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EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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FRONTISPIECE FOR "THE GOBLER OF GOD"

By Percy MacKaye, drawn by Arvia MacKaye.

See page 546

Still Robert Frost

WEST-RUNNING BROOK. By ROBERT FROST.
New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1928.
\$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

NO contemporary poet has been more praised than Robert Frost, and no poet has ever been more praised for the wrong things. The early reviews of "West-Running Brook" have renewed the false emphasis. Most of the critics are surprised that the writer identified with the long monologues in "North of Boston" should turn to lyrics, forgetting that Frost's first volume (written in the 1890's and published twenty years later) was wholly and insistently lyrical. One reviewer, echoing the false platitude concerning New England bleakness, applauds Frost's almost colorless reticence, his "preference for black and white." Another makes the discovery that "where he was formerly content to limn a landscape . . . here the emphasis is primarily on the poet's emotion."

A more careful rereading of Frost's other works should instruct the critics. Were they less anxious to affix labels and establish categories, there would be less confusion—a confusion that leads one otherwise intelligent reviewer to declare that "the poet nearest akin to him (Frost) is A. E. Housman," although, continues the bewildered reviewer, "Housman will admit color at times." . . . Forget for the moment Frost's most famous "North of Boston" and its successor "Mountain Interval"; examine his earliest volume "A Boy's Will," published in 1913, and "New Hampshire," published in 1923. What disappears first is the complaint (if we have heard it made) of colorlessness. Never were volumes less black and white; never were shades of expression more delicate and at the same time more distinct. Equally obvious is the absence of inhibitions. Poems like "Two Look at Two," "To Earthward," "Fire and Ice," "Moving," "The Tuft of Flowers" are anything but reticent; they are profound, ever personal, revelations. Frost has never been "content to limn a landscape." He cannot suggest a character or a countryside without informing the subject with his own philosophy, a philosophy whose bantering
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A Sermon on Style*

By HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THE English Bible is dying. I do not mean its theology, nor its historical or spiritual content. I do not refer to the controversies between Fundamentalists and Rationalists, nor to the interpretation as poetry and legend of what once was regarded as literal fact. Where the Bible is historical at all there is probably more evidence as to its historicity available than ever before. I do not assert that its moral values have declined, although they have certainly been transvalued, nor that as great literature it is one whit less than our ancestors (when they dared to think of it as literature at all) believed it.

But all qualifications aside, the English Bible, and specifically the King James version, is losing, or has already lost, a power over the imagination almost unexampled in history. It was couched in a prose so rich with the genius of a great language, and so invariably read with reverence, love, or fear, that there is perhaps no equivalent instance of the style as well as the substance of a single book influencing and sometimes dominating the mould of thought and form of expression of a whole people.

The Bible, for English speakers from the seventeenth century on, was the Word. When they read "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," they thought, or should have thought, of Christ as the Divine Intelligence and Mediator between God and man. But it was the English phrase, not the Greek meaning, which prevailed. The Logos, for English readers, was neither reason, nor the Divine expression as such, but the Word of a sacred Book, authoritative, irrefutable, magic. And it was a great Word. The most sophisticated megalopolitan cannot read Isaiah to-day, or Paul, without yielding to the spell. There has been equal eloquence in other tongues, but no such prevailing eloquence. Not all the obscurities, the contradictions, and the absurdities in the Bible can detract from its great power in this respect. Enter to scoff and you remain to be stirred and exalted.

My argument is simple, and must be simply stated. Whatever the spiritual and theological strength of the English Bible, its influence was due in no slight measure to the power of English eloquence, to style in the truest sense of the word. Whatever else it may have been, it was a great Book, a strong Word, an inescapable pressure of great statement, vital, simple, beautiful, upon ordinary man. If he did not read Homer, Vergil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, Wordsworth, Keats, Emerson, Whitman, he had this. And if the subject matter of the Bible had been the Hindu Gospel or Greek mythology or Buddhism or the philosophy of Confucius, and if the English style had possessed like qualities of excellence, the influence for which I am arguing would still have been immense.

There is an interesting parallel in Fitzgerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Kháyyám, a poem more Fitzgerald's than Omar's, yet expressing a philosophy sharply different from the ordinary currents of English thinking, and nevertheless couched in such vital English as to become the most widely quoted poetry of the latter nineteenth century.

It is as the Word, in the sense which English readers understood, that the English Bible is dying. It is through this Word, whether spoken or written,

that we got our strongest moral and spiritual stimulus. The power of a phrase may, and often does, exceed the power of an idea, because the phrase may carry with it a train of emotional suggestion and a stir to reminiscence that moves the whole being.

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.

Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. O let thine ears consider well: the voice of my complaint. If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss: O Lord, who may abide it.

And in the Biblical tradition

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee, and doth promise than when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their request; Fulfil now, O Lord, the desire and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.

From the Word in this sense our religious life has been quickened and the mind exalted. Not the literal meaning, but the rich suggestiveness of the phrase has been a saving help in time of trouble or the cause of new realization or resolve. The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life, can be very fairly paraphrased into a literary statement of the power of the Word.

At the moment when words have been given wings to speak round the world, when the radio has increased the stature (but unfortunately not the mind) of the orator by a cubit, so that where he spoke to a thousand, now a million hear him; when the press and its reduplications pour words in a torrent over every mind, the Word, as our ancestors knew it, has lost its power, speaks no more with final authority even to the most devout, and as a factor

This Week

"Charles James Fox."

Reviewed by FRANK MONAGHAN.

"Napoleon the Man."

Reviewed by LEO GERSHOY.

"The Great Enlightenment."

Reviewed by O. W. FIRKINS.

"The Discoverer."

Reviewed by CARL CHRISTIAN PETERSON.

"Hedylus."

Reviewed by GRACE FRANK.

"The Mad Professor."

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY.

Thumbsplint Anthology.

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

'Next Week, or Later

The Arts Under a Dictatorship.

By H. M. KALLEN.

* This essay will be reprinted in a book by various authors, entitled "If I Had Only One Sermon to Preach," to be published by Harper & Bros.

in spiritual and esthetic education has become quaint and reminiscent rather than vital and awesome. Whatever statistics may show as to the sales and distribution of the English Bible, it is not read as it once was. Our daily conversation, our writing, and our speaking prove this too readily. Ye shall know them by their fruits, applies to books as well as to men. Even Fundamentalists are modern (shall we say, most modern) in their colloquial spoken style, and if the Bible is read weekly in churches, it is clear that neither preacher nor congregation listen as they once listened to the Word.

I belong myself to that Quakerish school that never made a fetish of the Bible, and should be particularly disinclined to argue for a return to the general, indiscriminate, daily reading of the Bible which once was common. Not even the seventeenth century could turn all the Bible into impressive prose. Revelations is tedious and hysterical when it is not magnificent. Old Testament ethics are frequently shocking, and the English of certain speeches of Jehovah and Jeremiah is much more admirable than their content or the character of the speakers.

Nor do I hold with the worthy teachers who would have us adopt the English Bible as a model for current English. That is, to speak brusquely, nonsense. The Biblical style is eloquent and almost unequalled in emotional expressiveness. But it is entirely inadequate for exact statement or lucid analysis, as indeed was all English prose before the eighteenth century. The revision of revised versions has made its obscurer passages clearer only by a descent into flat modernism which sacrifices rhythm and emotion to the meaning of the original. This great style rises to its height, as all agree, in the Old Testament, where it is precisely least adapted to the needs of a scientific age, to any age indeed, not content to express itself by poetical indirection.

The rules of logical English Composition are nearly all broken in the Bible. Unity is by no means constant, coherence is casual, only emphasis is invariably maintained. To urge a youth entering any department of modern life to form his style upon the Bible is as foolish as to advise tilting, camel riding, and the study of medicinal herbs as a preparation for engineering or the law. The English style of the Bible is more remote from the practical necessities of modern prose than Pindar from the exposition of Aristotle. It is a magnificent prose, but absolutely inadapted to the expression of nine-tenths of what we as journalists, scientists, novelists, legalists, scholars, and even ministers, must necessarily express.

It is as a stimulant, a corrective, and a source, that the Biblical style has been so valuable. Lincoln did not learn to write from the Bible. He learned to write from Blackstone and the historians and the essayists. His Gettysburg speech is not Biblical in its style, but eighteenth century at the earliest. It was from the Bible that he learned pitch, and exaltation, and the power of the Word. It was his reading and hearing of the Bible that gave him simplicity and force in his diction. Order, clarity, logic, accuracy—these indispensables of style in a modern civilization—he got elsewhere.

Thus it is not to be deplored that editorial writers in the London or the New York *Times* do not use the style of Jeremiah. If they did, we would not read them; indeed we know too well, from a familiar kind of sermon, the unfortunate results of talking seventeenth century when you have a twentieth (or late nineteenth!) century brain. Yet it is to be regretted that we do not have what Lincoln had, nor are ever likely to possess it in the same measure from the same source. For the attitude of awed reverence for the Bible is gone, and what is more important, the wide and continual and often exclusive reading of the Bible is gone. The Word will always have power, but the power of a Classic not a Scripture. It will never again lift with little effort the style of plain men like John Bunyan or George Fox, because it is no longer in the active consciousness of plain men that read and listen. Norman French, with a great literature behind it, died out in England because the speakers could not count on an understanding. The parallel is inexact, because there are elements of permanence in the English Bible and factors of resemblance in modern English not present in the analogue, but the comparison points my meaning. The Bible and Biblical English will stay, will enrich our style, will stir our emotions (is it conceivable that the story of Absalom will ever lose its poignancy?), but the Word as an

influence of privileged might and universal acceptance is dying. It may put on the immortality of literature, but its moral dominance is gone.

I come—to quote from that other great reservoir of English style—to bury Cæsar, not to praise him. My preaching is concerned not so much with holding fast to our inheritance in the English Bible, as with inevitable losses that already may be estimated and are likely to increase. For with the decline of the majestic influence of Jacobean prose a whole department of style seems to be lost to us, and to regard the loss as merely literary is to take a most superficial view.

It may be said that the current age is scientific, utilitarian, practical, and therefore needs only the plain and flexible, simple and accurate prose which it is getting in characteristic specimens from our best writers. But this generalization is not true, and if it were, no one could rest content with what it implies.

We are scientific, utilitarian, practical, and we do need and have got in our modern English an instrument almost as accurate and flexible as French prose, and probably more expressive. To write now like Ruskin or Carlyle or Dr. Johnson or Robert Burton or the makers of the English Bible is a sign of weakness, not strength, and (whatever teachers of English and Tory critics may say) that kind of writing for us is nothing, gets nowhere, and indicates more surely than anything else a spiritual and esthetic plagiarism. It is well known among teachers of English that one of the surest symptoms of the intellectual parasitism of a second-rate mind is an essay written in the style of Charles Lamb.

But not all of us, and no one of us, is all scientific, utilitarian, practical. These are merely the contours which are turned for touch and shaping to this age in which we live. The waters still run deep even though the angel of the Old Testament seldom troubles them. A craving for beauty, a sense of awe, a moral urge, the love of an ideal, the need of worship, the belief in spiritual values, are of course as existent in a machine age as in any other. They have not pressed for expression because other needs in this economic century have been more urgent, and still more perhaps because the expressiveness of our fathers has until recently been sufficient for traits temporarily recessive. But they must find expression somehow, and may need a new expressiveness at any moment more urgently than do the measurements of science. Science, indeed, having come close to metaphysics, needs a new diction now. The physicist falls from very helplessness into the language of the Bible in the attempt to intimate (for he cannot express) his new sense of the non-existence of mere things.

It seems that we need a new Bible—new Jobs, new Pauls, new Isaiahs, but not in their similitudes nor with their voices. I do not refer to a new theology, although that is inevitable, nor to new spiritual and ethical conceptions, although they too are inevitable in so far as anything spiritual and ethical can be new. I mean a new responsibility for the Word as eloquence—as the “speaking out” of the depths of man. This means in plain English a new expressiveness for what is not practical, utilitarian, scientific, and sophisticated.

The King James version was a new medium for expression. I am naturally aware that it was a translation, and also of its partial dependence on earlier versions as far back as Wycliffe. Nevertheless it stands of itself; it dates as of seventeenth century protestant England where the leadership of the new world was being forged. The interpenetration of its language through all serious English literature of the next centuries is proof of what was accomplished. A new eloquence for spiritual and ethical concepts was given to the race. The subject matter was not English, although it deeply concerned the England of the day, but the style was native.

It may be done again, though not in the same way. It may be done, not for an ancient Scripture, but for some new subject of quest and craving. It must be done. We must translate deep spiritual emotion and strong ethical desires into our vernacular, but first from the vernacular we must make or remake a style.

The psychological effect of reading, as reading goes to-day, is difficult to estimate, but must be extraordinary. The book, as Spengler says with his customary dogmatism, but at least an aspect of truth, is disappearing. For the masses, who no longer are illiterate, this is the age of reading—of newspaper

and magazine reading, and of hearing the same kind of journalism over the radio. Millions of words, flat and soggy most of them, fall like an endless snow upon civilized man. He is drifted in with them, buried; wherever he goes he wades through printed or spoken words. His business is by words said or words read, and in his leisure he opens his mind to them. At the least estimate a city dweller reads or hears fifty thousand words a day.

This circumstance is so new that we can only guess at an outcome. That our thoughts are increasingly formulated in words—words drifted into the mind—is probable. That we use words more and get less from them, seems certain. The commonplaceness of everyday living in modern comfort is in part a mental reaction to the flatness of the words in which we have our being. Tabloid readers will eventually talk and think in tabloid—a soggy sensationalism. The mind overfed on the style so bleached of color and strained of disturbing complexities which is the ideal of good journalism and reaches its perfection of nullity in the English of radio broadcasting, will have no other medium in which to express itself. And the modern prose of literary masters which I, for one, admire, a prose that is adroit, accurate, subtle, scientific in the best sense, is still inadequate for purposes that must even in a prosaic age be importunate. It would be impossible to translate into its skilful commonsense the religious emotions of Job—

Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who hath laid the cornerstone thereof; when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? . . . Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? . . . Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominions thereof in the earth? . . . Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

And who dares to say that our inability to find equivalent organ tones of English is because we have no religious emotion, no spiritual insight, no quests and no cravings as urgent, if less naive, than Job's to express!

Modern English is lacking in eloquence, in its root sense of speaking out, and its acquired meaning of speaking out from the heart. We need a new “grand style,” and it is not a sufficient answer to say that first we must acquire grandeur. For grandeur is a constant, relative only in its degree and its manifestations, and in literature truly limited by the ability of an age to express its inner self. In this country we were well on the way to attain a prose style with scope and lift, in the creative period of American imagination which ended with the Civil War. Emerson and Thoreau were both eloquent, and Thoreau, at least, wrote with a mind as modern as our own. There has been little real eloquence in American prose since because there has been little felt need. And should a prophet arrive, or, if that is too archaic a term, a great teacher, philosopher, preacher, or writer of Pascal's calibre or Milton's, where is his medium? Can he forge it over night? It was a group of quite undistinguished men, as literature goes, which made the English Bible. But they had a great prose ready at hand.

It is hard to write of a Great Need without falling into the bombast or abstraction of those who speak of Long Felt Wants and Next Steps and Urgent Duties. This sermon on style raises, of course, more questions than it answers, and indeed that is my purpose. It implies, for example, that literature with a purpose deserves a great style, and this is an idea very distasteful to modern critics who like to see the cool detachment of science extended to art. Description, measurement, analysis, have been at the heart of twentieth century literature. Writers who attempted other modes have been called propagandists, sentimentalists, or accused (often rightly) of stale romantic symbolism.

And yet, though ethics has been run out of poetry and fiction clipped of its morals, the didactic has merely changed its costume for a business suit and

sneaked back by the stage door in Shaw's plays or entered as a hard-boiled journalist in H. G. Wells's novels.

The difference between H. G. Wells and the Bible can be measured in style. Both preach morality, and while I am not comparing subject matters, I am willing to grant to Wells a rather exalted morality. But Wells has no eloquence and needs none for his appeals to commonsense.

There is, indeed, always a moral, and a religious literature too, being written, even in the most immoral societies. But if we insist upon it being unlit-erary, not eloquent, deny it beauty and the attributes of art, turn it over to the journalists and the satirists and the professional propagandists, we get the kind of style and the kind of literature for which we ask. Even then, a Hardy will take a scientific age on its own terms and make great poetry of its doubts.

But it is not enough to say that we get the style we deserve. I readily grant that a commonplace people, let us say the Dutch of the eighteenth century, are not going to produce masterpieces of literary art. But where are the critics wise enough to estimate the essential greatness or littleness of their own times! It is argued that this is the great and virile age of America. It is argued that we are in the very decadence of true Americanism. Let them argue. All that can safely be said until time has finished with us, is that our literature is more or less expressive of what we are. The Elizabethan literature, it is now clear, was immensely expressive; the writing of the mauve decade of the recent 'nineties, when the astonishing twentieth century was in full preparation, was certainly not very expressive, or fully expressive only of imperialism, a fine-drawn febrile esthetics, and a vague romantic sentimentalism destined to blow away like mist banks within a decade.

Our styles—the adroit sophisticated style of the subtler British novelists and poets, the plain man-to-man style of Wells and Sinclair Lewis, the colorless, but readable and fluent style of American journalism, smart, humorous, and often wise in the columnists, informative, unemotional, but pointed and close to human needs in *The Saturday Evening Post* or *The New York Times*, the familiar, colloquial style of realistic poetry and modern biographical writing—these styles are all expressive and some of them excellent instruments. No one wants sex novels written in the prose of the Song of Solomon or articles on the plan of 2d Corinthians. Journalists and novelists alike have done well by the English language. They can say what they want and say it as well as it has ever been said. But who shall assert that there are no profounder emotions, neither descriptive nor analytic, demanding a different and nobler style in prose and poetry than any of these? And if they exist, by what tongue shall they speak?

My somewhat ideal thesis therefore, is, that we must recapture the Word, with all the content I have tried to give to that term. We are in real danger of losing, in an age of flat prose, an essential and invaluable capacity of the language, fully realized once in the English Bible, but realizable again—the capacity to express by tone and overtone, by rhythm, and by beauty and force of vocabulary, the religious, the spiritual, the ethical cravings of man who would still be obsessed by them if he were proved—as now seems most unlikely—to be only a biological machine.

And the Word, while secondary if you will, and an instrument only, is indispensable for turning ideas and emotions into communicable force. If, as the eighteenth century naively believed, we could find all that we need to say in the classics, if we could rest finally content with the eloquence of Job! But their words are already dim for a generation that does not feel their authority or receive their connotations; and such styles cannot voice the strange vicissitudes of an age that knows the mysteries of the prophets are the commonplaces of science, and yet must face new mysteries more perplexing and less absolute.

Who will give us a new Bible in English? For to one sensitive to the power of language, and aware of the difference between words and the Word, the priests of the twentieth century babble in a jargon that has lost its vitality, and the prophets are tongue-tied with a language that can say everything but what they most deeply feel and mean. They have the tongues of men, but not angels; not even sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, but only a language of the machine that can go swiftly to the right and to the left, but never up.

A Man Made To Be Loved

CHARLES JAMES FOX. By JOHN DRINKWATER. New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation. 1928. \$5.

Reviewed by FRANK MONAGHAN

Dictionary of National Biography

SOME months ago in addressing the English-speaking Union in London Mr. Drinkwater discussed the factors which determine his treatment of historical figures. Those figures about whom the popular traditions are true call for dramatic treatment and Mr. Drinkwater has given us plays of Lincoln, Cromwell, and Lee. But historical characters about whom the popular traditions are wrong demand "a closely-documented and argued biographical study." He has already published studies of Byron and of Charles II and now gives us a lengthy volume on Charles James Fox, "the least known of great statesmen though one of the greatest of Englishmen." Mr. Drinkwater has succumbed not only to the legend of his own building, but to an even greater degree has been captivated by the remarkable personal charm of the man whom he leads through these four hundred pages. Of the lovability of Fox's personality—of the warmth of his heart, the sweetness and buoyancy of his tempera-



JOHN BULL'S ADVOCATE (FOX) NONSUITED
Drawing by Dighton, January 1789, reproduced in "Charles James Fox," by John Drinkwater.

ment, his candid and benevolent disposition, there can be no doubt. "He is a man made to be loved," said Burke and he has enchanted his biographers as he did his contemporaries.

In his admiration of Fox Mr. Drinkwater believes he could have done no wrong nor had any weakness. Fox's resignation from the government in 1772 is treated as an instance of profound political conversion, though it was probably based on grounds of private dissatisfaction and on a desire to oppose the royal marriage bill in which the interests of his own family were involved. Of his hero's reactionary zeal in 1774 which inspired the attacks on Woodfall, a poor printer, and on the liberty of the press, Mr. Drinkwater says they were a "rather odd method" of breaking his relations with Lord North. We may overlook these early acts of Fox's career, but how shall we explain his coalition with North in 1783? Fox himself had said that "from the moment when I shall make any terms with one of them (North and his ministers), from that moment I will rest satisfied to be called the most infamous of mankind. I could not for an instant think of coalition with men who . . . have shown themselves void of every principle of honor and honesty." Mr. Drinkwater's apology for Fox's joining the disastrous coalition which Richmond and Pitt had wisely declined is hardly more satisfactory than the explanation of Fox himself. The explanation of his conduct is to be found in his lack of political judgment and in his weakness of character. The author considers Fox one of the greatest of statesmen. That he was an effective orator and a very great debater is true, but he was notably deficient in those qualities which make a party leader or a great statesman. As a politician he possessed liberal sentiments and he had a profound hatred of intolerance and oppression, but he lacked political sagacity and in the course of a long public career never succeeded in gaining

the confidence of the English people. He loved their rights and ideals, but it may be doubted if he understood the character and the temperament of the English nation. Aside from the libel bill of 1792 for which he was partly responsible he left very little of permanent value behind him and contributed but little to the history of national progress.

Considerable industry has gone into the making of this volume and Mr. Drinkwater has published some new letters from the Hichingbrooke papers and some passages from the diary of Mrs. Fox; the rest of his material has long been known to historians. A great wealth of detail and many bulky quotations embarrass the flow of the narrative. Of errors of fact we shall speak but briefly. To speak of the Five Nations in the time of George III is an anachronism, since by the admission of the Tuscaroras in 1715 they had become the Six Nations. We can hardly acquiesce in the account of the settling of the Carolinas nor do we believe that the Carolinas "distinguished themselves forever in American history by the institution of Negro slavery." Mr. Drinkwater evidently still believes in the tradition of Patrick Henry, and his comments on parliamentary reform argue that he is unfamiliar with the history of that movement in England. Though we may forgive some of Mr. Drinkwater's puns (i. e., "prophets at ten percent") how can we forgive him the complete lack of any index—so essential in a work claiming to be serious history?

According to Merezhkovsky

NAPOLEON THE MAN. By DMITRI MERZHKOVSKY. Translated by CATHERINE ZVEGINZOV. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1928. \$3.

Reviewed by LEO GERSHOY

HERE we have no steel-nerved surgeon wielding the scalpel. The author's name alone is sufficient guarantee against yet another of those century-old attempts to pin Napoleon down to the dissecting table. As well try to envisage the flight of an eagle by gazing at a stuffed specimen in a glass cage as to fathom the riddle of the restless Corsican by examining him microscopically. "The Napoleonic legend," says Merezhkovsky, "is still almost a Christian legend in the soul of the people, and there is no other way to the hero's soul than through the soul of the nation." Away, then, with the tempered judgments of sober historians, away with soul-beclouding facts and the jarring details of his work, away with the development of character and the evolution of Napoleon's thought. For Napoleon was "the last incarnation of Apollo, the Sun God," "a piece of rock launched into space," "the fateful executor of a command unknown"; not one to be measured by the wooden yard of moral values, "but by the 'golden rod' with which the Angel measures the wall of the City of God." And as it happens, the gospel according to Merezhkovsky recaptures more fully the apocalyptic mood of Napoleon's career than any other interpretation that this reader has ever seen.

The Russian mystic is at his best in this character study, for the simple reason that in Napoleon he has a subject qualified as no other ever was to sustain his own literary genius. Where else in the whole range of human destiny could he have found a figure who is so human and yet so much more than a man, who "waking is blind and sleeping has visions," who conquers reason with intuition and yet keeps a perfect balance of mind and character, who is a Dionysos, "a teacher of ecstasy" aiming at peace through the necessity of war, who to deceive all around him had but to remain perfectly true to himself—"Napoleon acting the part of Napoleon"—"whose whole soul is condensed in one great love of the Earth" and "whose God would be the Sun, the eternal life-giver," who would establish and consecrate the Empire of Reason and finds it necessary to use mystery and the supernatural to win men to his support!

"Napoleon the Man" is a book to cause historians to despair, so utterly unsound it is in its method and so amazingly just in many of its conclusions. It will goad the good rationalist to scribble savagely "glandular disturbance" every time that the author sees the face of the Sphinx staring at Napoleon. And it furnishes the reader a volume rich in fantasy and penetrating in subtlety, a magnificently imaginative portrayal of a complex being whose mystery is made all the more profound by this brilliant resolution of its elements.