

Thus the moderate doctrine cannot avoid committing itself to a statement of principle that represents a wide departure from old principles. In its real meaning, the doctrine is revolutionary as putting a large limitation upon the "sacred rights of property." We may have a slow and quiet revolution or a sudden and more or less violent revolution; but if it be true, as Professor Muir says, that those who have invested money in a property are not wholly the owners of it, then a revolution we shall have. Doubtless we are already in the midst of one! What it all appears to mean is that matters will have to be settled with considerable friction and through the logic of events—not merely through the application of enlightened common sense to existing conditions.

Professor Muir's book is notably clear, well-informed, and moderate in tone. It would be an error, however, to suppose that either he or any other can supply an easily workable programme. There appears the necessity of real conflicts over "rights" and "principles." But if men of good will and reasonable mind work together, the workable programme will doubtless become more and more a clearly seen reality.

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THE WASTED GENERATION. By Owen Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

In *The Wasted Generation*, the author of *The Varmint* and *Stover at Yale* appears in what is, despite intervening books, distinctly a new light. The audacity of his theme—the story of a French woman of quality ruined by a Prussian officer—obliges him to rise to heights not merely of fiction but of poetry; and he does rise to considerable heights. Whether he quite attains the authority and the detachment that his subject requires is another question. One does not dare to vouch that the fable of *The Wasted Generation* would have made Shelley blench, but certainly it is in itself not much easier of approach than that of *The Cenci*. Mr. Johnson is, of course, far too good an artist not to perceive that his theme makes the most exacting demands upon his skill. He is not one of those who, in the belief that a terrific situation necessarily makes a good story, rush in where angels fear to tread. He uses all the art he has, and it is a good deal.

In one respect, Mr. Johnson has been exceptionally and conspicuously successful: he has drawn from the war spiritual elements that make his story of love a real love-story—a thing none too common in fiction nowadays. The violated Bernoline is not a flapper, nor a "good sort", but a lady—and such a lady! And the atmosphere she carries with her—atmosphere of the French home, of French traditions, of France itself—enhances her effect mightily. Really, Bernoline says very little in the story, and that little is scarcely remarkable; moreover, one hardly sees her face to face. Yet she is not at all a shadowy person nor merely mysterious: one believes in her, in her reasons, and in her love.

Thus, Mr. Johnson has developed from the flux of life in his story some-

thing rare and beautiful, something that stands out while it seems to retire, a true love-story, a story of true love, unspoiled by sentiment.

Viewing the story as a whole, one is forced to conclude that the author's success is not in all respects so impressive. It is the function of art to transfigure life without misinterpreting it, without lying about it either consciously or unconsciously. Art must arrange matters so that we can have a right and satisfactory reaction to facts truly represented—something that in life itself is too often either impossible or excessively difficult. Mr. Johnson's art is surprisingly adequate so far as Bernoline herself is concerned, and even so far as her lover is concerned. The war-psychology of the latter seems so true that we do not accuse his creator of playing with motives or peddling moods. But as to the fable, who could humanize *that*, or insure us of a right reaction toward it? Perhaps at the dizziest height of tragedy this could be done—perhaps not. Practically, the abominable thing can only be thrown out as a sort of challenge to the conscience of civilized humanity. Just this has been done in at least one war-story—with the expected shock. But Mr. Johnson has taken the artistic way—not the way of rhetoric disguised as fiction. He has undertaken to *reconcile* us to a certain thing—to reconcile us in a painful or tragic way, perhaps (he is entitled to that resource, at least); but at any rate without “letting us down.” It is not surprising that he has not wholly succeeded.

The “other woman” in the story—the woman belonging to the hero's darkened and infatuated past, she who, out of pure delight in a wickedly impossible situation, marries the brother of her former flame—this other woman makes a somewhat crude and unnecessary contrast with Bernoline. In general, whenever the situation tends to become melodramatic, as it almost inevitably does tend, the reader becomes proportionately disillusioned. One reads the concluding pages with mixed feelings. The story has made an unusual impression; one really does want to know the ending; but one is also anxious to have the situation wound up before the fine effect of the best parts of it is utterly spoiled.