

## The Beauty of Philosophy

THE STORY OF PHILOSOPHY. The Lives and Opinions of the Greater Philosophers. By WILL DURANT. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1926. \$5.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

HERE is a book to delight the heart. "The Story of Philosophy" might have been called "the Essence of Philosophy" or "the Beauty of Philosophy" as it is written with equal love and understanding. Philosophers, teachers of philosophy, and anti-philosophers should all be grateful to Mr. Durant: philosophers because the nature of their work, the character of their problems, and their answers have been presented to the general reader with a persuasive clarity rarely equalled; teachers of philosophy because now when their own inspiration fails they have a text that will whet the appetite of their students; and anti-philosophers because they can learn the error of their ways and enter through formerly sealed doors into a world of new thrills and new meanings. Useful to all of these, the book will be particularly enlightening to those of the third class who have regarded philosophy as something "up in the clouds;" it will convince the most skeptical that the great philosophers have, on the contrary, had their feet planted most firmly on this earth. If the meaning of human life, which Mr. Durant rightly takes to be the central theme of philosophy, is not relevant to human life, then pray what is?

At the outset, he answers the most frequent criticism that is passed upon philosophy, namely that in comparison with the sciences it is static and unprogressive.

Science seems always to advance, while philosophy seems always to lose ground. Yet this is only because philosophy accepts the hard and hazardous task of dealing with problems not yet open to the methods of science—problems like good and evil, beauty and ugliness, orders and freedom, life and death; so soon as a field of inquiry yields knowledge susceptible of exact formulation it is called science. Every science begins as philosophy and ends as art; it arises in hypothesis and flows into achievement. Philosophy is a hypothetical interpretation of the unknown (as in metaphysics), or of the inexactly known (as in ethics or political philosophy); it is the front trench in the siege of truth. Science is the captured territory; and behind it are those secure regions in which knowledge and art build our imperfect and marvelous world. Philosophy seems to stand still, perplexed; but only because she leaves the fruits of victory to her daughters the sciences, and herself passes on, divinely discontent, to the uncertain and unexplored.

Into this difficult and dangerous region Mr. Durant steers with an imagination awake to all its interest, guided by such pilots as Plato and Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and six of his own contemporaries. He has not aimed to write a history of philosophy but to make us companions of the great philosophers on their adventures. He has striven first to recall each of them to life as an individual person, and then to reproduce the living movement of their thought. His long quotations are chosen with quite unerring insight and his commentary is usually penetrating. Mr. Durant has evidently sucked the sweets of sweet philosophy through many a day and year, he has meditated upon and synthesized his findings, and the result, if not a history of philosophy, is something better.

It would be pleasant to omit all negative criticism in the case of a work so brilliantly conceived and executed as a whole. But there are a few reservations that must be made. Even Mr. Durant's catholic appreciation fails him occasionally when he is dealing with those philosophers with whom he is temperamentally least in sympathy. Scant courtesy, for instance, is shown to Benedetto Croce. And to say that Santayana "likes the beauty of Catholicism more than the truth of any other faith" is to sacrifice truth for an epigram; to stigmatize his philosophy as "sombre" and add that "he has never caught the hearty cleansing laughter of paganism, nor the genial and forgiving humanity of Anatole France" is miles from the mark. Apparently Mr. Durant has not read the recent biographical accounts of Anatole France which show that he was the direct opposite of "genial and forgiving," and evidently he has never listened to Santayana's bursts of happy laughter; nor is he permitted the reply that he is speaking of the works and not the men, since it is one of his main interests precisely to see the author's personality in his work. These are minor errors, perhaps, but what is to be said of the author's slighting reference to mediæval scholasticism, the one organized system of occidental philosophy since the Greeks that has held its ground for more than a century?

Dogma, definite and defined, was cast like a shell over the adolescent mind of mediæval Europe. It was within this shell that Scholastic philosophy moved narrowly from faith to reason and back again, in a baffling circuit of uncriticized assumptions and preordained conclusions. In the thirteenth century all Christendom was startled and stimulated by Arabic and Jewish translations of Aristotle; but the power of the Church was still adequate to secure, through Thomas Aquinas and others, the transmogrification of Aristotle into a mediæval theologian.

This, a mere repetition of the incorrect and now outgrown statements of nineteenth century histories of philosophy, can only be explained in a man of Mr. Durant's candor, on the hypothesis that he has here too confidently accepted secondary sources; it is safe to say that if he himself had read "Thomas Aquinas and others" he would have written differently.

Notwithstanding all this, the mediæval philosophers, were they now alive, Santayana, and perhaps even Croce, would probably unite in praising Mr. Durant's work: for if he has not deserved well of them, he has deserved well of philosophy.

## Piquant Gossip

THE DREADFUL DECADE. 1869-1879. By DON C. SEITZ. Illustrated. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1926. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ELLIS PAXSON OBERHOLTZER  
Author of "A History of the United States Since the Civil War"

THE use of decades for historical periods, which has become a fashionable exercise, has given us a volume which is meant, we are told, to detail "some phases in the history of the United States from Reconstruction to Resumption."



Sir Fletcher Norton, from a caricature by James Sayer From "Satirical Poems," by William Mason (Oxford University Press)

It might have been called the Dark, or Dire, or Disgusting, or Diabolical Decade, but Mr. Seitz has named it the Dreadful Decade. Reconstruction in the South, "dreadful" enough, was nearly done. "Grantism," sufficiently "dreadful," too, was in full cry, and one scandal upon another in the national, state, and city governments, and in unorganized society, gave a terror to American life, with ill promise of a recovery of virtue in our institutions. It were well for that man (any one of a dozen, from whom we may hear at a dinner table), who sees only error and degeneracy in our present age, and greater merit and glory in the period when he was a youth, to scan Mr. Seitz's pages with a view to recalling what he, with too little consideration, reverts to with so much pleasant pride.

And he will not find it difficult to read Mr. Seitz's book. It is, in the first place, of no great bulk. Nor is it written in erudite stodginess. It is, to be plain, a piece of piquant journalism, like the work on Hamilton and Jefferson, by the writer who earlier told us about Andrew Jackson, or Mark Sullivan's history of the America of his younger manhood, or any one of several other works which those who wish to do their duty, by that good old department of letters called History, select as a cover for what would otherwise amount to complete neglect of any reading about our vanished years. The shade of Macaulay should envelop

them and disturb their dreams of learning. But they seem, so it would appear, by such a course in History to pass muster in our society for "well read" men.

Mr. Seitz's chapters, nine in number, are, in truth, like the work of so many of those who essay similar tasks, a mere culling and arrangement of sensational incidents from the files of the newspapers of the day, principally the New York *World*. It is the History of Piffle, of unimportant and trifling facts, or near facts, chiefly concerning persons. It is the gossip such as men and women entertain themselves with in conversation, but, instead of relating to their contemporaries, this relates to a dead generation. It is well informed gossip and some of it is useful enough for preservation, since it bears upon men who touched our national life, if only to defile and corrupt it. The account of "Jim" Fisk is better than anything in print. Now that Brigham Young, P. T. Barnum, and frontier outlaws are made the subjects of biographies, it is difficult to see how Fisk can much longer escape treatment in a separate volume. Mr. Seitz has laid the basis for such a literary undertaking. Tweed, too, who is so graphically portrayed, should be entombed in biographical literature without delay. As for Beecher, Tilton, and "Tennie" Claflin and her sister the case is not so clear. They, after all, come in only for the scandals attached to their lives, for what they did to fill the newspapers with their names had no influence upon the nation's career, unless it may be to have damaged the popular faith in preachers, religious journals, and social reform.

It may be properly said of Mr. Seitz, however, that his judgments, where he expresses them about the historical characters in the time of which he writes, are mainly sound, as in reference to Grant, Greeley, Tilden, and Hayes. Mr. Seitz says that Hayes "righted the ship of state"—he began a work which was manfully continued and completed by Grover Cleveland. The names of these two presidents should and will be found together in the gold and vellum in which the wise and discriminating embalm the memories of the quiet heroes in their country's annals.

## The Italian Trecento

Reviewed by KENNETH MCKENZIE

HUMANISM AND TYRANNY. Studies in the Italian Trecento. By EPHRAIM EMERTON. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1925. \$4.

FRANCESCO PETRARCA. The first Modern Man of Letters. His Life and Correspondence: A Study of the Early Fourteenth Century (1304-1347). Vol. I. By EDWARD H. R. TATHAM. London: The Sheldon Press. 1925.

THE EARLIER AND LATER FORMS OF PETRARCH'S CANZONIERE. By RUTH SHEPARD PHELPS. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1925. \$3.

Reviewed by KENNETH MCKENZIE  
Princeton University

THE Trecento—as the fourteenth century is frequently called in Italy—is not an arbitrary division of time, but a period with marked characteristics of its own. This is true not merely in literature, with the more important of Dante's works in the first quarter of the century, and the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio in the second, and third, but also in the evolution of social and political institutions. The germs of whatever seems new in this century can indeed be traced earlier, and its full development did not come till much later; and yet, as Professor Emerton says, "The continuity of history is not broken because we seem to interrupt it for a moment in order to gain a clearer understanding of one brief stage in its endless progress." That the stage of progress which the fourteenth century marks not only is vividly interesting, but can be made to illuminate pressing problems of today, is evident from the passages in which Professor Emerton draws analogies with present political conditions in the United States, and in Italy. These passages, by no means the least valuable in his book, could have been written only by a man humanized by a thorough knowledge of the past and at the same time alert to what is going on in the present. "Never, probably, was the world in a better position to understand the true nature of the Italian *tyrannis* than at the present time. The analogies we are studying become patent to everyone who reads the history



of the remoter and the nearer past beneath the surface." But reading beneath the surface of the recent history of foreign countries—particularly Italy—is precisely what most of us fail to do; and Professor Emerton's penetrating and sympathetic discussion will materially help those who really wish to understand the background and the significance of the Fascist movement.

"Humanism and Tyranny" consists of an admirably clear and readable translation of several Latin treatises and documents of the fourteenth century, together with an extended introduction to each. The starting-point was a study of the writings and the career of Coluccio Salutati, who was born in 1331, and from 1375 to his death in 1406 was Chancellor of the city of Florence. More than half of the volume is devoted to him, with the translations of his treatise "On Tyrants" and of two letters written in defence of liberal studies—Humanism. Looking back to the ancient Empire of Rome, Salutati saw it torn by party strife, and then brought to comparative peace and unity by the successful usurpation of power by one man; and he came to believe that the salvation of Italy in his own day must come in a similar way. An understanding of Mussolini helps us to explain Salutati's defence of Julius Caesar, and Salutati in turn helps us to understand Mussolini. Dante's idea of government was in some respects similar, except that he regarded the rule of one man as not merely a matter of politics but a divinely appointed institution. Fascism, as Professor Emerton says, is only another name for the national consciousness which, in spite of all obstacles, has persisted in Italy from the time of Dante on. Salutati and his contemporaries anticipate Machiavelli, a century and a half later. In spite of all the legal verbiage with which they clothe their discussions, it is clear that the consent of the governed underlies the problem of tyranny. If the people allow the rule of the tyrant to continue, they give it their implied sanction. A recent writer has said of Fascism that it persists because its worst mistakes are preferable to the successes of the government that preceded it.

The analogy between conditions in Italy in the fourteenth century and in the United States today is carried still further in the commentary on two treatises translated from the great jurist Bartolus of Sassoferrato, "On Tyranny" and "On Guelphs and Ghibellines." Bartolus discusses the question whether it is lawful to have political parties at all; and it is evident that in his day as with us, parties have attained a legal or semi-legal status which in theory they did not originally have. In mediæval Italy the party spirit was developed to such an extent that the jealousy which we feel for foreign interference was there directed toward one's fellow-citizens; and there arose the interesting institution of the podestà, professional executives or "city managers" from outside the community. In many Italian states, citizens were deliberately excluded from the important executive offices, which were turned over to these experts, as has only exceptionally been done with us. Parties are to be justified, Bartolus concludes, only as they work for the good of the community, and not for partisan ends; as to tyranny, he maintains that the tyrant is a plague of human society, but if he serves the community well, it is better to bear with him than to take the risks of social disorder.

The thirteenth century, "greatest of Christian centuries," marks the "triumph of the idea of unity over the facts of diversity." The fourteenth century marks the rise of a spirit of revolt which is characteristic of modern times as opposed to the Middle Ages. Dante, belonging in this respect to the mediæval period, clings to the theory of dual world-sovereignty represented by the Pope and the Emperor; but by the beginning of the fourteenth century, the chief opposition to the Papacy as a universal sovereignty came not from the Empire but from the rising national monarchies; and the new revival of classical studies began to pass from the chosen few to become the common property of the many. Dante's supreme poetic imagination rose superior to the traditions that still encumbered his thought; but from the time of Petrarch on, men were more apt to do their own thinking. The classical revival was only one aspect of the spirit of critical inquiry and revolt. Italy led the world in the development of popular government, but was beginning to come under the influence of "tyrants." The Italian language, hitherto regarded as inferior,

had become the medium of one of the world's great literatures. Practical uses were found for the new scholarship; literature could now be regarded as a career. With some justice, then, is Petrarch called the first modern man of letters. The character of this spirit of revolt, showing itself in Humanism, and its relation to the growing tendency to national feeling on the one hand and to the rise of the Italian "tyrants" on the other hand, are clearly brought out by Professor Emerton in his twenty-page "General Introduction"—a brilliant, illuminating, and absolutely sound piece of historical generalization.



Petrarch is the subject of the other two books now before us. That by Canon Tatham, which is as its title indicates a "study of the early fourteenth century," is laid out on a most generous scale. The present volume of five hundred large octavo pages is only the first of four; the second is announced as in press, and the others are already partly written, the whole work being so definitely planned that the author refers frequently to the chapters of the subsequent volumes. The present volume includes chapters on the state of Italy and the Papacy from 1300 to 1342, on Petrarch's life and writings up to 1342, and on his character and the nature of his love for "Laura"—the name is invariably printed thus, with quotation marks, although the author believes it to have been the lady's real name. The least satisfactory part of the volume is in the chapters on vernacular poetry, Provençal, and Italian, and on the Canzoniere; here the author does not show a first-hand mastery of the literature of the subject, and is betrayed into several inaccurate statements, as when he says that "no love-poem in the Canzoniere can be placed earlier than 1334" (Miss Phelps shows that several were earlier than that date). His discussion ignores many of the problems connected with the subject; possibly he reserves some of these for later chapters. He has included excellent translations of large numbers of Petrarch's letters that had never appeared in English before, and is familiar also with those that he has not translated here; the result is a most attractive individualized portrait of the scholar, the poet, and the man. Subsequent volumes of this biographical study will be most welcome.

In studying Petrarch's personality there is still much to be done in exploring his Latin writings, and Canon Tatham has performed a real service in making so much material available and in discussing it. The investigation of Professor Phelps, on the other hand, is concerned with a comparatively narrow problem—the method used by the poet at different times in arranging his Italian lyrics as a collection. In this investigation, the content of the poems is considered only incidentally. It is well known that Petrarch sometimes professed to attach little importance to his Italian writings; but that he nevertheless devoted great care to perfecting them and arranging them. At a comparatively early period the idea evidently came to him of forming an ordered collection of certain of his lyrics; and several preliminary forms of the Canzoniere (collection of lyrics) are known, as well as the final form preserved in a precious Vatican manuscript written partly by the poet with his own hand, and partly copied under his immediate supervision. But another fourteenth century manuscript, now in the Chigi library, contains 215 poems which with one exception are also among the 366 in the final form of the Canzoniere, and arranged in almost identical order; this manuscript must therefore contain, not a haphazard collection, but the selection and arrangement desired by the poet at a certain time. Miss Phelps compares minutely the Chigi and the Vatican texts, and reaches interesting conclusions as to Petrarch's method of (as we should now say) editing his works. A large part of her book is devoted to a discussion of when the several poems were composed.

Mr. Philip Gosse, already known to many discerning persons for his "The Pirates' Who's Who," has now compiled a catalogue of his collection of books on pirates and piracy. Sir Edmund Gosse contributes a short introductory note, in which he proudly claims the author as the fourth consecutive literary man of his line; and trusts that he himself, "if he can live a few years longer, may correct the proofs of a fifth generation."

## Table Talk

ANATOLE FRANCE AT HOME. By MARCEL LE GOFF. Translated by LAURA RIDING GOTTSHALK. New York: Adelphi Company. 1926.

LE GOFF'S "Anatole France at Home" is a volume which should be classed with the paritology of literature. M. Le Goff is neither a great artist nor a great thinker, not even a dispassionate and naïve recorder. After the death of Madame de Caillavet in 1909 France dropped out of the recognized frame work of French society and became a sort of uncrowned king of a disappearing Bohemia. Always courteous and gentle in his dealings with individuals he was temperamentally unable to protect himself from the importunities of admirers and literary hangers on. They thronged his rooms at the Villa Saïd until 1914. It was in part to escape from them that he withdrew in that year to La Bechellerie, his beautiful estate in the hills above the Loire, at a seemingly safe distance from Tours. M. Le Goff made his acquaintance at this time and gives us a record of some of his later table talk. That France had not succeeded in withdrawing into any tower of ivory we may gather from Le Goff's own account:

Later in these Sunday afternoons that I spent so frequently with him, I saw him again and again enthusing (*sic*) to perfect strangers who came to see him.

"My good friend, how nice, how very nice of you, indeed, to come all this way. I'm so glad to see you!" And in presenting the stranger to Mlle. Laprevotte, he would say:

"By the way, Mademoiselle, Monsieur . . ."

The name failing him, the stranger had to supply it. M. France would then say: "Ah! yes, M. X." and would straightway turn his back on him. A few minutes later he would approach one of his intimates and ask him if he knew this person; the answer was nearly always in the negative. M. France, completely satisfied, would then laugh his full, (*sic*) rub his hands together and say: "Neither do I."



Sidelights of this sort upon the master's way of life are occasionally illuminating. The volume also continues in part the *chronique scandaleuse* of France's later days after the dismissal of his renegade secretary "Jean-Jacques" Brousson. It would appear that the interest of the translator and publisher had been focussed upon these phases of Le Goff's work, for the treatment of proper names indicates only a fitful interest in France's intellectual milieu and in French literary history. So the name of the famous publisher Lemerre is three times disguised as *Lemarre*. The distinguished Jewish scholar, Salomon Reinbach, is spoken of only as *Reinbach*, the *academicien* de Nolhac will find his name twice changed to *Nohac*. The eighteenth century judge, Malesherbes, is confused with the sixteenth century poet Malherbe, Montaigne's friend is called *La Boëtius*, and Napoleon's Prefect of Police, *Fouche*.

The reader will lay aside the volume with the feeling that M. Le Goff was not sufficiently alert to grasp the subtle, elusive, and often playful intelligence of Anatole France, and that the translator, proofreader, or publisher, was not sufficiently equipped to comprehend even M. Le Goff. But the author of the "Garden of Epicurus" would probably have smiled indulgently at all this, and have given them his dispensation. Even though he is occasionally misrepresented, he would have held that "intellectual error is innocent," and in case good people desire to amuse themselves in this fashion there is no valid reason why this pleasure should be denied them in this old world where one man's foibles mean so little.

## The Saturday Review

OF LITERATURE

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