

NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POLITICS. By Raymond Leslie Buell. New York: D. Appleton and Company.

The study of the political life of a foreign country may have two main values: it may create the understanding necessary for intelligent sympathy and proper coöperation, and it may throw light upon general problems of government, broadening our views and enabling us better to judge our own habits and institutions. These two values are closely associated: any book that gives us the one must give us in some measure the other also. Sympathy that is not based upon knowledge broad enough to have an independent value and to afford a basis for self-criticism can be but superficial; knowledge that excites no sympathy toward a foreign people involved in difficulties altogether "human," however repugnant to individual reason, is probably incomplete or merely academic.

Many books about foreign peoples and their governments and institutions fall short of real usefulness because they are too much specialized, confined too closely to the consideration of government or history or politics—subjects somewhat artificially defined—or because they are restricted to some one point of view, such as the historic or the psychological. To profit by a survey of some particular province of thought or fact requires more supplementary general knowledge than the average reader possesses. It is no wonder that all but scholars are prone to turn away from such books and seek enlightenment elsewhere. Yet these academic works are more commendable than those "interpretations" in which sentiment and rhetoric reign supreme. There is a time, no doubt, for special pleas and for fervid "impressions"—as for everything else under the sun—but that time, so far as our ideas of France are concerned, is passing. It is well for us to have seen the vision of France in the glamour which her own heroism has cast upon her, but for real acquaintance something more is needed.

Mr. Buell's book affords the beginning of sound knowledge concerning France because it treats of the larger—that is, the political—aspects of French life with some approach to completeness and without the sentiment that blurs outlines, though with full and sympathetic recognition of that element of feeling which enters into all human relations and which must be understood if anything is to be understood. To see how institutions work, to perceive their defects and the inevitableness of these defects, and at the same time to have a normal vision of future progress—in short, to see how different historic causes and varying motives and opinions, opposing groups and interests,

interact to produce that wonderful living and growing organism, a great nation—this is to have true sympathy with the people of a foreign land and at the same time to enlarge one's political philosophy.

Nothing could more truly characterize the French people or mark more clearly the intellectual and temperamental contrast between them and the people of England or America than Mr. Buell's account of the confusing multiplicity of French political parties and of the French tendency to divide according to logical distinctions, complete programmes, even philosophies, rather than according to habitual groupings. Yet this is but the natural result of independent thinking in politics, of following principles rather than men, and an analysis of the French situation cannot but stimulate the reader to some highly critical thinking as to the very nature of party government and the conditions on which its success depends. Again, if we note the strength and extent of the socialistic trend in France and the variety of opinions and interests involved in it, we learn to appreciate not only the conditions of progress in that country and to see how far from easy is the path of the moderate reformist there, but we also gain some insight into the nature of the socialist tendency everywhere. Concerning a country in which every variety of view, from the most conservative to the most radical, is maintained with the utmost clearness and logical consistency, a country that one might expect to sink into disorder through confusion of counsels, it is interesting to read that "Socialism is in practically the same stage in France as it is in the United States. Its surest preventive is neither in force nor in a reign of terror; it is in a righteous policy of social reform." Other phases of the subject teach the same double lesson. To estimate French bureaucracy justly, one must understand not only the evils of the system, but the practical difficulties of "unscrambling the eggs." At the same time, one may learn of bureaucracy itself that it is not simply a kind of stupidity, but is an imperfect device of government not necessarily ruinous to a great (in this case, a very great) nation. If the French need of reparations and guarantees is stressed in the discussion of the Peace Treaty, nevertheless the diversity of French views on this subject shows rather strikingly that the whole question is wider than guarantees and reparations: even French opinion realizes that there is nothing necessarily final about the doctrine of the balance of power. Moreover, Mr. Buell's amusing chapter upon the French press not only reveals and partly explains an idiosyncrasy of the French mentality, but raises in one's mind the query whether our own newspapers give us quite all that they might in the way of intellectual stimulus. It is a curious and significant fact that each of the doctrinaire French papers has a large circulation among the *opponents* of the ideas for which it stands. These papers are read for amusement, for controversy, for the clarification of issues—not merely for facts or for mental dissipation.

The reader of this book cannot help being struck with the genius of the French people for reconciling differences while at the same time preserving the utmost individuality of thought and sentiment, for compromising without

making a fetish of compromise. And in studying the defects of French politics, he may find himself studying popular government and the relation that exists between forms of government and the character and history of a people.

NATURALISM IN ENGLISH POETRY. By Stopford A. Brooke, M.A., LL.D.
New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

The predominating impression one receives from these essays and lectures is that they are the work of one who narrowly missed being a great critic. Persuasively introducing his readers to the poets whose qualities and significance he discusses and tracing the transition from formalism to naturalism with rare clearness and tact, the author fulfills almost to perfection many of the functions of a good teacher of English literature. Occasionally he shows something like originality of interpretation or almost attains that simple profundity of elucidation which is the supreme virtue of the critic; yet in the difficult work of revealing the vital connection between literary genius in its various perplexing forms and recognized human needs or human destiny, he falls always a little short.

The failure to develop a definite literary creed, even to approach a standpoint from which one can see literary excellences as undoubted values (to do more than approach it is perhaps too much to ask of any critic), this failure is disappointing. Dr. Brooke's *humanity* is, to be sure, always as much in evidence as his artistic sensibility. His criticism is full of wise observations and exquisitely precise appreciations; it is never merely technical, and it is never crassly moralistic or philistine in temper. Frequently it seems about to bridge the gulf that divides the lover of art for art's sake from the dweller in the real world who obstinately wants to know what poetry is good for—a person whose point of view always has to be reckoned with in the long run.

Poetry, says the author, escaped "from London into the world, from artificial into natural thinking on the subject of mankind. And along with this outlook to the future of man in which fresh life was hoped for, there was also, and concordant with it, a reversion to the past when life was natural, when convention scarcely existed, when the artificial was all but unknown, and men spoke, wrote, acted and thought out of the impulsive passion of the moment." But should men think, act, and write out of the impulsive passion of the moment? One gathers from the whole of Dr. Brooke's discussion that *sometimes*, if not always, it is well to do so! This however is but the illogical compromise of the average mind bewildered by the power of poetry and by its lack of definite significance in life. Again writes Dr. Brooke: "It is a terrible business for poetry when it is wholly employed on man or wholly employed on nature. In either case, the poetry becomes thin, feeble, unimaginative, incapable of giving impulse or bringing comfort." The remark falls just short of profundity. Truly, one can scarcely resist the suggestion that poetry should