

An American Schoolmaster

THE FATHER OF LITTLE WOMEN. By HONORÉ WILLIS MORROW. Boston: Little, Brown & Company. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by VERNON L. PARRINGTON

THE judgment of history that inclines to salvage only Emerson and Thoreau from the wreck of transcendentalism, is a bit severe. Amongst the men of that vigorous age who were much talked about in their own time, certain ones may have been too carelessly forgotten. Perhaps Orestes Brownson and Bronson Alcott merit the oblivion that has come to them, but to grant them no appeal to a higher court than that in which they were first judged is scarcely just. Orestes Brownson was a picturesque figure even in the picturesque 'forties. Endowed with a muscular intellect and an enormous capacity for espousing causes, he ran lustily through all the isms of the day and fought briskly for every liberal cause. Beginning as a Presbyterian he passed successively through Universalism, Unitarianism, transcendentalism, and ended in the bosom of Mother Church. A militant democrat, he grasped the calloused hand of labor and hobnobbed with Socialists and Utopian dreamers; and having found peace nowhere else he knocked finally at the door of the Roman Catholic Church to lay his troubles at her hospitable altar. Bronson Alcott was less robust and pugnacious but equally individual. By common neighborhood report he was the most "erratic" of the transcendentalists, and the fluent mysticism of his Orphic Sayings made him the common butt of ridicule. Sensible folk regarded him as the blowsiest of a blowsy school, who wrote and talked endlessly and got few to understand what it was all about and fewer still to care. The ear of the world was early shut against him. Reams of his manuscript remain unpublished, including his diary, "some fifty volumes of exquisite handwriting on yellowed paper," each volume containing "three hundred odd pages"—the spiritual and intellectual autobiography of a singular life. Perhaps his neighbors interpreted him correctly in accounting his name a synonym for futility, but there is room for doubt.

Mrs. Morrow is of the opinion that he has been most unjustly treated; nay more, she is convinced that the materialism which has fallen upon American education is due in part to the rejection of the wisdom of this forgotten prophet who would make education to concern itself primarily with the things of the spirit; and that if we are to pull our schools out of that slough we must go back to Bronson Alcott and take up once more the work he was not permitted to carry on. "Nothing is so tragic about the disappearance of the New England leaven from American life," Mrs. Morrow suggests, "as the fact that New England itself destroyed so much of that leaven. And the story of Bronson Alcott tells, as nothing else can tell, how New England destroyed the things it loved." In the judgment of Mrs. Morrow, Bronson Alcott was the greatest schoolmaster America has ever had, and his greatness consisted in the skill with which he encouraged young minds to unfold themselves, stimulating them to think and feel, to live in the mind and the spirit. "Discipline, moral and intellectual"—that was Alcott's recipe. "A depraved child! Never was there one when parental and social influences were duly bestowed upon it"—a dictum that suggests both the Enlightenment and Behaviorism. And it was this insistence on freedom to live in the mind and spirit that scandalized New England parents and brought disaster on his successive schools; for parents then as now wanted their children taught the particular fetishes and taboos upon which their own stupid lives had been erected. Mrs. Morrow has told the story of the great venture with much charm, and if our professional students of education fail to read her book it will be their loss. To me the suggestiveness of the work lies in its testimony to the tragic difficulty with which education in America has made headway against the combined stupidity of parents and educators and Boards of Education.

Much of Bronson Alcott, of course, is not in this study. Mrs. Morrow has gone to the diary, but she has used only such portions as dealt with Alcott's theory and practice of education. Alcott the mystic and social reformer, Alcott the contributor to the *Dial*, the experimenter at Fruitlands, the founder of the Concord School of Philosophy, is not to be found in these entertaining pages.

The BOWLING GREEN

A Note on Conrad

I HAVE not read "The Sisters," Joseph Conrad's unfinished story which is printed in this month's *Bookman*. I am luxurious in my taste for reading J. C. and prefer to come to his pages in a particular mood and impulse. I need to be very much myself before reading him, for perhaps more than any other writer I can think of Conrad is (to me) valuable for self-discovery. I do not read him to find out what happened to his characters—almost all of whom are, to me, shadowy and unrememberable. I read him to find out what is happening to myself. The requisite equilibrium for reading "The Sisters" has not come. I began, got as far as the witty and sardonic second and third sentences, and paused. ("He set off on his search for a creed—and found only an infinity of formulas," was the sentence that halted me. Here, I said to myself, this is going to be good: I'll wait until some godlike evening when I'm fit for it.) One of my secret hoards is that there are still two or three of Conrad's novels that I've never read. I carry them, lashed down under the gunnle like an extra spar. They may serve as jury rig in case of emergency.

But I've read Ford Madox Ford's note on "The Sisters," which accompanies the story in the *Bookman*, and am inclined to agree with Mitchell Kennerley who remarked (with his customary and immediate positiveness) that it is one of the few really significant comments on Conrad that have been printed. Believing as I do that Ford's memoir of Conrad (three years ago) was one of the most thrillingly intelligent tributes ever paid to a great writer, I always listen with most attentive ears when Mr. Ford has anything to say about his friend and collaborator. The first job of the prentice theologian is always to 'harmonize' the Gospels; and as in the case of any Messiah who has passed on the patient student has to thread his way among the conflicting jealous accounts of those who Knew Him. But I esteem Mr. Ford's comments especially because he always deals with Conrad in a strictly professional sense. Amid so much only partly relevant remark upon Conrad's personal enchantment, his career as mariner, his financial difficulties, Ford considers him solely as the imaginative artist. In other words Ford takes Conrad very seriously, as Conrad did himself.

Mr. Ford mentions "The Sisters" and "The Return" (in "Tales of Unrest") as Conrad's early attempts to be a "straight" writer rather than "the relatively exotic novelist of the sea and the lagoons." He might also have mentioned their collaborated piece "The Nature of a Crime," the entire neglect of which by readers and critics always surprised me. It seems to me, much more than "The Return," evidence of Conrad's ability to make silk of the old familiar sow's ear. There is to me a certain humor in Mr. Ford's apparently deploring that Conrad went on to write such things as "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness" and "The Shadow Line" when he might have written about "usual human activities in cities." But Conrad was too great a man for many of us to agree about him.

The important thing that Mr. Ford's note brings up, and the thing every student of Conrad has wondered about is what Ford calls his "thwarted desire to write of the relationship between men and women." The one serious blemish to me in Conrad's great powers always seems the unreality of his women. They seem to me incurably romantic hallucinations, the conception of a lonely man on the poop of a ship. Freya, who played the piano against thunderstorms, and Jacobus's negligée daughter, are almost the only two who come back to me with any vibration of actuality—those and the barmaid of the Three Crows (in "The Brute"). Perhaps I'm wrong about this: but I've always wished that some accomplished feminine psychographer (Dorothy Parker, for instance) would give us a hand on this topic. To imagine women as a lonely ship's officer might, leaning over the taffrail in the middle watch, is undoubtedly the safest; but as Ruggles or Mr. Ford might say, it would never do with us.

Of the remarkable collection of Conrad data and letters carefully gathered by M. Jean-Aubry there will be as many interpreters as critics. Those compe-

tent to read here and there between the lines will see part of the curious and splendid tragedy of any great artist in this world. I do not think that any of us have yet come anywhere near assessing the greatness of the man, either as personality or as artist—the artist who wrote that "the intention of temperamental writing is infinitely complex," and who wrote:

Imagination should be used to create human souls: to disclose human hearts,—and not to create events that are properly speaking accidents only. To accomplish it you must cultivate your poetic faculty,—you must give yourself up to emotions (no easy task). You must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image,—mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse: you must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain,—you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression. And you must do it sincerely, at any cost.

And these were not the easy words of a man at the top of his career. When they were written Conrad had only just left the sea, had published only one book, and was in anguished travail with the second. It was about this time that he was writing to his publisher, in a discussion of terms, that he could not afford to accept a rate that would net him less than ten-pence an hour.

The MS. of "Victory," by the way, was sold in Philadelphia the other day for \$15,000.

Among the many claimants for the honor of having caught the Conrad vibration early in the day, I have never seen any mention of the remarkable review by J. Stewart Doubleday, in *The Reader* (Mitchell Kennerley's old magazine) in May, 1903. "Youth" had just been published over here, and what Mr. Doubleday said is still true a quarter century later:

The title-story of this volume is a masterpiece. The other tales contained in the volume, "Heart of Darkness" and "The End of the Tether" are good; they even in some qualities possibly surpass their predecessor, but they lack that undefinable virtue of attainment, that completeness of conception and expression, which distinguish "Youth." "Youth" is new; we are perhaps a bit disturbed by the glamor of its excellence; but at first guess (for criticism is after all like fortune-telling, a sort of experienced guess-work) it seems to supply something fresh yet essential to man, to give him a new harmonious arrangement, a pleasure as of spring or of ripeness or lucent streams, yet unexpected in a way. It bears the miracle-sign; it has intuition, inspiration.

The actual story—if one must in any way analyze a literary substance so perfect—is the same sea story we loved so ardently by candlelight long ago, when geography and arithmetic were put aside and the adventure book, the daring book, the book of the whole interesting unknown world was opened to our eyes, already dazzled with the expectation of sea enchantment. And herein lies the wonder of Mr. Conrad's achievement: he gives it all to us again; not the story alone, but the feeling, the growth, the unsayable desire, the youth, in a word, with which we read the old ones. Not with sadness does he bring the strong emotion back, nor with dry reminiscence and regret, but he flashes it into being with a certain freshness and glow that make us live that early time over again. When we read "Youth," we are laughing at the follies of our morning, but we are made morning-hearted, too.

And this story, this wisdom of a mature man, this clearly individual secret of life drawn from the sky and the sea and the human soul just blossoming in the great garden of the world, is aptly and musically expressed in as grateful and mellow English as ever, for the bringing out of noble nature, was employed by the various prose masters of brief narrative literature. Mr. Conrad's masterpiece is alone of its kind.

"Heart of Darkness" tells of an Englishman who went out to the deadly West Coast of Africa to become the captain of a river steamboat. His experience is weird and interesting. Rascality, mismanagement, cruelty and pestilence make of the river settlements one of those hells which only a healthy-minded man like the writer can profitably depict, and none can make real but one possessed of a striking imagination. Mystery is there in abundance, and something wholly regional of horror, which the reader who knows not the nightmare of the tropics must inadequately realize. The story is a very fine piece of impressionist's work, and throughout that impressionism, like the fever in the jungle-river mist, lurks something sinister and swift, which compels attention; yet which, when all is said, seems a thing of mood rather than a thing of truth. Besides, the diction is often turbid, and we frequently mark the trail of a long-lost Rudyard!—momentous faults in the writing of a man distinguished for clear and individual phrase. These shortcomings should not, however, blind us to the fact that "Heart of Darkness" is a very fine piece of descriptive and psychological fiction.

In writing about Conrad there need be no pettiness, no attempt of rival friends or executors to score off one another. He was, as M. Jean-Aubry finely said, "an artist in the great manner and a man strong in soul." His magnificent and unbelievable career gives the perfect contour of the artist's adventure in this planet. Do not forget that when a long official envelope reached him, containing an offer of knighthood, he feared to open it, believing it an income tax blank.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.



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Books of Special Interest

On Beethoven

BEETHOVEN: HIS SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT. By J. W. N. SULLIVAN. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$3.50.

BEETHOVEN: THE SEARCH FOR REALITY. By W. J. TURNER. New York: George H. Doran. 1927. \$6.

Reviewed by MONTGOMERY BELGION

THESE two books have an identical subject, argued in each in opposite order. Mr. Sullivan starts with a theory of art and in particular of music and then illustrates that theory with what he calls Beethoven's spiritual development and the expression of that development in the music. Mr. Turner starts with the assumption that Beethoven's music was "the richest and most significant expression of his personality," and from that argues a theory of music and of art generally. Neither author is concerned primarily with Beethoven. Rather, this being the centenary year of Beethoven's death, both have used Beethoven in order to expound, Mr. Sullivan the views already explicit in his two volumes, "Aspects of Science"; Mr. Turner the hypothesis originally dealt with in his "Orpheus, or the Music of the Future."

Mr. Sullivan is a propagandist for a "conception of the function of music" and of art "incompatible," as he says, "with the general intellectual climate of the last three centuries." Beethoven, he declares, must have regarded art as a way of communicating knowledge about reality, have held what Mr. I. A. Richards in his "Principles of Literary Criticism" terms the "revelation theory" of art. "The greatest function of a work of art," says Mr. Sullivan, "is to present us with a higher organization of experience." Again:

Beethoven's work will live because of the permanent value, to the human race, of the experiences it communicates. These experiences are valuable because they are in the line of human development; they are experiences to which the race, in its evolutionary march, aspires.

As to Beethoven's spiritual development, which gives to Mr. Sullivan's book its title, he divides Beethoven's compositions into three periods. In the first the music was merely the expression of various moods, yet "experiences which are not only fundamental but universal." "The spiritual content" of the second period is "achievement through heroism in spite of suffering." In the third period, first, that is, in the Ninth Symphony, "a synthesis has been achieved." The last complete work, the quartet in F major, Op. 135, "is the work of a man who is fundamentally at peace." "Muss es sein? Es muss sein!"

Such a transition, as we find from Beethoven's "second" to his "third" period, is extremely rare * * * He adds one to the very few cases that exist of a genuine spiritual development.

It is upon a similar view of Beethoven and his music that Mr. Turner bases his theory of art—and life. Art, for Mr. Turner, is the "crystallizing" of experience into images. The artist has a formless desire or state of being, and this inner experience he puts into form and embodies forth. A spectator or auditor has to carry out the opposite process. A pianist, to give an auditor a sonata as the composer experienced it, must live it over again, and likewise the auditor must, as far as he can, turn the image which is the sonata back into feeling or experience. Life consists in precisely these two processes: the experience "becoming" the image and the image becoming the experience.

Our whole sentimental, intellectual, and emotional life consists in that conception which is the coalescing of the coincidence of an image with a feeling.

Thus living is the realizing of ideas and the conceiving of ideals. But both ideas and ideals are mere "crystallized" fragments of life itself. Hence an ideal cannot be an ultimate goal in life; but it can be only a point of departure from which to start living. Likewise art. Art does not consist in copying artistic ideals:

The function of these images [artistic ideals] is to melt again into feeling, penetrating as far down into the observer's soul as the depth from which they arose in their creator's, and in so doing to release fresh life which may in its turn be imaged forth to the world to be a source of further fruition.

Education should not consist, as it does, of teaching us to live the experience of others by setting up for us ideals, *i. e.*, images of what others have experienced; it should teach us to turn ideals into experience, so

that we can go on from that to experience originally for ourselves.

Art is the conduct of the soul * * * the highest, freest, and most developed form of action.

And what applies to art applies to the rest of conduct. In the region of individual behavior action must be original and not conventional:

There must be a struggle to reembody feelings in conduct and these feelings must be ever undergoing modification and change and then be reimagined forth into conduct.

Mr. Turner's theory, in short, assumes a certain relation between art and life and asserts two series of terms to be each equivalent: life-feeling-experience and art-image-idea-ideal-action.

Of the two writers, Mr. Turner is the more copious, Mr. Sullivan the more sober. Otherwise there is little to choose between them, as may have been gathered from my exposition and in particular from their airy references, Mr. Sullivan to "evolutionary march," Mr. Turner to "becoming," it being highly doubtful, as most people know, whether there is any "evolutionary march" or any "becoming." Though Mr. Sullivan, it is true, devotes a chapter to disputing Gurney's "The Power of Sound," the fundamental defect in both authors, it seems to me, is this: they are so eager to insist upon their theories that they neglect to establish any solid basis for them; each, that is, is guilty of a *petitio principii*. It is not enough, surely, to illustrate either theory with the one example of Beethoven, even if what the case of Beethoven furnishes is evidence. The theories would have to be shown to apply to at least more than one artist—to Bach, for instance, as well as to Beethoven.

Bach, indeed, provides a stumbling block for two ingenious theorizers. So Mr. Turner is led to compare Bach to "a Short-horn bull," to "a good but stupid athlete." And Mr. Sullivan is led to say:

The man who has sincerely accepted a religious scheme in which all the major problems of life are provided with solutions is likely to go through life without ever experiencing the direct impact of those problems. That is, in fact, the weakness of Bach as compared with Beethoven.

Which is, it will be agreed, an amazing statement!

A Pioneer Work

THE RUSSIAN ICON. By NIKODIM PAVLOVICH KONDAKOV. Translated by Ellis H. Minns. New York: Oxford University Press. 1927. \$35.

Reviewed by FRANK JEWETT MATHER

THIS beautifully made quarto is the first systematic work in its field. It was completed by the learned and venerable author in his eightieth year, when he was a refugee at Prague. Representing as it does the summing up of over fifty years of research, it is fortunate indeed that it fell into the hands of the most sympathetic and competent of editors and translators as into those of the most considerate and generous of publishers. It is in every sense a pioneer work, for it is only recently that the cleaning of Russian icons has given us with the material evidence a reasonably sure basis in schools and chronology, and even now the collateral Balkan material remains imperfectly explored. With this book and Wulff and Malparoff's "Denkmäler der Ikonmalerei" the student is now in a position to confront the vast and inchoate collection of Likachév and the thousands of still unpublished icons.

No complete review of a highly specialistic work is possible here. We may note only that Professor Kondakov remained to the end faithful to his theory that the glories of Russian icon painting in the fifteenth century were chiefly due to a backwash from the finest Italo-Byzantine painting, Balkan painting playing an inconsiderable rôle except, again, as an intermediary with Italy. In short Kondakov throughout minimizes the fashionable and perhaps over-popular East-Christian hypothesis. At present there can be little certainty in such generalizations. At least Kondakov's view puts the esthetic emphasis where it belongs.

While naturally this pioneer work is intended for specialists, the volume will appeal to bibliophiles in its own right; it offers in the reproductions much that is beautiful and novel to the art lover, and to the amateur of cults and superstitions, much that is interesting.



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