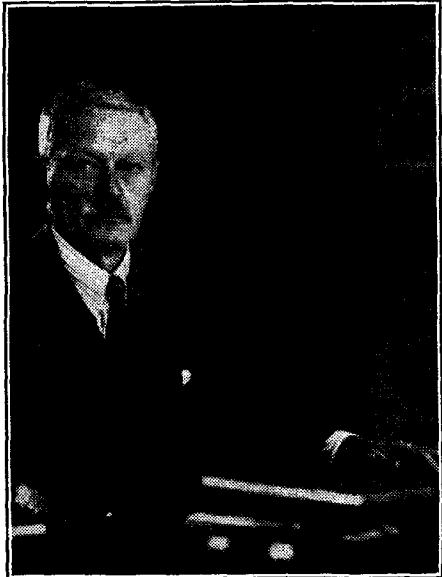


## As We Are—But Are We

AS WE ARE. A Modern Revue. By E. F. BENSON. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1932. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

IT is doubtful whether any psychologist has yet allowed or accounted for what is surely the most significant mental phenomenon of our times—the extraordinary susceptibility of the modern mind to mass suggestion. Once we see a thing in print, particularly if it is repeated often enough, we come to believe in it against the evidence of our senses. We allow our authors and journalists to create a world of their own which we complacently accept, and which, if we are authors or journalists ourselves, we describe, in all good faith, as if it really existed. It is only the striking, the grotesque, the abnormal, that has publicity value, and it is such stuff that



E. F. BENSON.

our dream world is made on. But a dream world has this disadvantage to its inhabitants, that sooner or later they will be brought up with a disconcerting bump against the hard facts of life.

These reflections are suggested by the sequel that Mr. E. F. Benson has written to that delightful Victorian Peepshow of his that was entitled "As We Were." The new volume, "As We Are," sets out to describe a period extending from just before the war down to our own day. The book is divided into two parts that differ as much in method as, I venture to suggest, in merit. In the last three chapters Mr. Benson writes, as he did in his last book, about people and things of which he has positive knowledge, and about which he is attempting to say no more than he positively knows. His portraits of Mr. Balfour, of Archbishop Davidson, of Sir Ernest Cassel, of Sir Edgar Speyer, are not only delightful to read, but are contributions to history of the highest value. His account, by no means flattering, of recent developments in literature, is as stimulating a piece of criticism as we should naturally expect from one who was already a novelist of note in the nineties, and to whom years have brought no diminution of vigor. And the almost unrelieved pessimism of his final chapter, in which he takes stock of the present situation, must surely command our respect, if not necessarily our agreement.

But for the rest of the chapters, ten out of thirteen, Mr. Benson is experimenting with a new and different method. So anxious is he to depict in the most vivid colors the changes that have taken place since pre-war days, that he abandons the safe path of the historian, and peoples his stage with frankly imaginary characters. He takes a great country mansion, that he calls the Parable House, and proceeds to trace the fortunes of its inmates and of those intimately connected with them. But a parable house, and still more a parable family, are dangerous things for the historian to start creating. For it is the nature of parables not to deal with real people or things, but with types. And to be of any historical value, the types must be in the fullest sense typical. If Mr. Benson was writing a novel, it would be open to him to select the most exceptional

characters, and present them in the most unique circumstances he could conjure up. It is no criticism of "Dodo" to say that the heroine is not a typical woman of the nineties. But it is an entirely legitimate criticism of Mr. Benson's parable puppets that they are not normal but newspaper types, that they are, in fact, just such striking abnormalities as make excellent copy and—let us concede at once—excellent reading.

What is the truth, or theory, that Mr. Benson's parable is written to elucidate? It is twofold. First, he wishes to show how utterly the old order of semi-feudal country-house society, that flourished before the war, has been swept away by the growth of taxation and democratic sentiment. Secondly, he is—if one may put it without offence—obsessed with the pretensions and triumph of an intensely self-conscious Youth, spelt with the biggest of Y's, and inspired by what may be best described as the cocktail spirit.

To take first the case of the landed gentry—it is common knowledge that the owners of English estates, both small and large, have been hard put to it to make ends meet, that many big houses have been converted into clubs and institutions, and that the old easy standards of pre-war life are no longer approached except by a few very rich people whose incomes have been derived from business or speculation. All this is the merest commonplace—what is the really remarkable thing, and the point we should expect an observer as acute as Mr. Benson to bring out, is the extraordinary, in fact unique, extent to which the influence and prestige of the landed gentry has survived the hardest of their hard times. For such trials were no new experience to post-war landowners. In the great agricultural depression that covered the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it is estimated that the value of landed estates declined by no less than fifty per cent. All over the country the land had been passing from the families that had held it for centuries, into the hands of *nouveaux riches* without any of the old traditions. And yet these new owners—and still more their sons, whose characters were formed in the public school mold—did succeed, to an amazing extent, in securing the acquiescence, and even the loyalty, of the folk whose wages they paid, whose shops they patronized, and whose sport they financed. The evidence of election figures is overwhelming. In this year, 1932, the country districts, under a universal franchise, are more solidly Tory than in the days of the Rotten Boroughs and the Cavalier Parliament; they are represented everywhere by the local gentry or their nominees; in no single rural constituency did the Labor candidate stand even a dog's chance of getting in.

These facts, though they are not those on which the journalist chooses to lay emphasis, must be perfectly well known to Mr. Benson. But unfortunately they are not those which the parable is supposed to illustrate, and hence they have to be kept carefully out of sight.

The fact is that our author is not writing history but writing up a theory, a theory that has a certain substratum of truth, but is not the whole truth or even the most essential part of it.

I suppose it would be too much to expect any book on modern life not to make full play with the youth-knocking-at-the-door stunt, which may be described as the greatest journalese ramp ever foisted on the public. The historian of the future will, no doubt, be able to produce reams of contemporary evidence to prove that all the young people who grew up during or after the war are, or were, inspired by a sort of class animus against their elders—mainly on account of their alleged responsibility for the war—and determined to vindicate their freedom by an entire absence of moral restraint. The English youths of the post-war period will go down, we fear, to posterity, as effeminate masters, and the corresponding girls as gin-sodden, foul-mouthed, and sexually promiscuous.

One can only speak for oneself, but I must confess that I have been living in England ever since the war without hav-

ing once had the doubtful pleasure of meeting a young person remotely corresponding to those from whom one can never get away in books or papers. As for cocktail drinking, I seriously doubt whether, in the up-to-date little town in which I live, there are as many as three houses in which one could be procured—I only know of one for certain. There is indeed a small and noisy clique of plutocrats and their hangers on who have succeeded, by strenuous efforts, in attracting to themselves almost the whole of the limelight. We had them with us before the war, before they had learned to call themselves Bright Young Things, and their antics were every bit as vulgar and vapid as now.

Mr. Benson no doubt could, if he had stuck to his role of historian, have given us a fascinating account of this diseased excrescence on the social system. But instead he takes up his unfortunate parable as if the whole youth of England were infected.

All the great majority of modest, well-mannered young people that one meets everywhere today might never have existed at all so far as Mr. Benson's parable is concerned.

If only Mr. Benson had not hit on this unfortunate device of a story that is neither history nor straightforward fiction, and had fashioned his first ten chapters on the model of his last three, how immeasurably this book would have gained in value as a chronicle of the time! Even as it is, with all its faults of distortion and exaggeration, it makes excellent reading, and if it is not exactly history, it is no doubt what will pass for history at some future day.

## The Seeing Eye

LANCES DOWN. By RICHARD BOLES-LAVSKI in collaboration with HELEN WOODWARD. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1932. \$3.

THE new book by the author of "Way of a Lancer" takes up his story at the moment of his arrival in Moscow in the autumn of 1917, just after his wild experiences following the collapse of the Russian front and on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. Boleslavski was even more rootless and adrift than most of those about him in that crazy time. He was Russian and yet not Russian, for he had been fighting both for his Emperor and for the Poland still to be. As a man and an artist—he was a devoted member of the Moscow Art Theatre group—he saw no definite right or wrong in the catchwords and furious prejudices and hates of either the White or Red camps. The greater part of his narrative, which purports to be autobiographical, consists in the impressions of such a relatively detached participant during the dozen or so days of fighting which ended with the crushing of White resistance and the beginnings of Red Moscow.

One says "purports to be autobiographical," for the reason that while the story is told in the first person and consists of incidents in which the author doubtless had a part, its various episodes are so dramatized and so elaborated with dialogues—which, in the nature of things, could not have been reported accurately—that it must be read almost as if it were fiction; artistically true, perhaps, but not literally so. As the story proceeds, this subjective quality increases, and we finally run into wholly personal meditations on the "Russian soul," on that mystical Bear, which cares nothing either for White or Red, or words of any sort, but "stands on its hind legs and looks centuries ahead . . . as it stood three hundred years ago, before the Romanovs came," waiting its time, "listening for the spring."

Although we can not, therefore, look on these vivid chapters as "history," even in the relative sense in which such a book as John Reed's "Ten Days That Shook The World" may be regarded as history, they may very well give the long-distance reader just about as real a notion of what life was like in Moscow then as Reed's gave of the corresponding period in Petrograd. For Boleslavski actually was on the spot, and has sensitiveness and the

seeing eye, however he may always remain the man of the theatre.

In addition to his pictures of street fighting, of the various types that peopled that transition scene, of the hatred and horror and spiritual bewilderment of that earthquake in which the whole upper level of a seemingly solid society crashed down while the under levels heaved up to take its place, Boleslavski gives an inside story of what Bolshevism meant to the Moscow Art Theatre, and, by implication, to art, in general, in the "bourgeois" sense of the word.

Suddenly the old stage situations refused to "jell"; people weren't interested in the woes of lovely heroines, in the moods and whims of individuals. A play had to show which "side" it was on; general forces took the place of personalities, and generalizations had to be heaped on generalizations, all leading to the "right" end. Chekov made one uncomfortable with his intimate detail; Tchaikovsky irritated with his "bourgeois whining" (although such shifts in point of view scarcely came in those first few days), and audiences demanded the sweep of mass-forces driving toward some definite goal.

In an epilogue, consisting of supposed extracts from the letters of a friend who stayed in Russia and made his life over again to fit the ideology of the new order, we have the experience of many who "died," in one sense or another, so far as their old existence was concerned, to find footing, nevertheless, in a new world.

Alec's is the case of a man who gives up "things" completely; scraps money, and all those "bourgeois" values based on knowing the right sort of people, living in the right sort of neighborhood, and so on, finds harmony and hope in a spiritual oneness with earth, sun, wind, and rain; in the fundamental passions and aspirations of the "unspoiled" primitive man. It didn't mean savagery in Alec's case any more than it did in Thoreau's. Although he was still too much a product of the old order to march shoulder to shoulder with the new crowd, his old values were nevertheless so shaken that he deliberately set about to build a new life based on realities as unquestionable as those from which a tree, let us say, draws its strength. In other words, he seems to have retired to the country and to a life which, on its physical side, was that of the simplest peasant, but which, through his children and the children of the neighboring peasants, and the simple lessons and sound steering he, as a civilized human being, could give them, brought him a new and solid spiritual satisfaction.

Every "bourgeois" flat-dweller who likes to go picnicing, touches now and then the skirts of this conception of life. Every farmer who farms, not merely to acquire the things that city wage-earners buy with their wages, but because he prefers growing crops as a way of life, more or less follows it. Russia is a good place in which to practice it nowadays, because everybody has been forced to give up "things," and simplicity is fashionable. The real test of this neo-pioneerism will come, doubtless, when all the dams and power-plants have been built, all the tractors bought, when the home market has been supplied, and the Russians begin to acquire a surplus of leisure and of things, in spite of themselves.

## The Saturday Review of Literature

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## East of Suez

CHINA: THE PITY OF IT. By J. O. P. BLAND. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1932.

Reviewed by HENRY KITTREDGE NORTON

WHEN one sees the name of J. O. P. Bland gracing the cover of a new volume on China, one may be sure of several things. The author has something to say; it will be said skilfully and forcefully; and there will be no wishy-washy sentimentality about it. Mr. Bland has known his China for a third of a century and he is convinced that if that unhappy country has moved at all in the last three decades, it has moved backwards.

Without relieving the Chinese of their share of the responsibility in the premises, the half-baked liberalism of the West—by which is meant Great Britain and the United States for the most part—is found to be the chief cause of expanding disaster in China. What we should do is “to desist from experiments in political idealism and to apply measures of a practical humanitarianism, with a view to putting an end to the long-drawn sufferings of the Chinese people.” If we would but display “more concern for their unhappy fate and less for the vain doctrines of racial equality and ineffective sovereignty,” there might be some hope of extricating China from the mire.

The Washington Conference was the fatal turning-point. The purport of the treaties signed there was to proclaim “America’s intention to establish a moral guardianship over China and, by virtue thereof, to challenge Japan’s position of ascendancy in Manchuria and Mongolia.” This policy, Mr. Bland holds, could only hope to succeed if the young Chinese could establish a responsible government along modern lines in their country.

There is no news in Mr. Bland’s conclusion that they have not done so. There is room for argument in his further conclusion that they never can. Yet he makes a strong case. He reemphasizes the fact that the dominant loyalty of a Chinese is to his family and that thus far few have been able to substitute a larger social unit. The country suffers therefore from the activities of its officials, and in this respect the author rates the politicians of the Nanking and Canton groups no higher than the members of the old mandarinat. Like their predecessors, they have always been ready to sell their country’s interest to foster their own.

The author takes the missionaries and their efforts severely to task. They have been undermining the nation’s reverence for those things which have given stability and harmony to her civilization. This they have done when they might have been giving steadying guidance through a difficult period.

Of even greater import in the disruption of China is what Mr. Bland sarcastically terms the “F. O. School of Thought.” The Foreign Office, he finds, has been unduly swayed in the shaping of its policy by such incorrigible liberals as Mr. Lionel Curtis and the other “earnest busybodies” of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Institute of Pacific Relations. As contrasted with Mr. Curtis, it is hardly necessary to add that Mr. Bland is of those who are convinced of England’s divine right to govern other peoples of the world. In his own words, “The British type of civilization will probably continue to be the best type evolved by the nations of the Western world.” Doubtless it is this conviction which makes him hesitate as much as he does about commending Japan’s activities in Manchuria. His argument on that score is not so much a plea for Japan as a plea for imperialism in general.

Mr. Bland’s remedies for the distressing situation which exists proceed naturally from his premises. As to method he would return to the old reliable application of force. What China most needs, Mr. Bland is convinced, is ten years of uninterrupted peace and security. This, he is equally convinced, she cannot possibly achieve without assistance from outside. The

powers therefore owe it to the oppressed Chinese people to abandon their formula of non-interference and to recognize that the doctrine of self-determination is inapplicable to a people which is manifestly incapable of self-government. He would have the powers formally notify the Nanking government and the provincial war lords that the railways of central China shall henceforth be neutral zones from which all military adventurers and other freebooters will be excluded. He opines that this would not take a large force and that the expenses of the operation could easily be met out of the profits of the railways under an honest foreign administration. In fact, these profits will be sufficiently large to pay not only the expenses of the actual operation, but the funds necessary to buy off the war lords and, in addition, to purchase the authorization of the central authority! Nay, there would still remain a surplus with which the foreign administrators would be able to purchase the “allegiance” of the so-called “Communists.”

The pity of it is that practically every-

injustice of publishing at the very end of the year a book on Manchuria which was apparently written in the Spring without an opportunity for revision. Many of Mr. Hutchinson’s imponderables have in the meantime become facts; many of his uncertainties have been settled.

Paul Hutchinson knows his Asia and has conclusive opinions concerning it. He undoubtedly, like most Americans, knows China better than Japan or India, but he is equally positive in his opinions about all these countries. A Christian, a liberal, a missionary, and a journalist, he brings to his subject what one likes to call a humanitarian point of view which too often becomes more judicial than descriptive, more moralistic than political.

The essential of the struggle between Asia and Europe is race. Many problems which appear obviously political or economic are essentially racial. Mr. Hutchinson lived in Asia during the crucial war years, when Asiatic youth began asserting its right to racial equality; he witnessed the first efforts to find a road to emancipation from “white” superiority. He has since seen this tendency take on curious forms in Japan, China, and India. These he seeks to understand and to discuss, sometimes without bias and partiality, some-

led him to realize that the Twenty-one Demands vary only in degree from the general imperialistic program of the Powers in China. Prior to 1915, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia had forced upon China non-alienation agreements, regional understandings, advisership clauses, concessions, etc., which differed from the Japanese group only in the fact that they were spread over a long period, even often imposed by actual warfare and seizure of territory instead of the threat of force, and many of them were made effective while the Japanese failed. The “white” man managed to get away with the booty; why should not the Japanese? It has been a constant source of surprise to the Japanese that they may not be as immoral as the Western Powers. They never have been able to understand this double standard.

Again, Mr. Hutchinson says:

The nationalism of the Nanking government had, as a major part of its program, the securing for China of tariff autonomy, with the subsequent erection of protective tariff walls and the encouragement behind these walls of Chinese industries. These policies proved, in actual working out, more inimical to the great textile industries of Japan than to any other foreign interests operating in the Chinese market. It was, therefore, the very commercial interests in Japan that had encouraged the establishment of the Shidehara policy of friendly cooperation with China that seemed to suffer most from the operations of that policy. Naturally, commercial support became more and more uncertain.

Now, this is exactly wrong. I had something to do with this matter—obliquely and indirectly, of course. As a matter of fact, Japan has been investing steadily in the textile industry of China until there was more Japanese than Chinese money in this industry. The Japanese textile interests in China were not opposed to tariff autonomy, which was finally arranged by a treaty between China and Japan. The Japanese problem was more complicated than that of any other the varieties of goods in the two countries and assistance upon an actual.

It is not accurate, however, to suggest that the opposition arose from the Japanese textile interest, for they had invested about \$200,000,000 in China to meet this particular prospect.

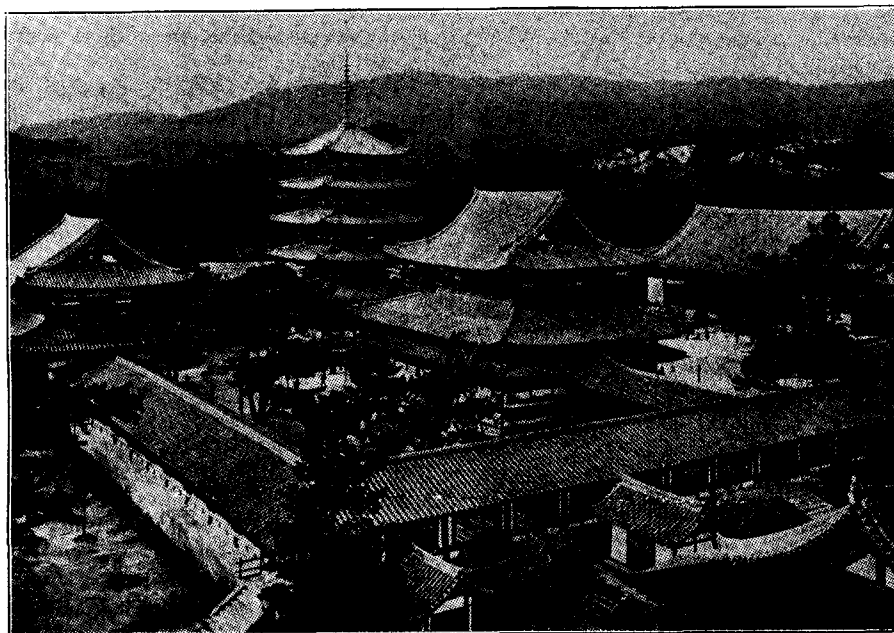
Mr. Hutchinson’s book has the specific value of presenting the liberal Christian reaction to Asia. He is often alarmist, as for instance when he says:

If the military clique continues to hold Japanese policy in China on the strong-arm line, there will come open and avowed war. And it is very unlikely that this war, when it comes, will be confined to the two first antagonists.

Nearly a year and a half has passed since September 18, 1931, and there is no world war in the offing. As a matter of fact, there is less danger of an extension of the Manchurian trouble today than there was when Mr. Hutchinson wrote his book. Whereas at that time, there was an agitation for the punishment of Japan, today all efforts are in the direction of reconciliation between the contestants. The Lytton Report has had the sedative effect of indicating that a simple solution for so complex a problem is not reasonable, that there are so many sides to it that only conciliation offers hope of bringing it to an end.

Mr. Hutchinson’s judgments on so many questions are so sound that it is almost certain that had he revised his manuscript in the face of the new data appearing between August and the publication date, he would not have erred in the direction of a possibility of world war. It is unfortunate that publication of his book was delayed. Yet, in the literature of this subject it will find a notable place because it is an honest expression of opinion growing out of personal relations with the countries discussed.

George E. Sokolsky, who is the New York Times expert on the Far East and has been intimately connected with affairs in China during a long residence there, is the author of one of the most illuminating of recent books on the Orient, “The Tinder Box of Asia.”



THE ORIENT THAT ANTEDATED FOREIGN ENTANGLEMENTS.

thing that Mr. Bland says is true, yet these truths hurtle against one of the overwhelming imponderables of the present age. It may be, as he says, that “many of the Bible Belt’s ideas on political economy still emanate from an undigested Pentateuch.” Nevertheless, that spirit, manifesting itself in such “liberal” expressions as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Institute of Pacific Relations, and Mr. Lionel Curtis himself, is as ineradicable a fact in our time as the “immortality” of Mr. Bland’s China. Even if China herself remained unchanging, China’s relations with the outside world and the relations of the Powers with China cannot be the same in the twentieth century as they were in the nineteenth. Such continuity will only be possible when the civilization of the whole world has become as “static” as Mr. Bland conceives the civilization of China to be.

Henry Kittredge Norton was at one time lecturer in Tsing Hua College, Peking, and has held positions in various international conferences. He is the author of “China and the Powers” as well as several other volumes.

STORM OVER ASIA. By PAUL HUTCHINSON. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1932. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE E. SOKOLSKY

JOURNALISTIC books on the Far East tend to date, no matter what an author may do to forecast events, to avoid the details of the moment for the broader tendencies into which any events should fit. But these events do not too often occur so as to suit the prophetic journalist. They have a way of marching off all on their own—much as a Chinese army marches when its commander holds the money bags too tightly. Mr. Hutchinson’s publishers have done him the grave

times with a sentimentalism which is characteristically American.

Few have stated Japan’s attitude toward China as keenly:

Japan has no enmity against China. That, I think, any dispassionate observer will concede. The tone adopted in the Japanese notes of 1931-32 to the United States and the League of Nations—that of undertaking a duty of correction more in sorrow than in anger—is not a cynical diplomatic pretense. It represents the actual feeling of most Japanese. They see in China a sprawling, helpless child-nation, her own worst enemy and, because of her helplessness, a constant temptation to the cupidity of the rest of the world. What China needs, as Japan sees the case, is discipline—someone to come in and whip her into shape. Because of the size of the problem, this may involve a measure of practical subjugation extending over years, or even generations. But this is all, in the long run, for China’s own good. It keeps the danger of further Western penetration of the East at bay. It delivers China from further despoliation at the hands of her own military freebooters. And it will so organize China’s potentialities that, when the period of tutelage is at an end, China will take her place easily and without dispute among the world powers. In the meanwhile, is not the tutor worthy of his hire?

Yet in the discussion of the details of relationship, Mr. Hutchinson seems often to deviate from the exact facts. For instance:

The Twenty-one Demands were, when taken as a whole, an unblushing attempt to establish a Japanese protectorate over China. Why it should have been dreamed that they could be presented—let alone secured—without utterly changing the relations between the two peoples it is impossible to understand. Yet many Japanese seem to have been honestly and profoundly surprised at the reaction which the Demands evoked in China.

Mr. Hutchinson’s studies should have