

have that universal human pertinence which transcends history. And for our time, any effort to maintain inviolate a high personal standard of conduct in the midst of a general collapse of standards has a particular pertinence. Olimpia commands our sympathy and inspires our admiration as one who carries a precious fragile vase in precarious security across a torrent: a journey which all of us must attempt who can aspire to her courage. Miss Trautwein has illumined her story with a brooding piety, a lambent mysticism which have nothing to do with conventional religiousness; she has touched it with a pity and an understanding without scorn and without weakness. It is a notable and satisfying creation. Miss Trautwein's prose has a lucid loveliness rare even among the present generation of German stylists; her translators have been skilful and sympathetic, and, although one may reasonably object to the rendition of an Italian "palazzo del popolo" into English as "Burgher-House," their work is, considering the idiomatic tenseness of the syntax with which they had to reckon, very nearly faultless.

Gay Mockery

MOLINOFF, or The Count in the Kitchen. By MAURICE BEDEL. New York: The Viking Press. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

IN the essay on the Comic Spirit, Meredith gave English literature the classic definition of something of which English literature furnishes almost no examples. Meredith's malicious and beneficent daemon, who pricks every blister of folly and prunes away every excess, derives his piercing power from logic; and English humor, like everything else that is English, is gloriously illogical. Shakespeare in making Falstaff, Dickens in making Mr. Pickwick, are not endeavoring to improve the world by curing elderly English gentlemen of folly; they are improving the world by pouring such folly into it. For the true Meredithian satiric comedy, "formed to delight at once and lash the age" we must go to France, to Molière, to "Molinoff."

In "Molinoff, or The Count in the Kitchen," the author of "Jerome, or The Latitude of Love" shows the same gaiety, wit, and charm that delighted the critics in his earlier novel, and the same satire that is not less keen for being so delicate. The opening scenes are laid in the household of a *bourgeois gentilhomme* new style. The old new rich made themselves ridiculous by buying historic estates and trying to remodel themselves into historic families; the new rich make themselves still more ridiculous by buying historic estates and remodeling the estates into cosmopolitan casinos. Nothing of this escapes M. Bedel: there is a triumph of mockery by mere implication in his account of the reception given by his plutocrat for which he orders from a super-caterer "a dethroned king, a maharajah, members of the Spanish nobility and of the Hungarian Jockey Club, the Ambassador Plenipotentiary from Macedonia, and a handful of French marquis and counts, whose titles were guaranteed," being completely ignorant that his dowdy neighbors bear some of the oldest names in France.

But excess may be upon either side, as Molière and the logical French perceive, which is one reason why "Le Misanthrope" is a better play than "The Plain Dealer." The dowdy, long-descended neighbors are themselves as funny in their own way as the banker in his, and M. Bedel sketches them with the same delicate cruelty. They are obsessed with Royalism, and talk of nothing but the Pope's condemnation of the Royalist cause; after a further reverse, one of them says, "It almost seems as if God were on the side of the Pope, does it not, Cardinal?" Between these two circles Count Molinoff leads a cinematographic double life, cook in the one, guest of honor in the other, and provides a farcical plot for the background of high comedy.

At only one point does M. Bedel break with the traditional of Molière. He would surely have brought his lovers together for the curtain, but M. Bedel is so afraid of sentimentalism that he goes out of his way to be unkind. But except for the last chapter, "Molinoff" is one of the very few books to be both thoroughly sophisticated and thoroughly light-hearted. A delicious book.

The World Congress of Librarians has just been held in Rome with some of the most widely known librarians of the United States in attendance. Premier Mussolini delivered the inaugural address.

A Nightmare Period

THE NAKED YEAR. By BORIS PILNYAK. Translated from the Russian by ALEC BROWN. New York: Payson & Clarke. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

THE author of "The Naked Year" was twenty-three when the Bolsheviks seized power. He is one of those younger members of the Russian intelligentsia who has "accepted" the Revolution—has remained in Russia, that is to say, and become, in revolutionary slang, a "fellow-traveller," without becoming a Communist or taking any active stand for or against the events in which he has been whirled.

Any sensitive and thinking Russian, now in his middle thirties, who has weathered such an experience, has, naturally, lived through a terrific mental and emotional strain. He has been pounded by war, revolution, civil war, terror, famine, and breathed an air in which values of all sorts were constantly changing and which was nearly always tense with uncertainty and fear. As a "fellow-traveller" up to a certain point, he can not have escaped the contagion of the Revolution's fresh strength and idealism; as a political outsider, he must have wallowed desperately, from time to time, in horror, disillusion, and despair.

Small wonder, then, that "The Naked Year" written in the midst of the famine and published in '22, should be "queer"—bizarre in manner; without a center of gravity, taking and leaving the Revolution, so to speak, in the same breath. Imagine the difficulties, for example, of an artist writing both in and of that more or less nightmare atmosphere, and for an audience before whom he might scarcely let himself yield too frankly even to the harmless blandishments of a sunny day without an apology, expressed or implied, for his "petit bourgeois lyricism."

Part of the craziness of "The Naked Year" is doubtless conscious and intended—a young writer following local literary fashions and trying to express himself in new forms. But more of it, one suspects, reflects the subjective uncertainties and floundering inevitable in the circumstances.

Briefly, what Pilnyak appears to be trying to do, is to give the "feel" of Russia itself in that hideous naked year, when, as one of the characters in the narrative puts it, human beings lost hope and faith in that which heretofore had supported them at the same time that nature herself shrunk into indifference and sterility. There is no plot, in the ordinary sense, but a variety of tentative and potential plots, "intersecting planes," which aim to show how the Revolution worked on all sorts of lives. Sometimes the individuals and the course of action which seems planned for them, move in the ordinary way, but scarcely has the reader become interested when the whole design disintegrates, kaleidoscope-wise, and later, perhaps, reforms again. Bits of affectionate feeling for Russia—the nostalgic sadness of its plains, mists gathering on the river bottoms, the old-fashioned belief in the wisdom of the simplest people, "ancient, our own, and beautiful"—bits as "bourgeois" as Turgeniev—are interspersed with, or dispersed by, savage shots of sex; stylistic eccentricities; the attempt to be swift, strong, ruthless, in the new way.

One can explain, as aforesaid, but can scarce escape being irritated, and the irritation is sharpened, if anything, by a certain revolutionary preciousness in the translator. The book is not work of the first class, but is decidedly worth reading, and reveals very real talent. It will be looked back to, probably, as much for what it doesn't say, for its indirect reflection of the nightmare psychology of the time, as for its objective story.

The Life of the Ants

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE ANTS. By AUGUSTE FOREL. Translated by C. K. ODGEN. New York: A. & C. Boni. 1929. 2 vols. \$15.

Reviewed by BEVERLEY KUNKEL
Lafayette College

IF Forel's spirit and philosophy of life are the result of his long and devoted study of the ants, the most useful step for our modern society to take would be the general study of these insects, especially by those who essay to direct our social life and shape our national policies.

At the age of eleven, a copy of Huber's classic volume of the habits of the native ants was pre-

sented to Forel. He fairly devoured it, and when he found that he had already made an observation which had escaped the notice of the author whom he so greatly admired, he vowed to himself to become the historian of the ants and pursue the task all the days of his life. On his eightieth birthday this English translation of his *magnum opus* was put into his hands.

The spirit pervading the work is best expressed in the author's own words: "All that man knows and all that he can know about the world which lies around him and from which he issues is revealed to him, not by a God whom he can never know, but through the mediation of the sensations which he owes to his sense organs." He does not regard the ants simply as machines nor would he lead any one to think that scientific inductions are based on the ultimate nature or essence of the objects in question. "Let us learn to be content with the relations between this self of ours . . . and the external world surrounding us . . . Let us imitate the ants of a single polycalic formicary; we shall then become more modest and sociable throughout the entire world by the federation of all peoples."

Except for his occasional brief references to human relations, revealing most delightfully the author's personality, the 996 pages of these volumes are almost exclusively records of facts, for Forel tells us that "genuine science teaches us to avoid premature generalizations from particular observations as we would fire."

The ants include some 7500 different species, races, and varieties, and exhibit the most varied relationships with other kinds of animals as well as with plants and other ants. This is not the place in which to attempt an enumeration of these ways of living, but the reader may be reminded that some species of ants tolerate other species in their nests apparently without paying the slightest heed to one another, while other species carry on the most sanguinary wars with enemy ants, and still others steal the eggs of different species which they bring into their nests and rear to maturity when they assume the arduous activities necessary for the continued life and health of their masters. At the same time the masters cease to produce the worker caste and become quite dependent on an alien species for their existence. Still other species capture and tend insects which yield secretions which form the sole food of the ants, and others bring bits of fresh leaves into their nests which they infect with certain molds. These are treated by the ants in such a way that they develop abnormal growths not known under other circumstances which form the sole article of diet of the ants.

Besides the varied social relations of ants with other species, the author discusses very fully the habits and reactions of ants to stimuli and the social life within the single colony. In this particular field in which it is so easy to attribute human mentality to the ants, Forel is most careful to avoid this pitfall and contents himself simply with the facts which have been observed and which are in terms of the activities of the insects themselves. It is in this respect that the present work will probably serve for many years as a source of facts for other myrmecologists, even as Darwin's "Origin of Species" still is referred to for the facts of natural history gathered from all fields in that work.

The ordinary reader will not find this work easy reading. The chapters on anatomy and classification will prove especially difficult because of the necessity of referring to many species which must remain to most of us who do not collect ants simply as names. In this connection, too, it might be said that it would prove a great convenience, if the reference to figures and plates could include the page when the reference is not adjoining the figure.

The Saturday Review of Literature

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.....Editor
AMY LOVEMAN.....Managing Editor
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.....Contributing Editor
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.....Contributing Editor
NOBLE A. CATHCART.....Publisher

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The BOWLING GREEN

OUR cheerful correspondent F. H. P. is highly amused because a little one-act play of ours called *East of Eden* was solemnly banned by the British Lord Chamberlain. He writes:—

Some guys just have all the luck. Brer Mencken went all the way to Boston to cast himself before a bush league court, and you sit quietly at home and catch a gorgeous Foreign Functionary.

And with what serpentlike wisdom the Lord Chamberlain declines to accompany his decrees with reasons. We don't do that sort of thing in so grandiosely impersonal a way and hence we appear fussy, rather than like Joves touched with senility. We are doubtless too earnest in doing good. For example, Mr. Bryan lived to see many of his emotions transmuted into statutes—but not laws. It is around this "but" that the Crime Commission's problems center.

Police power is a dangerously flexible term and its excessive use has caused auto-intoxication in many governments. That the race has outlived, and will outlive, many states is unknown, it seems, to many of our best minds to whom the garment is more real than its wearer.

As Arnold Bennett says, one of the defects of the Anglo-Saxon temperament is a passion for interfering with other people's tastes.

But—to have an August Official shoot at your butterfly with a 16-inch gun—

One way for reasonable people to celebrate this summer's vacation is to get hold of a copy of a very fine pamphlet by G. M. Trevelyan, called *Must England's Beauty Perish?* It is published in London by Messrs. Faber and Faber, 24 Russell Square, W. C. 1. It will strike at the heart of those who have ever had an opportunity to know and love the extraordinary and almost painful beauty of rural England. If I think back over my reasons for being grateful to chance, one of the best of them is that as boy and student, in days before the War, I bicycled literally thousands of miles on English byways. And not only in England, but in France and Germany also. In America, where our whole feeling and instinct for landscape is on a different scale, where the mood of European village or vista is little known, we have taken almost for granted the cruel blight that mechanical civilization casts on country loveliness. But in England thoughtful men have grown desperately anxious about it, and Professor Trevelyan's fine appeal deserves the widest possible hearing and support.

Americans especially have always had a traditional tenderness for England's wizard spell. How often we have smiled to ourselves to hear our countrymen, in the boat train from Southampton to London for the first time, exclaiming with ecstasy over idiosyncrasies that are familiar enough to the old traveller—thatched roofs with mosses and flowers on them, or the different shape of trees. One of the educations that sensible people are intended to have in this surprising planet is a laboratory course in English Villages and Gardens. Those who are going to have it this year should provide themselves with Professor Trevelyan's pamphlet. It is an appeal for the work of the British National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, and appends a fascinating map and list of properties all over England which the Trust has taken in charge to preserve from vulgarization or decay. The happiest vacation I can imagine would be to get on board a bicycle and visit them all.

One would gladly quote Professor Trevelyan's essay entire, which may not be. But a portion of it will be sufficient to give you something to think about the next time you are motoring out of town:—

A hundred years ago, just before the railway age began, this island was, almost all of it, beautiful, even more beautiful, perhaps, than it had been in its wilder state a thousand years farther back in time. For in 1829 our countryside was still the England of Turner and Constable, of Bewick and Wordsworth, of *Lavengro* and *Cobbett's Rides*. It was all good to look at, not least the "improvements" of the eighteenth century: the thatched and gabled houses, the cornfields, hedges, lanes, stone bridges, new plantations of oak and beech, all harmonized well together, and harmonized also with the wilder parts of the nature in which they were set, the still remaining wrecks of the old English forest, thicket, moorland, and marsh. For man's daily work still supplemented nature's, without those harsh contrasts of line and color to which we are to-day only too well accustomed. A new barn or a coach-house did not injure the landscape or the village street as an aerodrome or a petrol station is likely to do. To-day the old is almost identified in our thought and speech with the beautiful, and the new with the ugly. But before the age of machinery this was not so. It was only just beginning to be so a hundred years

back. In 1829, except for a small area of industrial district of the latest type, the island was all of it beautiful. To-day it is beautiful in parts and ugly in parts, particularly in those parts where most people live. A hundred years hence there will be very little beauty left, unless by taking thought in time we provide otherwise.

The law of the machine age is inexorable, and if we allow it to operate everywhere uncontrolled, it will show us no pity. The law is that action taken for purely economic reasons no longer as of old creates new beauty, but destroys old beauty and substitutes modern ugliness. Our generation is placed under economic pressure to use the machines and methods which most rapidly destroy the lines of nature, and to employ materials that contrast harshly with nature's shapes and outlines. Concrete is cheaper than stone. A wire fence can be more quickly set up than a hedge or a stone wall. A curving road is regarded as a public nuisance because it impedes the pace of the motor. A bungalow or a red brick villa are more easily run up than a house of the old local material. Electric power marches across the country on poles that scrape the sky. It pays better to plant conifers than beech or oak—and so forth through innumerable instances.

I was thinking the other day what uncalculated and far-reaching effects a small inoculation of beauty may have. Between Roslyn and Westbury, Long Island, there is a high garden wall where the owner of the house has planted roses on the outside of the barrier. Every year at this time they swarm over the wall beside the road, the pleasure of every passer. More than once, when I happened to feel a bit grim about this or that, I have gone by there and concluded that things were better than I feared. Sometimes, thinking about Cotswold villages or cliffs in Normandy or the quiet sweetness of an old chateau in the Côte d'Or I tend to brood a bit on the furious ugliness and racket of much American life. When I feel like that the roses at Westbury are a comfort. And though they grow openly along the public way I don't believe they are ever despoiled.

Professor Trevelyan continues:—

We have turned every high-road into a locomotive racing track, and many are clamoring that every by-road and lane should be treated in the same way, that yet more beauty should be destroyed in order that speed may be increased. The growth of new industries in the rural districts of Southern England, though heartily to be rejoiced at, brings fresh danger to the delicate landscape of the South, even less able than the Northern moorlands to endure monstrous erections and excavations. The Victorians may have invented the "uses of advertisement," but they never carried them to the lengths of to-day. Our rural villages and much of our country landscape to-day glow with glaring advertisements and enamelled signs. *The proper place for advertisements is in the press.* Moreover, our Victorian grandfathers did not string out bungalows along the downs and hills and sea cliffs to anything like the same extent as we. They planted oaks and beeches; we cut them down and do not replant them. Our grandfathers did not, doubtless because they could not, send out hordes to the most secluded nooks of the island to root up the ferns and primroses wholesale, and sow the woodlands and heaths with paper and refuse. In the Victorian age the Philistine was preposterous enough in Gath and Askelon, but at least he abode in his cities, and the travellers could still safely walk by byways. But now—

*What strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?*

In the ordinary course of things, unless other considerations prevail to regulate the process, the Road Board, the Local Authorities, the builders, the week-end villa dwellers, the manufacturers, the timber merchants and quarrymen, in the discharge of their duties and in the course of their legitimate trades and pleasures, will complete the destruction of old England and leave a mechanized landscape for our descendants. Our grandchildren may then go in motor cars or aeroplanes or whatever the latest means of locomotion may be, but they will find no beauty through which to drive, no unspoiled woodland or mountain haunt to visit at week-ends and holidays—unless we now determine otherwise and are wise in time.

I remember what was once a lovely road in Cornwall running between old Cornish banks of stone covered at Easter with primroses. A certain local authority there, in widening the road after the war, pulled down several miles of those banks on one side and replaced them by solid gray concrete, on which nothing can ever grow, a hideous profanation for all time to come. The pleasure in the drive is spoiled for miles.

Many other public bodies, in widening paths or bridges, small or great, have substituted and still substitute concrete walls or rail-posts for the beautiful old stone walls of the country. Others have acted with more consideration. These problems of road widening, bridge construction, town planning, building schemes of all sorts, are perpetually coming up before the local public bodies. So much depends on men and women of the right sort being elected to serve on them, and consenting to stand for election. Then and then only we shall get increasingly these questions for the preservation of beauty dealt with in the right spirit. Public bodies, I submit, are charged to preserve not only the public health but public amenities. Many of them know this and act on the principle. May their number increase. The powers that public bodies have to preserve amenities are being constantly increased by law, if only they would exercise these powers. Besides control over advertisements they now have considerable control of petrol pumps under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act, 1928, Section II, which I commend to the notice of all interested in the esthetics of Filling-up Stations.

There is, here in New York, one specially interesting example of the vision of a great town-planner that was disregarded and is now forever impossible of full achievement. In 1824 Colonel John Stevens, the manorial proprietor of Hoboken, implored the City of New York to buy the whole Hoboken water-front to preserve it perpetually as a park and recreation ground for the public. Every visitor to New York in those days, even the acrid Mrs. Trollope, commented on the Elysian Fields as perhaps the most remarkable rural beauty adjacent to any great city. As Colonel Stevens wrote, "So easily accessible, and where in a few minutes the dust, noise, and bad smells of the city may be exchanged for the pure air, delightful shades and completely rural scenery, through walks extending along the margin of the majestic Hudson to an extent of more than a mile. The beauties of which may at a small expense be made to surpass everything of the kind to be found anywhere."

Think, added Colonel Stevens what such a park would mean to New York a hundred years hence. That would have been 1924. We are thinking.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

A Story With a Difference

THE BOWERY MURDER. By WILLARD K. SMITH. New York: The Crime Club. 1929. \$2.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

MR. WILLARD SMITH is not satisfied to write a mere mystery story—and thereby, no doubt, reads himself out of membership in the sect of true believers to whom no mystery story is mere. But the first thing about "Bowery Murder" is that it is an excellent mystery that mystifies you, and holds your interest, to the very end. Thomas Woodward, who had just beggared thousands of speculators by doing something on the stock market when they had expected him to do something else, was the most hated man in New York. On the night after this spectacular feat of financial skulduggery he was murdered. Ten thousand people wished they had done it; half a dozen people were present when it was done; three of them in due course and one at a time, confessed to the murder. Who did it? There are the ingredients a story that will keep you reading.

To those whose addiction to mystery stories is tepid or intermittent there will be deeper interest in other aspects of Mr. Smith's offering. The reader of the book gets it precisely as a newspaper reader would get it in real life—in a succession of newspaper stories, covering the whole field from the *Times* and the *Evening Post* to the tabloids and the blackmailing weeklies, complete with headlines, by-lines, and the occasional interpretive editorial. On this extremely complicated structure Mr. Smith must have spent three quarters of the work that went into his novel; and it is largely a labor lost because only newspapermen will appreciate it. The general reader, in so far as an ex-newspaperman can conjecture his reaction, may find the story a little easier to follow in this familiar form than as a straight narrative, but he is not likely to care which paper sets forth each new development or what is the difference between them. Mr. Smith presumably did this for his own amusement, and former reporters will find it immensely interesting. In the main, too, it is admirably done; here and there the exigencies of his plot require him to put into newspaper stories details that the fear of libel would probably keep out, and it may be doubted if the editorial page of the *Evening Post*, even under the present ownership, would speak of "ruination" when ruin is meant. But in the main Mr. Smith acquits himself very well in this immense if rather supererogatory labor.

Of more enduring value is his picture of the actual conditions lying back of the investigation of a metropolitan murder mystery in which some of the figures have important political connections. His Inspector Carr who eventually unravels the mystery observes that the police in real life work from tips, not clues; as in fact they do. Not observation and deduction, but stool pigeons and the menace of the rubber hose, produce the larger part of our annual crop of detection and solution of crime. In this respect "Bowery Murder" is far afield from the ordinary mystery story, and very close to truth. It is almost perilously close to truth in its understanding of political backgrounds. If Mr. Smith talks in his sleep, some night he is going to tell the wrong person who killed Rothstein, and then the boys will take him for a ride.