

Many a stately tragedy is less austere moral, less heartrending.

In "Private Lives" and "Design for Living" Mr. Coward dodged this problem of fusing surface jape with serious feeling. If it were not for "The Vortex" and "Post Mortem" one would scarcely suspect that he was attempting anything more reputable than *comédie rosse*. Probably not one in a hundred of his capacity audiences gets the slightest glimpse beneath the rather shameless tomfoolery. Still fundamentally a moralist and sentimentalist, he no longer endeavors to transfer the pain in his heart to the hearts of his public. Quite the contrary. Sentiment and morality lie perdue beneath a coruscating surface of sophistication.

In "Private Lives" a young couple squabble on their honeymoon in a manner most witty and amusing; they divorce and remarry, only to squabble again with their new mates, and even less satisfactorily; they meet once more and elope for a week-end that is now legally adulterous, still squabbling and still gaily self-assured. The Catholic Church itself, they observe, would give their reunion its blessing. Except for the title of the play, there is no hint of a preachment. Why shouldn't marriage be private, and inanely quarrelsome as one chooses to make it? The question of children and other problems of state, which Mr. Coward considered so deeply in his green youth, are laughed to scorn. Only by an effort of will does one remember the venerable Montgomery Schuyler's characterization of a shamefully delinquent fellow townsman as "one of our most private spirited citizens." In brief, Mr. Coward has laid aside his satiric lash, the ponderous cat-o'-ninetails, and has caught up the ringmaster's whip, snapping it incessantly to the pain of none and the delight of all.

"Design for Living" regales us again and even more preposterously with the light comedy of sexual promiscuity. In the first act Gilda is living as mistress with a struggling artist, Otto; but, bored by poverty, she has already taken on his friend

friend of all three. Though she has refused to marry either Otto or Leo, she now finds the irregular state a bore and marries Ernest. In the final act, she is bored with both Ernest and matrimony. Leo and Otto, meantime, under the spell of their common jilting, have become warm friends again and turn up in Ernest's penthouse. They are dressed alike in swallowtails and wear identical boutonnieres. Under a surface of identical persiflage, they make identical love to Gilda and carry her off between them. That is (ostensibly) the true design for living, and at the close of the play there is every reason for believing that Gilda will continue to weave it with ever increasing duplications similarly regimented.

Does one feel inclined to wield the lash of virtuous indignation upon Otto and



NOEL COWARD.

Leo? Not at all. Unlike the characters of the equally amusing Mr. Waugh, there is no hint that in reality they are vile bodies. To all appearances they are rare good fellows, madcaps in a very agreeably madcap world; faithful, too—in their way, posi-

tively monogamous. And they are played by those past-masters of light comedy charm, Messrs. Coward and Alfred Lunt. But surely our once moralistic playwright has a lash in pickle for the peccant Gilda, polyandrous bobbin in this progressive design? Wrong again. When there is question of society as such, of children, she plausibly pleads her private preferences; and, being played by Lynn Fontanne, she pleads them engagingly and convincingly.

The Mr. Coward whom one encounters in "Cavalcade" is a very different person, serious to the verge of tragedy; and, though what was written as a play is reduced in America to the dimensions of a talkie, its popular appeal seems as great as that of "Design for Living," both playing to crowded houses. Here again there is no shrill and strident moralizing, but also there is no jester's cap and bells. What one sees is reality, humble and unsophisticated—the fortunes of an English household traced from the climax of the Boer War through the World War into the present Depression. This is no merely private life, for one sees it always against the pageant or cavalcade of the nation's destiny. At the outset, England is staggering under the first blow to her imperial prestige. At the close this mood is strangely altered. In the opinion of the producers at Hollywood, apparently, it has given way to despair. From time to time a ghostly cavalcade flits across the silver screen, arrayed in medieval armor and with banners flying, yet going always down hill.

Neither Mr. Coward's text nor the demeanor of the very able company warrants this symbolism. The nineteenth century mood becomes chastened but there is an ever-growing suggestion of a thing worthy, more than worthy, to take its place. In the final scene the Master and Mistress of the household have lost both sons and are financially with the rest of us; the years of peril and bereavement have left them haggard and white-haired. But they have achieved a humor which, though wistful, is deeply felt and tinged with courage of the spirit. "What toast

Then he adds, raising his glass, "The Future of England." To see in the oncoming years only what the past has brought, the same old friend, may be original; it certainly is not gay—and as certainly it is brave. In her answering toast the wife clothes the thought with simple eloquence. "Let's drink to the spirit of gallantry and courage that made a strange Heaven out of unbelievable Hell; and let's drink to the hope that one day this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and grace and peace again." It is indeed a strange Heaven in which there is no thought of being top-dog or dog of any kind, but only the pride and the courage which are of the spirit. A nation that is panoplied in that, can scarcely be represented as marching down hill.

It is quite possible that "Cavalcade" will surpass "Design for Living" in appeal to the public. That as an artistic achievement it is far finer and higher is scarcely open to doubt. It is one thing, perhaps not a bad thing, to extract pain from the heart with a laugh; it is another and far better thing to transmute it into fortitude.

From the emotional shrieking of "The Vortex" and "Post Mortem" it is a far cry to the easy self-control of "Private Lives" and "Design for Living"; yet as the one mood is native in Mr. Coward so the other has become strong. In "Cavalcade" he has combined them and fused them. The result is not satire. It can scarcely be called tragedy, though it has the true katharsis. Whatever it is, it is as thoroughly in the modern English manner as the humorous diatribes of Bernard Shaw and Evelyn Waugh, more thoroughly so than Mr. Coward's own rather empty whimsicalities. That "Cavalcade" was acclaimed in London by multitudes of all sorts gives us a new sense of the British mood. That it bids fair to exert a similar spell here, in spite of the humbler medium in which it is cast, would seem to indicate that our public is capable of a fare more stimulating than our own playwrights have proffered of late.

The British Scene

JUST THE OTHER DAY. By JOHN COLLIER and IAIN LANG. New York: Harper & Bros. 1933. \$3.

Reviewed by AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS

CAN you imagine disliking the human race so much that you made a young female chimpanzee the heroine of your novel, and then set out to spend a happy year or so writing a contemporary history solely calculated to show up *homo sapiens*? I can well imagine it, though I don't feel like that by any means (and besides, where would I go? For unfortunately I read a book by a zoölogist, one S. Zuckerman, which showed up chimps!). But Mr. John Collier feels like that and wrote "His Monkey Wife" to say so. He doesn't even seem to wish he did like the human race.

A first edition fancier has been compiling a bibliography of his work to which this author has contributed a preface. "I

feels to speak their minds. Yet though it may seem quieter, that is not to say that it is really tamer. No one who has studied the English scene during the years since the war can fail to be struck by the book's remarkable power of getting right in on the inside, while on the other hand a reader who had not studied the events described could hardly fail to be amused and instructed. Indeed it would hardly be too much to say that this is the perfect book for the American reader who wants to know about England, if that reader will just bear in mind Mr. Collier's general attitude to the race of animals of which he is an unwilling member!

Then one more caveat. Mr. Collier, like every other creature, has not only genera and species but can be further classified. He is not only a man, he is a gentleman, a member of a cultivated section of the British bourgeoisie. And it will dawn upon the reader who is at all aware of class, that when he speaks, as he does re-



GRAND OLD MEN, STILL LIVING "JUST THE OTHER DAY."
Photograph of Thomas Hardy and Sir Edmund Gosse, reproduced from "Fifty Years" (Dial).

cannot see much good in the world," Mr. Collier writes, "nor much likelihood of good. There seems to me to be a definite bias in human nature towards ill . . ." and so on—all of which might have been induced by a contemplation of the abhorred dexterity of first edition fans, and seems to me in that case to be fair comment. The larger question is this: need the color run—as it does in his history—all over the rest of us who are not F. E. F.'s? Do all seemingly things made by men—streets, domes, theatres, and temples—lie? Is the life of man a general mist of errors?

Now I am not prepared to concede this point to Mr. Collier, though I didn't much care about the war either, and though I quite agree with him about the smash the British Labor Party has come. But what I do say is this, if this point of view is tempered by a slightly less gas-oven mooded collaborator (I attribute a slight mitigation in sense of woe to Mr. Iain Lang, his co-author), then it rather seems that, suppose it coexists with literary light-handedness, it's a very good frame of mind for a contemporary historian. For no doubt this book is good.

In language that is in the main grave, and in a mood of unbiassed malice, Mr. Collier gives his reader the dirt and the low down as far as the laws of libel admit. The reader is given to understand (in its generous and modest preface) that the book is intended as a companion volume to "Only Yesterday," in which Mr. F. L. Allen so successfully surveyed the American scene. On the whole not quite so spectacular nor so statistical. For one thing, the events to be chronicled are on a more modest scale, and call for a more, shall we say loving, and intimate touch from the satirist; for another, the law of libel in England often makes it difficult for English writers who feel as Mr. Collier

peatedly, of "Mr. and Mrs. Everyman" he does not mean the majority of his countrymen and women at all. He does not mean the man of the pick and lamp, of the Goliath Stoker, of the pneumatic rivetter, of plough, of oil-can and cotton-waste, nor does he mean the woman of loom, bench, or washtub. Like most of his class and kind he knows nothing of the mass of the workers. He thinks (as they nearly all do), when he considers "Mr. and Mrs. Everyman," of the girl behind the counter or the typewriter, and of a funny little man with a season ticket and a lawn mower, and he has never got it into his head that even in England these people, the black-coated workers, though they are numerous, and though they do not belong to Mr. Collier's class, are yet for all that not the people, no, nor one-tenth of the people. They are as far removed in taste and culture and ethic from the main body of the workers as they are from that of the cultivated section of the ruling class to which these authors belong.

However, Mr. Collier and his colleague are by no means singular in their failure to observe the workers or to see that they, too, have their point of view in the problems of the hour, so the reader must not neglect this book in hopes of a better! As for Mr. Collier's pessimism, the pessimism of so many intelligent people today—is it possible that this curious inability to perceive the majority of the human race is responsible for it? Who knows? If and when these melancholy ones do see that the workers exist, they may find that it is in a world seen from the point of view of their needs that they can find balm for their unhappiness, and thus be willing to abandon the company of the arboreal members of the family of Primates.

Buchmanism

FOR SINNERS ONLY, THE BOOK OF THE OXFORD GROUPS. By A. J. Russell. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1932. \$1.50.

Reviewed by ALBERT CLARKE WYCKOFF

THIS book claims the unique distinction of being directly inspired by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even down to the exact words of its title. As though this were not enough to keep properly subdued any presumptuous reviewer, there is added a whole chapter entitled, "The Stung Conscience." Over its portal in large flaming letters there appears this sign: "Beware of the Stung Conscience." It warns that the stung conscience is the first cause which motivates one to criticize a "deeply spiritual movement like the Oxford Groups." Here is a characteristic statement: "The chief opposition to the Oxford Group still comes . . . from those whose consciences



FRANK BUCHMAN.

are stung." My predicament, as one who happens to work in the field of psychology, is increased by the unfortunate coincidence that the two most notorious offenders caught in the "stung conscience" class are those who criticized the proceedings of the movement upon psychological grounds. One had to leave town within two weeks because of his conduct, the other finally broke down and confessed his secret sins, and "admitted that he was the fraud, not the Group." Such an instinctive fear of the psychologist seems to haunt Mr. Russell that he takes the defensive precaution to introduce a chapter entitled, "An Oxford Psychologist Speaks," who, upon investigation, turns out to be a Professor of Philosophy. Because of this peculiarly delicate situation, for my own protection, and to avoid any suspicion of irreverence toward the Holy Spirit, who is so familiarly treated in these pages, I shall quote the exact words of the author when presenting important points.

When, as an unregenerate English journalist, Mr. Russell first approached Dr. Buchman about running a series of articles on the Oxford Group in his newspaper, he was promptly refused permission. The principal reason is thus given:

Further—and here he threw a bomb at me—the Holy Spirit's guidance was against encouraging me to write or organize the publication of anything about the Oxford Group until I myself was spiritually ready for the task.

Then follows in several chapters the story of how he experienced the miracle of the "changed life" which eventually qualified him to write "The Book of the Oxford Groups." The chapters entitled, respectively, "The Voice from the Blue," "The Three Troubadours," "Sex and Money," "A Journalist's Strangest Journey," and "Guidance at Work," furnish the details, and provide the supernatural, mystical atmosphere which pervades the whole book.

The leaders of the Group hold the firm conviction that "not a man, but the Holy Spirit" founded this movement. His "Human Engineer" was the Rev. Frank N. D. Buchman, D.D., an American Lutheran minister, ex-Y. M. C. A. Secretary, and

the present executive head of the work. From him it derived its original name, Buchmanism, by which it was known for many years until recently, when, as some one said, "it went collegiate" and rechristened itself The Oxford Group. This new name has won instant popular acceptance. It possesses the exact psychological quality of social tone and intellectual atmosphere to appeal to the class its leaders are out to reach.

Our author very correctly insists that "no one will ever understand this movement who does not accept as a working hypothesis" the group's belief in the Holy Spirit's special guidance of Dr. Buchman. He italicizes the following statement: "Frank is a child listening to God and obeying Him implicitly." In another place we read: "It is impossible to understand Frank at all unless he is thought of as always in God's presence, listening for direction and accepting power." Again and again we come upon remarks like this: "Frank is the most absolutely surrendered, completely guided, perfectly disciplined man I have ever known." And, "whatever he does he feels must be right, since he is doing what is the guided thing for him to do." And, "Frank sees both sides of a subject, right through a man, and all round the earth." The amazing fact about these claims is that Dr. Buchman not only accepts this spiritual distinction, but supports it by special claims of his own, and exercises the authority which it naturally confers upon him. Here is one statement:

But that day I found the secret of true education. The Holy Spirit is the Light, the Guide, the Teacher, the Power. What I am able to do I do through the power that comes in the early hour of the morning quiet, waiting and watching for the voice of the Living God to break through the shadows of the night.

This idealizing of Dr. Buchman as *The Holy Spirit-Guided man* elevates him to the level of a spiritual superman. The only thing that saves this movement from turning into a super-belief cult organized around him as its Divine founder and prophet, is the character of its leaders and constituency. They are healthy, wholesome, for the most part, young. They are well-stabilized by education, social culture, world travel, recreational activities, a keen sense of humor, love of a good time, shrewd, practical common sense, and normal church affiliations; and the informal, intimate, friendly, democratic spirit which prevails among them. There are no Holy Orders, no specially consecrated priests or preachers. Their confessional is the group. "Sharing" one's sins with the group, automatically guarantees forgiveness and absolution. At least, the sense of guilt and uncertainty about forgiveness do not present any problems. They have no need for the prophet or preacher of "The Word," for their "Thus Saith the Lord" comes to each one personally through the Spirit's guidance in the quiet hour. And is recorded in a "Listening in" notebook, which constitutes a private little bible containing for its possessor the only "infallible rule for faith and practice."

Our author next presents the great objective of the movement. It is:

To found a new community of saints, always ready to be fools for Christ, al-

ways careless and carefree in an age of blank and blind materialism. To call together an interdenominational band of lay friars, Spirit-guided and controlled, who would roam the world with no visible means of income, living on God's manna as God's warriors, while outliving, outloving, outlaughing all in a glorious crusade to redeem the world from the thousand enticements of sin in a luxury loving, security seeking, sensual civilization.

Here we find described an exotic social organization. Similar ones have appeared periodically in religious history. Let us symbolize it under a Biblical idea. This mystical direct-Holy-Spirit-Guidance-belief, as above described, is religious wine of ancient vintage. It has been fermenting and seasoning since the days of primitive religion. It is a heady, highly intoxicating religious stimulant with a real kick in it. That it is dangerous stuff with which to trifle, no one with historical knowledge of religion will deny. It has been responsible for the ruinous religious sprees of many earnest individuals and groups. Like all highly intoxicating stimulants it has the power to relax one's natural reserve defensive mechanisms. So it opens the way to readily established new chummy intimacies, increased communicativeness, personal confidences, and confessions. Whenever you notice these reserve mechanisms unduly relaxed, you always find stimulants at work. This fact of itself is no condemnation of the belief. For stimulants have their place in the religious pharmacopoeia. Yet it should be remembered that such stimulants are always to be administered as medicine, never as healthful beverages or food. They have emergency, restorative value.

Mr. Russell advertises on every page that the Oxford Group specializes in this old, highly intoxicating religious wine. And the remarkable results which they get from its use are attracting the attention of the Church and the world. Secret sins are openly confessed, weakened moral and spiritual natures are revived and strengthened, lives, from parsons to prodigals, are changed. This practical contribution to the psychological and social world is of great value. The original genius of the movement, however, is not the power to change lives. Religion has been doing this through all ages. The new features are the social and intellectual strata it has selected for its field of work, and the unusual social-group unit it employs. It works among the young, healthy-minded, educated, athletic, students in our universities and colleges, and the adults who are socially and economically well established. The "up and out," as they say, instead of the "down and out," as is usual. One reporter remarked: "It is the Salvation Army gone high hat."

The psychological strategy by which this class is intrigued is the house party. This is an original, modern way of merchandizing this ancient religious belief. It is putting the old wine into new bottles. Not a trace of the old bottles remains. The language labels all have been changed. No pious or traditional phraseology is used, but modern slang and gripping words. The house party is far removed from a formal Church service, a prayer meeting, a rescue mission. It furnishes a luxurious home or hotel, and guarantees only socially superior guest companions. It is exclusive, while the Church is inclusive. It promises fun and a good time. All this is different. By its new idea of "sharing" it has wrought a subtle psychological

change in the quality of the traditional experience of confession of sin. Instead of the overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, unworthiness, there is experienced a feeling of exhilaration, of courage in confessing, of heroic self-disclosure.

The last department in this new merchandizing enterprise to be modernized is its salesmen. How different these new "lay friars" from the traditional priest or preacher! We will let Mr. Russell describe the three men who were sent to make contact with him. They are typical. He says:

My three callers were . . . (two) sons of bishops, and . . . a bronzed and athletic young Quaker. . . . Three exceedingly likable young men, smartly dressed and radiating good feeling, kindness and self-possession. . . . Evidently Frank knew how to choose men.

These attractive, informal, friendly contact men remove the last barrier which might separate them from the group by insisting upon being called by their Christian names. So we know them as Frank, Bob, Rip, Garrett, Cleve, Sherry, Sam, Bill; a Rotary Club idea.

One of the most puzzling features of this "new community of saints" is its daring adventure to live without fixed incomes by faith and prayer. This is an oversimplification of what actually takes place. When "Frank" wants money he does pray for it. But this is not all. He establishes and cultivates carefully selected contacts with distinguished and wealthy people. He invites them to his public exhibitions; he not only won one English journalist, but he gets unusual newspaper publicity. He features the wealthy and prominent upon all occasions. He teaches the stewardship of and "sharing" of material possessions. The great majority of those associated with the movement are economically secure. He makes the group the economic unit, instead of the individual or family. And he keeps the financial structure of this unicellular organism protoplasmic enough to be able to call the resources of the whole to the help of any needy member. And when he asks for support and does not get it, Mr. Russell tells us, he can write a very "stiff" letter of rebuke and warning.

When one attempts to evaluate this movement, as our author presents it, its inception, growth, beliefs, present popularity and power, its strong leaders, its high class and eminent constituency, and its entirely original method of group functioning, we are forced to acknowledge that it is one of the most extraordinary religious movements of modern times. And its founder and executive head possesses to a remarkable degree, originality, courage, intellectual imagination, psychological alertness, a magnetic personality, great executive ability, a character above reproach, and exceptional religious faith.

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"Whatever else he was," says the London Observer, "Professor Saintsbury was encyclopaedic. It was popularly believed that no one had read, or remembered, so much in the way of literature. I believe, he once said, I have read nearly all the printed stock of English verse before 1600, and I know that I have read every poet of the slightest repute since that date, and a great number of poets who neither have nor deserve any."

"Saintsbury was not an O.M.—many people wondered why—but Galsworthy was, and had, in addition, quite a narrow escape from becoming a knight. His name actually appeared in the Honors List of 1918, but it was explained afterwards that the letter declining the honor had been delayed. Among others living today who have taken the same decision are J. M. Barrie (though he accepted a baronetcy later) and General Smuts."

An English journal asks: "Was it William James who tracked through the course of history the consequences of the act of the small boy who threw a stone at Socrates? We find something of the same largeness of view in the case of the lady who, in a lecture at Barcelona last week, discussed the influence of Sir Walter Scott on the movement for an independent Catalonia."



OXFORD, THE BACKGROUND OF "THE GROUP."