

Foreign Literature

Russia or 'Eurasia'?

YEVRAZIYSKY VREMENNİK (The Eurasian Annals). Edited by Prince N. S. Trubetzkoy, P. Savitzky, P. Suvchinsky. Berlin: The Eurasian Publishing Company. 1925.

ISKHOD P VOSTOKU. (The Exodus to the East). Sofia, Bulgaria. Reviewed by ALEXANDER I. NAZAROFF

Russia is neither Europe, nor Asia; it is Eurasia, a cultural entity by itself in which the paths of the East and of the West converge. The frontier between Europe and Asia passes not along the Ural Mountains, as we have been taught, but in the hearts of the Russian people.

SUCH are the basic principles of the new philosophical-historical doctrine developed by the school of new Russian thinkers, the "Eurasians" in the books reviewed hereunder. A number of brilliant Russian names are to be found in their ranks; suffice it to mention Prince N. S. Trubetzkoy, the son of the famous philosopher and himself a professor of the University of Vienna, the sparkling Professor A. P. Karsavin, Professor V. N. Ilyin, P. Suvchinsky, and many others. The solid and scholarly erudition of these men cannot be doubted, and they cannot be accused of having come forward with a daring and original theory with the hidden purpose of "making a hit" and of getting cheap publicity. They certainly do not belong to that class of men.

Their purpose is purely scientific. They want to prove that Russia's political life has been erroneously forced into European channels and that Russia's history has been erroneously taught as a part of European history. Russians, our authors contend, have just as much Turanian (Tuak, Finnish, etc.) blood in their veins as they have of the Slavonic. Take the Russian folk music, and you will see that it is based on the "Indo-Chinese" major scale of sounds unknown to the rest of Europe. Take the Russian (and the old-Slavonic) vocabulary, and you will see that most of its spiritual, religious, and abstract words are akin to corresponding Indo-Iranian (mostly Persian) words, while its concrete, realistic, and economic words are kindred to those of Western European languages. Such examples could be easily multiplied *ad infinitum*. All of them tend to prove that Russia is Eurasia, that the ethnical, psychological, linguistic, and historical ties binding her to Asia are just as strong as those attaching her to Europe. Let it be added right away that some of these arguments are open to discussion; yet one cannot help recognizing that Prince Trubetzkoy sets them forth with a brilliant lucidity and convincingness.

It is in the light of these assertions that Eurasians analyze the Russian history. The great upheaval of 1917 is in their eyes but a natural consequence of the most unfortunate reforms that had been undertaken at the dawn of the eighteenth century by Peter the Great in order to "Europeanize" Russia. Russia's greatest statesman and Czar is in their eyes the father of all Russian misfortune. Up to Peter's time Russia had an original culture of its own based on the semi-European, semi-Asiatic Byzantine foundations. It is idiotic to think, the Eurasians assert, that it was a primitive culture. As all mystically religious cultures—and it was above all a culture based on Eastern Christianity—it had been sneered at and forgotten in the truly barbaric years of "enlightened" positivism. Yet it was a complicated, well developed, and highly spiritualized culture. It was essentially national in that it was the culture of the Czar, of a ruling boyar, and of a plain commoner alike.

Peter the Great dealt a mortal blow to these traditionally Russian spiritual values. He violently transformed the poetic Eurasia into pure Europe. He replaced the idea of theocracy by the idea of the somewhat agnostic autocracy. The Old Byzantine-Slavonic learning gave place to the European learning, and soon Voltaire became the idol of all courtiers. It goes without saying that only the upper, the aristocratic, class became Europeanized, emancipated, and de-Russianized to the extent of forgetting the Russian language (it was only towards the middle of the nineteenth century that Russian nobles were again in full control of their native tongue). This naturally brought about a complete breach of all spiritual ties and relations between the aristocracy and, later on, the *intelligentsia*, on one hand and the people on the other. The gentleman became in the eyes of a peasant "a foreigner." It is no consolation, add the Eurasians, to repeat that, having assimilated the Euro-

pean culture, our educated class has given birth to great writers, composers, etc., of its own. What is this in comparison with disasters that followed? For in the eyes of Eurasians the great Russian upheaval of 1917 was above all the brutal and violent protest of the real, though uneducated, Russia against the "foreign" culture of Petrograd and of Peter the Great.

Of course, I have given here but a rough outline of the rich and interesting material contained in these two volumes. The reader may say that all this is one-sided, incomplete and far-fetched; perhaps it is, to a certain extent. Yet, at the same time, it brings to light sides of Russian life and history which have been hitherto too often overlooked and the importance of which cannot be denied.

Foreign Notes

THE history of Norwegian shipping from prehistoric times down to the end of the eighteenth century is exhaustively and illuminatingly handled in a volume which the Shipping Association of Norway has sponsored. The work consists so far as it has gone of some 600 profusely illustrated pages in which the story of Norwegian sea trade is related to the year 1600 by Alexander Bugge and carried on from that point by Roar Tank. "Den Norske Sjøfarts Historie" (Oslo: Steenske) is a book of great value to students of Scandinavian annals.

When a bullet ended the life of Peguy at the Marne it cut short the career of a Frenchman whose death stirred literary France to its depth. A brilliant, contradictory, recalcitrant nature, his genius and his personality cast a spell over his countrymen, and his passing was deplored as one of the great wounds wrought to literature by the war. The man as he lived appears again in the two volumes of his friends, the Tharauds, whose "Notre Cher Peguy" (Paris: Plon) has recently appeared. They have depicted him tenderly, with an insight and a sympathy which makes of their work a noble monument to the man.

Trade Winds

LAST week—I mean the week that was last week when I was writing this—was the publishers' annual melancholia. The booksellers were in convention in St. Louis, which means that they weren't ordering anything, and authors who visited publishing offices to have a look at the Sales Sheets were correspondingly gloomy. But now the Bon Voyage Book Basket season is at its height; people have learned by degrees that flowers, fruit, and candy are extremely depressing in a steamship stateroom as soon as she passes Sandy Hook, and a book like Santayana's "Soliloquies in England" or the latest André Maurois, in French, is the only decent steamer gift. I sent young Amherst to attend the convention in St. Louis, it was the first time he had been west of West Philadelphia, and he came back with his mind considerably enlarged. Also with an enthusiasm for Thorne Smith's book "Topper." Apparently at the convention someone from McBride's office got hold of young Amherst; they told him a story of how a bookshop in New York had been cajoled into putting into the window a Pink Step-In (I had no idea what this could be, but Jocunda says it's a garment) which apparently plays some part in the story; and that this had sold numerous copies of the book, and after the display was finished the lady bookseller got the Step-In as perquisite. Young Amherst was keen that we should do the same thing in my shop, but Jocunda—to my pleasure—vetoed it. She said it was undignified.

Master Amherst reported that some booksellers at St. Louis were grumbling a bit about the great success of the Book of the Month Club, Mr. R. K. Haas's really remarkable invention which promises to be one of the few important new ground breakings in the distribution of books. I hear, for example, that the choice of "Teetallow" by Mr. Haas's committee of judges as the "book of the month" for April resulted in no less than 12,000 copies being sent out to subscribers—the great majority of whom are, I believe, off the general paths where bookshops are easy of

access. It is childish of booksellers to believe that this diverts trade from their own counters; on the contrary it broadens and mulches the whole market. Neither of the first two books chosen by the Book of the Month Committee—"Lolly Willows" and "Teetallow"—seem to me ideal novels for very wide and indiscriminate distribution, but naturally the judges must select from what is before them in that month. I for one look forward with the greatest interest to the development of Mr. Haas's lively scheme, and I believe that publishers and booksellers should heartily welcome it.

A good deal of amusement has been caused in my shop by customers who, looking over Professor Cross's new edition of "Tristram Shandy," exclaimed with surprise when they found the famous unprinted page—somewhere about p. 180 in this new Boni & Liveright edition—and brought back the volume thinking it imperfect. Apparently Sterne, like almost all the other Founding Fathers, is unknown to the New Literates. Jocunda showed me with glee a letter from some old Vassar chum of hers which said "I am saturated with Cabell, Van Vechten, and Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson and Gautier." "She must think that Gautier's one of the new Frenchmen," cried Jocunda, who is developing a sharp little sense of the quaint, "for I'm sure she wouldn't trouble to figure out his French if she knew he was dead." Jocunda, to my private amusement and applause, now proclaims J. B. Priestley as her new Prophet; she says Priestley has "disposed" of Mencken and we can go ahead with new things. The New Things, judging by what Jocunda and her friends are reading, are Catullus and Rabelais and Balzac. "What's going to become of Cornell Woolrich and Harry Emerson Fosdick," says Young Amherst (ironically, I suppose) if the young generation rediscover the things that Chauncey Tinker and York Powell sat up late to read? I didn't know that young Amherst had ever heard of York Powell, but rivalry with Jocunda has spurred him to prodigies of poking in my shelves. He is writing a skit called "No More Prudes" which he believes will sell like Anita Loos. P. E. G.

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Points of View

"The Man Mencken"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I wish to protest against the autopsy performed by Ernest Sutherland Bates on Isaac Goldberg's "The Man Mencken." The incompetence of the review can be explained, it seems to me, only on the assumption that Mr. Bates read the book hurriedly, was irritated by it, and vented his spleen in an ill-considered lambasting.

It is obvious that Mr. Bates did not read Mr. Goldberg's Preface with any care. He was evidently more concerned with parading his own pet theory about Mr. Mencken's true importance than he was with understanding what Mr. Goldberg was trying to do.

He asserts, with clinical ire, that Mr. Goldberg "seems to have been driven mad by the supposed magnitude of his task." Has the reviewer mislaid his sense of humor? The preface of "The Man Mencken" states: "This book is the contemplation of one very human being by another. It is written, naturally, out of a fundamental sympathy,—a sympathy which is none the less an independent harmony, not a colorless unison with the subject." What evidence is there here, or anywhere else in the book, that the author is overborne by awe of his subject? To be sure, he does not moralize impetuously, for the book "is addressed to those who find in the performance of the human, as well as the literary, comedy, an aesthetic rather than a justiciary satisfaction. I consider Mencken . . . rather an artistic phenomenon to be enjoyed than a text to be stretched into a sermon." Mr. Goldberg seeks to give the reader understanding of his sitter, as a part of aesthetic pleasure. But his criticisms, though sympathetic, are independent, and his views often divergent from those of his sitter. He quite clearly shows what Mr. Mencken is not and does not have and cannot be as the reverse. He does not burn incense before the mystic shrine nor offer "personal flatteries" to the great God Mencken—"flatteries which degrade him to the level of the latest moving picture actress," as Mr. Bates gently remarks.

The reviewer appears to think that Mr. Goldberg was attempting to write a ready-made biography. But "The Man Mencken" professes to be neither the conventional critique nor the conventional biography. Rather, it is a "biographical and critical survey." Though largely chronological, as the ready-made biography is, it does not hesitate "to dance about in time and space. Here . . . is the portrait of a living sitter, who is far more lively than sedentary. Accordingly the canvas is meant to grow, not feature by feature in a steady view, but stroke by stroke; now a daub at the chin, now a smudge at the ear, here a return to a preliminary line, heightening it by contrast with the new pigment, there a sudden completion of a surface that was previously but hinted. At the end, the picture comes to life, but only at the end."

It is this devil's dance of facts, to which he seems unable to find the clue, that bewilders Mr. Bates. For him the book is compact of multitudes of facts, almost all insignificant, miniature ant hills trying to be mountains; all clamoring for equal attention, all seeming "to stand on the same stupendous level of importance." The individuality of the man appears to him as trodden down under this devil's dance of the facts [about him].

His sense of humor being for the time at least in abeyance, Mr. Bates is particularly annoyed at the half dozen or so pages which draw on the Nathan-Mencken "Owen Hatteras." Here appear those facts which most upset him. He fails to perceive that in this small portion of the first chapter Mr. Goldberg, like Hatteras, has a touch of the "kiddie" about him. Doubtless the biographer smiled as he wrote this section; certainly he was not darkly bent on stripping bare the jests of the Nathan-Mencken opus. While it may not win souls to Mr. Mencken to know that he is his own manicurist and wears 7½ hats, some of the facts, if gossip, are more humanly illuminating than Mr. Bates allows, and the section as a whole has a sly rather than "elephantine" touch. Can it be that it is Mr. Bates, and not Mr. Goldberg, who takes Mr. Mencken too seriously?

Mr. Bates objects to "the elaborate treatment of Mr. Mencken's ancestry, his boyhood, his editorial and journalistic career." Yet it is from just the piling up of details in these matters, with a careful eye to their bearing on Mr. Mencken's career and personality, that there emerges at the end the completed portrait of the man. There are

many facts? Of ancestry? Well, Mr. Mencken has a keen feeling for his clan and its history, and notably inherits many characteristics and something of his viewpoint from various persons on his family tree. Of boyhood? But in the child and his environment we can see interesting indications of what the man became and why he became so, and as intriguing other possibilities never realized. Of editorial and journalistic career? Ah, now the man begins to emerge; now varied writings take on fresh aspects.

In "The Man Mencken" there is a plenitude of facts, but there is "no democratic equality of insignificant facts," as Mr. Bates asserts. Indeed, many of them can be seen to be insignificant without the use of a magnifying glass; of others Mr. Goldberg points out the significance. The very accumulation of details is effective.

"It is Mr. Mencken's inner life that is of interest: the formation and development of his ideas," writes Mr. Bates. True. But what forms and develops his ideas? In large part his outer life. Says Mr. Goldberg, "His writings, from the very beginning, take on the quality of what Italians have called *la vita vissuta*—life truly lived." The outer life has to be painted if the inner is to be understood. By detailing the former Mr. Goldberg does not submerge Mr. Mencken's individuality, but rather illumines it.

Mr. Bates sticks different labels on Mr. Goldberg's and his own estimates of Mr. Mencken's inner life. He asserts inadequately that Mr. Goldberg is content to consider his sitter "ultra modern." He himself considers Mr. Mencken's mind as "almost wholly of eighteenth century cast."

Biographer and reviewer are not so far apart in their views as this libelling would make them appear. For instance, as Mr. Bates could have discovered on the page following the section that most aroused his ire, Mr. Goldberg speaks of Mr. Mencken's "classic form," and says further, "despite the peculiar modernity and contradictoriness of the man, despite his restlessness, his healthy anarchism, he tends to-

wards order, clearness, and serenity." Elsewhere Mr. Goldberg stresses Mr. Mencken's intellectual control of his emotions, certainly an admired and characteristic quality in the so-called "age of reason."

In reality, an "ultra modern" journalist who gives his preference to such writers as Shaw, Nietzsche, Huxley, Darwin, and Mark Twain is not of an essentially different cast of mind from, say, Voltaire. What label we choose to stick on him does not seriously matter. LAWRENCE B. WALLIS. Cambridge, Mass.

Ximenes Doudan

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

Ximènes Doudan, although not well known in this country, is recognized in France as an exquisite moralist and one of the most perfect gentlemen of his time. He was considered a sort of *arbitre elegantiarum* in the circle of the Duke de Broglie in which he lived. He was widely read in English literature. The regrettable revival of an old controversy may justify the reprinting of this extract from a letter written Sept. 20, 1869.

"Ah! que c'est vilain à madame Beecher-Stowe! Les amis de lady Byron pensent en effet qu'à la fin de sa vie elle n'avait pas l'exacte possession de ses souvenirs. Le chagrin avait brouillé sa mémoire. On devrait très-peu se mêler de débrouiller des mystères de famille quand on est d'un tout autre pays, d'une autre société, d'une autre civilisation. J'ai eu l'honneur de voir à Paris Madame Beecher-Stowe, avec sa jolie figure et son air de douceur et de bonne éducation. Je ne l'aurais pas crue capable de jeter avec tant de témérité un pavé à la tête du *Giaour*, de la *Fiancée d'Abydos*, de Childe-Harold. Quand on a écrit le charmant roman de la *Fiancée du Minstre*, comment est-on capable de si vilains procédés envers un homme de génie? Je suis fâché que ce fonds de barbarie reste aux compatriotes de Franklin, de Washington, de Lincoln, de Longfellow, de Prescott, de Ticknor."

BENJAMIN M. WOODBRIDGE.

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