

## Africa at the Peace Conference

*African Questions at the Peace Conference, by George Louis Beer, Edited by Louis Herbert Gray. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$6.00.*

MR. GEORGE LOUIS BEER was one of the most remarkable—perhaps the most remarkable—of the able and devoted body of advisers whom President Wilson brought over with him to Paris in 1918-19. Already known for his five volumes of authoritative historical work on the British Colonial System, and for a suggestive book on the English-speaking Peoples, published during the war, he was asked to undertake the study of colonial questions in Colonel House's Inquiry, and later appointed Chief of the Colonial Division of the American delegation at Paris. There his influence extended far beyond the bounds of his own subject. His wide knowledge, his scrupulous exactitude, and his unselfish accessibility, not only made him known to a wide circle, but helped to maintain the standard of discussion on the plane of true scholarship. He was designated the first Secretary of the Permanent Mandates Commission; but his work had overtaxed him, and he died at New York in March, 1920, at the age of forty-eight.

This volume, edited and brought up to date by a colleague, contains the papers on African and one or two other territorial questions prepared by him for the Peace Conference. They are of interest to British readers for numerous reasons. It is true that, unlike some of the other American inside publications regarding the Peace Conference, they are not sensational. Mr. Baruch gave us the Smuts Memorandum, which belonged, we have been told, to the most secret category of documents. Mr. Lamont gave us the unforgettable picture of the interview between the President and his economic advisers after he had yielded on the pensions clause. Mr. Bullitt told us of his Russian mission and of his disowning by the British Premier on his return. Mr. Lansing astounded us by revealing his complete lack of touch with his chief on the principles and proposals of the Covenant. Mr. Ray Stannard Baker, with all the President's documents at his command, has let light, sometimes even more than he suspects, into innumerable dark corners. Side by side with these "revelations" Mr. Beer's admirably compiled and documented memoranda may seem of secondary interest. Yet they deserve to be read, by others than professed students, as models of clear, detailed, and impartial discussion on a host of difficult and contentious problems.

As an American, Mr. Beer approaches African questions with complete detachment; yet his studies had cured him both of facile idealism and of a predominantly commercial outlook. He loses no opportunity of advocating the Open Door, but "the vitally important side of the questions," he writes at the opening of his survey on Central Africa, "is the development of a sound African civilization; the secondary side is Africa as a source of supply to the Western world and as a market for its finished wares." He is particularly interested in the development of cultivation by native producers, and points out that neglect of this principle must have for a consequence that "many of the colonies, practically all except the British, will have to change so fundamentally as almost to begin their economic life afresh." He is also keenly interested in the relations between India and East Africa, citing Sir John Kirk's dictum that "East Africa is the America of the Hindu." In his

summarized recommendations he definitely advises that German East Africa "be entrusted by mandate to the British Empire as a place of settlement for British East India," declaring it to be "essential" that "India's need of a country for unrestricted immigration be met." In another place (p. 63) he remarks, regarding Indian immigration, with as much of irony as he permitted to his most scrupulous pen, that "it is not altogether plain why the addition of German East Africa to the British colonies in this region should be necessary to its success."

On trade questions he is equally definite and outspoken. In proposing that the Cameroons should be placed under a French mandate, he stipulates as a condition to be insisted on, "if possible," "that all existing and future international agreements about equality of opportunity and freedom of navigation of rivers should apply, not only to all the Cameroons, but also to all French Equatorial and West Africa."

On the other hand, he points out that the Open Door is a formula of limited application. "Until Africa is secured from competing territorial ambitions, it would be unwise to oblige any State to open its colonies to economic penetration aimed at detaching them. Fears of such nature kept Portugal and Belgium from welcoming German capital in the past. . . . The crux of the problem is to eliminate the political motive. That effected, the difficulty will not consist in giving equal opportunities to the private capital of all nations, but in attracting it at all. This will be especially the case," he adds, "if the native is adequately protected from exploitation by effective labor laws."

Beer had never been to Tropical Africa; but he had intended to undertake regular visits to the mandated and other areas as part of his Geneva work. It will be interesting to see whether this project will materialize in other hands. In any case, the Permanent Mandates Commission has set out on its task, as its proceedings show, with the blend of high principle, prudent judgment, and pertinacious curiosity for which Beer's inquiries were undoubtedly the preparation.

The editor has added to the value of the volume by over a hundred pages of useful documentary appendices.

ALFRED E. ZIMMERN.

## Our American Theatre

*Our American Theatre, by Oliver M. Sayler, with Illustrations by Lucie R. Sayler. New York: Brentano's. \$4.00.*

HAVE you ever wondered how it would seem to read a book that was present in all its parts yet somehow absent as a whole? Such a paradoxical effect may be reached—or nearly—by the help of Mr. Sayler's latest. Perhaps this is because the book practically dispenses with historical perspective; perhaps because, though full of revolt and reform, it lays small stress on revolt *from* what and reform *of* what. Eliza skips nimbly from ice-cake to ice-cake on her way to emancipation, yet we hardly hear the bloodhounds or see the shore she has just left behind. The children of Hope stand neatly marshalled for the maw of Moloch, but Moloch himself would appear to be functioning elsewhere, or nowhere. Yet, as everybody knows, the fiery furnace of Things as They Are burns and glows nightly in the vicinity of Times Square, and the bloodhounds bay loudly along a good half-mile of Broad-

way. Mr. Sayler concentrates on other and newer and more hopeful matters. His theme is the general amelioration of the past fifteen years; and the tough actualities of a system deeply entrenched are touched upon only in his last half-dozen pages, in a very short chapter which is mildly entitled, *Economic Problems*.

"Organize the theatre," Matthew Arnold once demanded. "The theatre is organized!" cries Mr. Sayler, at the end, in triumphant despair. With swarming associations of managers, actors, dramatists, stage-hands, musicians, bill-posters, teamsters, scrubwomen, dressers and what not—all intent on the pursuit of narrow personal interests—the wonder is that anything gets done at all: every play finally brought into being before the public eye becomes a miracle—a specious front that veils a struggling chaos of rivalries and extortions. No wonder that our author postpones this spectacle to the end, and then makes our glimpse of it as brief as possible. No wonder that he details with relish the activities of small, informal, earnest groups, with sometimes a benevolent autocrat above them. Extreme organization is easily capable of cutting both ways; and truly the history of the drama has shown worse things than a Vincent Crummies, with his boys and his pumps.

Mr. Sayler is, as I have implied, contemporaneous. To-day suffices. And intensive. Just one small field. The persons and ideas within it. All under one little lens. Theatre Guild; Provincetown; Neighborhood Playhouse. Jones; Norman-Bel Geddes; Simonson. Round and round in the squirrel cage. And a diction to match. No verbs. Courte haleine. Snippy. Affected. In the long run rather irritating. Yet sometimes a happy forgetfulness of this new style, as in the chapter on the Russians, which gives matter precedence over manner, and which, if seemingly an insertion or even an intrusion, is welcome none the less. It is a good chapter, alike in substance and method, and shows how well a man can do when he is not intent on putting the language through a hoop.

Both text and illustrations lay their major stress on "Our Designers," with their gran rifiuto of "representation." Right here develops an interesting antinomy. It is relatively easy to stylize stage-settings, with a confident presentment of personal moods, even if these sometimes happen to be wilful and obscure; yet how to stylize the players and, most of all, their diction? Still, unity of production, homogeneity of effect, must be reached somehow. Hence two opposing schools of thought. Abolish the actor, says one school. Suppress the "designer," says the other. "Speech betrayeth," rejoins the artist; "let me have mutes, or masks, or marionettes." "Words are the very breath of our being," retorts the actor; "give us a background with which our words may square." An antinomy indeed! Is it not possible that the designer, like the orchestra leader, tends to become too predominant? Might not his highest, dizziest flights be slightly curtailed? Is there not a happy medium between his extremes and the dour determination of the old-time scene-builder? Why not a middle course that would stress simplification and economy by a reliance on the indicatory, avoiding an elaborate literalism on the one hand and a freakish individualism on the other?

Mr. Sayler has a few instructive, if slightly rueful pages on the mere receptivity of the American theatre-goer. Yet the passivity of the show-seeker is little compared with that of the spectator of painting, and nothing compared

with that of the spectator of architecture. The drama gets more response from us than most of the other arts. Not enough, however, to satisfy Mr. Sayler. He thinks of the ready responses of our football crowds to their cheerleaders, and wishes for a like liberation of the spirit before our various dramatic spectacles. Well, we have our pageants; and we have the informal—and sometimes imprudent—intimacies of our zanies of vaudeville and revue. He is doubtless thinking, with encouragement, of these; but he is evidently thinking more of Reinhardt and his participating audiences in Berlin. The American people is not yet fully formed, and possibly another generation may bring wonders; yet for the present, one surmises, sport will in all probability operate with a greater liberating force than art.

It might almost be wished that the author had made his title less possessive. *Our American Theatre* is flattering, doubtless; but as a possession it is almost too recent and lightly-poised to be secure, and much of its inspiration issues from abroad, rather than from home. Yet, sudden as it is, and cosmopolitan as from the current nature of things it must be, Mr. Sayler has provided a liberal allowance of the connected facts and details. Perhaps, too, there is a larger insinuation of aesthetic fundamentals than credit has been given for. And possibly even some desirable bits of a chronology broader than designed may be gathered by the intent.

HENRY B. FULLER.

## The Life of Christ

*Life of Christ*, by Giovanni Papini. Freely translated from the Italian by Dorothy Canfield Fisher. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company. \$3.50 cloth. \$10 morocco.

PAPINI'S *Life of Christ* is a book which enrages the professional scholar of the New Testament. It is written with a complete and complacent disregard of all that has been found out about the true history of Jesus by applying the ordinary methods of historical criticism to the documents which relate it. What Papini has done is to take the gospels as they stand, ignoring any questions of literary relationship or comparative value, and apparently priding himself on the fact that he does ignore them. The result is a book which is entirely devoid of any value whatever for anyone who wishes to know what the truth about Jesus really is.

Nevertheless the book has a certain attraction for those who are not interested in historical truth but rather desire to evade it by reading its skilful perversion by a man who knows how to treat ancient documents in the spirit of Italian opera and present such facts from the four gospels as please him, rewritten in a saccharinely sentimental manner so as to attract the pleasure of the uneducated intelligentsia.

Lest it may seem that this criticism of Papini is too fierce, let me quote part of his treatment of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

But the prodigal son had no choice and was forced to lead the herd of swine out to the pasture. He was given no pay and very little to eat, because there was only a little for any one; but there was no famine for the hogs, because they could eat anything. There were plenty of carob beans and they gorged themselves on those. Their hungry attendant enviously watched the