

## Books of Special Interest

### Follies of Mortals

THE PUBLIC MIND: ITS DISORDERS, ITS EXPLOITATION. By NORMAN ANGELL. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by JOHN BAKELES:

FROM the myriad follies of the war years, long since decently forgotten, the merciless hand of Mr. Norman Angell rips the covering. Though only a decade has passed since we were all uttering them, it is extraordinary how thin and how utterly preposterous the cock-and-bull stories now appear, which we all believed from 1914 until a little while after the armistice. It is not pleasant to recall one's own erstwhile willingness to swallow all the utterances of the good and great; but there is some consolation in the reflection that it must be, if anything, even more unpleasant for the prominent personages themselves—assuming that those superior creatures will read Mr. Angell's new book on "The Public Mind"—which is, I fear, only too improbable.

Few men alive are now in some respects in a better position to say, "I told you so" to the rest of the human race than the author of "The Great Illusion"; and it is greatly to the credit of his powers of self-restraint that he actually does say no such thing. He prefers rather to convict his opponents out of their own mouths, by quoting foolish statements which the last few years have shown to be something worse than folly. His original thesis, however, that amid the complexities of modern society a world war cannot possibly pay, is certainly not weakened by the appalling array of wartime idiocies that he placidly catalogues in a few quiet and unhurried pages. Most pacifists have a tendency to shriek. Not so Mr. Angell. The facts are good enough for him—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the unadorned facts are damning enough.

How difficult it is today to believe in an infallible reagent, "which immediately makes known the presence of treason," or to talk with becoming seriousness of "craven beasts" and "enemies of humanity." Yet these fiery phrases and others like them were being blithely mouthed as late as April, 1918, by a sufficiently important college professor in a sufficiently important newspaper. How hopelessly old-fashioned it is to prate about "greed and bestial blood-lust." How silly now appears the wartime effort to prevent the teaching of the German language—which, as any intelligence officer can explain, was a very useful accomplishment at the front—even though it is a scant ten years since a Columbia professor was demanding its elimination.

All this nonsense helped not at all to win the war, and hindered immeasurably the post-war task of salvaging civilization. To make matters worse, people knew a great deal better—they simply didn't act on what they knew.

The knowledge that might have saved Europe was not lacking. What was lacking was the capacity or willingness to use knowledge already possessed, a certain self-discipline, a sense of the social and moral obligations to apply intelligence to the situation in which our passions are involved, and which, if applied, would deprive us of the satisfaction of some emotional appetite such as vengeance, or show what we call our moral indignation to be all founded.

Nor was education, that unfailing American panacea for all the world's ills, of any avail against the hasty passions of the war years. On the contrary, the passions that led up to the war and the still bitterer passions that accompanied it were largely the handiwork of the educated—scholars, authors, statesmen, journalists—who first provoked them and afterward kept them alive. Where national prejudices are involved, neither learning nor intelligence appears to be a trustworthy guide to accurate conclusions. "It is European learning which condemns European learning, the while both sides fail to provide any prophylactic against the moral and intellectual errors which menace European civilization." Mr. Angell demonstrates his point by showing German scholars flatly saying one thing and British scholars of equal eminence with equal flatness saying the exact opposite. Or he shows us British writers expressing one set of opinions about the French in 1870 and in 1890 and cheerfully reversing those opinions in 1914. Still more amusing, or more distressing, is the fuss about text books in American history. Until 1917 American school children had to be satisfied with one set of facts. In 1917 we suddenly discovered we had for a century been tra-

ducing our gallant British allies—the Germans, naturally were to blame—and we changed our texts. Now that our affections have somewhat cooled, we hear proposals to change back.

Such a wavering and uncertain thing is public opinion. What makes it so? And does it matter? The trouble is with the mental processes of the average man and the inadequate knowledge on which his inadequate thinking is based. It matters very much, according to Mr. Angell; for whether in a monarchy of the good, old, absolute sort, or in a dictatorship of the most up-to-date model, or even in a democracy, it is public opinion that ultimately determines.

Though discussion of the war hysteria is the most interesting and important part of "The Public Mind," Mr. Angell's new book is in no sense concerned primarily with war. It is, instead, precisely what its title implies—a study of that nebulous but very real force, the opinion of the crowd. If the war and its unsavory examples of mass emotion are rather prominent in its pages—well, the war provided the most alarming examples of mass hysteria we are likely to encounter for some years to come.

For better or worse, says Mr. Angell, the public is in the saddle. The hereditary ruler, and the ruling class are definitely out of it. Even dictators, who are becoming so fashionable nowadays, have to take public opinion seriously. In consequence, unless things are to go to smash, the public must begin to form its opinions more intelligently than hitherto. That this is possible, Mr. Angell seems to have no doubt, though he has no illusions, great or small, as to the difficulties.

Catalogue No. 11, "First Editions, Autograph Letters, Manuscripts, Americana and Association Books," just issued by Barnet J. Beyer, Inc., 5 East Fifty-second Street, is a well printed octavo of fifty-two pages, comprising 422 items, and is of special interest to collectors of modern first editions. Among the rarer and more valuable items are *The Gad's Hill Gazette*, one of the rarest of Dickens's items, \$2,500; an unpublished literary letter by Edgar Allan Poe, 2 pp., 4to, Philadelphia, September 18, 1841, to Lewis J. Gist, \$1,750; and Milton's "Paradise Lost," 1667, first edition with the second title page, \$1,200.

As the Church Sees It  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ITS REACTIONS WITH SCIENCE. By BERTRAM C. A. WINDLE. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1927.  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PHILOSOPHY. By FR. VINCENT McNABB. The same.

THE two most recent volumes of the Calvert Series edited by Hilaire Belloc endeavor to explain and defend the attitude of the Catholic Church toward science and toward philosophy. In "The Catholic Church and Its Reactions with Science" Sir Bertram Windle points out—what everyone ought to know but not everyone does—that the doctrine of Papal Infallibility applies only to *ex cathedra* utterances on points concerning faith or morals, that the Imprimatur on Catholic books means merely that the theological portions have been found unobjectionable by higher authority, and that the Index only prohibits Catholics from reading books that have been condemned because of their immoral or heretical tendencies. Sir Bertram has no difficulty in showing that the church accepts the teachings of modern physical science, that she has produced many eminent scientists, and that with regard to evolution, while condemning atheistic interpretations of the theory she has remained entirely non-committal on the theory itself. As to Biblical exegesis, "If it is quite clear and absolutely certain that the literal interpretation of a given passage offends against historic or scientific truth, then we must treat it figuratively and seek its meaning in that direction."

In all these respects, it is obvious, the Catholic Church today is more liberal than several of its Protestant rivals. Unfortunately Sir Bertram feels it necessary not merely to defend the present attitude of the Church but to argue that its attitude has always been the same. Thus he minimizes the condemnation of the doctrines of Copernicus and Galileo and points out that Giordano Bruno and Cecco d'Ascoli were burnt, not for their scientific views, but for such teachings as "that the Holy Spirit was the soul of the world" or that the human will is not free. Thus at best he saves medieval tolerance toward science by tacitly impugning medieval tolerance toward philosophy.

This brings us to the companion volume, "The Catholic Church and Philosophy," by Fr. Vincent McNabb. This work reveals far more than does Sir Bertram Windle's (possibly because its author is a priest in-


stead of a layman) the divergence of the Catholic mental attitude from the non-Catholic. It is simply impossible for the author to look upon the work of a philosophical opponent without seeing in it some mental or moral obliquity. Thus, for example, "Epicurean agnosticism came of the complete inconsistency and weakness of their wills;" Bacon, Descartes, and Kant "were intellectually diseased and anarchic" and afflicted with "megalomania;" modern German philosophy is "sophistry . . . the art of making up systems which do not really solve problems and which are hardly intended to do so by their authors." The writer sums up his argument as follows:

Throughout the last three centuries the Catholic Church has been furthering true philosophy by effectively warning men off false philosophy. Far from looking on the Church's condemnations as her weakest acts we look on them as almost the most praiseworthy or indispensable. . . . The whole truth and the real apotheosis of Reason was when the five hundred and forty bishops [of the Vatican Council in 1870] damned anyone who would deny that reason had such insight and foresight as to discern God.

The bishops, who seem to have been good at cursing, also damned all atheists, materialists, and pantheists. And the author adds a note that "All forms of Pantheism, Materialistic and Idealistic, are intellectual imbecility." Presumably it is clear to Fr. Vincent McNabb—but is by no means clear to a non-Catholic—that this attitude is in perfect harmony with the words of St. Thomas Aquinas quoted elsewhere in the volume: "Those whose aim is to discuss truth and truth only must not take up an attitude of hostility to any of the disputants on whose claims they are about to sit in judgment."

Sir Bertram Windle writes in an urbane and conciliatory manner, Fr. Vincent McNabb in a contentious and truculent manner, but the fundamental positions of both are of course identical, as they express the position of the Church itself. This position may be expressed very simply: the utmost sympathy with both science and philosophy as long as neither attempts to disturb Catholic morals or Catholic theology.

Compton Mackenzie has been appearing recently in "The School for Scandal" at Guernsey with Lady Sackville-West, the wife of the Governor of the island. He is a very clever amateur actor. His father was the founder and pillar of the Compton Comedy Company.



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## Aurora

By MAGDELEINE MARX

Author of "Woman"

"RUSSIA, venerable Russia, whither are you wending your way? Answer!" implored Gogol in an anguished apostrophe in which he compared his country to a sleigh being drawn on a mad course by mettlesome steeds.

To judge by the profusion of talent and the multiplicity of works Young Russia is in a fair way to meet his challenge. Not, to be sure, that a masterpiece has as yet appeared, or that a new genius, such as Arion or Pushkin, has "been cast up on the shore by the tide," or that an entirely new mode of expression has been created, but that a fever of literary interest has seized upon the country, a torrent of dreams poured over it, and that from the Baltic to the Caspian one section emulates another in paying tribute to literature and poetry. Amidst the general seething of effort, frequently abortive, occasionally brilliant, and the confusion of voices, it needs an attentive ear, attuned to the country, familiar with its language, long bent upon its political activity, to distinguish the true from the false, and isolate essential tendencies and authentic writers.

Any attempt at evaluation of the Russian literary output would be useless that did not take count of its chronology or that ignored the fact that it was at once elicited and bound by a categorical imperative which tended to create new modes of expression for all literary forms, and which produced a proletarian literature deriving from and carrying the stamp of the class in power. As early as 1918-1921, when the civil war was at its height and the intervention of foreign armies was in progress, there came into being official organizations known as the Protecuts which were avowedly dedicated to the development of a "specifically proletarian culture." These Protecuts founded their circles in the smallest market towns, drawing upon the ranks of the young working men and women for their membership, plastered the walls with bulletins, launched propaganda, produced poets, staged plays, elaborated theories, organized courses, and even formed an international committee.

Despite their enthusiasm the Protecuts were doomed to failure. Their effort was premature, and their plan, though grandiose, entirely utopian. Indeed, what kind of culture was possible for them at a time when their membership was mobilized to a man and forced to live on a ration of 200 grams of bread a day and three dry herrings a week? However, though it is true that they failed to lay the foundations of a new culture, nevertheless it would be unjust to deny some measure of service to these organizations, for from their ranks sprang such meritorious poets as Alexandrovski, Kirillov, Vassili Kazine, and Obradovitch.

Such is the creative genius of the Russian people that at the end of a year of peace what was virtually an entirely new literature had sprung up in the capitals and with it had come into prominence a number of new names. "Never," said Maxim Gorky at that time, "never have we had so many young writers, and such a wealth of promise." First came the brothers Serapion and their coterie; then Boris Pilniak, Vsevolod Ivanov, Yacovlev, Nikitine, and Tikhonov, all of whom had breathed in the invigoration of the steppes, and finally the Lebendinskys and the Biednys whose inspiration was drawn from the memory of battle or from the atmosphere of the factories.

The literature which these young men produced was revolutionary. Yet it was equivocal, and capable of diverging in various directions,—toward a savage mysticism, toward a sort of neo-nationalism, or in the direction of outworn traditions. It was not the literature which had been anticipated, and it came as a disappointment and a surprise. The communist leaders, still under the influence of recent struggles, declared war on it. Their means of battle was a review entitled *Au Poste*, a journal deserving of mention not only as one of the best of the Russian reviews but also as one of the most solid and robust of recent years. Irreproachable in manner, easy in style, rigorous and logical in attitude, lofty in point of view, and remarkably courageous, its fault was that it wished to arbitrarily shape the course of the new literature at a moment when if the post-Revolutionary Russian writers had known how to play their rôle properly they would have made no pronouncement.

In 1924, abandoning pure criticism, the staff of *Au Poste* in conjunction with a

group of young men, founded the Association Moscovite des Ecrivains Proletariens, and began publication of the review, *Octobre*. But again, as with *Au Poste*, their publication, though its criticism was strong, sensible, keen, well-executed, proved unsatisfactory. They were unaware of their own limitations, and they had no regard for conciseness. Their poetry on occasions was vibrant, brilliant, even winged, and again it was heavy, diffuse, inelegant. Like a leitmotiv there ran through the review a theme which was sounded in its first number—the adoration to writers to "master the forms of the art of the past before experimenting with new ones, and to devote themselves to monumental compositions treating especially of the life of the proletariat."

There is no doubt that there were many essentially sound ideas embedded among the theories of the *Octobre* group, but the best of theories must compromise with realities. Is it reasonable to suppose that in a vast agricultural country like Russia, where cities are oases of advanced civilization, a young writer fresh from the workshop should be able to overstep the preceptorship of bourgeois art? Does one begin a literary apprenticeship with "monumental compositions"?

Nevertheless *Octobre* forecast an imposing program. From its pages one learned that its members were about to publish a dozen slim volumes of verse, and that the group of *Printemps Ouvrier* had devoted itself for months past to most intensive work. They had produced fifteen articles, seventy-six novels, 261 poems, and twenty conferences extending over a period of ninety-six evenings, in which 450 authors had participated!

Do not smile at these figures. Remember that two-thirds of these authors had plodded through the Russian snows in torn boots, and that they worked at their writing with the charming ingenuousness of children determined to grow up. In a suburb of Moscow, among many other groups, sprang up one formed of laborite correspondents of the newspapers, Pérékati-Polé, an old writer, blind and poor, gathers them together in his miserable dwelling, and there gives them instruction in writing prose and poetry. There are not enough chairs to go around so the pupils sit on the floor. The works produced by this gathering whose members came reeking of tar and machine oil, and covered with metal filings, are naturally enough crude as yet, but the mere fact of the existence of such a circle is of importance. It is inspiring to think that these humble laborers are turning after an arduous day to interests of a lofty sort.

There are thousands today scattered throughout Russia who are contributing to newspapers, publishing books, writing poems, having plays put on, seeking experimenting, meditating. And among these thousands names are beginning to stand out in letters of flame. We are not referring to such authors as Alexander Block (whose admirable poem, "The Twelve," has been translated into almost all languages), nor to André Biely, nor to Balmont, nor to Valère Brioussov, who, in sympathy with the Revolution and influenced by it though they were, nevertheless had already had brilliant careers before it broke out. It is not of them that we speak but of those whom the Revolution revealed, Serge Essenine, Koussikov, Archine, Boris Pilniak, Vsevolod Ivanov, Nikitine, Yacovlev, all of whom bear the impress of the Russia from which they have sprung. Others we have in mind are children of the factories—Lebendinsky (who wrote "La Semaine," a novel of astonishing power), Seyfoulina (who died at an early age last year, having already exerted a great influence upon the younger members of her sex); Tarrasov, Rodionov, both excellent writers, Demian Biedny, who after having written sparkling pages of revolutionary satire has now relapsed into a dull officialism; two critics and journalists without their peers, Sosnovsky and Koltsov, and finally, among the poets, Mayakovsky.

Which of these writers is the most gifted? It is quite impossible to say. But, in completely opposite fields, Ivanov and Mayakovsky are so representative that it is worth while perhaps to consider them for a few moments apart from their fellows.

Vsevolod Ivanov has been called the "new Gorky." Author of several long novels ("Le Train Blinde No. 14.69"; "Les Vents Colores"; "Les Partisans"; "Les Sables Bleus"), he invariably writes of the life

of the Siberian peasants during the civil war. When one reads Ivanov, one has the impression of being whirled across the Russian steppes in an express train. The snows are over. It is spring. A vast expanse, checkered with colors, now brilliant, now soft, stretches away. One's chest expands. The eye feasts on the blues, the greens, the rose, and the gold. The soul drinks in the scene, loses itself in it, becomes intoxicated on it. And when the train stops one meets at the station—which is only a poverty stricken wooden platform lost in the immensity of the plains—an aged peasant with a shaggy beard, who philosophizes in a soft voice on truth.

The form of Ivanov's narrative resembles that of his associates. His stories have no descriptions, no narration, no reflections, no psychological developments; acts and words, words and acts are identical. The dialogue is concise, simple, direct, the language has nothing of the literary. Practically throughout their entire length these books are written in swift moving dialogue, and composed of phrases which rarely have more than five or six words. Nevertheless this dynamic writer is a poet. In the greater part of his novels, he abandons himself after his own fashion to an inner lyrical vein, with an effect that is ravishing and that instead of being in sharp contrast with the action of the simple folk of the Siberian steppes, accompanies it as the singing of a male voice accompanies marching men. This lyrical quality in Ivanov can be compared only to that of Walt Whitman or some of the vedas. The woodcutters of California, the pioneers who founded Manhattan could not have been a different sort of beings from these woodcutters and pioneers who will only be able to be judged at the century whose Republic they founded.

With all his abundant vigor, his faith, experience, and observation Ivanov has the many faults of all the young writers who were shaped by the Revolution and not by traditional culture or literary schools. His composition is frankly bad, he makes bad use of details and incidents, and his psychology is frequently superficial. In short he gives us not "finished" works, but crude materials from which a new architecture is capable of construction, and in which gleam many gems.

In the domain of poetry the first place goes to Mayakovsky, whose ingenuous boast which rests, however on a superb talent, is that he opened the channels of proletarian art. Leader of the Russian futurist school, Mayakovsky wishes with his disciples to break with the past, to destroy classic standards, to exalt the individual, to sing of the machine, of trains, of bridges, of cities, of the realities of the present. In his vigorous poems ("Le Nuage en Pantalon," "La Guerre et la Monde," "L'Homme," "Mystere-bouffe," "De Ceci") in his appeals, his manifestoes, his satiric pieces ("Hymne au Juge," "Hymne au Pot de Vib"), his long compositions (of which the most remarkable is called "150,000,000") under a torrent of hyperboles, unleashed images, imprecations, and anathemas, Mayakovsky sings of the new day, of the bouleversement which has taken place, and of the prevalent gestation. With the cries of the iconoclast, and the invocations of the neophyte, addressing the sun, the universe, the Revolution, he chants, he yells, he rages, he abuses.

Can it truly be said that he is the poet of new Russia, and that in its entirety his poetry bears the signs of the renaissance which it proclaims? It would be an exaggeration to pretend so. His abuse of hyperbole, his too great liking for the grotesque and the startling, his overweening individualism, bind him, despite himself, with that past which he despises. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that he has succeeded in producing most successfully the impression of rejuvenation, that his work is full of a formidable vitality, and that like the work of the best writers of his generation, his poems recapture something of the epic simplicity and the magnificent stumbling of the earliest works of literature.

These works ought not to be considered as things apart. We must not forget that the development of culture, the flowering of literature, presuppose normal conditions, a skilled technique, a certain degree of well-being, of retirement from the heat of events, of leisure, and especially time for maturing. Young Russia has not yet been able to achieve this. And therefore the work of its poets and writers can be regarded as yet merely as a promise of what is in store.

In the murky and dubious sky of European literature, the promise of Russian letters shines out like the rosy gleam of dawn.