occupy it. In twelve years he had published ten books including *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Lord Jim*, *Youth*, *Nostromo*, and *The Secret Agent* which are distinctive of his first period. "The writing of these books," wrote Mr. Galsworthy in 1908, "is probably the only writing of the last twelve years that will enrich the English language." And there were still to come the two most elaborate and characteristic of Conrad's performances, *Chance* and *Victory*.

The place of Conrad in the literary movement of the time has been often indicated—his inheritance from both romantic and realistic progenitors, which enabled him to add to romance (the poetry of circumstance, as Stevenson defined it) the realism of human experience, and to make realism significant as the poetry of character. It must not be forgotten also that 1895 marked a definite advance in the revival of mysticism. Ibsen was writing the last will and testament of realism in *When We Dead Awaken*, and a new cabinet of European letters was being formed under the presidency of Maurice Maeterlinck. Whether Conrad ever read it or not, Maeterlinck's preface to the first collected edition of his plays states the program which Conrad's work was to illustrate. "High poetry," says Maeterlinck, "is composed of three elements: First, verbal beauty; next, the passionate contemplation and depiction of what really exists around us and in ourselves; and finally . . . the idea that the poet makes of the unknown in which float the beings and things that he evokes, of the mystery which dominates them and presides over their destinies."

How completely Conrad lends himself to this analysis is obvious. In verbal beauty, in mastery of the beautiful material of language and the swaying of it in powerful and haunting rhythms he is supreme. Again, the passionate contemplation and depiction of reality was the beginning of his literary workmanship. He has told us how the sight of Almayer, "forty miles up, more or less, a Bornean river," set his mind working on the problem which required seven years for its solution. His first inspiration was visual. "He (Almayer) was moving across a patch of burnt grass, a blurred shadowy shape with the blurred bulk of a house behind him, a low house of mats, bamboos and palm-leaves with a high-pitched roof of grass." But the interest shifts to character. "If I had not got to know Almayer pretty well," Conrad wrote later, "it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print." What happened in the case of

Almayer is typical of Conrad's method. First it is the sensuous appeal which takes him, and no one has ever rendered more acutely and strikingly the effects of darkness, light, heat, rain, wind, forest, river, sea, and of men and things exposed to these elements. But Conrad's realism is never authoritative and photographic. Appearance immediately becomes subjective, and to make the method more explicit the experience is often transmitted through the consciousness of a third person. This is the characteristic procedure in Conrad's undoubted masterpieces, *Lord Jim*, *Chance* and *Victory*.

It is the third element, and in Maeterlinck's view the most important, which has given rise to most dispute in regard to Conrad's position—"his idea of the unknown in which float the beings and things that he evokes, of the mystery which dominates them." That he is acutely conscious of this mystery there is no doubt—it is as present to him as to Maeterlinck himself. Mr. Wilson Follett has called attention to Conrad's frequent preoccupation with the physical presence of somebody or something hidden, as in *The Secret Sharer*, the symbolism of which tends to bridge the gap between appearance and reality. But what idea does he give us of this unknown? Mr. Mencken thinks it merely the crass casualty or cosmic implacability of Mr. Hardy's universe. He sees all of Conrad's heroes "destroyed and made a mock of by the blind incomprehensible forces that beset them," and the title *Victory* "an incomparable piece of irony." But surely this is not the emphasis which Conrad himself places upon his world. It is true his heroes are not conquerors in the material sphere, but the significant thing is that they continue to strive. The theme which Conrad presents most constantly is one of affection, devotion, protection, tested by danger, by the fury of nature and by the craft of savage men, calling out courage, loyalty, endurance, sacrifice. The object of this devotion may be a child, a ship, a woman. Often his theme is the loyalty between men of different race, of white men to brown, or brown to white. It is hard to miss the meaning of *Lord Jim's* sacrifice, as in expiation alike of his own long ago faithlessness and the treachery of men of his own race he goes before Doramin to die by his hand—a witness to the imperial truth that the test of a man's fitness to rule his fellow men is his willingness to die, not only for them and with them, but by them.

If Conrad had not presented this theme so constantly, his own comment, sparse as it is, would give us a definite idea of his moral index of the world. "The world," he says in *Reminiscences*, "rests on a few very very simple ideas, so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably amongst others on the idea of Fidelity." It is because the sea emphasizes the dependence of man upon man and loyalty to the ship as a condition of survival against the hostility of nature that Conrad justifies it as the medium of his tales. "The sea," he writes

in *The Shadow Line*, "is the only world that counted, and ships the test of manliness, of temperament, of courage and fidelity—and of love." It is the fidelity to the claims of race which leads him to dedicate *Rescue* to Hugh Clifford, "who among the Malays whom he governs, instructs, and guides is the embodiment of the intentions, of the conscience and might of his race." And finally his own creed embodies in words which Maeterlinck himself might have used the sense of the business of the artist to promote the union of mankind in the presence of the unknown, which becomes an ennobling rather than a mocking, terrifying, or crushing conception, through the participation of all men in its mystery.

"He [the artist] speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity and beauty and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other; which binds all humanity—the dead to the living, and the living to the unborn."

What They Have Accomplished in London

CONSIDERING the terms on which it was summoned, the Conference which has recently assembled in London to agree upon a method of operating the Dawes plan has reached a tolerable compromise. All parties to the Conference have made substantial concessions in the interest of agreement. So far as M. Herriot is concerned these concessions are sufficiently substantial to prove the good faith of his announced desire to restore coöperation among the Allies. So far as the British Prime Minister is concerned, the concessions are also substantial, but on the whole they represent probably a smaller deduction from the previous attitude of the British government than they do from the previous attitude of the French government. The result is an extremely cumbersome piece of machinery which will not work in practice unless the people who operate it are really and continuously anxious to coöperate. But in so far as there is any probably fatal flaw in this mechanism, it is the product not of the new agreement so much as of the Treaty of Versailles. Under that Treaty the French government claims the right in certain conditions to adopt punitive measures against Germany without the consent of its co-signers. The nature of these conditions is not precisely defined. They are necessarily indefinable, but whatever they are the London Conference has fastened restrictions on them. As a result of it France is for the present committed to participation in an elaborate international eco-