

Administrator, Harry L. Hopkins, has taken a realistic view of the appalling situation, has cast off all trivial clichés about the poor, and has acted with skill and promptness. With much justification, Mr. Hopkins may be called the most enlightened and realistic statesman in the whole administration at Washington, not excluding the President himself. However that may be, millions are being kept out of starvation by government intervention with "the natural course of things."

This relief practice based on the slogan that nobody shall starve is generally accepted, despite differences over methods. And it thrusts something new and portentous into the application of the idea that American society is a congeries of interests. Either the millions are to be kept from starving by excrescent institutions or they are to be absorbed into the congeries of interests by some radical adjustments not yet made or in sight. Bread and circuses are easier to manage for a time. Drastic readjustments in the productive system call for titanic energy and courage; they will be resisted at every step. The risks are great. No statesman likes to assume them as long as any other way seems open. Will coming history so narrow the choice as to make the decision appear inexorable? Past history cannot answer that question.

## A Handsome Tribute

BLISS, PEACEMAKER. *The Life and Letters of General Tasker H. Bliss.* By Frederick Palmer. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1934. \$3.75.

Reviewed by T. H. THOMAS

BY his peculiarly trusted and confidential relation to Secretary Baker, General Bliss was rather more of an insider than any American official of high rank. His own record of the development of American military policy in the war could have been an invaluable contribution toward clearing up what is still, after fifteen years, the most obscure and the most carefully masked and camouflaged aspect of the whole struggle. It would have been of the more weight because of the rather remarkable position General Bliss came to hold in the American world after the war. Few war-time figures have continued to grow so consistently in general esteem during the post-war years; and in no small degree this came about precisely because Bliss himself took no active hand in the process. He cast no yearning eyes upon the front page. Even when charged in print with having yielded to the wiles of the French and British in an effort to thwart Pershing's independent American army, Bliss did not trouble to speak out in self-defense. (On this point, Colonel Palmer's explanations seem unjustifiably timid and apologetic.)

General Bliss left no Memoirs and apparently kept no diary or journals; in an extreme period of historical self-expression he maintained loyally the discretion of his confidential official relations. For one reason or another Colonel Palmer has perpetuated this attitude, and with all Bliss's papers at his disposal the story they contain remains almost as unknown as before. In Palmer's biography of Secretary Baker, Pershing's sharp criticisms of the War Department were answered by counter-attacks which at least cast some light (for the first time) upon the real questions the Department was facing and the real attitudes of the leading American authorities. This brief glimpse of actualities has been promptly smothered. The sharp angles which are the essential features in Bliss's war record have been deftly smoothed and rounded; and in place of a biographical history Colonel Palmer has gratified all concerned with what in by-gone days was termed a handsome floral tribute.

One fact at least emerges from this disappointing method. From the moment of our declaration of war General Bliss's own conviction was that as large an American army as possible should be got into the war without delay. How or why this recommendation was rejected at the outset, the author does not make clear; his narrative even masks consistently the fact that it was ignored.

# The Creator of Karamazov

DOSTOEVSKY. By Avrahm Yarmolinsky. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1934. \$3.75.

DOSTOEVSKY. By Nicholas Berdyaev. New York: Sheed & Ward. 1934.

Reviewed by MANYA GORDON

STUDENTS of Russian literature will find Mr. Yarmolinsky's biography invaluable. Factually it is the last word on the subject. Not a thread of the available information seems to have escaped the attention of the author. The canvas emerging from Mr. Yarmolinsky's facts is not radically different from Mr. Carr's Dostoevsky, but it is ever so much deeper in color, and the lines are more sharply drawn. Every shade of Dostoevsky's subtle, complex, erotic, and contradictory psychology is in the portrait. The vast amount of personal detail adds a fictional aroma to the story, stressing at the same time the close relation between the great realist's personal life and his work. It reads like a Dostoevsky novel.

The fiftieth anniversary of the death of the novelist was commemorated in Europe and in the Russian press by a comprehensive discussion of his political philosophy. Mr. Yarmolinsky does not overlook Dostoevsky's political convictions but is more interested in his religious aspirations. However, Dostoevsky's religion was so thoroughly seasoned with politics that it is impossible to describe the one without revealing the other. But the dominant theme of the present volume is not politics. Against a pietistic background the creator of Karamazov appears more complex and contradictory than ever. The champion of the gospel of love and the sacredness of human life was himself a malevolent hater who detested Germans, French, Swiss, and Jews and abhorred Catholics. In fact, he thoroughly disliked everyone who was not of his own faith and hated those of his own countrymen who disagreed with him. His pacifism was largely a political gesture directed against the socialists and in defense of the monarchy. Russia's bloody activities in Poland he applauded. Dostoevsky would have welcomed a war for the conversion of Western Europe to the orthodox faith. In fact he considered the salvation of misguided Europe his country's duty. In his own person he made not the slightest effort to live according to the precepts of Christ. His Christianity was a political weapon against the revolutionaries and a defense mechanism.

Much has been written about Dostoevsky's prophetic vision as recently revealed in the catastrophic events in Russia. The present biographer concurs with this interpretation. As a matter of fact Dostoevsky's predictions are rather commonplace. They differ little from the prognosis of any other articulate, reactionary Slavophile of that period or any other. These monarchist prophets of evil saw every socialist effort in the struggle for freedom and economic betterment through the eyes of Nachaev, the hero of "The Possessed." The conditions Dostoevsky and his colleagues fought to preserve were not better than the worst evils of Bolshevism. They worshipped the reactionary Alexander III, and would have cringed before Ivan the Terrible. Autocracy, oppression, and persecution did not conflict with their conception of Chris-

tianity. Dostoevsky's only original contention—that after the overthrow of the monarchy and the triumph of materialism the intelligentsia would dominate the scene to the detriment of the masses—has failed to materialize. While the Russian intelligentsia was in power the people were free and ever so much happier than they had ever been. It was the destruction of the intelligentsia and Russia's return to despotism that ushered in the state of affairs foretold by Dostoevsky.

Dostoevsky's relations to the three women—his first wife, Pauline Suslova, and his second wife—are given in great detail, but the interpretation does not differ from

Carr's. In other words, Suslova's importance is minimized and Dostoevsky's happiness with the "dowdy," commonplace, "cheese-paring," semiliterate second wife, Anna, is exaggerated beyond the limits of reality. Granting the novelist's eroticism, he was aware that Anna was not pretty, was insincere, petty, and did not hesitate to tell his friends that she understood nothing of his business, his writings. He detested mediocrity, and Anna was its very embodiment.

Professor Berdyaev is not concerned with Dostoevsky's life or his personal history, and he is interested only in those of his writings which help to illuminate the author's philosophy of life, and his conception of "Christ, the God-man." In the nine essays in this little volume, Berdyaev endeavors to explain wherein Dostoevsky and Nietzsche saw eye to eye and wherein they differed. They both knew man is free and that "liberty is a tragic and grievous burden to him." But having abandoned humanism, Nietzsche turned toward the superman, the mad-god. Dostoevsky on the other hand fought the self-deification of man and found his ideal in Christ, the God-man.

In developing this philosophy the author is continually tripped up by Dostoevsky's life and contradictions. Thus, according to Dostoevsky, Belinsky, Nekrasov, Chernoshevsky, Turgenev, and all the other socialists and radicals who defended the masses were Antichrist because they deified the people. At the same time, in his fight against materialism and the things his radical opponents defended, he himself glorified the masses and their opposition to materialism. It is difficult to demonstrate that a man of Dostoevsky's conflicting psychology saw Christ, or approached him spiritually. Little wonder that so profound a student of Christianity as Merejkovsky, according to Berdyaev, in his book on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky was unable to tell Christ from Antichrist. Neither Tolstoy nor Dostoevsky was free from uncertainty. However, the former undoubtedly understood the precepts of Christ better than the latter. Dostoevsky in his declaration of faith, after asserting "that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more sympathetic, more reasonable, more manly, and more perfect than Christ," continues: "and I tell myself with jealous love that not only is there nothing but indeed there can be nothing." This rather pagan adoration is immediately followed by a note of doubt. "Furthermore, if anyone proved to me that Christ is outside the truth and it really was a fact that the truth was outside of Christ, I would rather remain with Christ than with the truth." What is Dos-



DOSTOEVSKY IN 1858  
Photograph taken at Semipalatinsk, Siberia

toievsky's conception of remaining with Christ? Does that imply the following of Christ's ideals? Not at all. According to Dostoevsky, Christ's teaching can only be realized by angels in heaven. But angels in heaven obviously need not struggle to be kind, merciful, and loving, and this is therefore the direct opposite of his own credo, since he maintained that the Christian ideals could only be reached through an inner struggle and suffering.

Christ's overpowering influence upon humanity was derived through personal sacrifice and mercy towards sinners. Dostoevsky's was largely a matter of the printed word. He suffered with the Karamazovs and other characters who peopled his books because they embodied all his vices. The definite impression conveyed by the Slav realist is that only the sinners are sure of salvation, notwithstanding Berdyaev's assertion that only the ignorant, who do not understand Dostoevsky, receive this impression. Christ absolved the sinner, but He did not sin Himself. This all-important fact seems to escape those who insist upon writing about Dostoevsky in terms of the ideals of Christ.

## The Good Old Days

THE SENTIMENTAL YEARS: 1836-1860.

By E. Douglas Branch. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company. 1934. \$4.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

ANYONE who has a taste for the past, and who would know how his immediate ancestors reacted to the world about them, will find Mr. Branch's book most engaging reading. Less than a century gone, the "sentimental years" of which he writes wear an aspect at once quaint and endearing. From 1836 to 1860, from the Great Fire of New York to the holocaust of the Civil War, as he puts it, his chronicle runs, covering a period which profoundly believed itself under the special protection of divine Providence, which saw the introduction of the telegraph, the automatic reaper, and the steel plow, thought salaries of seventy-five dollars a year sufficient compensation for young men, named its girls Tabitha, Jemima, or Ethelinda, fiercely resented condescension in foreigners developed a favorite pastime in twisting the lion's tale, gazed askance on bloomers and doted on Byron, Young, and Mrs. Hemans, was interested alike in transcendentalism and table-tipping, and flocked



THE HAPPY FAMILY

Mezzotint by John Sartain, reproduced in "The Sentimental Years" from Miss Leslie's Magazine (1843).

with enthusiasm to Barnum's Siamese Twins or Swedish Nightingale.

True, the sentimental years knew stirrings of industrial discontent; Lowell mills were not all they should have been, slavery raised a menacing issue, and some grumbling resulted from the fact that the American workman worked more hours than the English in certain industries. But on the whole it was a happy America which Mr. Branch resuscitates, an America with its face turned Westward, which spawned Currier and Ives prints and "Old Folks at Home," held its women in reverence and clothed its statesmen in tails and high hats, and lay down to rest at night in the beatific certitude of a fortunate tomorrow. *Eheu, fugaces!*



## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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### A Plea to Our Censors

There is a great deal to be said for the current attempt on the part of many organizations, religious and otherwise, to improve the moral tone of our moving pictures. There will be much to be said in favor of the attempt, likely to follow, to improve the moral tone of books. Yet already enough evidence has accumulated to show the dangers that lie in the path. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has issued a peremptory division of the moving pictures and plays now current which specifically rules out, along with the dubious, pictures such as Galsworthy's "One More River," and "Catherine the Great," which many judges of art have classified as good. But what is much worse, the moving pictures which remain after the holocaust, especially those approved for both old and young as this year's diet for good Catholics, seem, on the whole, to be weak and meagre fare for a picture hungry public. As for the permitted list of current drama, which contains four items only, including Gilbert and Sullivan, it would seem that after the last performance of "The Gondoliers" the only advice one could give to Catholic playgoers is to stay at home.

The dangerous fallacy in such censorship, which is by no means confined to Roman Catholics, is that of two criteria of judgment—conformity to a doctrine of morals and the possession of values, human and artistic, of real worth—only one, the first, is considered. Now evidence can be found all down the ages of the effect upon the mind, whether Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or Moslem, of cheap and meretricious art and cheap and meretricious ideals of human conduct. Granted one does not believe in divorce, is a fine play, or fine book that deals seriously with the divorce question, and with an affirmative answer, more or less dangerous, than a sentimental assemblage of trash, orthodox in its morals, but weak, thin, false in its ideals and its conduct and its portrait of human nature? If, to the censor, both types seem dangerous, then let both be condemned. And yet that is a risky procedure too. For once he goes beyond a warning that such and such a play does not conform to the ethical standards or spiritual doctrine of the body for which he speaks, and places the artistically good in the same category with the flashy and trivial, he invites reaction. It was Aucassin and Nicolette, both good Catholics, who decided to go to Hell because all the

interesting people, all the good lovers, good talkers, and good thinkers seemed to be there, instead of in an insipid Heaven.

When representatives of the Methodists and Baptists stand with flaming swords at the doors of every play that tolerates drink, when the Roman Catholics ban every book in which some one gets divorced, when the Council of Protestant Churches frowns upon any story that contains an adultery or a liaison, when the capitalist central committee pickets communist and socialist performances, and the newspaper association agrees not to mention books that attack advertising; when the Utopians bar cynicism, the communists ban religion, the American Legion proscribes attacks on war, the Irish boycott comic Irishmen, the Jews protest mention of anti-Semitism, and all together combine to apply every standard to art except truth to imagination and the quality of beauty and the power to communicate pleasure of the mind, the eye, the ear, then we shall get the logical results of ill-considered censorship.



"PARDON ME, WOULDN'T YOU BE INTERESTED IN BUYING MY LITTLE TWO-VOLUME HISTORY OF THE AZTECS?"

## Letters to the Editor: *Three Correspondents* *Reply to Mr. Adamic*

### Proletarian Readers in Libraries

SIR:—Louis Adamic's assertion that ninety-nine and one-half percent of American workers are "practically beyond reach of radical . . . or serious, honest writing" is a terrific indictment and, if true, should cause magazines like *The New Masses* to close shop at once or clamor for articles on social problems by Mary Roberts Rinehart, Grantland Rice, and others. Mr. Adamic seems to include as worker-readers only those who own books or those who receive them from well-meaning but misguided proletarian sympathizers. Hasn't it occurred to Mr. Adamic that most cities in this country boast of a free public library? Libraries are still patronized—in fact, according to an editorial in *The Saturday Review* a year or so ago, they are crowded and books are scarce.

And who are the patrons of the libraries? Excepting school children and women (who constitute the majority), I believe that most of the men have rough and calloused hands. I was born of the working class (farmers and miners). Early in youth I developed a mania for reading (an unproletarian habit). I became an habitual frequenter of the library reading room, even spending most Sunday afternoons there. From fourteen years of observation, may I point out that the reading room of this library in Butte, Montana, is used almost exclusively by workers. The room is a large one with approximately fifteen tables, half of them being used most of the time. It is a rare event to see anyone coming in who looks like a business man. In fact, since figures are the precedent, I would say that ninety-nine and forty-four hundredths percent of those patrons are workmen—this statement including as laborers only those who wear a work shirt, without a necktie. Of course, some of the magazines in the room are of the calibre of *Satevepost*, but most of them are "serious, honest writing," ranging from *The New Masses* to the *Atlantic Monthly*. More often have I had to wait for some "roughnecked" workman to finish reading the erudite *Nineteenth Century* and *After than Collier's*. I am at present in a college town, and even here I notice in the public library that work shirts outnumber the white shirts. I have observed that the same condition prevails in other cities.

Why should Mr. Adamic be so hasty in damning the working class to eternal ig-

norance and stupidity? Isn't the entire reading public of "honest, serious writing" exceedingly small? From his article one would think that the circulation of *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, or *The Saturday Review* ran into millions. And what is the probable number of readers of serious fiction among the bourgeoisie? Publishers would be very happy, I think, if they could rely on one-half of one percent of the people consistently to buy "serious" books.

I suggest that Mr. Adamic include in his research a tabulation by circulating librarians of the number of business men who take out books to the number of workmen who do so—and the kinds of books. . . . I agree with most of Mr. Adamic's criticisms of current proletarian novels, but I sincerely believe that his imputations of ignorance and mental apathy to workers are unjust, and his figures grossly misleading.

WAINO NYLAND.

Boulder, Colorado.

### Perennial "Wolf" Crier

SIR:—I was greatly interested in the article by Mr. Adamic, as I happen to live in one of the cities which he visited on the trip of which he speaks and was present at his address in our city.

If proletarian literature is what Mr. Adamic believes it to be (incitation to revolution) then I think we can feel greatly relieved that it is not read by the masses or considered seriously by them rather than discouraged by it as he seems to be.

I have greatly enjoyed Mr. Adamic's books and find him much more interesting as an author than as a lecturer; I was interested in his continual lamentation on the foreigner's plight in this country, not only in his address but also in his magazine articles. His idea of the gross mistreatment, misunderstanding, and mistakes in regard to the foreigner within our doors is partly contradicted by himself in your paper in the paragraph on Flint, Michigan, first column, page 322; he seems to be one of these perennial "Wolf" criers. But on the other hand the comedy of this situation is that the people for whom these individuals write, the proletariat, will not read their works; whereas, the class which they deride, the middle class, the bourgeoisie and the capitalists, buy their books and consequently give them the other hand to bite; and I never heard of any of them returning royalty checks because of the money being tainted.

In your editorial in this same issue you ask why more books are not read. Mr. Adamic has partially answered that in his article, and from the other side I know personally fifty men and women who are college graduates who all read prolifically and who never buy a book; they continuously borrow books from the one or two of the group who do buy any, and the biggest majority procure all their literature from the circulating library at the various book stores, and a small group go freely to the public library. It is my opinion that this picture is repeated in every town and city affording such facilities.

RALPH DAVID.

Flint, Michigan.

### Education for Reading

SIR:—All praise to the thoughtful article by Louis Adamic on the batting average of proletarian literature, although I think most writers of any perception already suspected his conclusions. I believe that the answer to the dilemma which Mr. Adamic propounds is inadvertently contained in your editorial in the same issue, namely, that the blame can be laid at the door of our educational system. Our schools still cling too fondly to McGuffey and the three R's, which, though admirable perhaps for the laying of a basic foundation of knowledge, do nothing to broaden a child's knowledge of life itself, to make him inquisitive as to the social forces and customs which bind him in. Similarly, any liking that the elementary or high school pupil may have for literature is generally smothered by the dead hand of outmoded pedagogical instruction.

The reason for this, of course, is that our school system is entrusted to boards of education generally composed of business men, lawyers, and so on, who are not overly friendly to too much questioning of the status quo, so that what meager instruction is afforded in modern literature, sociology, psychology, political science, and the like is apt to be perfunctory and unquestioning. Nor do our colleges and universities offer much hope for advancement. . . .

EARL CLARK.

Columbus, Ohio.

### Strikers and Scabs

SIR:—In his review of Robert Cantwell's "Land of Plenty" in your columns last May, Henry Seidel Canby, deploring the too pronounced working-class bias of that otherwise excellent novel, wisely remarked, "When the modern novelist takes up the class struggle, one eye or the other goes blind." In Mr. Cantwell's case, the affliction seems to have spread to both eyes and to have rendered him incapable of reading the plain text of a story of a strike that does not follow the same pattern as his own novel.

On no other hypothesis not highly uncomplimentary to him can one explain the reckless misstatements which make up the greater part of his attempt to review for you Van der Meersch's "When the Looms Are Silent." For example, it is obvious that he would never have made the mistake of stating flatly that there was "no provision for feeding the strikers" if he had read the frequent allusions to the regular distribution of relief at union headquarters or the detailed account of the systematic house-to-house collection of food from local merchants and strike sympathizers or the picturesque description of the huge outdoor kitchen maintained exclusively for strikers.

However, the assumption that Mr. Cantwell did not really read the book hardly excuses his misrepresenting it as a "tribute" to strikebreaking, when the hero of the story is an indefatigable and fearless striker, and the only scab among the leading characters (Reine is a colorless dummy of minor importance) is a pitiful dotard who receives such a fright-

(Continued on page 388)

## The Saturday Review recommends

### This Group of Current Books:

A STUDY OF HISTORY. By ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE. Oxford University Press. History in its relation to geographical environment.

NEGRO AMERICANS, WHAT NOW? By JAMES WELDON JOHNSON. Viking. A study of the relation of the races.

FER DE LANCE. By REX STOUT. Farrar & Rinehart. A new departure in detective stories.

### This Less Recent Book:

DREAMTHORP. By ALEXANDER SMITH. Doubleday, Doran. The reissue of a book of essays written in the country.