

What of Democracy

DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS. By HAROLD J. LASKI. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1933. \$3.50.

Reviewed by CLAUDE G. BOWERS

THE favorite pastime of a type of intellectual, especially in America, has been to deride democracy. Destructive criticism of all institutions that must have the inherent weaknesses of humanity, is easy, and constructive criticism hard, and this accounts for the derision of the democratic concept without the submission of a substitute. Even so, there is no escape from the conclusion that in operation democracy has developed weaknesses that cannot, and should not, be ignored.

Mr. Laski, in "Democracy in Crisis," evidently prefers democracy to any governmental form now in existence or in contemplation, without blinding himself to its weaknesses in operation. He finds that the democracies of the world certainly have done as well by the people governed as the dictatorships,—military, communistic, or fascist,—and without depriving them of the liberty to think out loud. "It is clear enough," he says, "that any governmental decisions which are built upon the assent of citizens are better than those that rely upon force. . . . Government by persuasion is invariably a more creative adventure than government by violence."

Nor is he impressed with the plan of the technocrats, and some of our intellectuals of the more precious variety, to turn society over to the experimentation of the "experts," having no direct responsibility to the people to be governed. Being an intelligent man, Mr. Laski does not underestimate the vital importance of experts in dealing with the complicated problems of our time. But he realizes the experts' limitations as a governing force. He knows that human problems touching people are not geometrical propositions. No one, in few words, has put the case so well against the substitution of experts for statesmen in government. Thus he says:

The fundamental issues of society are not the kind of problem the expert is accustomed to handle. They require, not specialization so much as the power to coordinate. They involve judgments of value, predictions about psychological impact, which are the product, not of expert technique, but of a divine common sense which has no necessary connection with it.

All of which means, however, that a statesman, if worth his salt, must understand people, their reactions and limitations, as well as issues, and increasingly must avail himself of expert knowledge for facts; but the application of the facts must be left to the experts in statecraft in the end.

Thus Mr. Laski dismisses as substitutes for democracy, communism, fascism, military dictatorships, government by experts, and then frankly faces the weaknesses of democracy in action. It is easy to make out a case against the operation of democracy today. But some of the evils on which Mr. Laski dwells are negations of democracy, and have no proper relation to it. In touching upon the rather stupid domination in America of certain business men having no real concept of the state and its functions, it is hardly fair, perhaps, to ascribe this to democracy. The philosophy of the type of business men he has in mind is that of privilege. "Specialization in money-making," he says, "has, in fact, gone so far with the business man that he is unable to understand the building of social relationships in which its attainment is not a primary end." And he adds: "In the United States the record of his political activities is a sorry one." And yet, for three generations, a dominant one,—and based upon the Hamiltonian concept of government as a subordinate agency, or at least the political partner, of Big Business. The social, financial, industrial evils Mr. Laski so impressively describes are not inherent in a democracy since they come from privilege which is the very negation of democracy.

While Mr. Laski surveys other democracies with their problems of parliamen-

tary government, we are especially interested in the application of his observations to our own here. He sees the challenge to democracy that Jefferson saw from the beginning. The philosopher, being a practical man as well as a dreamer of dreams, knew that democracy cannot thrive on popular ignorance; that for the success of his system the mass mind must be educated to its opportunities and duties; that government of, by, and for the people calls for a trained leadership. Laski, commenting on the failure of our educational system adequately to prepare the mass of the people for citizenship, reminds us that "all régimes built upon inequality draw their strength from the ignorance of the multitude, and all such régimes seek to make their methods of education such as are least likely to injure their own foundations." He might have added that in this country, only the other day, a powerful group, expecting to wax fat on privilege, was caught in the sorry business of bribing professors of economics in colleges to act as propagandists, and of introducing alleged textbooks, prepared in the counting room of privilege, into the schools. This movement for the utter degradation of the schools and colleges was intended to divert the people from the facts on issues vital to their interest.

It was the firm conviction of Jefferson that if the people are given the facts they may be counted upon generally to act upon them wisely. That explains his interest in the educational system, and in the freedom, and integrity of the press. Mr. Laski puts his finger on what, to me, is the most serious menace to democracy when he discusses the press. Here it is free, as far as government is concerned,—Jefferson saw to that. But it also is free to suppress or write down news, or color it, or distort it. That is the reason that, not long ago, a powerful group bent on privilege at the expense of society as a whole, was found buying up newspapers, under cover, at strategic points. Privilege pays enormous dividends, and it can well afford enormous expenditures in the acquisition of a powerful press for the blinding of the masses of the people to their own interests. The fact that privilege, which is a negation of democracy, has that in mind, as disclosed in the incident mentioned, is one of the menacing features of our time. Unless the people are in position to get the facts, and all the essential facts, democracy must end in failure. The life of democracy demands light. Just what can be done about it, Mr. Laski does not indicate, but when he points to the shortcomings in the agencies of education, the schools, and press, he goes to the heart of the democratic problem.

He ventures on dangerous ground and invites abuse when he implies that the Constitution, so difficult to change, under the interpretations of the courts has, in the opinion of great numbers, been converted into a protective agency of Big Business. The doctrine of implied powers, which Jefferson questioned, and which is so much lauded by the orthodox to the glorification of John Marshall, makes almost anything possible; but Professor Beard has sought to show in "The Economic Origin of the Constitution" that it was framed primarily for the protection of property. Mr. Laski cites the case of *Smyth v. Ames* as an assumption of "the

right of the courts to decide passionate political controversies between business men and legislative assemblies in the interest of the former."

But here, again, much depends upon the personnel of the courts. It surely is not controversial to say that we have been trained as a people to believe that only conservatives or ultra-conservatives are proper for the federal judiciary. On what other ground can we explain the stubborn fight against the confirmation of Justice Brandeis who thinks in terms of social justice? Mr. Laski's observations are interesting in the light of Jefferson's fear that the courts would be used as a bulwark against democracy.

We will not subscribe in whole to Mr. Laski's conclusions, or agree with all his observations. But his book has the high merit of being a courageous discussion and provocative. We can stand books of this sort to rattle the dry bones of the sterile minds. Clear-eyed to the weaknesses of democracy, and yet loyal to it, in preference to other systems thus far proposed, it is well worth while.

Claude G. Bowers, the newly appointed Ambassador to Spain, is a journalist of distinction, a prominent figure in Democratic politics, and the author of several excellent historical studies.

English Vocabulary

THE SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY on Historical Principles. Prepared by WILLIAM LITTLE, H. W. FOWLER, J. COULSON. Revised and edited by C. T. ONIONS. Vol. I, A-M; Vol. II, N-Z. New York: Oxford University Press. 1933. 2 vols. \$18.

Reviewed by GEORGE PHILIP KRAPP

UNLIKE the earlier draughts from the vast stores of the original and unapproachable "New English Dictionary" which have appeared bearing the magic name of Oxford English dictionaries, the "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary" retains in spirit and in essential content the qualities which have placed the "New English Dictionary" in its proud place as the greatest achievement of modern English scholarship. The "Concise Oxford Dictionary" was the first abbreviation to appear, but this admirable work, now definitely established on its own level as a classic among dictionaries, is a comparatively brief book as dictionaries go, and moreover is a practical work not constructed according to those principles of historical scholarship which give to the unabridged "New English Dictionary" its supreme distinction. The "Concise Oxford Dictionary" was followed by the "Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English," with its later revision for American use by Mr. Van Santvoord. This is also an excellent dictionary, if not for the pocket, at least for use with one hand, but a molehill to a mountain in comparison with the original "New English Dictionary."

The chief impediments in the way of the wide general use of the original "New English Dictionary" have been its great size, its cost, limiting private ownership to the fortunate few, and to some extent its very virtues. Its amplitude of scholarship no doubt sometimes checks the zeal of readers who have not themselves the leisure and the learning to consult the book profitably in the spirit in which it is written. These obstacles the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" removes, and now makes it possible for every serious student of the English language to have at his elbow an

authoritative statement of the essential facts of the history of the English vocabulary. But obviously this "Shorter English Dictionary" could be made only at the cost of a great deal of compression. The "New English Dictionary" contains 15,000 large quarto pages, the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" contains 2,500 pages of somewhat smaller size. This reduction in bulk was not attained by any few large eliminations or modifications. The type of the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" is as readable and as generous as that of the original work. The "New English Dictionary" contains no pictorial illustrations, nor does the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary," and no gains were made therefore in this direction. The abridgment was made, in fact, by the exercise of the most rigorous and meticulous editorial supervision, not with any hope of retaining all the information of the "New English Dictionary," but at least of presenting "a quintessence of those vast materials." The method of the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" reflects, the editor declares, "exactly that of the principal work."

What then is left in this abridgment which has been reduced to probably not more than one-tenth of the size of the original, is the method, and the materials on a reduced scale of citation and illustration. The vocabulary of the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" is designed to include "all words in regular literary and colloquial use," with a selection from those of more technical, archaic, dialectal, and obsolete character. In making their selections, the editors may perhaps be thought to have been more generous towards these latter groups than towards the words in regular literary and colloquial use, especially recent and present use.

Naturally a dictionary constructed on historical principles will have a leaning towards a vocabulary that has a more or less extensive historical background, but are not *ace*, *aileron*, *blimp*, *fuselage*, and *nosedive*, to mention only a casual few in one group, sufficiently historical now to find a place in a full record of regular use? And *doughboy*, recorded only for 1685, "a boiled flour dumpling," might well have had its history carried on several centuries later, especially as *doughface*, the following word, is so generous in this respect, noting that the word, first recorded for 1833, was applied to Northern politicians who were too compliant to the South during the Civil War agitation. One would also like to see *alumnus*, 1645, "The nursing or pupil of any school, university, etc.," brought into somewhat closer relations with present realities, and perhaps one would even go so far as to grant the word *alumna* a place in the history of the English vocabulary.

Probably the largest single elimination of the "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" has been made in the amount of space accorded to quotations illustrating the history and use of the words of the vocabulary. That this could be done without loss, no one would maintain, for the "New English Dictionary," with all its Jovian grandeur of gesture and stride, is not a diffuse work. But whatever philosophers may say of it, when it comes to printing, space is a fixed and ineluctable matter. The "Shorter Oxford Dictionary" will not take the place of the greater "New English Dictionary," nor was it expected that it should. The editors are certainly justified in their hope, however, that "both the student and the general reader will find in this work what they might reasonably expect to find in a historical dictionary of English compressed within 2,500 quarto pages," covering the general English vocabulary from the time of King Alfred to the present. If not a complete substitute for the "New English Dictionary," the "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary" is nevertheless an invaluable introduction to and aid in the use of the larger work.

George Philip Krapp, who is professor of English at Columbia, is an authority on English speech, and the author of a number of books bearing upon it. Among those works are "Modern English in Its Growth and Present Use" and "The English Language in America."

By a regrettable misunderstanding "Broken Arrow" was recently reviewed in these pages. The book is not to be published till September.

The Saturday Review Recommends

This Group of Current Books:

TSCHIFFELY'S RIDE. By A. T. TSCHIFFELY. *Simon & Schuster.*

An account of a trip across two continents on horseback.

EVA GAY. By EVELYN SCOTT. *Smith & Haas.*

A long novel, which is a panorama of persons and places, impressive if not entirely successful.

DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS. By HAROLD LASKI. *University of North Carolina Press.*

A discussion of the trend and manifestation of present-day democracies.

This Less Recent Book:

YOUR MEXICAN HOLIDAY. By ANITA BRENNER. *Putnam.*

A guide to Mexico which is at the same time a readable book



HOME OF MATTHEW ARNOLD AT COBHAM, SURREY.

Matthew Arnold

THE LETTERS OF MATTHEW ARNOLD TO ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH. Edited with an introductory study by HOWARD FOSTER LOWRY. New York: Oxford University Press. 1932. \$3.

Reviewed by KARL YOUNG
Yale University

THIS exhilarating volume is modestly offered as "the first publication in a study of Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough" which Professor Lowry has been carrying on for several years, and which he purposes to carry forward during a number of years to come. The comprehensive project is based primarily upon two remarkable collections of unpublished manuscripts: the Clough Papers (journals, correspondence, and literary drafts), and the Arnold Papers (notebooks, marginalia, and other writings). The book now before us presents a substantial unit from the Clough Papers, consisting essentially in some fifty or sixty letters written by Arnold to Clough. These are introduced by two highly rewarding essays of the editor, and are richly annotated, much of the illustrative matter being published for the first time from related manuscripts.

Since Arnold repeatedly declared Clough to be his chief intellectual intimate, and wrote to him with the abandon of a brother, the new letters inevitably become our first accurate record of the ennobling friendship of the two men, and give us our best single insight into the forming of Arnold's mind. They provide also an abundance of other noteworthy disclosures, such as judgments upon literary contemporaries, elucidations of specific poems, political gossip, a fleeting glimpse of a Marguerite, and an engaging jauntiness in the writer himself. These disclosures clamor for attention and comment, and all will eventually take their places in the literary chronicle of England; but, for the moment, they must give way before weightier considerations of devoted friendship and of general ideas.

Of the firm attachment between Arnold and Clough we are now enabled to distinguish the three phases. During the first, and briefest, of these Clough, who had "passed eight years without a Fault," and was "thanking God for [Dr.] Arnold," employed his Rugby conscience in attempts to regulate the intellectual waywardness of Dr. Arnold's restive son "Matt," who was "full of Parisianisms . . . enters the room with a chanson of Beranger's on his lips . . . breakfasts at 12 . . . has been to Chapel once." During the second phase, when both men had entered upon their productivity, Arnold assumed the master's rod, commending the "wholesome abundance," "sincerity," and "instruction" of Clough's writing, but also launching broadsides like these: "A growing sense of the deficiency of the beautiful in your poems . . . made me speak as I did . . . I doubt your being an artist." "You are too content to fluctuate." "You are the most conscientious man I ever knew: but on some lines morbidly so, and it spoils your action." "To solve the Universe as you try to do is as irritating as Tennyson's dawdling with its painted shell." In the lamentable absence of Clough's replies to such offerings we cannot speak confidently as to their effect upon his spirit, but one can hardly escape the impression that they contributed something toward the quiet estrangement that hovered over the third phase of the relationship. Arnold's phrases during this last period have a tone of manly devotion and regret: "I really

have clung to you in spirit more than to any other man." "I do not think I have increased your stock of happiness."

From the shortcomings imputed to Clough in the course of this hardy friendship one turns willingly to the body of positive ideas which it evoked from Arnold upon the problems of how to live and how to write. From the letters one infers that the revolution of 1848 gave Arnold his first clear realization that England needed an infusion of fresh ideas, and could get it from France:

It is this—this wide and deepspread intelligence that makes the French seem to themselves in the van of Europe. . . . Our weakness is that in an age where all tends to the triumph of the logical absolute reason we neither courageously have thrown ourselves into this movement like the French: nor yet have driven our feet into the solid ground of our individuality as spiritual, poetic, profound persons."

Here begins that lifelong homily upon French "curiosity" and clarity which may yet prove to be Arnold's best gift to his Hebraizing countrymen. Of a more personal nature are the evidences of a struggle against "a confused multitudinousness," and a cultivation of the inner life. In stirring confessions Arnold shows himself the moralist who, decade after decade, treasured in his notebooks the sources of his secret meditations, and thus compiled that still unpublished record which Professor Lowry purposes to bring forth as "one of the great devotional books of the world."

For Arnold the problem of how to live was related intimately to the question of how to write, for to him it seemed essential that religion and poetry be united. "Modern poetry," he wrote to Clough, "can only subsist by its contents: by becoming a complete *magister vitae* as the poetry of the ancients did: by including as theirs did, religion with poetry." Hence he assures his friend that he must "choose adequate subjects,"—those which "animate and ennoble." But subject and matter are not enough. The ennobling will depend also upon "a grand style,"—a style which is "the expression of the poet's character," and which has power "to compose and elevate the mind." Elevation such as this is most readily found in Homer: "I read Homer and toujours Homer." And finally the great poem will be plain and orderly: it will use only sparingly "the exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, and the felicity, of the Elizabethan poets"; it will not "lose itself in parts and episodes and ornamental work," but will "press forwards to the whole." Thus did Arnold thread his way to that masterly pronouncement which we know as the Preface of 1853.

What, indeed, are the dicta of these letters if not the vigorous first expression of ideas which guided the creation of the poems, and which developed later into the literary, moral, and religious essays? Professor Lowry's new volume, then, is nothing less than a new key to the thought and art of Matthew Arnold.

"The name of Pepys," says the London *Observer*, "appears several times in the London directories, but there is not yet any general agreement as to how the word should be pronounced. A witness in the West London Court recently described himself as 'Peppis,' which is understood to be the form favored by the Earl of Cottingham's family. Both 'Pappis' and 'Peps' have their adherents, but the descendants of the diarist's own family call themselves 'Peeps.'"

Round about Parnassus

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THE CASE OF WILFRID GIBSON

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON (now signing himself simply Wilfrid Gibson) was one of the Georgian poets just before the Great War. I possess his *Collected Poems* (1905-1925). His *Islands* (Macmillan) is subsequent, like his *The Golden Room* and *Hazards*. Always a realist, and early involved in portraiture of the stricken average, who earn often bitter daily bread, Gibson has proved an extremely fluent poet, usually interesting, more usually to be prized for his matter than for his manner, and the creator of a very few poems that will, I think, have a fairly long life. *Islands* is divided into four sections, "Adventure," "Traffic," "Sails," "Coronach," and "Highland Dawn." This poet is good at description. The first section has a wide range; the poem on some savage tribe drumming in the jungle is a *tour de force* of onomatopoeia. The description of a flier above the clouds, of an avalanche, of sundry other adventurous episodes, is well managed, if some of the poems are rather too long-drawn-out. Section two is much concerned with death, and many of the instances noted are moving. "Sails," the third section has, naturally, much to do with the sea and actual sailing. Among the other elegiac strains in the fourth section, "Coronach" raises one for that glamorous immortal, Rupert Brooke. "Highland Dawn," the last section gives us something of the indwelling mystery and legendry of Scotland. And yet through all this book of many poems I find it hard to pick out one to quote here. A certain edge, which Gibson possessed in his earlier poetry, seems to me to be gone from this deft reporting, and the lyricism is rather faded. Perhaps it is that Gibson has written too much in his day. He was never an innovator in form, and his musings have worn themselves thin and have become repetitive. As I have already said, he has done some notable work in his time, but I should rather go back to his poetic-dramatics in *Daily Bread*, or to his *Thoroughfares* of 1914.

ARIADNE REVISITED

I have tried now several times to muster a brisk interest in F. L. Lucas's *Ariadne* (Macmillan). It is imported from Cambridge, England, a beautiful example of book-making from the Cambridge University Press. The dedication begins:

"Pooh!—from a lover!—this moth-eaten tale!
What a superannuated nightingale—
A thing three thousand years old at the least!
You know I'm rather younger! What a feast
Fit for one's grandmother, warranted to bring
Slumbers as sound as the Idylls of the King!
Why will you waste your—well, we will not say
Talents—your time, on such worn-out child's-play?"

I must say I am inclined to sympathize with the young lady, Prudence, who is supposed to be speaking! The author addresses her a moment later as "Little nymph." The versification of that introduction is pretty limping. Then, when I begin the poem itself, it is to encounter:

Twice, since the dawn, far down the Athenian plain
Had stormed the long white lances of the rain,
While the sword-blades of the lightning, jag on jag,
Plunged and replunged from crag to bel-
lowing crag
High up Hymettus.

Which, to me, as a description of a thunderstorm, leaves a great deal to be desired! In my youth I loved the story of Theseus and Ariadne, and the tale of the Minotaur. And I believe that all old legend can excitingly be brought to life when the proper poet attempts it. But, though

Mr. F. L. Lucas is indubitably a gentleman and a scholar, so much of his poem as I could read, seemed to me devoid of that freshness of phrase and power of description that come only through vivid imagination. His images, his simile and metaphor are rubber-stamped. His power of narrative is only average. Probably the story as he has told it does not drop so dead as I have made it sound, but it remains to me one of those interesting attempts in verse, to retell something already told much better, that one always intends to get around to reading, and always evades. Compare it, for instance, with Aldous Huxley's *Leda*!

AS TO THE GREAT

Burton Stevenson, famous as editor of *The Home Book of Verse*, has compiled a new anthology called *Great Americans as Seen by The Poets*, "a ready reference book." It is a faithful culling of everything in American poetry that relates to Great Presidents, Great Statesmen, Great Soldiers, Great Sailors, Great Writers, Great Adventurers, and contains an heroic miscellany that brings in Famous Legends and Famous Rides. In the present day we do not celebrate our Great Bootleggers and Great Racketeers in serious verse, our Great Bank Presidents (even without mention of Atlanta), or our Great De-bunkers of the Great. It is, perhaps, just as well. Many famous school poems are here, and there is a modicum of good stuff written, principally, about the time of the Civil War or concerning events in the Civil War. Brownell's "The Bay Fight," for example, is, in the main, a remarkable war poem. But when one chances on "Down on the Little Big Horn," for instance, by Francis Brooks, one yearns for the Indian-fighting authenticity of John G. Neihardt. For this, truly, is terrible:

Down on the Little Big Horn
(O troop forlorn!),
Right into the camp of the Sioux
(What was the muster?)
Two hundred and sixty-two
Went into the fight with Custer,
Went out of the fight with Custer,
Went out at a breath,
Stanch to the death!
Just from the canyon emerging,
Saw they the braves of Sitting Bull
surging,
Two thousand and more,
Painted and feathered, thirsting for
gore,
Did they shrink and turn back
(Hear how the rifles crack!),
Did they pause for a life,
For a sweetheart or wife?

Such pure and unadulterated blah makes even Henry W. Longfellow's "The Revenge of Rain-in-the-Face" seem epic. To tell the bitter truth, most great men and most great events are but scurvily commemorated in verse. Once in a great while a great man or a great event has inspired a poet actually to write poetry. But the instances are so rare that such an anthology as this is doomed from the start to be a cenotaph of heroes and deeds quite inadequately celebrated. In "Whitman's Ride for Oregon," by Hezekiah Butterworth, occurs the great passage:

Yes!—yet that empire he had saved,
And to his post went back to die,—
Went back to die for others' sake,
Went back to die from Washington,
Went back to die for Walla-Walla,
For Idaho and Oregon.

We gather that he went back to die. It makes me want to die—for old Walla-Walla.

LISTED BUT NOT TO BE REVIEWED
SECRET SNOW. By Ethel McKenzie. Philadelphia: Roland Swain Company, 1932.
COLUMBIA POETRY. Columbia University Press. 1932.
THE SONG OF SONGS. Arranged by John L. Patterson. Louisville, Ky.
WINDS OF THE WORLD. By Caroline H. W. Foster. Boston: Bruce Humphries.
SILVER PINIONS. By Florence Eakman. Sierra Madre, California.