

Theirs Not to Reason Why

OUT OF CHAOS. Translated from the Russian of Ilya Ehrenbourg by Alexander Bakshy. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ARTHUR RUHL

UNLESS the reader is fairly well acquainted with revolutionary Russia and its writing, he may well find Ehrenbourg's new novel a bit heavy going. It isn't so much composed as spattered on the page. The chaos of the subject is echoed in the writing. All sorts of allusions and contrasting points of view, objective statements and subjective moods, tumble after one another pell-mell, in what amounts frequently to a sort of literary shorthand. The author, himself a more or less rootless emigré, who has been both in and out of revolutionary



ILYA EHRENBURG

Russia, physically and in spirit, and is now back in Paris again, has sometimes been pictured as dashing off his chapters, as the mood struck him, at café tables, between drinks. The writing sounds like it.

The welter of characters, which go jostling and grinding past, like ice in a spring freshet, center about Kuznetsk and the feverish building of a "Giant"—a huge steel-plant. Old Bolsheviks and young communist shock-troops, dispossessed kulaks, wrecks of the old bourgeoisie, Kirghese, Kalmucks, Tartars, Buriats, American engineers, unemployed miners from Westphalia and Silesia, dreamers, swindlers, girl teachers and librarians, goodness knows what, help to make up the crowd. There are something like two hundred and twenty thousand of them, working day and night, with the desperate intensity of an advancing army digging themselves in close to the enemy's front.

Russia needs iron. Everything else—individual desires or preferences, theories, questionings, all that is irrelevant—goes down before that. This categorical imperative, and the exaltation of those who completely accept it and are convinced that they are building a new and better order, emerge finally from the confusion which gives the novel its title as a sort of pattern and sustained viewpoint.

Hero and heroine, in so far as there are any, are represented by a young worker, Kolka Rzhakov, and a young school-teacher, Irina Koreneva. Big, good-natured, clear-headed, hard-fisted Kolka is a sort of symbol of the best side of the Revolution—of its youth, hope, energy, simple faith in the ultimate goodness of its new world. (There are, or were, plenty of Kolkas in the pioneer settlements and boom-towns of our own country, but possibly that is beside the point.) Both young people find firm footing and free air in the Revolution; love and life.

Volodia Safanov, whose feverish soliloquies on this and that throughout the book serve to express the intellectual's comments on the Revolution, is the traditional "student" of Russian novels and plays, carried down into the present generation. He is of the Hamlet type, unable to plunge wholeheartedly into any sort of action, destined to make trouble for himself and everybody with whom he comes

in contact. Once Volodia planned a little speech to deliver at one of the evening discussions of "culture." As he got to his feet something outside of himself took hold of him.

"There is a kind of knowledge," he said, "which condemns us to inaction—I know it well: it is a dead knowledge. To build a plant one must know something; that is another kind of knowledge, exact and limited. What you are striving for is spring water. I'll tell you frankly: you know very little. But already you know a great deal more than those French students with their diplomas and their Boul' Mich. I am not comparing programs. I am speaking of their attitude toward knowledge. They know this and that. The important thing for them is to take a place in a life already made, whereas you want to create this life. For this reason what is important for you is knowledge as such. Can there be any doubt with which of the two lies the future?" . . .

Volodia could talk and feel that way for a moment, but the next moment his doubts and questionings, all the ill-digested inheritance from that "dead" culture taken from "Them," began crawling and messing about in his mind like so many worms. He could do nothing, really. He was doomed—in love, life, everything, a useless person.

Kolka and Irina, on the other hand, worked, laughed, and drove straight ahead. Theirs not to reason why. It was all quite simple. The Giant was their job, and Russia needed iron. How different their unconscious ideology may be from that of our own, or indeed of any other pioneers, faced with immediate concrete tasks that simply have to be done, might be an interesting question for discussion, which so far as Ehrenbourg's novel as a work of fiction goes, is, as already remarked, beside the point.

The Narrow House

(Continued from first page)

at the close of the last century to near wealth during the World War. This family represents, I think, the so-called "norm" established by middle-class society in England and America. Here we see the stuffy Victorian interior: heavy plush and satin clothed furniture and dead birds (given a dubious immortality by the skill of taxidermists), in life-like sleep under glass bells. Through locked doors and windows one hears the slow roaring of the sea. This near past, extending through the reigns of Victoria, Edward, and the present George, seems, because of its outmoded proximity, more distant than any other period in history. To go into the lives of the people is very like wandering

among the ashes of old Rome, and though some may still survive in flesh, the world that gave them a confident excuse for being is now an edifice half destroyed by premature decay. It will be observed that even in Mrs. Scott's remarkable first novel, "The Narrow House," the social structure that she revealed was on the point of ruin, and so again we see the signs of ruin here.

The photographs disclose the entire company of Courtneys: Philip and Fedelia, father and mother of the household; Bertram the son, Tilly who died young, Ethel, Meg, and Cora, the daughters. See again Philip, the successful man of business, portly, middle-aged; wistful, inarticulate, inept at home; brutal, arrogant, and by no means scrupulous in business hours. Fedelia, his wife, carries her domestic, blind, harsh virtues before her as one might hold a banner. She rules the house as Philip rules his office and her drive toward power, clearly shown, is as

destructive as every human reach toward earthy power becomes; blindly, she maims her children. The weaker variations of Philip and Fedelia are the children: the highly sensitized Tilly, a family sacrifice, to become a symbol of childhood death for Courtneys, then Ethel, nervous, ecstatic, trapped in marriage to a commissioned naval officer, then shallow Cora, then ugly Meg doomed to neurotic spinsterhood, and last, ineffectual Bertram who was to be the family hero, fulfilling his destiny by death on the battlefield of the Somme. Ethel in trapped rebellion and Bertram, closeted by an all too-conscious despair, are the central figures in the latter sections of the novel. Ethel's sons are citizens of the new world, the material out of which fascists and communists are made and their speeches are the means by which an epilogue is written.

So much for the particular range that Mrs. Scott has chosen for this latest novel, but on reading it one sees again the inner structure that was implied in "The Narrow House." One may even go so far as to identify a similar cast of characters, but this detail is not important. It is the theme at the core of the two books that commands attention, a theme that reveals how human beings are trapped in their own toils, as inevitably, as fatally as Macbeth caught in the maze that surrounded his immediate ambitions. The story is an old one, and how then does Mrs. Scott make it significant to us and to our times? In "The Narrow House" a rapid insight into human motives guided her way. It was a violent book, written with such conviction, that admitting certain flaws, its publication promised the arrival of an important novelist. Here, I would say, Mrs. Scott's prose instrument lacked the flexibility required for her more subtle observations, for what she has to say will admit no facile means of speech and to drive her point home, a number of specific instances must be placed before her readers. For the most part, she has selected her examples from American life and revealed them in the light of melodrama. I know that I am oversimplifying her statement when I say that her people are trapped and thwarted by the demands of sex, of money, of a transitory position in society. One must read the novels as one reads poetry, to get the full impact of Mrs. Scott's argument. In this last book she no longer turns to a melodramatic statement of her thesis and the result is that of subdued lyricism, an elegy, if you will, of a society that is now about to die. The danger that Mrs. Scott sees in the new order is that mistaken confidence that human beings have in the victories of material power, that very power which breeds ambition and then frustrates its final gratification. Her warning to the younger communists is that

they too may fall into the narrow house that holds the bones of their grandfathers, the Victorians who celebrated the hollow conquest of iron and of steel.

As I said at the beginning of this review, Mrs. Scott voices no final solution of the problems she presents to her critics. She, like the old philosopher who sought an honest man by carrying a lantern, is seeking for some

ultimate expression of reality. Her novels represent the road she has traveled during the past twelve years. At this moment only a few, I think, will realize the full importance of that journey. From the evidence of this last book before me I doubt if Mrs. Scott will ever run to shelter; she will never relinquish, I think, her special power to observe the changing world. If I were looking for a parallel of this latest novel in modern literature I would be forced to reread Thomas Hardy and note again that courage to observe in human action the fatal end of earthly destiny.



EVELYN SCOTT

From a portrait by Francis Criss

Dilemma of a Poet

NOW WITH HIS LOVE. By John Peale Bishop. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1933. \$2.50

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

M. R. BISHOP begins his book with what in the old days would have been called a "Proem," entitled appropriately enough, "Speaking of Poetry." The first lines disclose his dilemma:

The ceremony must be found
that will wed Desdemona to the huge
Moor. . . .

and the last lines emphasize the difficulty:

The ceremony must be found

Traditional, with all its symbols
ancient as the metaphors in dreams;
strange, with never before heard music;
until the torches deaden at the bedroom door.

This is not only Mr. Bishop's dilemma, it is the problem facing every modern poet:—to unite poetry, that delicate Desdemona, with Othello, the brute world of action; to fuse the old associations and the traditional images ("ancient as the metaphors in dreams") with a new inflection, an unused idiom, "strange, with never before heard music."

Unfortunately, Mr. Bishop, in company with many others, cannot quite accomplish this longed for union. Like most of his confrères, he has a stock of the traditional harmonies as well as a choice assortment of the latest dissonances, but he cannot integrate them in a complete composition or "ceremony." The traditional and the experimental, the brilliant and the banal, the ecstatic and the sordid are placed side by side, but they will not mix; Mr. Bishop assembles his varied effects, shuffles them, translates them into many shapes, juggles classic mythology and private allegory—but he does not fuse them. The reader is too conscious of other voices—chiefly Laforgue's and Eliot's—to be aware of Bishop's.

This is a pity, for, not quite submerged by other accents, there is a genuine and original voice here. When Mr. Bishop is not attempting to follow the *dernier cri* in poetics, when he is not so determined to pit the tawdry against the beautiful and exploit the trick of the incongruous, he writes recognizable, even traditional poetry. His best moments are not in the extended "October Tragedy" nor in the obviously ironic "Riviera"—Cummings in Three Easy Lessons—nor in the confused instrumentation of "Aliens" and "Martyrs' Hill"—Eliot *con sordino*—but in such straightforward pieces as "Wish in the Daytime," "Epithalamium," "Fiametta," "Metamorphosis of M," and "The Truth About the Dew."

The evidence seems to indicate that, in such lines, the subconscious poet triumphs over the conscious theorist. In spite of his conflicts and devices of contrast, Mr. Bishop has a few fine and direct things to say. They are not profound nor, as the blurb has it, exciting, nor even, for all the apparatus, novel. What he says best is what most poets have said: the loveliness of the beloved, the weariness and renewing wonder of the flesh, the impartial fecundity of death, hunger for the land of one's youth, the unappealing spirit. And it is when he is simplest that he says these things most memorably. The verses which begin "I have seen your feet gilded by morning" are eloquent in their unaffected tribute, and the reader regrets that there are only two stanzas. The pair of faintly archaic quatrains beginning "When first my beloved came to my bed" would grace any anthology.

Such natural lyricism makes one regret the translations from the Provençal—pallid after the lusty paraphrases by Pound—and the selections from the Greek Anthology, bettered by Humbert Wolfe and a dozen others. Even more surprising are the lapses in style and tone, lapses which permit so sensitive a poet to write:

Rheumatically intent shifts gears
Unloosens joints of rustic years.

Such phrases represent Mr. Bishop at his worst, and they are anything but frequent. His best is very good indeed, and if it is not, as Archibald MacLeish has generously declared, "as sound as any in our generation," it has a sound—and solidity—of its own.

"World Power or Downfall"

GERMANY PREPARES FOR WAR. By Ewald Banse. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1934. \$3.

Reviewed by FRANK H. SIMONDS

"OUR next war will be fought for the highest interests of our country and mankind. This will invest it with importance in the world's history. 'World Power or Downfall!' that will be our rallying cry." It is something more than two decades since General Friedrich von Bernhardi wrote these lines in a book that was shortly to provide the enemies of Germany with a weapon of incalculable effectiveness in that conflict which he forecast so confidently and so correctly.

We are on the threshold of an iron age. For us it stands the sign of the Third Reich. . . . We want an empire in which we can once more profess ourselves German without fear of being sat on. . . . Mighty empires are not founded by treachery, deceit, or huckstering; they only grow out of the clang of swords. The Third Reich, as we dream it—from the Flanders Coast to the Raab, from Memel to the Adige and the Rhone—can also be born only in blood and iron.

Thus writes Professor Ewald Banse, twenty years later eagerly pressing into the hands of new prospective enemies the old advantages.

Now this Banse book, like the Bernhardi volume before it, will have various interpretations. Already the Germans, as in the case of Bernhardi, are rushing forward to discredit it officially by minimizing the importance of the author. They have, indeed, banned, but not burned it. They have protested that it is without real representative significance, although a dozen reputable authorities have testified to its use as a textbook and to the recognition that the Nazis have conferred upon its author.

But recognizing that if Germany goes to war anytime in the next decade this book will have a propaganda value for the enemy of incalculable magnitude, perceiving that it coolly proposes the extermination of the population of northern France, the extinction of the independence of Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, with Switzerland thrown in for good measure; that it foreshadows the invasion of England by allied German and Irish armies—Nazis and Patseys, I suppose, that it proposes also the mutilation of Poland and Italy, the colonization of Soviet Russia, let us for a moment dismiss these significant and even sensational details and look at the psychological import.

Accept, as one must, the obvious fact that Banse's book is a translation of Hitler's mystic vision into geography and strategy, what does it mean? Have the Germans gone mad? Surely they must see that such a program can only mean a new rallying of Old Europe to a fresh coalition for the defense of Continental independence. And, since, on the face of it, such a prospectus discloses delusions of grandeur, must one not assume that it is the expression of a handful, of the few who are demented? After all, what is Banse himself but a professor in an obscure technical school in a mere provincial town? But no, the truth has to be faced. Within the limits of their intellectual outlook this is what German leaders feel. They felt it before the World War, they have felt it tenfold more strongly following the mutilations of the Peace Treaties.

We are not facing here in Banse's book the question of self-determination. That could count in the matter of Austria, Czechoslovakia with its German minority, the Upper Adige with its German majority. Not even the Corridor and Upper Silesia enter largely into the question. On the contrary, what Banse does is to draw a map of Europe including all these territories which for political, economic, or strategic reasons seem to him essential to that Third Reich which Hitler promises. To be great, to be powerful, to be prosperous, Germany must have these things.

In the face of this dominant necessity, the same necessity without knowledge of law that Bethmann-Hollweg cited to defend the invasion of Belgium, the Dutch, the Belgians, the French of the North, the Danes, and the Swiss have no rights. They are in fact to be dealt with on the strength of the same principle of law which enables states to seize private property by right of eminent domain, when that property bars the way to public improvement. The French must be exterminated, the Slavs expelled, the Dutch, the Swiss, and the Danes violently assimilated.

Now what does all this mean? It isn't mere madness. Quite the contrary, if it were only that it would not be so profoundly disturbing. What it indicates is that the rulers and leaders of the contemporary Germany are satisfied that Germany cannot be a great country, in the sense that Russia, the United States, Japan, or the British Empire are world powers unless it has a vast territorial base. It must dominate Europe, as Hitler says, and never permit a second military power to rise on the Continent. It must have territory to settle its growing population, lest it suffocate.

Here you touch upon a conception entirely different from that of other peoples of the West—Italy perhaps excepted, and Mussolini renounces European expansion. British, French, American, do not think in terms of the conquest of territory, that is any longer. That phase in our existence is over. All three peoples, we are satisfied with what we hold.

Germany, on the other hand, has no colonies and now cannot hope to acquire beyond the seas lands satisfactory for white colonization. The Americas, South Africa, Australasia, these are closed definitely. Europe is the only place. That is what Hitler preaches, that is what Banse proclaims. The German people are a great race with a mighty mission. The doctrine of the Aryan and the Nordic is common to the Führer and to the Brunswick Professor who is his disciple. But so far the German people have been defrauded of their rightful place in the sun, their God-intended opportunity.

Twenty years ago, in the language of Bernhardi, Germany fought for world power or downfall and achieved the latter. But the result of defeat was not recognition of the impossibility of attaining the far-shining objective. Banse does not preach the mistakes of exaggerated ambition, which led nearly the whole world to take up arms against his country. He does not see that the Hohenzollern Empire, like the Napoleonic before it, fell at last because, in the language of Victor Hugo, "God got bored," because all other peoples before or during the war became effectively alarmed.

No, what Banse sees are only the incidental mistakes of German statesmanship and strategy; how a battle might have been won or an enemy kept out of the firing-line, as if it were Grouchy's blunder at Waterloo which actually cost Napoleon his empire. The supreme error that rallied the world against Germany, the colossal, all-comprehensive blunder of failing to perceive that the German conception in itself was irreconcilable with a world that could fight and did, that escapes him. And now he is prepared to start the whole thing over again. Better a smashed Germany and a shattered world than a Reich restricted to the limits of a mere European state, an equal among equals: "World Power or another Downfall," that is his text.

It is, too, the lesson being taught German youth by the Third Reich. Germany's right is the supreme law of the universe, that is, Germany's right expressed in the territorial terms I have cited. Here, of course, there is no question of revision of the Treaty of Versailles, no proposal simply for the return of lost provinces or surrendered colonies. That was the old Locomo dream, dead with Stresemann five years ago. This is a new Germany carved out of the living body of many states.

That is why "Nazi means War," as Leland Stowe has indicated in his recent and

admirable book of that title. That is why with the rise of Hitler the League of Nations and all related machinery for maintaining peace by collective action collapsed. That is why the Disarmament Conference went into the discard. For there is and can be no basis of agreement with a people who make national rights, nationally defined, the sole measure of national policy. With a people who think in such terms, peace itself is only momentarily possible.

This is a terrifying book, but it is also an illuminating book. It should be read by all who even pretend to discuss European conditions. Indubitably it is also as prophetic as was Bernhardi's volume. It discloses a great people dominated by those whose delusion of grandeur attains proportions which defy exaggeration. It also indicates what it must mean for other peoples to live on the frontiers of Nazi Germany. Nor does it leave any doubt as to what such peoples will eventually do. In a word, it merely foreshadows a new chapter with the old ending.

Ways of Religious Life

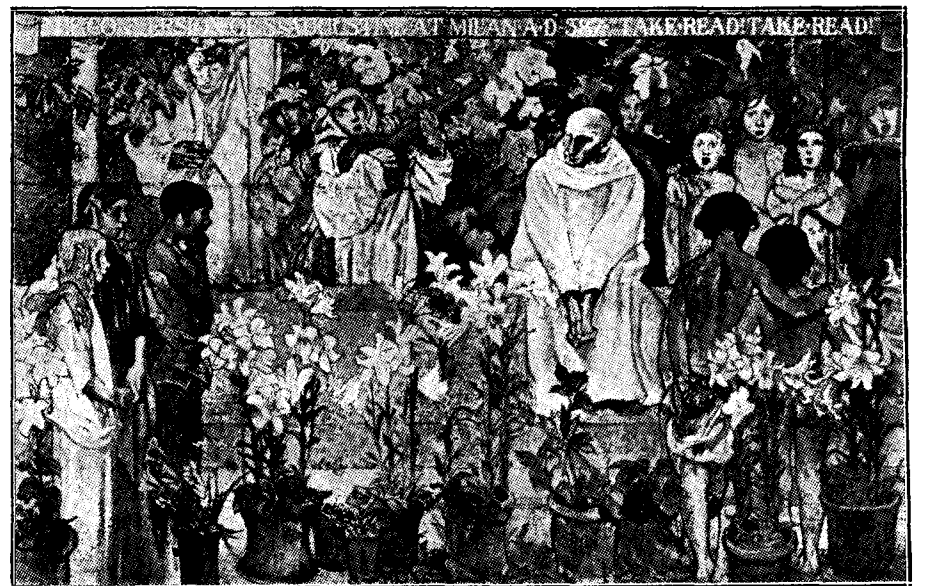
CONVERSION: *The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo.* By A. D. Nock. New York: Oxford University Press. 1933. \$5.

Reviewed by CAMPBELL BONNER

THE sub-title of this book is no useless appendage. Professor Nock is not concerned, as the title "Conversion" alone might indicate, with the emotional phenomena belonging to new and revolutionary religious experience, or to a change from one way of religious thought and feeling to another. He does not, it is true, overlook the tremendous effects which the impact of new religious ideas might produce upon the emotions of a responsive individual; but he views

The significance of Alexander's conquests for religious history lay in the fact that they brought thousands of Greek soldiers, officials, and business men into daily contact with Oriental cults; and as the author shows, the good-natured tolerance of the Greek led these expatriates to seek in the alien gods somethings akin to their own, and eventually to worship them—often, doubtless, with a certain mental recoil from the more "barbaric" elements in the cult, and with some modifications in its actual practice. Thus the Greek spirit, too active and fertile to leave anything unaffected by its touch, Hellenized religions of Phrygian, Persian, Syrian, and Egyptian origin, and prepared the way for that "opposite current" of Oriental influence upon the Western world which Mr. Nock describes in his fourth chapter.

The reader will find much to fascinate him in the author's development of this theme. With a sure hand he traces the ways by which Eastern religious ideas penetrated the West, following the paths of trade, carried by soldiers from one end of the empire to the other, communicated by Oriental slaves to Roman masters. He skilfully analyzes the nature of the appeal made by the new cults to spirits swept from their moorings by great political and social changes, and shaken by storms of doubt as they faced a life of growing complexity and a world full of dangers and difficulties. To some, philosophy was the medicine of the soul, as Mr. Nock shows in a good chapter in "Conversion to Philosophy." But more and more still another Eastern religion, Christianity, adapted to Western minds by the interpretations of Greek apologists, and doctrinally based by the religious philosophy of Alexandria, claimed the allegiance of men in all parts of the empire, and in all walks of life. To explain its ultimate success with full command of the evidence, but in a spirit



THE CONVERSION OF ST. AUGUSTINE AT MILAN
Painting by Frank Brangwyn

his subject more broadly. His task has been to examine the circumstances which led a group, a community, or even entire nations to adopt as their own forms of thought and worship and ways of life which were previously alien to them.

The upper time limit is significant. Before the time of Alexander new cults had passed from one Greek community to another, and foreign deities from northern and eastern lands had received a place in the worship of the state. At least one substantial monograph has been written about these "cult-transfers." A state believed that it could obtain some benefit from the favor of a deity previously unhonored, or it yielded to the partly political, partly hieratic influence of the Delphic oracle; or it responded to the pressure of a group of immigrants within its own boundaries, who desired official recognition for their particular divine patron. For the most part such arrangements involved nothing that could be called conversion. As Mr. Nock sensibly remarks about the introduction to Athens of the Thracian goddess Bendis, "There was in this nothing more revolutionary than there was in the introduction of the potato and tobacco into England from America." The religion of Dionysus and the Orphic movement were potential exceptions, held in check by the communal conservatism of the older Greece.

of calm detachment from controversy, is no mean feat. Mr. Nock has accomplished it admirably.

The book is full of learning, which the writer is wise enough not to thrust upon the reader's attention needlessly; the specialist will find a trustworthy guide to the evidence in the notes at the end. The style is in the main lucid and interesting; there are only a few places, chiefly in the third and fourth chapters, where one finds it a little hard to see the wood for the trees. This is a defect which goes with the excellent quality of conscientious fidelity to the evidence. Mr. Nock is dealing in these pages with fragmentary proofs, and in his anxiety to draw from them no more than is his right, he qualifies and inserts parentheses to a degree which somewhat mars the expository style. But broken gleams of natural light are better than the specious glare of artificial clarity.

Of actual slips there are very few. There is an odd case on p. 250 where an intrusive "other" seems to make the Chinese philosopher Mencius a Jesuit missionary. The book is beautifully printed; its form is a credit to its publisher, as its substance is a proof of the scholarship and ability of its author.

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