

so with scientists. That it is so now is an honorable achievement of their guild.

Curiously enough, while this admirable development has been going on in circles scientific, the opposite seems to have been happening in realms religious. There prejudice to an astonishing degree has displaced fairness, fact, and judgment; and people seem to be daily flying off the handle in strange parables—advancing with assurance the most daring and unsupported theories, religious or anti-religious, and becoming irritated when one presumes to doubt what they say or to request supporting evidence from the actual spiritual experience of the race. And while almost everybody thus deems himself called upon to utter cocksure and snappy theories about God and the human soul, hardly anybody seems to be willing to listen to the testimony of the ages or to patient examiners of the facts. Neither writers nor readers in this field seem bent on study, but only on promoting or denying unsupported theory.

It might help if we could have a little more scientific spirit in our religious discussion. In fact, we need it grievously. We need to listen to those who know what has been and is. We need to pay some heed, for instance, to the people who have really examined the psychology of religion, men like William James and Stratton and Barry and Thouless. We need to study the history of religion dispassionately, and to beware of those clever fellows who twist that history to the support of apparent and preconceived theses. We need to ponder, with the aid of every modern device and method, the lives and thoughts of the great geniuses of the life spiritual—men like Francis and John the Divine and the Buddha and Loyola and a Kempis and George Fox, women like Theresa and Catherine of Sienna; and to analyze their experience. We need the open ear and the not too speedy tongue. If we had them there would be, on the one hand, less attempt to present religion merely as a set of verbal shibboleths, or as a program of legalized moralities; or as an organized social grouping demanding an unreasoned loyalty—less conventionalizing and sterilization of the spiritual impulse within man; and, on the other hand, there would be a blessed lot less of offhand talking about such things as “the antiquated anthropomorphism of a personal God” and “the sexual basis of religion” and “religion as a social by-product” and “the outworn power of a greedy priestcraft” and “religion as the opiate of the people,” as well as fewer instances of that thumbing of the nose at God and man which passes as a smart attitude with too many literary persons of the moment. There would be a greater perception of the dignity, the subtlety, the intellectual and emotional shadings of this human impulse for personal contact with reality, this moving, pathetic, yet shining thing which bears the name religion.

It is with no desire myself to be unduly dogmatic, and thus to disobey mine own injunction, that I venture to suggest three things about religion which do seem to be almost certainly established by our best study both of religion as an historical fact and of religion as a present psychological phenomenon. The best thought of the past and the best investigation of the moment seem in agreement on these things. Therefore to state them is perhaps not to be unduly swift in speech. They seem next to unknown to most of the ladies and gentlemen who have written these swift-coming volumes which I have lately been constrained to read.

First of all, religion is not primarily a system of thought. It is not fundamentally a theology, which means a set of propositions about the nature of God; nor a cosmology, which means a collation of statements purporting to describe the natural world; nor an anthropology, which means an arrangement of basic, or allegedly basic, facts about man. Religion may lead to a theology, to a cosmology, to an anthropology; but itself it is an intuitive personal relationship existing between men and women and the Ultimate Person.

There has never been much valid argument for or against religion. People have not been converted to it by having it proved to them that there is a God. The overwhelming number of human beings has without any proof at all known that there is a God, in precisely the same manner that people have known that they themselves exist. I cannot prove that I am, but I quite well know it. I cannot prove that my world is real, but I am quite sure that it is. I cannot prove that there is a Deity, but I will risk my eternal destiny that there is, and further that I can know Him, fear Him, love Him, disobey or obey

Him. This almost every man born into the world has known and has known that he has known. So universal is this conviction that the Psalmist thought he was uttering the simplest commonplace when he said, “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” He did not at all mean to be uncharitable. It is on this certainty that God is, that He may be found, that He cares, that all religion is built. This would seem necessarily to imply several things: that to destroy religion from the earth will require the eradication of a next to universal intuitive cognition, which of course can never be done; that religion has not primarily to do with one’s relationship to other people, though that, to be sure, is secondarily involved; that its social aspects are incidental; that its concern with morals is derivative; that its business is not to buttress social orders or to destroy them; that it has to do with the Ultimate on the one hand and on the other with the seeking, hungry, peaceless, lonely souls of individual persons, of you and me and the next man and the woman around the corner, each of which is restless until it can find a rest in God. Or, as Professor Whitehead says, “Religion is what a man does with his aloneness.” That that is what religion has meant historically and what it means psychologically, is indubitable. A would-be author about spiritual subjects might at least listen until he learns that much before he rushes off into wild remarks which ignore all that as though it were not.

A second thing which may be noted from the past and from the best study in the present is that man’s creeds have always been pictures of God rather than descriptions or analyses of God. Nobody ever has comprehended the Ultimate Person—put their intellectual hands all around Him. There are two kinds of knowing, comprehending and apprehending. They both are real knowing, though they differ greatly one from the other. It is possible to get one’s mind all around some things. Others can only be touched, tangentially. I can comprehend that two and two is four. I can only apprehend how in reality time does not exist, that a thousand years is indeed as one day. I can comprehend digestion. I can only apprehend beauty. I can comprehend what an atom is. I can only apprehend what energy may be. I can comprehend bread and butter. I may perhaps apprehend God. Things which may be comprehended I can diagram; but of the things I apprehend I may speak only in symbol. When one says and means, “I love you,” it is symbolic language, not diagrammatic. A physical relationship is mentioned but more than that is meant. When a religious man says, “God is my father,” that is symbolic language too. Another physical relationship is used but more than that is meant. When the Psalmist says, “The Lord is my light,” he means vastly more than the mere words denote. When one declares, “The good God has washed away my sin,” the words are picture words. When Athanasius declares that “God Is Three Persons in One Essence,” he is not trying to present a proposition in mathematics. The things we apprehend but cannot comprehend, these we express through the arts. We paint them in great pictures, carve them in compelling statues, erect them in mighty buildings, sing them in noble songs, clothe them with words in immortal verse. In all art that is good, there is revealed, behind and through the physical medium, that which has been seen but may not quite be uttered. The creations of art are symbols all. Religion is not a science, dealing with things men comprehend. Religion is an art, and deals with things they apprehend. Nor is it the less true for that. At least men might remember this when they are speaking of it. It would save a lot of stupid chatter if they did.

And one more thing may be perhaps suggested from the wisdom of the past and the best research of the present—a thing to be remembered concerning the nature of those dogmas and rituals which are the vesture of religion. Valid dogmas are not arbitrary formulæ originating in one man’s mind, or in the minds of some priestly caste, and then rammed down the throats of the people; nor are rituals merely hocus-pocus arbitrarily designed, into participation in which human beings have been forced or fooled, contrary to their own desire. When people have like experiences of God, personal experiences, they find in certain symbolic language expression of that common experience. They design, hammering it out in long decades and centuries, great picture-languages to describe what God has meant to them and may

mean to others. Those utterances of common making are the basic dogmas of the world religions. A dogma that one man may make is not good unless it appeals to others as expressing truly what they too have felt. Dogmas must be accepted, and widely accepted, before they have validity. John Calvin made new dogmas of his own, and they are happily almost all forgotten. The Church made dogmas by common consent through long centuries of growth. Millions of people—including many of education and intellectual honesty—still find them true. A dogma is a common thing, a vulgar thing, a democratic thing. And as for rituals, they, too, must be symbols of a common attitude toward God, held individually by millions, before they matter much. People are of course continually making new rituals of their own. Most of them die with their creators. The rituals which last have a symbolism which appeals to people generally as honestly embodying what men normally feel toward God and what they naturally would give to God. Rituals, too, are democratic things. Time-tested creeds embody what the people are sure is true; rituals that last have a racial validity. They are not thrust externally upon the millions of God’s children. They come from what the millions of God’s children themselves have learned from God’s own dealing with their souls.

The people do not desire creedless faiths, nor should they, for they know that such religions are always necessarily the creations of persuasive and eccentric individuals; and the mass of mankind rightly distrusts all biological and psychological “sports.” The ways of the race, the folk ways, are the true ways. God made *man* in his image, says Genesis, not just some few bright men. Nor do the people desire religions without ritual, for if there be no symbol of the common worship then all that one can do is, again, to listen to some bright prophet. It is a thing worth noting that the religious hunger is not a hunger for prophets, but a hunger for God Himself.

It would indeed help if all those permitted to write books about religion could be persuaded to submit to a little impartial study of such basic facts as these. But would there then be any great demand for their product? Now that fiction has either become sordidly realistic or else built upon the strict mathematics of the detective-story formula, the popular reader is almost forced to buy religious books in order to find any wild romance, any mad creation of imaginative superstructure without the bother of foundations. And one need not be absurd about these fanciful spiritualities. One never took “Graustark” or “Under the Red Robe” seriously. Such books were good fun, or sometimes not so good. Even so with most of what purports to be the new religious literature.

Perversion in Wimpole Street

THE BARRETTS OF WIMPOLE STREET.
By RUDOLPH BESIER. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1930.

Reviewed by O. W. FIRKINS

COMEDIES in five acts are now rare, and Mr. Besier’s five-act play is comedy with a difference. The action it portrays and the feeling it evokes can both be abridged into a single word—oppression. The elder Barrett’s effect upon his household is conveyed in two lines from Tennyson:

And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey.

Hitherto literature itself, like the man’s children, has been hushed before the grim anomaly of the elder Barrett’s character. There has been a grotto in 50 Wimpole Street even less penetrable than Elizabeth’s bed-sitting room, and that grotto has been the mind of Edward Moulton-Barrett. This is the problem: How could a man of conscience and intelligence behave in one matter persistently and consistently like a cruel blockhead? Mr. Besier’s treatment is simplicity itself: he removes the conscience and intelligence. In a word, he *removes* the problem. His Barrett is quite mean enough to impart a semblance of probability to the worst of his recorded acts. It is harder to understand how such a man should have been paternally related to Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

There is, however, one marked originality in the treatment. In the fifth act Barrett intimates that he entertains toward his daughter feelings which

overstep the normalities and the proprieties of fatherhood. This has no effect upon the outcome; the outcome is already behind us; Elizabeth is married. All that happens is that Mr. Besier and Edward Barrett, in sinister complicity, succeed in making both Elizabeth and the reader very uncomfortable. It is curious to observe how far sometimes, in popular interest, the obvious exceeds the remotely and insalubriously lawless. In this book, the prescribed, the inescapable, situation, the father's consternation at Elizabeth's elopement, is far more moving than the anomaly which Mr. Besier has gone so far, and trodden in such miry ways, to seek.

The best of the play is not the delineation of the high protagonists. Mr. Besier is not at home with greatness. Robert Browning would never have courted Mr. Besier's Elizabeth, and Elizabeth would never have left even 50 Wimpole Street in company with Mr. Besier's Robert Browning. Browning furnishes the livelier stage material; he dominates and insists, proving conclusively that it is a great deal easier to be dominating and insistent than to be Browningsque. Mr. Besier's best work is done on a lower plane where he moves with the cheerfulness and freedom of a man in his own yard; he succeeds with Henrietta, the romping rebel, and her agreeably boobyish lover, Captain Surtees Cook. The best act in a rambling and ambling drama is the fourth, where Barrett's ruthlessness with Henrietta is skillfully employed to goad the reluctant and shrinking Elizabeth into decision. The other Barretts have a lumbering sprightliness and timid swagger which is probable enough, but not markedly sympathetic.

The play has literary associations and a theatricality which experiment in two capitals has apparently verified. On no other grounds is it entitled to hope for a lasting or significant place in English literature.

Not Sad Enough

WOMEN ARE NECESSARY. By JOHN HELD, JR. New York: Vanguard Press. 1931. \$2.

Reviewed by BARRY BENEFIELD

A CROWN must be set, at any rate, upon the courage of John Held, Jr. He is a professional funny man who, as a pictorial artist, has deliberately, diligently, and profitably mocked at all the old characters, situations, and themes supposed, these days, to belong exclusively to sentimental melodrama. Now, as a writing man, in this his first novel, he tells the story of Edna, the young, innocent, good-natured, small-town girl who is wronged by a prowling, heartless man of the cities and towns; and then she goes down and down, dying in physical and moral degradation on a bed of shame on the last page, thinking brokenly of her childhood, her baby, stray events of her womanhood.

But no, you say, surely Mr. Held is not serious about such a story; he's just making fun. Yes, he is indeed serious. You will find no funning in "Women Are Necessary."

And well he might be serious. The story of the Ednas of the world is a great theme for a supreme master. It is being retold constantly by shoddy fakers who are ashamed of it and who put it under heavy disguise to make it seem something other than it is. We salute again Mr. Held's courage and sincerity; he gives Edna's story straight. He not only gives it straight and neat, he blazes with righteous indignation about it.

The trouble with Edna's story as told by Mr. Held is that it isn't effective enough. He didn't do what he wanted to do. We don't believe in his Edna or any of the persons, almost all men, with whom she is concerned. He should make us believe in them so thoroughly that we should want to weep and fight about them.

This day of ours being what it is, and we being what we are, an author who tries to make us believe in Edna and her group, and feel adequately about them, is undertaking a heroically hard job. But if he elects to work on the job, he is properly responsible for what he does. Mr. Held tried—Mr. Held failed. His story of Edna is simply not good enough. It is not sad enough.

Seldom has a professional funny man given such an opening as has Mr. Held in this novel for facetious, smart-alecky jibes aimed at him—him of all people!—in the role of sob sister. He is not a sob sister. He is a recklessly brave writing man who attempted a story far beyond his present powers.

A Puritan History of Art

MEN OF ART. By THOMAS CRAVEN. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1931. \$3.

Reviewed by LLOYD GOODRICH

THAT the Book-of-the-Month Club should have chosen an art book this time is unusual; but this is an unusual art book. Most volumes on art nowadays are either highly technical or sentimentally popularized. Mr. Craven has brought back the human note, combined with a vigorous and masculine philosophy. His book is the most readable "outline" since Elie Faure's great work; but unlike the latter, it is restricted to painting in the Western world from Giotto to the present, as exemplified in its leading figures, and the emphasis is as much on the lives and backgrounds of the artists as on criticism.

Mr. Craven is far from the detached, Olympian type of critic. He is a vehemently personal writer with strong convictions. His creed is a violent reaction against certain trends of modern criticism best represented by Roger Fry: the conception of art as a purely formal, abstract affair, independent of its epoch or environment or of any "literary" content. To Mr. Craven all this suggests the ivory tower. Art must bear a vital relation to life or he will have



Hogarth's portrait of Lord Lovat, painted the day before that famous rascal's death, and showing him counting off on his fingers the days of life that remain to him. From "Men of Art."

none of it. To him it is not something esoteric but a universal language expressing the most broadly human ideas and feelings. His tastes are realistic; subject matter is of fundamental importance to him, and he is absolutely opposed to abstractionism. The masculine virtues interest him more than the feminine. His admiration goes out chiefly to the great artists of the Renaissance.

All of this represents a healthy change from the preciousness of much contemporary esthetics. Mr. Craven says many things that need saying today. With the breakdown of old standards there has been a tendency to lose sight of the great figures and the great qualities of the past, and to exalt minor ingenuities and preciosities. Mr. Craven does well to recall the supreme creators. The largest and finest part of his book is devoted to the artists of the Renaissance, and in his chapters on Giotto, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Rubens, Rembrandt, he is at his best, writing with enthusiasm, imagination, a generous sweep, and true passion. It is good to read such criticism, in which the basic human values of great art are once more affirmed with power and intelligence. These pages prove that in spite of all that has been written on these themes, they have not lost their capacity to inspire fresh thoughts and emotions.

Mixed with the author's appreciation is a ballast of hard, shrewd commonsense. He is never carried away by admiration into false emotion. The old masters to him are human beings, not angels, and his treatment of their personal side is robustly realistic, with a lack of idealization which emphasizes their humanity without detracting from their greatness. A keen sense of character makes his portraits of them living, and rich in material which contributes to the understanding of their art.

Mr. Craven's enthusiasms are balanced by equally strong dislikes. For every great man whom he praises there are hosts of others with whom he has no patience. His critical viewpoint, honest and vigorous as it is, has its limitations. Its chief premise, that the artist should be inspired directly by life, not by the art of others or of the past, is healthy but not very profound. Distinctions between "art" and "life" are at best crude and superficial. Genius operates in various ways, and gives its vitality to anything it touches. Mr. Craven places an unwarranted value on the type of artist who comments directly on his age and environment, and he rates satirists like Goya, Hogarth, and Daumier on a level with far more universal figures. On the other hand, he has not much capacity to appreciate a work of art, aside from its background, as a primarily esthetic creation. Formal qualities mean comparatively little to him; he does not see that they are of more enduring value than any amount of comment on life. He makes the common mistake of assuming that concern with form means a divorce from reality. He is suspicious of "beauty," and in a sense rightly, for the poor word has been so manhandled by academic critics that it suggests only mauve Whistlerian sentiments; nevertheless it does represent an essential and ultimate value, to which he is more or less unreceptive.

He appears similarly incapable of appreciating art that is calm, happy, and untroubled by conscious thought or conflict. That painting should be merely a praise of life, a re-creation of the sensuous beauty of the world, he seems unable to understand. Sensuousness goes against his grain; at bottom he is a Puritan critic, to whom great art must always be austere, difficult, tragic. Hence among the Italians he is partial to the Florentines at the expense of the Venetians, and omits Raphael, to whom he refers as a pretty, popular painter—mistaking his repose for weakness and missing his serene power.

This strain of Puritanism shows also in a curious distrust of any element of sex, which appears with a frequency that suggests obsession and distinctly warps his artistic opinions. Venice to him is "the courtesan city," whose most typical artist is Titian, a "sensualist" and a creator of "aphrodisiacs." Into Titian's nudes he reads implications strange to a healthy-minded person, even quoting with approval Mark Twain's provincial ravings at "Titian's beast," a piece of insane prudery which one can forgive in a professional backwoods humorist but not in an art critic. This prejudice leads him to a strange misjudgment of the art of the great Venetian, who, he says, could neither draw nor compose—this, about one of the few supreme masters of formal design!

But it is when he comes to French art that Mr. Craven loses his balance most disastrously. There is no doubt that the present tendency is to overrate the French, who in spite of their domination of European taste since the end of the Renaissance, have produced rather a succession of lesser figures than any artist of the first rank; but while this fact would bear emphasizing, it could be done without going to the ridiculous extreme of wholesale condemnation. Mr. Craven's Francophobia sounds almost pathological; nothing that the unfortunate race can do pleases him. His estimates of French artists, with the exception of Daumier, are grotesquely unfair, and his account of them is one long polemic against France and everything French. Paris is as much a den of iniquity to him as to any Methodist minister.

He shows an even more pronounced complex against modern art. Sideswipes at it keep intruding into his discussions of the older masters, considerably marring the dignity of the theme; and as he gets nearer to the present day his voice rises. Finally he sets up a straw man, the Modernist. This despicable creature is anti-social, afraid of "life," morbidly introspective; his sexual life does not bear looking into; he is lazy; he has no "mind"; he paints nothing but bloodless abstractions; he spends his time brooding in his studio (there is something inexplicably offensive to Mr. Craven in the word "studio"). To anyone familiar with contemporary artists and their work, this is laughable. If, as the author himself says, "our chief concern is with the art of our own time, whether we like it or not," it would seem worth while to make a serious attempt to understand it.

Mr. Craven, as can be seen, is far from the perfect critic. He lacks the essential qualities of balance and the desire to understand even those artists he does not like. Impersonal truth interests him less than the expression of his own prejudices. He has a habit of making facts agree with his opinions, instead of the reverse. It is remarkable how things which are virtues in the artists he likes become vices in those he dislikes: running a picture factory, for ex-