

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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France

IN France they are discussing whether so and so has turned Catholic, and what effect it will have upon his style. The old coteries are broken, the old leaders dead or discredited, writers group themselves around publishers, with scarcely distinguishable aims. A metaphysics of language which concerns itself with the accuracy of expression and neglects the thing to be expressed absorbs the finer talents. No books of range and scope appear in French. Impressions of America, or tropical Africa, or the underworld of the ports or of Brussels are wrought into nervous sets of phrases each trying to catch the light and all reflecting a skeptical temperament that believes nothing of the world except that it can strike the senses. Valéry sets down in lapidary phrases a fine, thin summary—too logical, too final—of the theory that Spengler in an earlier period built crudely from a mass of generalized evidence. The German disgorges facts by the ton and is too busy with his material to refine upon his hypothesis. With the Frenchman truth seems to depend upon the placing of an adjective. It is a French generation wounded, tired, weak, which in default of energy will be fine. If it has little to say and doubts the utility of both theories and emotions, at least it can improve the instrument of saying. If there is no game to be hunted, we clean the guns and sharpen the knives.

France for the moment is absorbed in physical recovery and advance. Factories, mines, vineyards, olives, wheat, forests obsess the national thought. There is little margin of generous thinking, and only a reluctant interest in the outer world. The magnificent system of French culture functions: the right words are said, right ideas taught; the French intellect wherever applied is always superior, if not invariably right, or even excellent. In a thousand French villages and towns are a thousand war memorials of which almost none are ugly and most are beautiful. The French genius is too competent to fall below its minimum. But that genius is pallid and tired. In art, it does the needful without much interest. Words and lines excite it more than ideas and human nature.

The great industrialists share the really vital energy of this new France with the absorbed millions of toilers. Their names are unknown except when affixed to an automobile or a world allying trust, but they, with the workers, are France—for the moment. The *littérateurs* are the playboys of the time. No national literature at this moment exists—not so much as in America, not nearly so much as in England; but the never interrupted restlessness of the French intellect goes on—even though its roots are no deeper than the Parisian café pavement—refining, speculating, innovating with words if there are no things, with phrases where ideas are lacking.


France today is epitomized in any one of a hundred provincial newspapers. Spread upon four sheets, well arranged and badly printed, one-half the paper is such collected junk of anecdote, gossip, fashions, sports, pictures, and local items as must be fed daily to every modern community. For the rest, the humblest journal covers in detail the crops, the manufactures, the stock markets of all France. This is vital. But the half page of news at the back is not vital. It is a jumble of casual paragraphs—a factory burnt in Jugo Slavia, a revolution in Vienna (two paragraphs), three bicyclists killed in Utah, the vice president of Ireland (name misspelled) shot, a storm in the valley of the Ariège, a murder in Marseilles. France is not interested

How Many Dreams

By MAUD E. USCHOLD

HOW many dreams for a penny?
 Dreams are poor fare for many.
 "Flour and salt," said the grocer,
 "Herring and dills—"
 In a purple fen the fireflies hover
 around a silver lotus.
 "Dreams pay no bills."
 "Scissors and steel," said the surgeon,
 "Weeping and groans—"
 A voice goes through the trees
 like a rustle of eagle feathers
 and rain in silver buds
 breaks from the branches.
 "Dreams mend no bones."
 "Clover and corn," said the farmer,
 "Horses and kine—"
 Ripples of silver sequins
 on lazy waters
 tease the drowsy pools'
 unwinking amber eyes.
 "Dreams feed no swine."

How many dreams for a penny?
 Dreams are poor fare for many.



This Week

"Gallion's Reach." Reviewed by
Henry Seidel Canby.

"A Book for Bookmen." Reviewed
 by *John Macy.*

"Pero Tafur." Reviewed by *Helen
 McAfee.*

"H. G. Wells, Educationist." Re-
 viewed by *E. Preston Dargan.*

Humbert Wolfe's Poems. Reviewed
 by *Louis Untermeyer.*

"A New Testament." Reviewed by
Hamish Miles.

"Navies and Nations." Reviewed by
Capt. Thomas G. Frothingham.

"France," and "The South Afri-
 cans." Reviewed by *Bartlet Breb-
 ner.*

"Grotesques." Reviewed by *Arthur
 Colton.*

Selections from a New Dunciad.

Next Week, or Late r

"England." "America." Two Edi-
 torials.

in news of the world, or even in news of herself not industrial. France cultivates her garden and looks over the fence only in vacant moments, and then with suspicion or dislike.

It is a beautiful garden, excellently cultivated. But the French intellect has to live there, and the French man of letters leaves it only to try the effect upon his garden mind of new impressions which he can work up later in the café corner. A recent anthology of French contemporary prose is full of
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What Can a Man Believe?*

By ELMER DAVIS

BROTHER BARTON'S question answers itself, so far as the average man is concerned; he can believe whatever he finds it necessary or convenient to believe in order to go on doing what he felt like doing anyway. That can be set down before you read the book, and after you have read the book there is no need to change the answer. There are exceptional men who are constrained by spiritual fervor, intellectual honesty, or sluggish livers to believe things various, difficult, extraordinary, and inconvenient; but Mr. Barton's message is not for them. He writes for the Divine Average; in fact, he comes pretty near being it, as his success attests. His question should have been rephrased, however; what he really asks is, What is it most convenient to believe? To that inquiry, he has no trouble in giving a highly satisfactory answer.

Mr. Barton's Fifth Gospel, of which this is the third volume, has been considerably derided (though not by the ten or twenty million people who bought his previous books); but that is unfair. Christianity is a protean religion; it has spread chiefly because, in the past, it could adapt itself to the special tastes of its local public; and if it is to go on spreading, or even to hold its own, it must go on adapting itself. Surely a church whose various branches revere Apostles to the Slavs, and Apostles to the Indians, ought to have room for an Apostle to the Luncheon Clubs. Mr. Barton's arguments are not for those old-fashioned persons who dislike to see mansions in the skies sold by the same high-pressure methods as lots in a Florida development; but the great majority which bought land in Florida is likely to find him a persuasive salesman of building sites on the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

There are crabbed citizens who think that what this country most needs is the development of sales resistance; but this damnable heresy, as yet, hardly dares to raise its scaly head. It is repugnant to the Spirit of American Business; and Mr. Barton, who is so sure that the church ought to change with the times would probably call for the rack and thumb-screw if anybody suggested that this Spirit of American Business, well enough suited to the days when any man who didn't like his home town could go West and homestead a quarter section of good corn land, perhaps needs modernization now as badly as does the Nicene Creed. The Sales Resistant is doubly damned, atheist and traitor too; let us ignore him and go on to more seemly matters.

Mr. Barton has been called (or if he has not been so called heretofore, he is now) the Everlasting Yea. He is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. He exudes pep and optimism and prosperity; his adrenal glands gush with the torrential flow of those oil wells that exist only in the prospectus; and his God is like unto him. And why, one must ask, not? The vitality of Christianity, to the Protestant mind, lies precisely in this continual personal reinterpretation. Mr. Barton admits candidly that Man has always made God in his own image; and, quite as candidly, that a god made in the image of Bruce Barton might be a good deal worse. Which is true. God-the-First-Rotarian may have his weak points, but he is a considerable

*What Can a Man Believe? By Bruce Barton. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1927.

improvement over Chemosh the abomination of Moab and Milcom the abomination of Ammon, not to speak of deities highly respected nearer home. Some of us who are neutral in thought as well as act, in the present conflict of religions, would, if a constitutional amendment compelled us to burn incense on some altar, prefer the mirrored God of Bruce Barton to the raucous and ill-natured deity who wells from Sinclair Lewis's inner shrine.

However, since choice is not yet compulsory, let us see what Brother Barton has to offer to volunteers; assuming that anybody can be said to do anything voluntarily when a high-pressure salesman gets hold of him.

The most persuasive part of his argument, to the skeptical reader, lies in his picture of what the Church of the future ought to be—called, as one might have expected, the Church Nobody Knows. It would be a community church, undenominational and without doctrine (the Catholics, of course, are omitted from this harmonious synthesis); more important, almost without sermons and services. There would be plenty of music; the church would always be open for rest, meditation, and prayer; and the day would begin, for the whole community, with prayer broadcast by a sort of Vitaphone to home and schools and offices. Religion would be as natural and regular a part of life as breathing, and the principal activity of the church would be welfare work, physical, economic, mental, and spiritual.

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That, one may agree with the author, is a pretty fair outline of what the church ought to be. Some of the details have been omitted from the above summary, but never mind them; for this Church Nobody Knows is, one must fear, the Church Nobody Will Ever Know. Not until some divinely sent pestilence carries off every bishop, every minister, every deacon, every church trustee, and every president of a Ladies' Aid Society over night. The right kind of men, says Mr. Barton, do not often go into the ministry any more; which is undeniable. But men who have gone into the ministry and risen high in it are not likely to see anything so dreadfully wrong about an institution in which men like themselves have risen to power. To borrow William James's extreme statement of the case—Great changes would occur if the Pope turned Presbyterian; but a man likely to turn Presbyterian will never be elected Pope.

One may give three hearty if rather hopeless cheers for Mr. Barton's project of a reform in church polity and practise; it would be a great thing for the church, the nation, and the individual; but don't put your money on it yet. Kirsopp Lake divides contemporary clergymen into three classes—Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Institutionalists; and in most churches the Institutionalists seem to hold the balance of power. Consider the current proceedings at Lausanne. A good many churches are unwilling to give up their sanctified peculiarities for the sake of Christian unity; so, at this writing, the Conference on Faith and Order is behaving like the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament—it is accepting everything in principle and leaving everything in practice about as tangled as before. Declarations vague and broad are formally adopted, with the reservation that they may be interpreted in practice according to taste; which means, if the vague declarations of principle mean anything, that you can interpret black as white for the sake of harmony and Christian truth. Church unity is an admirable ideal, but to attain it you must sacrifice either time-hallowed doctrines or intellectual integrity. It must be said for the Church that it has never hesitated for one moment, when confronted with that choice.

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The future of the Church, however, is only a part of Mr. Barton's theme. The book, one reads, was written in answer to a series of questions from a prosperous business man—one of these big, brusque, straight-from-the-shoulder-and-no-nonsense executives. He asks, Would the world be better or worse off if it abolished religion; has the church done more harm than good; of the various religions now extant which is the best?—to all of which Mr. Barton returns the expected answers, on the obvious grounds. To persons of his turn of mind, his arguments will be convincing; this reviewer did not find them holeproof, but then this reviewer is not a big, prosperous business man. One wonders how the earnest inquirer was satisfied with the answer to his

fourth question—"What few simple things, if any, can a business man believe?" A question reasonable enough: and so is his proviso that Mr. Barton's answer must not "creep up behind my reason through the back door of my emotions." In reason, not in emotion, what can a man believe?

Mr. Barton, unlike Aquinas and other theologians, does not begin his answer by assuming God as an act of faith. "It is not our business habit to begin thinking with what is farthest off and most difficult to prove. We start with what we know. That is the way business is built up." We know, to begin with, that Man exists and has intelligence; now comes the act of faith—"Because I am, I believe God is; because I have intelligence, there must be Intelligence behind the universe. Why? Because otherwise the universe has created something greater than itself, for it has created me; and the assumption that the lesser can produce the greater does violence to my common sense." Here, obviously, we leave the solid rock of induction and stand upon the somewhat unsteady footing of formal logic, and Mr. Barton appears to feel that it is a little shaky. For he leans back instantly on Paley's argument from design, the watch that implies a watchmaker, for corroboration; Paley brought up to date, of course, an evolving watch and an evolutionary watchmaker. And, it being more reasonable to suppose that God made the universe than that it just happened, what sort of God is He?

Well, says Mr. Barton modestly, He must be at least as good as Bruce Barton; "I do not hesitate to ascribe my own best attributes to God." Omar Khayyam, who also pondered these matters, came to a somewhat different conclusion; one cannot help wondering whether the difference is a question of reason or of emotion. And such a God implies immortality; for would God set Man going, let him believe he is going somewhere, induce him to get up quite a state of mind about the incidents of the journey, and then let him discover at last that he was going nowhere after all? Bruce Barton wouldn't; nor, it seems to him, would God.

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All this is the commonplace of Modernist theology; Mr. Barton's original contribution is the climactic high-pressure exhortation that clinches the sale. "This book has established the intelligent man's right to believe. One last thought remains to be added. It is this: Not only has an intelligent man a right to believe, he is cheating himself if he does not exercise that right." God is good business; what further argument can any man want?

For faith, Brother Barton truly observes, removes mountains; "it is the creed of the men who have built big things. They do not buy bonds; they buy common stocks in order to share in the growth of the country." Cosmos Common has been quoted rather low of late years, but Bruce Barton thinks it is a good buy. So, after hammering in the value of faith and the ruinous consequences of unbelief, he Gives the Invitation, as the evangelists used to put it, but gives it in the idiom of today:

Since faith will do so much, and the lack of it is so destroying, why not believe? What does one lose by accepting the positive side of the argument and acting on its impulse? What can one lose that is anything in comparison with the gain?

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There you are, brother; the dotted line is before you and the freshly filled fountain pen is in your hand; sign and be happy ever after. In that same tone, in almost those very words, one has heard the "lecturer" pouring forth the invitation in a Florida development, while salesmen worked the aisles just as God's salesmen do it in a Billy Sunday revival; the invitation to buy lots in a wonder city that was a swamp six months ago, and is destined in another six months to be a swamp once more. Bruce Barton would say that it reverted to swamp only because not enough people had faith—the faith to put in their money and enable the developers to go ahead with the development. Mean-spirited persons, the sort of persons who would rather buy five per cent bonds in what seems probable than common stock in Bruce Barton's Cosmos Development Corporation, might say that there is no sense in trying to make a wonder city out of what is naturally a swamp. Your preference between these answers is probably dependent on your liver and your ductless glands; you will find plenty of evidence in Florida, and in the Universe, to support you in either one.

However, it cannot be denied that Mr. Barton is a master of selling approach. Even if one doesn't believe it, "what can one lose that is anything in comparison with the gain?" Not a thing, except possibly one's self-respect. And in these days of gang thinking and high-pressure persuasion, self-respect is as out of fashion as sales resistance.

Marriage Taboos

THE MYSTIC ROSE: A Study of Primitive Marriage and of Primitive Thought in Its Bearing on Marriage. By A. E. Crawley. Revised and greatly enlarged by Theodore Bestermann. New York: Boni & Liveright. 2 vols. 1927. \$10.

Reviewed by C. K. OGDEN

THE death of Mr. A. E. Crawley before he had completed the revision of his famous work, which has elicited praise from such divergent viewpoints as those of Havelock Ellis, Malinowski, Reinach, Rivers, and Westermarck was a serious loss to general anthropology. The two volumes now revised and enlarged by Mr. Bestermann are devoted to the accumulation of evidence for the view with which Mr. Crawley's name is chiefly associated—the explanation of sexual customs, and of marriage customs in particular, in terms of taboo. Sex, he maintains, is something mysterious to primitive man; and therefore something dangerous. And where mystery and danger affect social customs, there is no knowing what queer things we may find.

The food of a Fijian chief may not be carried by boys who have not been tattooed. Jewish weddings are universally celebrated under a canopy. In Persia, marriage by proxy is the rule, and so forth. Certainly most of us would never discover for ourselves half the well-considered trifles garnered in books like 'The Mystic Rose;' still less their connection with so prosaic a ceremony as marriage.

But the inquiry takes us farther afield, even into the heart of grammar! For the fact, however, that in Japan, female writing has a different syntax from that of men, and the Japanese use two alphabets, one for either sex, we are referred to I. L. Bird (1880) and P. F. von Siebold (1841) respectively. Is it possible that so surprising a feature of the civilization of one of the great World Powers has not been the object of further significant literature in the last half century?

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Such linguistic oddities are indeed amongst the most remarkable that Mr. Crawley's researches have brought to light. Thus, as regards names, if a Hindu wife so much as dreams of her husband's name her sin "will inevitably lead him to an untimely end." If a Kaffir woman uses any word which contains the sounds of the names of her husband or his relatives she is punished with death; and the prohibitions are naturally so numerous that the women have to invent special vocabularies, with the result that the men do not understand the *ukuteta kwabapzi*, or "women's language." Nor must we forget the widespread taboos on the words which may not decently be uttered in female society, the practice of exchanging names in order to seal friendship, and the change of names at puberty. In all such word-magic the mother-in-law naturally plays a rôle of peculiar importance.

Very curious is the solicitude which causes parents to change their names on the birth of a child; in particular, to take the name of the first. Some Australians even change their names at the birth of every child, both fathers and mothers. In Madagascar parents will assume the names of such of their children as rise to eminence in the public service, which as Mr. Crawley remarks, is due to pride rather than the more usual motive of taking under protection that part of the loved one which is most vital to his wellbeing—the name.

The editor has done his work well, though it is doubtful whether Mr. Crawley himself would not have paid more attention to Dr. Malinowski's important contributions to *Psyche* which are now available in book form. The revised Bibliography and Index occupy over seventy pages, and the format of the whole is pleasing and convenient.