

The Origins of Spirit

THE REALM OF MATTER. By GEORGE SANTAYANA. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1930. \$3.50.

Reviewed by IRWIN EDMAN

FAITHFUL readers of Mr. George Santayana have these last years been troubled a little by the eloquent adieu he seemed to be bidding to all the furniture of Heaven and Earth and all the sphere of mortal concerns. That homesickness for Platonism which has in him been discernible from the beginning began in "Platonism and the Spiritual Life" to turn into an actual going home. In "The Realm of Essence," mingled with a not always clear psychology and a metaphysics far from easy, sounded the unmistakable note of Pure Spirit, and the theme of free and bodiless Intuitions beholding Essences timeless and pure.

Mr. Santayana once long ago played ironically with Matthew Arnold's comment on Shelley "as an ineffectual angel beating his luminous wings in the void in vain." It was a notation some of his more carnal readers were beginning to make on the margins of his own thought. Even the less carnal ones were indeed beginning to regret the apparent passing of that naturalistic sanity and sensible consciousness of earth and sky and the things between them which marked "The Life of Reason," the realism which disciplined Santayana's eloquence, and gave pertinence to his most lofty flights. He seemed latterly to have fled not simply from America, but from earth itself to some interstellar Nirvana, the Alone, soliloquizing in a style, at once passionate and impeccable, upon the Alone, "loving too much to be ever imprisoned, understanding too much to be ever in love."

"The Realm of Matter," the second volume in the enterprise of analysis of the Realms of Being that Mr. Santayana has set himself, is sufficient reassurance. Mr. Santayana's feet are, where they always have been, on the ground, and his eyes, though they scan the heavens and see, perhaps beyond them, have taken note in their time,—and still do—of infra-celestial things. "The Realm of Matter," for all its celebration of spirit, "has now, conceived how it came into existence and how it is the natural light by which existence in its waking moments understands itself."

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Mr. Santayana has in other words returned, though we were mistaken, perhaps who supposed he had ever quit, to his initial and enduring wisdom, to his comprehensive sense that there is a world with its own order of genesis, a realm of matter. Spirit discovers, so far as it is possible or needful, its urgent or compulsory objects, as well as the organs ailing or healthful which give it play. Santayana has studied in other places, as incidentally he studies here, the objects with which spirit is concerned and the meaning of spirituality. He is here more exclusively concentrating upon the origins of spirit and the conditions which give it birth, perspective, fuel, and possibility. The skylark and his song have preoccupied him more elsewhere. He is intent in this volume upon reminding the reader of the earth from which the skylark rises, the earthly origins of its song, and the natural conditions of its singing.

In an essay on "My Friendly Critics" some years ago Santayana advanced the suggestion that he was the only honest and thoroughgoing materialist. But his materialism is far from being identical with or dependent upon that tight nineteenth century mechanism which has now long ceased to be in vogue even among physicists. Except that he prefers to avoid words with rhetorical or false poetical associations he might, as he remarks in his preface, have used the word nature or revolution instead of matter. Matter is his name for something very like that *phuesis* which is the condition of all action and understanding and the dynamic source of all spiritual life. It is fertile, generative, and contingent. Matter is (the pun is almost inevitable) Mater Genetrix. However refined into intelligence sensibility may become, however contemplative and detached spirit may think itself, matter is its source and its condition and provides its occasion and its themes.

Santayana's "Realm of Matter," therefore, provides a double corrective. It is a cure for that materialism that is merely abstractionism turned into idolatry, a worship under the name of Law of some observed regularities in the various and generative flux. If he is a materialist, he is yet one who recognizes of how much novelty, creation, and dreaming infinitudes matter is capable. He is much more like

Lucretius in his pæan to Venus than to Democritus or even to Lucretius in his atomic scheme. If he accents that candle which is the body, he does it, like Aristotle, in many ways his master, to remind us simply of the conditions of that flame which is the soul and which alone gives the candle worth. He thinks nature must be explored to be understood and must be understood, if life, certainly if spiritual life, is to flourish. But he does not think the understanding is rigid or mathematical, or that nature is anything less or other ultimately than a mystery.

But his materialism is a corrective also to hasty appreciations or egotistical idealisms. The reader is reminded again and again of those various forms of evasion or delusion by which idealists in love with essences persuade themselves that their love or contemplation of them has no natural conditions or material origins. He neatly pictures those egotistical philosophers so in love with a private consciousness that they try to pretend through psychologism that there can be consciousness without objects or psychical, that is, mental life, without material conditions.

No one could be more deeply in love with essences, the infinite catalogue of eternal forms, nor more devoted to their tranquil, almost Buddhistic, contemplation, than Mr. Santayana. But he is more



Illustration, by Donald McKay, for Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" (Random House). See page 526.

than enough of a realist, sceptical and humble, to refrain himself, to ask others to refrain, from converting ideals into facts and forms into powers. Platonism inhabits a heaven of forms, but Santayana reminds us that that heaven is one of the imagination or of intellectual insight, and that imagination and insight are both engendered and nourished by the natural world.

One of the finest single chapters in this volume is that on the Psyche where Santayana in a few paragraphs, apparently merely poetical, packs more illumination than is crowded into a dozen volumes of the ordinary or even the most fashionable psychological theories. What could be neater, for example, than his description of the psyche (which is for him largely what it is for Aristotle, the entelechy of the body, a trope, a pattern, a complex habit in matter) as it understands itself:

Of her life as a whole the Psyche is aware only as we are aware of the engines and the furnaces of a ship in which we travel half asleep or chattering on deck.

Many psycho-analysts have said less in a dozen pages or a dozen volumes.

But the book as a whole with its insistence as firm as it is genial, on the material conditions of the life of the spirit, of the natural genesis of understanding and of the objects of understanding, reminds one again of the paradox in Santayana's thinking, a paradox characteristic of every sensitive modern, though in Santayana expressed with unusual subtlety. There is always the naturalist's honest sense of conditioning realities, there is always the Platonist's half happy, half nostalgic turning toward those eternal essences which mortal things may transiently embody, and which spirit, in any individual being also mortal, may momentarily behold, the fated mortal partnership in immortal things. Even in this volume, where the theme is the realm of matter, Santayana cannot help

commemorating once more the essences toward which the free or the relatively free spirit turns and the timeless essences which it beholds.

The author's concern in this analysis of realms of being may be compared, if so fastidious a work of literature may be compared with so banal a work of music, with the Poet and Peasant Overture. At least the title of the latter is appropriate to Santayana's theme. It is the poet in him that turns so often and broods so persistently upon these infinite lights of essence, clear, abiding and *non-existent*. It is the poet in him that is thus preoccupied with the infinite realm of forms which the thinker may discern in existence or, not discerning, may imagine or conceive.

But it is the peasant in him, the sturdy child of nature, who realizes and remembers always the soil which nurtures the poet, and is ultimately if sometimes obliquely the source of his most unearthly visions. Yet even where the *motif* is, as in this volume, that of the peasant, it is a lyrical peasant who speaks, a poet who has made for the moment his earth and the realm of matter his theme.

It would be trivial or insulting at this late date to praise at length Mr. Santayana's style. But at some date and soon by some one there should be an attempt to analyze and define the miracle of this instrument of his at once so just, so eloquent, and so serene. It is a style that in one sense has betrayed him. For readers have frequently reduced his finalities of thought to mere felicities of utterance, forgetting that in great literature as in great music the two are profoundly one.

Remembered in Tranquillity

EDUCATION OF A PRINCESS. A Memoir by MARIE, GRAND DUCHESS OF RUSSIA. New York: The Viking Press. 1931.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

A FEW weeks ago, on the screen of a little Times Square "movietone" theatre, Marie, grand-daughter of Alexander II of Russia, and niece of Nicholas II, appeared in a five-minute talk in which she spoke of the change that had taken place in her fortunes and her determination to succeed in the job at which she is now working in New York. It was a good little talk, in its mingling of modesty and pride; there was everything in the young Grand Duchess's pluck and tragic experience to touch the sympathies of her audience, but she was ill at ease and had an unhappy way of breaking the continuity of her words, every sentence or two, with a hesitating "A-a-a . . ."

This mannerism, so natural in the circumstances, had, on the screen, all the effect of premeditated burlesque. First the crowd tittered; before the unsuspecting Grand Duchess was through, fat men in thick overcoats were bellowing aloud.

On the same bill was Mr. Shaw. He bragged about himself and his plays; turned himself about, front-face, both profiles, backview; acted the clown, in short, but with such ease, grace, distinction, such an air of smiling down at a squirming mass of Liliputians, that the house listened with deference and chuckled its admiring delight. In that curious place and moment, it was the Grand Duchess who was merely a diffident, rather awkward woman of forty, and the British Socialist who had the air which kings should, but so rarely do have, in everyday life.

The little episode was, of course, merely one of those common examples of the theatre's peculiar values, of the unconscious cruelty of the theatre audience. But reading the Grand Duchess Marie's reminiscences, one may see behind it, I think, something more than that—see that strange, repressed, often wounded, childhood; that royal isolation and education which, as Marie now looks back at it, tended to atrophy rather than to develop natural powers and produced "an inferiority complex against which I had to fight"; that macabre marriage to a foreign prince, with whom, as with his people, she remained spiritually a stranger; a whole train of absurd, pitiful, tragicomic episodes which make the personal life of this Russian Grand Duchess a sort of museum-piece of the repressions of the Victorian era and of the wrong-headed, anachronistic, and unreal existence, into which the members of the Romanoff family were driven in those bat-eyed decades immediately preceding the Great War.

It is through this part of her story that the Grand Duchess Marie makes her most valuable contribution to the history of the time. All of the story is interesting, for it is all well written and part of an unusual life, but there have been innumerable memoirs

and volumes of letters and political happenings have been raked over from every side by those better able to speak of them with authority. Her experiences in her hospital unit at Pskov, for example, after she had annulled her marriage with the Swedish prince and begun to "live her own life," however vital to Marie herself, differ in degree rather than in kind from those of other young women who found in their war service a hitherto untouched reality. Her escape from Russia and subsequent adventures do not differ essentially from the experiences of many of the more fortunate Russian emigrés.

The really unique part of her narrative is the picture which the Grand Duchess gives of her childhood and home life—or lack of it—and of the royal personages whom she knew as her cousins and aunts. Her view of the killing of Rasputin throws a slightly different light on certain aspects of that conspiracy in which her brother, Dmitri, took part, but one may learn more that is significant, perhaps, of the whole Rasputin episode in the indirect interpretation of the Empress's baffling character and personality which is found in Marie's intimate portrait of her "Aunt Ella," the wife of the Grand Duke Serge and the Empress's older sister.

The two sisters must have had much in common. "Aunt Ella," too, was beautiful, shy, and superficially cold, similarly ill at ease in the world, with a somewhat similar turgid, brooding, morbidly intense inner life. The little Marie, left without a mother when a mere baby, and without a father when her adored parent, the Grand Duke Paul, was exiled because of his second marriage, was sent to Moscow with her brother, Dmitri, to live with their Aunt Ella and Uncle Serge. Once, the lonely child, seeing her aunt in a particularly becoming white muslin dress with her hair gathered, unbound, at the nape of her neck, by a bow of black silk, exclaimed, "Oh! Auntie, you look like the picture of a little page in a fairy story!" Aunt Ella turned to the English nurse, Nellie Fry, and "spoke in a dry, sharp tone: 'Fry, you must really teach her not to make personal remarks,' and swept away." Another time, "mute before the spectacle" of Aunt Ella in court dress, ablaze with jewels, "I raised myself to the tips of my toes and placed a kiss full of devotion on the back of her white neck, directly under a magnificent necklace heavy with sapphires. She said nothing, but I could see her eyes, and the cold, hard look in them chilled me to the heart."

This was the same Aunt Ella who went more or less crazy over nursing wounded, "displayed incredible heroism" when her husband was assassinated by terrorists, and finally found comparative emotional equilibrium in a religious order. After her husband's death, she gave the foster-children the love which before that had been locked in by a curious jealousy. There is a priceless picture of her trying, with her ladies, in the garden of the country house at Ilinskoie, to read Dostoevsky.

She did not know enough Russian to read it herself; one of the ladies read it aloud to her. And so great was my aunt's fear of details too realistic that she would permit no one to attend these readings! . . . At this period she read only English books and chose her authors with great caution.

It was "Aunt Ella" who arranged the unhappy marriage with Prince William of Sweden. However the young Grand Duchess, then only seventeen, might shiver at the prospect (the nice, if slightly stiff, young Prince was as helpless as she), the conventions of her caste and time compelled Marie to write her father that she was "madly in love." That whole story is another museum-piece of what such royal marriages frequently must be. One cannot forget that tragi-comic honeymoon through France, with motor tires blowing out every few miles, the new Princess in the long, hot skirts of the period, with a hat perched on top of a high coiffure and refusing to stay there, the thick veil with which it was lashed full of dust and cramping her neck; nor the glimpse of her, when they finally reached Paris, late at night, throwing her arms around the neck of Zhdanov, her brother's old valet, "trembling with joy."

It was poor humans like these (other members of the family are no less illuminating than "Aunt Ella," in their different ways) tangled in their curious repressions and complexes, completely isolated from the vital life of their country, who were called on to rule autocratically the vast and bewildering continent of Russia. They were reared in the idea that Russia was "the bearer of some special ideals, the purity and loftiness of which the West could never

understand, and certainly never attain. Russia was thus permitted, in our eyes, to be centuries behind the times in terms of progress, yet eternally superior."

Western ideas filtered through, nevertheless, were taken up by the valuable intelligentsia, who were thereupon suppressed and turned into enemies of the very state, which, under happier auspices, they might have helped to build. The rest is the history of the deluge, from which, out of all those unhappy relatives, each of whom loved what to him was "Russia," Marie, whom old-fashioned Russians sometimes called "the madcap Grand Duchess," was one of the few permitted to survive.

Remediable Tragedy?

SOME FOLKS WON'T WORK. By CLINCH CALKINS. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1930. \$1.50.

Reviewed by PAUL H. DOUGLAS
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THE greatest barrier in the way of reducing unemployment is the indifference of the comfortable classes who in our society direct industry and form public opinion. They have unconsciously invented defense mechanisms to save their consciences by repeating to themselves that men are out of jobs because they are not really looking for work and that families are in distress solely because they will not save. These comfortably situated men and women are immune to statistics and cling to their delusions all the more ardently because at times they have uneasy feelings that perhaps there are impersonal causes of human misery and of unemployment.

Only poignant case studies of men and their families who suffer through no fault of their own from unemployment can break through this protective armor of self-satisfaction. It is the supreme merit of this book that it presents in a sensitive and moving manner the actual stories of how unemployment affected many families all over the country even before the dark winter of 1929-30 had set in upon us. The material was gathered by residents of over a hundred settlements in different cities of the country under the competent direction of Miss Helen Hall of Philadelphia, and has been edited in its present form by Miss Calkins. Only those cases were included where the worker had lost his job through no fault of his own and the material was collected, it should be remembered, before the business depression set in and when we were supposedly enjoying prosperity. And yet the impression of human misery which is gained from these accounts is both piercing and overwhelming. Savings are swept away and families crippled with debt. Mothers are forced to work outside their homes and to neglect their families. Babies are stunted and on occasion starve. Family relations frequently break and mental as well as physical diseases multiply. The futures of large groups of families are irretrievably crippled. And shining through all the cruel strain can be seen humor and bravery, infinite pathos, and a moving sense of tragedy—greater to me at least than that which I find even in Greek drama.

I wish that everyone with an assured income could be made to read this book. And in particular, I should like to make it compulsory for at least three groups of people. First, for that "army of the indolent good" whom John Morley long ago marked out as the chief supporters of evil in the modern world and who so largely permeate all middle class society. Secondly, for all legislators and men in public office who have it in their power to give us a decent system of public employment offices and to substitute a self-respecting system of insurance for our present humiliating, uncertain, and inadequate distribution of doles. And finally, for the industrialists who have it partially in their power to lessen unemployment, and who if they withdrew their opposition could enable decent collective provisions such as employment offices and insurance to be put into effect.

Nearly a century ago, Thomas Carlyle in "Past and Present" tried in a somewhat similar manner and yet unsuccessfully to stamp a concern about unemployment on the conscience of British Philistia. I do not know whether Miss Hall, Miss Calkins, and their associates can succeed any better with our Philistines. They have done their best with complete veracity and without overstraining the truth. If the American middle class is not stirred to action by this book and by the multiplied horrors of the far worse conditions which are now settling about us, then it

will have stamped itself as hard of heart and barren of sentiment. It will have given further evidence of lacking that true culture of concerned kindness for which no amount of humanistic veneer can ever be a substitute.

Changing Weather

MACKEREL SKY. By HELEN ASHTON. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1930.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

MISS ASHTON in this "conversation piece," as she styles her chronicle of a few months in the lives of a young married couple, demonstrates again the remarkable carrying power of a method which is entirely free from flamboyance and exaggeration. Here, as in "Doctor Serocold," she compounds out of the small detail, the mixed emotions, and the often dull happening of daily intercourse a tale which achieves complete plausibility as a transcript from life. There is in it nothing of the heroic, little of excitement, and much of monotony, a leisurely progression of incidents and emotional situations which by their very commonplaceness lend it convincingness and appeal. Miss Ashton has no style in the rhetorical sense, but she imparts the very accent of actual conversation to the dialogues that carry so much of her story, and she has a straightforwardness of narrative that conveys scene and personality with unusual veracity. Her characters, realized through speech and incident, and not through description, attain a striking verisimilitude.

In its essence, "Mackerel Sky" is but one of a hundred recent novels which have portrayed the disillusionments, the friction, and the difficulties of adjustment of a marriage between two young persons whose wisdom is not sufficient to compass the frailties of temperament and whose love is not strongly enough buttressed by philosophy to withstand the pricks of disappointment. Gilbert, with the creative artist's instability of mood and the novelist's petulance with whatever interrupts the smooth functioning of the writing impulse, Elizabeth, with her business ability, her inefficient housekeeping, and her assumption of the role of financial provider have retained during their five years of married life moments of harmony and understanding, to be sure, yet live always on the edge of estrangement as a result of their self-absorption and impatience. Still loving each other, and desperately wanting to recover the first completeness of their love, they yet find themselves involved in quarrel after quarrel. Even as the reader dismisses them, happily reconciled to each other after the last and most serious breach, it is with a doubt which their author evidently shares when, speaking of Gilbert's mother she writes: "she said to herself, although with some misgiving, as the two figures passed out of sight, 'They'll be all right after this.'" Will they? Miss Ashton is too stern a realist and too competent an observer to be sure.

It is in the detachment of her portrayal, indeed, that Miss Ashton proves her strength. She is neither cynical nor sentimental, but wise and critical, with a sort of compassionate humor that lends to her story a breadth and interest denied to the many similar tales which lack its perspective on life. Her personalities are always in character, never heroic or tragic, merely very average human beings, foolish at times, pathetic or pitifully amusing at others, sharply individualized and yet having a thousand prototypes in life. All in all, "Mackerel Sky," though not so good a novel as "Doctor Serocold," not as well rounded, as artistically shaped, or as free from the trite and the repetitive, confirms the impression of that earlier book, that Miss Ashton is a writer of more than usual ability.

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