

Revolution as an Art

By BERNARD FAÏ

IF slogans are needed for a presidential campaign in the United States, they are just as necessary to Parisian writers. Without a good and sonorous, and if possible, an objectionable slogan there is no real fun in starting new literary fashions. The public does not realize what is going on; it fails to be scandalized, and quarrels become too vague, too intellectual. So the ambitious young people of Paris have acquired a real knack at inventing literary slogans; and just as good cooks put always on their menus the word "pure" the young Parisians have chosen in the past ten years "pure" as the necessary seasoning of all slogans. Five years ago it was "pure poetry," "pure art," "pure literature," today it is "pure revolution."

Nothing short of that will satisfy them. A radical is no good, he does not care enough for revolution; a socialist is not much better, he dreams of improving the world rather than of revolutionizing it; a Bolshevik is somewhat more attractive, for he has *élan* and invention, but he is not satisfactory. In general he does not take revolution as an art in itself, as it should be taken, he takes it as a means, *puh!*

The revolutionary fad is now supreme among the young writers of France (not that *all* are revolutionists, but that the most noisy ones are). It has developed gradually since 1919 and is actually in full swing; many causes helped to make it popular, some of them quite unexpected. For instance, the campaign against war which has been going on since 1919, encouraged by the radicals, the liberals, the uplifters of all countries, as

also by the United States, the Carnegie Foundation, the League of Nations, Krishnamourti, Gandhi, and the Soviets, has been one of the main reasons for this new fashion. Young people in Europe need excitement; baseball, football, fraternity initiations do not provide enough for them. And national elections are considered decidedly dull in Europe. The young people were, nevertheless, quite ready to give up war as a thrill; they had had rather too much of it. They willingly enlisted in the great crusade against war, and made money by selling violently anti-war books, belligerently pacifist novels. That was quite all right—Berlin, Paris, London, and Geneva approved of it, New York and Moscow bought it. And it sounded awfully "human." As a matter of fact it was a little less naïve and innocuous than people on this side of the Atlantic believed, because to attack war was at the same time to attack standing armies and national military service; it led directly to making fun of national hopes and faith, to showing up the emptiness of national devotion, of patriotism, and even of the idea of nation. Most of these books tended, directly or indirectly to prove that class, not nation, was the real distinction between men. They claimed that the French, German, American, and English privates suffered from the war, while the French, German, American, and English generals enjoyed it. The anti-war campaign built at one and the same time a sound hatred of war, a somewhat less sound hatred of officers, of generals, and of chiefs in general, and a rather disturbing worship of all forms of

violence and murder which are not war. The demigod nation, was broken to pieces, and the God war was covered with mud, but a new God was created and a big golden statue of him erected—revolution.

There our nice and clever European boys found the excitement they wished for. As soon as they had written an essay, a novel, a story against war they wrote a poem, a novel, or an essay in praise of revolutions in general, and of the Russian revolution in particular. Of course some of them had good financial reasons to do so, but with many others (for most of them I should say) it was sheer enthusiasm. And it was unavoidable they had not given up their worship of violence; they could not, it was too deep in them, and their souls were not really changed by the sufferings of war, they had transferred this tendency from one kind of organized and rather old-fashioned violence to another one, newer, wilder, less organized, and consequently more destructive, more exciting. It was always "Siva," but a new and more deadly incarnation of "Siva."

It began with a magazine started by Barbusse, the author of "Le Feu," the great anti-war war book of France. But this did not go very far. Those were ponderous, clumsy men, they could not possibly launch a new fashion. Then a group of most clever, most attractive, and most gifted young men took up the same task and, this time, succeeded. As a group they were known as "Surréalistes," because they claimed that by some half-physiological, half-literary process they were able to express not only this fallacious outside appearance of things which we call the real but the true inside of things, the "surréal." The theory was exciting, the practice also, but it failed to stir up the French public. People began to look and listen only when they announced their new creed: "Revolution for the sake of Revolution." That motto proved to be most successful, it brought thrill and interest to the French literary circles, which were rather bored at that time. The surréalistes disclaimed any other political idea than hatred and scorn for the *bourgeois*, the people who believed in God, nation, and duty, and any other belief than the need of permanent revolution, to keep the human race in a good condition. The theory had something new and pleasant, and the leaders of the movement, M.M. Aragon, Breton, Eluard, René Cravel, were really great writers, as well as very charming young men. Unfortunately the outside manifestations of their followers did not prove as bright as the program established by the chiefs: they insulted Jean Cocteau, they hissed the Russian Ballets, they addressed letters to the French people saying that Poincaré was an ass. All this seemed tame and banal. People expected the Surréalistes would set fire to the Opéra or the Elysée, shoot in the streets, or at least go to jail. They simply got married, and not even all of them did that.

That was a disappointment. Some of the followers and a good many of their friends organized a revolution against them. Hence quarrels, too complicated to be told here. Finally a new group of revolutionists for the sake of revolution appeared, with two excellent writers among them: M. Malraux and Mr. Emmanuel Berl. Malraux wrote a remarkable book, "Les Conquérants," a description of the nationalist-Bolshevik Revolution in China, and M. Berl published the best pamphlet of these last years "Mort de la Pensée Bourgeoise," pointed attack against the leading French writers of today. These two books are probably the two most entertaining French books of the year. They provide a glowing picture of all the joys one can find in revolution if one is a pure revolutionist. They even give some recipes showing how to become one, although in this they are not perfectly clear. And of course M. Berl violently attacks the Surréalistes as not being thorough and sincere enough in the revolutionary faith.

But please don't believe that they are joking. Although the Surréalistes and the other "pure revolutionists" have a sense of humor, they are convinced of what they say; they are convincing a good number of young people in France and all over Europe, where they are acquiring a following of young writers. Some of them have most attractive personalities and cannot be dismissed as noisy children: Breton is a deep and interesting thinker, Aragon has a style like Bossuet, René Cravel is probably the most appealing character of his generation and is also a very gifted novelist. They cannot be dismissed with a smile.

Probably the most striking feature of their curious career is that they are read in bourgeois circles and have practically no popular following.

They show that to have peace, it is not enough to destroy war.

Notes on the Romansch

By ANNE GOODWIN WINSLOW

THE year just ended has seen two important additions to Romansch literature: Dr. Velleman's eagerly awaited Dictionary and the collected poems of the Honorable Peider Lansel, at present Swiss Consul at Leghorn and for many years now the beloved poet of the Engadine. In this tastefully printed volume, which borrows its interesting title, "The Antique Inkstand" (*Il Vegl Chalamêr*) from the initial poem, Dr. Lansel has collected with discretion and restraint the lyrics from his earlier books which seemed to him most definitely important and offers to his readers a hundred or more poems written in the Romansch language, and some thirty-six translations from other poets into the same idiom. It is a rich harvest gleaned from years of wide experience and fruitful thought, and the compatriots of the poet have every reason to feel pride in the fact that of all the languages at his command he should have chosen these echoes of their beloved mountains for the expression of his lyric gift.

The Engadine press of Samedan and St. Moritz, Switzerland, has recently published a work of great interest to philologists and of inestimable practical value to those who from motives of patriotism, erudition, or merely a romantic curiosity, are interested in that noble survival of the Latin tongue that one may still hear in the mountains and valleys of the most picturesque part of Switzerland. This language is neither the French, German, or Italian heard in the various cities of this polyglot land, nor yet the pretty and expressive Swiss-German with which visitors have grown familiar. It is a speech which differs as much from any one of these as they differ from one another; a speech with its own origin and history which has held itself quite proudly uncontaminated through many centuries: the *Lingua Ladina* or Romansch language spoken in the Engadine. The publication in question is an Abridged Dictionary of this vernacular, giving to each word its French, German, and English equivalent and giving besides many indications with references to topography and population of great usefulness to the student. When one takes into consideration the magnitude and variety of such a content, the word "abridged" in the title would seem to have rather an ironic signification, but by some miracle of lexicography the author has succeeded in restricting to one small volume which might be carried, if not in the vest pocket, at least in the pocket of one's coat, what seems a fair library of information. It is the work of Dr. Anton Velleman of the University of Geneva whose *Grammatica Ladina* was noticed in the columns of this *Review* something more than a year ago. Dr. Velleman, who in addition to his professorial duties and his association with the League of Nations, still finds the leisure and the strength for philological labors of such gravity and importance, has achieved in this, his latest publication a literary *tour de force* which has excited the admiration and eulogy of European critics.

"Of the three works recently published by M. René Grousset, an acknowledged authority on the history and art of Asia, the longest and, for the layman, most opportune is 'Les Civilisations de L'Orient' (Crès, 75 francs each volume)," says the *London Observer*. "For a history of art, this title may seem misleading. But it was chosen with a purpose. M. Grousset's point of view is not merely esthetic. His object has been to identify Eastern art with the circumstances in which it originated, then to explain its evolution. The first of the four volumes, which dealt with Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and Arabia, has now been succeeded by the second, on India; the third and fourth, on China, Central Asia, and Japan, will be issued in the spring and autumn of this year."

The first number of England's latest periodical, the *Week-End Review*, came from the presses last week.

The journal has been founded by Gerald Barry, former editor of the *Saturday Review*, who resigned with all his colleagues when the former proprietors switched suddenly to the support of Lord Beaverbrook's United Empire party.

"The choice of time was our own," writes Mr. Barry in an introductory note, "and we stand for judgment as we are."

Contributors to the first number include Arnold Bennett, who becomes dramatic critic; Humbert Wolfe and James Stephens, among the poets; A. P. Herbert and Gerald Gould among the essayists, and the former *Saturday Review* editorial staff.

Limited Editions

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New Haven Journal-Courier

"Its illustrations are the best yet achieved in any magazine."

Kansas City Journal-Post

"A magnificent tribute to business. Words adequate to describe this de luxe journal of business are available, but they would be regarded as gross exaggerations save by those who have examined FORTUNE."

Harrisburg (Pa.) News

"Its publishers have accomplished a notable achievement—and done it just a little too perfectly. Radicals, debunkers, philosophers, buffoons and Jeremiahs have failed; and where they have failed, the cult of the de luxe has itself accomplished a complete success in these few pages of print."

San Diego Union



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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Biography

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF SIR HARRY JOHNSTON. By ALEX JOHNSTON. Cape & Smith. 1930. \$3.50.

It cannot be said that Sir Harry Johnston gains anything in stature by the well-intentioned "Life and Letters" written by his brother, who for some years was also his secretary. The volume is intended "to supplement not to supersede" Sir Harry's own autobiography, "The Story of My Life," and it gives a certain amount of interesting material, especially regarding Johnston's African explorations and his relations with H. M. Stanley and Cecil Rhodes, which is not to be found in the other book. Marked by an almost excessive fraternal piety, it will be read with sympathy by admirers of the many-sided genius who is always a hero to his secretary brother; but so far as the essentials of Johnston's full and fascinating life are concerned it adds little to what was already known. And that little at times might well have been less: one could wish for more of the authentic letters and less of fraternal exegesis.

There is little doubt that the man who added thousands of square miles in Africa to the British Empire was somewhat scurvily treated by his Government, but it is difficult to believe that the hearts of the politicians and the permanent officials were quite as black as the indignant Alex paints them. Sir Harry Johnston was a man of extraordinary gifts: explorer, administrator, naturalist, writer, artist, linguist—there seemed to be nothing that he could not do and he did everything well; at the end of a career full enough to satisfy a dozen ordinary men he started writing novels, one of which, at any rate, is by no means the least of his claims to distinction. But his restless energy, his versatility, his passionate adoption of "causes," above all his Puckish sense of humor, were qualities which the official mind always and everywhere is prone to regard with suspicion. The worst of Alex Johnston's partisan judgment on the official treatment of his brother is that it makes one wish to hear the other side of the case. And there is nothing to be gained by a stirring up of old controversies. Sir Harry Johnston's fame needs no apology; it stands secure—that of a brilliant, chivalric spirit (within the external trappings of a humorous-faced, pudgy little man), who may occasionally have tilted at windmills but whose lance did knightly service for his country.

CANFIELD: The True Story of the Greatest Gambler. By ALEXANDER GARDINER. Doubleday, Doran. 1930. \$2.50.

Today every other person you meet gambles on the stock exchange, and colyumists, dramatic critics, and college instructors swap stories of their losses with business men and brokers. In the Gilded Age and later, this human proclivity was satisfied by the roulette wheel and the faro box. Richard A. Canfield, the gentlemanly keeper of two famous gambling hells in New York and Saratoga, grew up in the period when the Bowery was lined with policy houses and lower Broadway with luxurious gaming "clubs." He had famous predecessors; the best known were probably John Morrissey's establishment on West Twenty-fourth Street and Chamberlin's on Twenty-fifth. Morrissey went to Congress; Chamberlin opened a noted restaurant in Washington and built a great hotel at Old Point Comfort. Canfield never connected himself with great political figures of the day as these two men did. Yet by virtue of the scale of his operations, the size of the sums won and lost at his famous Forty-fourth Street house, his defiance of the law through years of public agitation and denunciation, and his battle with William Travers Jerome, he doubtless deserves to head the list of great American gamblers. In his big brownstone house near Delmonico's, with its Oriental rugs, masterpieces of painting, and rich foods and wines, he made a fortune; according to this volume, he accumulated \$4,900,000 from his gambling houses, and in Wall Street at one time increased this to \$12,400,000. But he was caught in the panic of 1907, and lost much of his riches. When he died from a fall in the subway in 1914, he was worth perhaps two millions.

Mr. Gardiner's book on Canfield is careful and thorough, and it need not be said that so far as its materials extend it is interesting; but on the whole it is a disappointment. The reason is that all that is significant or

notable in Canfield's career could easily be condensed into two fairly long magazine articles, and the man and his activities hardly justify a 337-page book. Most of the data on which it is founded is obviously drawn from the press; some of it comes from old friends of Canfield's. Though he was a friend of James McNeil Whistler, who painted his portraits, he wrote few letters and no memoirs. Mr. Gardiner has weighed his newspaper evidence critically and well; he draws an amusing picture of the great days of Canfield's, Dave Johnson's, and Hallenbecks, with Anthony Comstock, Senator Brackett, Bet-a-million Gates, and Hatzfeldt among the *dramatis personae*; but though the book will some day document a valuable page in some social history of New York City, it is a bit thin.

Drama

DON FELIPE. By D. Maitland Bushby. Nankin, Tenn.: Sawyer.

PRODUCING PLAYS. By C. B. Purdom. Dutton. \$2.50.

Education

INSOMNIA. By Joseph Collins. Appleton. \$1.50.
METEOROLOGY. By Richard Whatham. Stokes. \$3.

MAGAZINE ARTICLE WRITING. By Ernest Brennecke, Jr. and Donald L. Clerk. Macmillan. \$3.

NEW METHOD IN COMPOSITION. Fifth Year. First Half. By William A. Boylan, Constance W. Fuller, and Albert S. Taylor. Scribners. 60 cents.

MANUAL FOR "OUR ENGLISH." By Joseph Villiers Denney, Eleanor L. Skinner, and Ada M. Skinner. Scribners. 84 cents.

MANUAL FOR GOOD READING. Fourth Reader. Fifth Reader. Sixth Reader. By John M. Manly, Edith Rickert, and Nina Leubrie. Scribners. 84 cents.

STUDIES IN MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING. Macmillan.

ENGLISH MASTERY. By William R. Botwin. Merrill.

THE NURSERY CHILD IN THE CHURCH SCHOOL. By Anna Frelove Betts. Abingdon.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD. By Edgar James Swift. Appleton. \$3.

Fiction

NATIVE SOIL. By ALLAN UPDEGRAFF. Day. 1930. \$2.50.

This novel is an extraordinary mélange. It begins in a vein of fantastic humor: the hero, Gerald Enthoven, returning after a long sojourn in Paris to his native city of Springfield, Mo., finds it more advanced than anything he has ever encountered. A friend offers to cede Enthoven his wife, for the good of all concerned; a girl, wanting a full education, applies formally for the post of his mistress—here the general reader will be apt to risk the confutation that overwhelmed Judge Brack, and cry "People don't do such things!" But the idea of a man of the great world being driven back to the respectability of Paris by the unconventionality of Springfield, "in the region made famous by Harold Bell Wright," is a fine comic conception, and the reader willingly suspends his disbelief and prepares to enjoy the fun. Almost at once, however, he is drawn through a chapter of sentiment beside the grave of Enthoven's mother into a tragedy, a hideous and humiliating accident. The book proper ends with the gruesome grotesquerie of a cremation, and, finally, the incident Mr. Louis Bromfield has twice treated so sardonically, the attempt at a romantic scattering of ashes that ends in undignified failure.

So much of the book, to draw a single effect from so many moods, is a contribution to the literature of sophisticated futility. Since all emotion is painful, the author seems to say, it is best to regard sexual love as a ridiculous extravaganza, filial love as a chapter of Sterne, and death as a nightmare, macabre rather than tragic. And, after making these violence to the soul seem as petty as possible, let us cheer ourselves with culture and *savoir vivre*. Thus, just as the young English wits are discovering charm in the spacious days of the great Victoria, Mr. Updegraff is pleased to decry the world's capitals, New York and Chicago, and cry up Paris, France, and Springfield, Missouri, as two exquisite provincial cities, essentially the same.

This effect does not quite come off, how-
(Continued on page 856)