

Let It Die, by Henry R. Luce, on page 296

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Growing Pains

IT should be recorded as an item of news that the intellectuals have decided to support America. For about two decades they have had little good to say of their country. The *Nation* bombed us, some years ago, state by state. Thirty Americans united in a single volume to discourage the optimists, young gentlemen living in Paris dropped acid remarks, the *New Republic* was afflicted with a somewhat bilious melancholy, the *American Mercury* spouted mud volcanoes, and Sinclair Lewis published his novels. *Harper's* and the *Forum* have been more impressed by the problems of Americans than by the hopelessness of America, and you could always find records of pioneer virtue in the *Atlantic Monthly*, but a sense of something terribly wrong has nevertheless been a general symptom of belonging to the intelligentsia.

This, of course, has been a dominant characteristic of American men of letters from Jonathan Edwards down. They have nearly all been carpers because all, without exception, have had to face an obsession with material welfare. They have lived in a country which, with instances unimportant except for the South after the Civil War, has been in a boom since 1700.

There have been exceptions. Emerson was one. In spite of his convinced idealism, he was optimistic for his country. Whitman was another. He believed that sweat and hurry and movement and the desire to possess were better than looking backward. But Cooper, Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Howells, Thoreau—a formidable rank, were on the other side.

But it is not fair to say with M. Julien Benda in his recently published "The Treason of the Intellectuals," that those who approve the results of political and industrial energy are traitors to idealism. His argument that a man of letters who takes sides debases himself, is a little fine drawn at best. It does seem that we have intellectuals enough to spare some for the fighting in the streets, in the press, in the government. The ivory towers can all be garisoned and still leave man power for sallies and ambushes. No, the new willingness of gentlemen like Messrs. Dewey, Mumford, Klein in the book just published called "Whither, Mankind?" and of a distinguished group in another book, the "Recent Gains in American Civilization," edited by Kirby Page—their willingness to argue that the machine age, if not precisely golden, is certainly neither all steel or all lead, is a sign of rallying not desertion. Commonsense has told a good many of us that, no matter how much we detest outdoor advertising, tabloids, subway crushes, radio conversation, hot-dog stands, real estate developments, religious and other boosters, and the vulgar cheapness of the social ideals of a bourgeois civilization, nevertheless we are getting a good deal of solid satisfaction out of automobiles and concrete roads, out of good books easily available, out of the towers of Chicago and New York, the shortened day of labor, the ease of travel, and a hundred more opportunities directly and wholly due to the mechanization of the age we live in.

Indeed the time to accept the new terms of machinery and standardization is overdue, and a philosopher and an individualist must study how to adapt himself with more gain than loss. We need another Thoreau to write another "Walden," which, this time, would be laid unquestionably in a city

Night Hawk

By ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN

THE night-hawk goes up to the light
Lingering over coming night.

His slender wings have mirrors under
Their slow sweep of peace and wonder,
Twin heliographs to relay on
Brave words of the sun that's gone.

There is not among the birds
A grace so out of reach of words.

So thin and beautiful a scroll
Against the sky that day seems whole;

After things at six and seven
Here is calligraphy of heaven.

Up. Then like a falling star
He falls with a brief, celestial jar,

Like a bowstring snapped apart,
Like the daylight's broken heart.

Darkness leaps to have its way,
And the door swings to on day.

Creator! if Thy children might
Take such a clean leave of the light!

A Man of Ideas

By MONTGOMERY BELGION

M. R. IRVING BABBITT, in an article published some months ago, mentioned that America, in its literary and artistic modes, followed Europe—"usually at an interval of from five to forty years"—as surely as America led Europe in bathtubs and sanitary plumbing. "We shall presently begin to hear," he went on, "of certain new developments in French literature and critical thought that point, though indecisively as yet, to a radical departure from what has been the main current since the eighteenth century and in some respects since the Renaissance." And he instanced, as French writers "who reveal in different ways the latest trend"—Maritain, Maurras, Lasserre, Seillière, and Benda.

The present article is about the work of the last-named of these writers, Mr. Julien Benda, and it may be as well if, in considering him, both the reader and myself bear in mind these remarks of Mr. Babbitt's. They are, to begin with, an intimation of the importance of the article's subject. If Mr. Benda's writings point to "a radical departure from what has been the main current," then obviously they must be important. And then there is the question of America's following in the wake of Europe "in its literary and artistic modes" and particularly of the "interval of from five to forty years" she takes to do so.

The occasion for this article is that a book by Mr. Benda, bearing the weird title "La Trahison des Clercs," was, in spite of its being entirely a book of ideas, the literary sensation of last winter in France. And here, within less than a twelvemonth, is a translation available for America.* That looks like confirmation of Mr. Babbitt's view of Mr. Benda's importance, and at the same time suggests that, in one instance at any rate, his estimate of the time it takes America to become aware of, if not of the time it takes America to follow (if she does follow), a new fashion in European critical thought, is too cynical.

But the fact is, so far as that goes, that Mr. Benda, who is, I understand, now sixty-one years old, first published a book as far back as about 1910. He called it "Mon Premier Testament," and it appeared as one of those "Cahiers de la Quinzaine" which were the chief source of the fame of the late Charles Péguy. For it was in Péguy's now historic little bookshop at No. 8 Rue de la Sorbonne in Paris that Mr. Benda first came into contact with the literary life. He did so, then, when about forty, and found pride in thus having waited to enter the world of letters until his maturity. As he pointed out, before settling down to write, he had lived; and whereas many writers seek ideas because they have to write, he was seeking to write because he had ideas.

What set him thinking was those twin events which so stirred both the Péguy group and the whole of France towards the turn of the century—the preferring against Captain Dreyfus of a charge of treason and the advent in the Collège de France of Mr. Bergson.

Mr. Benda was opposed to Bergson's theories; his preferred philosopher was and is the Neo-criticist,

* THE TREASON OF THE INTELLECTUALS (LA TRAHISON DES CLERCS). By JULIEN BENDA. Translated by RICHARD ALDINGTON. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1928. \$2.50.

This Week

"The Treason of the Intellectuals."
Reviewed by *Montgomery Belgion*.

"Cursory Rhymes" and "Retreat."
Reviewed by *Louis Untermeyer*.

"The Polar Regions in the Twentieth Century."
Reviewed by *Viljalmur Stefansson*.

"The Cipher of Roger Bacon."
Reviewed by *Louis Cons*.

"Giant Killer."
Reviewed by *Stephen Vincent Benét*.

"The Coming of the Lord."
Reviewed by *Earl A. Aldrich*.

"Jingling in the Wind."
Reviewed by *Allan Nevins*

Modern Lighting.
By *Elizabeth Bowen*.

Casual Anthology.
By *Christopher Morley*.

Next Week, or Later

"To the Pure."
Reviewed by *Ferris Greenslet*.

street and tell how a man can keep his soul as cheaply as his Ford.

But these books have the same faults that made Emerson's essays sometimes more eloquent than convincing. The writers see clearly what marvelous things can be done with nature controlled and
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Renouvier. As for the *Affaire*—he is, like Dreyfus, a Jew—that revealed to him that, since people are swayed, not by their ideas, but by their passions, the political and religious ideas most widely held are held, not because they are believed to be true, but because they satisfy those passions.

If, for example, people adopt the idea that Jews are wicked and despicable, they do so, not because it appears to them, as a result of historical knowledge, personal experience, etc., that the idea is true, but because this idea satisfies the need in them of hating and despising. It is not reason, but sentiment which provokes ideas. Men's sentiments need an intellectual complement, and so these sentiments catch at or invent the ideas best fitted to them. In this fashion does hatred generate the idea of antisemitism.



Mr. Benda went on to classify the chief of existing political and religious ideas according to the sentiments they satisfied, and found that the ideas which he opposed fell into three groups: (1) those that satisfied a need of hatred or suspicion, (2) those which responded to a need of pride, possession, etc., and (3) those which satisfied a desire for surprise.

Such was the theme of "Mon Premier Testament." Two years later there followed "Le Bergsonisme ou Une Philosophie de la Mobilité." This, of course, aimed at being an exposure of Mr. Bergson's theories. Its conclusion was that Bergsonism was nothing else but an attempt to substitute sentiments for ideas, emotion for reason. Mr. Benda contended that Bergsonians went a step further than he had, in "Mon Premier Testament," accused the majority of mankind of doing. The majority of mankind, he had said, adopted ideas in so far as those ideas satisfied their passions. Bergsonism, he now claimed, got rid of ideas altogether and left the field entirely to emotion.

Next, in a companion volume to "Le Bergsonisme," "Sur le Succès du Bergsonisme," he went on to diagnose why Mr. Bergson had met with such a prodigious success in France: it was because French society was so eager today to exploit emotionalism, and only emotionalism. Then, immediately after the War, he followed that up with a full-dress indictment of the esthetic tastes of contemporary French society (meaning the French ruling class, the people of culture and leisure). This was "Belphégor," Belphegor being another name for Moloch. French society, he asserted in this essay, had developed a horror of the rational and simultaneously a passion for mystical thrills. It was determined no longer to go to art for any kind of intellectual pleasure; what it demanded from art was emotions and sensations. Art must now seize things in their own existence, by an act of pure love, sympathy, or intuition. It must melt into and unite with its object. It must seize things in their active vital principle. And not only must art do all this, but so also must philosophy and science—at least biological science—and, likewise, criticism and history.

This change in the attitude of the French cultivated public was chiefly due, Mr. Benda suggested, to the general lowering of the level of culture, and to the attitude of women, in whose hands is the management of the things of the mind, towards the masculine spirit. Formerly, they had always regarded it with respect; today they despised it.



"Belphégor" was a success: its ideas made a number of enthusiastic converts in France and Mr. Benda came to be regarded there as one of the significant writers of our time. It also spread his influence abroad, for, as Mr. T. S. Eliot has pointed out, much of Mr. Benda's analysis of the decadence of contemporary French society could be applied to England; and, no doubt, some Americans will see that it could also be applied to America. Of specific instances of Mr. Benda's influence outside France, the most noteworthy, perhaps, is that he has had upon Mr. Wyndham Lewis, and in "Time and Western Man" the latter has not failed to record his debt.

These brief summaries of some of Mr. Benda's earlier books well prepare one, I think, for the thesis of "La Trahison des Clercs," the most ambitious of his works and the one to which I now turn. To begin with, however, I must cavil at the title of the American edition: "The Treason of the Intellectuals." The one used in England, "The Great Betrayal," is certainly better. For the book is not

concerned with anything that in English can be called treason; it is a book asserting that a trust, a duty, has been betrayed. Nor, in my opinion, are those who have betrayed the trust correctly indicated by intellectuals.

Mr. Benda first points out that political passions have now become far more intense than they ever were. Today the individual bestows upon his group—race, class, nation—a religious adoration, and this is nothing less than the deification of his own passion. Examples of political passions which have recently become conscious passions are: (1) Jewish nationalism, (2) Bourgeoisism, (3) Fascism.

Further, and this is most important, everyone now claims a philosophical justification for the political movement to which he belongs: whichever it happens to be, it is in accordance with "the march of evolution," "the profound unrolling of history," or something else of the kind.

Moreover, political passions can be reduced to two fundamental desires: (a) the desire to satisfy one's interest, and (b) the desire to satisfy one's pride. And these two desires are but the two parts of man's general desire to situate himself in *real existence*. Thus, the intensifying of political passions today marks an increased determination on the part of mankind to situate itself in the *real* or *practical* mode of existence as contrasted with the *disinterested* or *metaphysical* mode. The State, one's County, one's Class—these today are avowedly God.

All that applies, however, Mr. Benda says, to the masses—working-class or bourgeois—to kings, ministers, and political leaders; to all the lay element in the human species—all, that is, whose essential interests are what Mr. Benda calls temporal interests. But, he goes on, until fifty years ago there was, beside that class, another class, the class he calls "clerks," by which, as he says, he means all whose activity was essentially not an activity for practical ends; those who found their solace in the exercise of art or science or metaphysical speculation. They are those who may be considered to have told themselves: "My kingdom is not of this world." One might put it that, thanks to the existence of this class—the "clerks"—humanity, for two thousand years, did evil but honored the good.

But at the end of the nineteenth century there occurred a fundamental change: the "clerks" went out into the world and joined in the game of political passions. That is the great betrayal, the betrayal by the learned, the scholars, of their trust of extra-mundane values.



And this brings us back to Mr. Babbitt. For it is, I imagine, Mr. Benda's stress upon extra-mundane values which leads Mr. Babbitt to name him as one of the French writers who are now pointing to "a radical departure from what has been the main current since the eighteenth century and in some respects since the Renaissance." As Hulme insisted in his "Speculations," the Middle Ages believed in, as facts, "the subordination of man to certain absolute values" and "in the radical imperfection of man." But with the Renaissance an entirely opposite belief sprang up and has since been believed in equally, not as a theory, but as a fact, the belief that man is the measure of all things and that values belong to this world. Then, in the eighteenth century, this Renaissance belief underwent modification, the Noble Savage was discovered, and man's instinct became the criterion.

Parenthetically, I don't quite see why Mr. Babbitt should suggest, as he seems to, that America is to rely exclusively on France for the importation of ideas. As regards, in particular, this matter of intrinsic values (as extra-mundane values are also called), the movement which is reviving philosophical realism in England is intimately bound up with it. And, furthermore, America is not entirely unaware of that, since Mr. G. E. Moore has had, I understand, some ardent devotees at Harvard.

However, to keep to Mr. Benda—it seems to me that of the French writers mentioned by Mr. Babbitt—Maritain, Maurras, Lasserre, Seillière, and Benda—only Mr. Maritain and Mr. Benda challenge "the main current" set up as far back as the Renaissance; the others at most quarrel with the eighteenth century. But Mr. Benda rejects even Mr. Maritain's Neo-Thomism on the ground that it is too particularist, that it is really an expression of contemporary man's desire to situate himself in *real existence*, to be concrete, individual, distinct. Mr. Maritain, he says, does oppose *being* to *becoming*,

but he reserves being for his group; a Neo-Thomist, Mr. Benda considers, might well declare: "We are men; the others are only dogs and swine."

As for Messrs. Maurras and Lasserre, Mr. Benda insists upon the same valuable distinction with which Mr. Babbitt has made Americans familiar, the distinction between humanism and humanitarianism, and while he cannot adequately express his contempt for humanitarianism, he is not opposed to humanism; quite the contrary, Mr. Babbitt's brand would certainly be highly esteemed by him. But he combats the humanism of Messrs. Maurras and Lasserre because that humanism depends, he says, not, as Mr. Babbitt's does, on a concept, but on a denial of extra-mundane values, of values such as disinterestedness, and is thoroughly involved with a passion for authority.

But all that may seem to be the matter of an internecine quarrel, and one may ask what special interest in that case the book possesses for America. There is little fault to be found with the translation. Mr. Aldington might have indicated the existence of a translation (by T. E. Hulme) of Sorel's "Reflections on Violence," since that book is mentioned so often: it is published in America by the Viking Press. But really he has fully lived up to his reputation for turning French into English. The point is: Has there been here any call for him to do so?

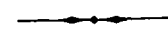


Would it not be more desirable for the American public to have, in place of this translation, an original study by some American who, being sufficiently familiar with French thought, had digested Mr. Benda's views and could apply them to the examination of American conditions; who could put Mr. Benda's case, or some analogous case, without bringing in all the French writers whom "La Trahison" discusses, but who are mostly unknown here? Without wishing to minimize Mr. Morrow's enterprise, I cannot help thinking that that would be more desirable.

At the same time, since the translation has been made, it would surely be folly to dismiss Mr. Benda because he deals mainly with France. What is now taking place everywhere in the West, what he calls attention to, is one uniform thing. For example, on one page he does refer directly to the United States, and on others he discusses Pragmatism—the European kind. Or again he finds it noteworthy that America should have had the desire, when she entered the War, to pose as purely idealistic. Now there, I believe, he misses the real nature of the tribute American vice now pays to virtue. But, on the other hand, what he says later on about the effect of Pragmatist teachings in Europe must apply equally to the fruits of Pragmatism in America. The fact is that America has witnessed within the last thirty years a fundamental reversal of the relation between precept and practice. While New England Puritanism dominated the country, it was customary to pretend that people simply did not do what they were agreed upon was wrong; people, in short, were self-righteous: that is, it was claimed that practice rose to the level of precept. But today, not only does every American *openly* pursue self-interest and self-indulgence, and take any means as justified by the end of laying up treasure for himself, but a new code of precepts has come into vogue, according to which such conduct is *right*: precept has been lowered to the level of practice. This code proves, at bottom, to be Pragmatism. And it is an identical degradation of precept with which Mr. Benda reproaches Pragmatism in Europe. In fact, his whole book is written to register that degradation.



An interesting work recently published in France is "La Croix de Sang," by Gaëtan Bernoville, which tells, with poetry, faith, and passion, the life-story of the Carlist leader, Santa Cruz, who began as a parish priest in the Basque country and ended, only a couple of years ago, long after the Carlist rising had failed, as a Jesuit father in the pampas of South America.



Folklorists from many countries recently attended the International Congress held in Manchester, England, to mark the jubilee of the Folk-lore Society. The name, folk-lore, it appears, is an English invention. It was coined by the late Mr. Thoms, the founder of the Society, and is now used wherever men study the customs and superstitions of races.