

Salvation by Intelligence

LIBERALISM AND SOCIAL ACTION.

By John Dewey. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1935. \$1.50.

Reviewed by HORACE M. KALLEN

THIS book took form as a series of lectures in the university which Thomas Jefferson founded. It is dedicated to the memory of Jane Addams. It is written by the foremost living philosopher of liberalism in the United States. A happier coming together of the different streams of the great American tradition could hardly be, nor a clearer, more compelling exposition of its humane wisdom, and its scientific courage.

For the great tradition of America is liberal, and Dewey's "Liberalism and Social Action" restates in the language and under the conditions of his times what Jefferson's Declaration of Independence affirmed in the language and under the conditions of his. The burden of mankind in Jefferson's day was the weight of institutions upon the individual, bowing him down, defeating his will, frustrating his individuality. The Declaration affirmed the equal status, in nature and in right, of different individuals. It affirmed that governments, and by implication, all other institutions, are made for men and not men for institutions; it rested their powers on consent and their continued operation on service. Climax of an intellectual vision and a political attitude whose first great interpreter was John Locke, anticipation of the same vision and attitude restated by Jeremy Bentham and his "philosophical radicals," the Declaration of Independence is the high classic among the scriptures of liberalism. It is the fighting word, the great Liberal Manifesto.

In the new-spreading economy of industry the doctrine of *laissez faire* extended the individualist premise of the Declaration without its collectivist consequences. Captains of finance and industry insisted that only the powers of government rest on consent and only government operations continue through service, but the institutions of business are exempt from this control. They thus employed the principle of liberty as the in-

strument of a new bondage, bringing liberalism into disrepute as a hypocritical defense of the institutional *status quo*.

It is this latter day degradation of the liberal outlook and paralysis of the liberal principle which Mr. Dewey attacks, it is new birth of liberalism that he seeks. What, he asks, shall the liberal do to be saved in a world where technology, resting upon science and established upon industry, calls for fundamental institutional changes? and where institutions, defined in the organized habits and cus-

tom of men, resist all changes, imposing scarcity in the face of almost inevitable abundance, coercion and oppression in the face of enriched possibilities of liberty? What shall the liberal do? Shall he drift? Shall he attempt to accomplish change by violence? Or shall he mobilize the freed social intelligence, and by implementing of the method of science in the institutions of society, sustain the continuous and im-

manent ends of liberalism by new and more relevant means? For the ends of liberalism are what they always were: the equal security of all men in their lives, liberties, and happiness; but the means change. "Liberalism," declares Mr. Dewey,

is committed to an end that is at once enduring and flexible: the liberation of individuals so that realization of their capacities may be the law of their life. It is committed to the use of freed intelligence as the method of directing change. In any case, civilization is faced with the problem of uniting the changes that are going on into a coherent pattern of social organization. The liberal spirit is marked by its own picture of the pattern that is required: a social organization that will make possible effective liberty and opportunity for personal growth in mind and spirit in all individuals. Its present need is recognition that established material security is a prerequisite of the ends which it cherishes, so that, the basis of life being secure, individuals may actively share in the wealth of cultural resources that now exist and may contribute, each in his own way, to their further enrichment.

What is this, but the principle of the Declaration in modern dress, a new "philosophical radicalism" which, seeking not reforms but reformation, recognizes that you cannot win freedom by means of en-

slavement nor abundance by means of scarcity, and that the method of freedom must vary with its conditions? The permanent task of liberalism is to keep the ways to the good life wide open for every man. At one time, in one place, under one set of circumstances, it does so by the centrifugal action known as *laissez faire*; at others by the centripetal action known as *collectivism*. What determines the use of the one or the other is not its dogmatic content but its factual consequences. As in scientific procedure, so in social action; the method of intelligence will bring together, confront, and test out all possible alternatives until they come to a consensus. This consensus is the "socially organized intelligence," the true alternative to drift and violence. It rests upon democracy, scientific method, and experimental control. *Laissez faire* having led only to the oppression and confusion of individuals, it turns from *laissez faire* to the socialization of the forces of production. This is now the next step in the attainment of freedom by the method of freedom for the ends freedom conceived as the growth of each individual into the abundance of the good life. If we are to be saved, only the coöperative intelligence of mankind can save us.

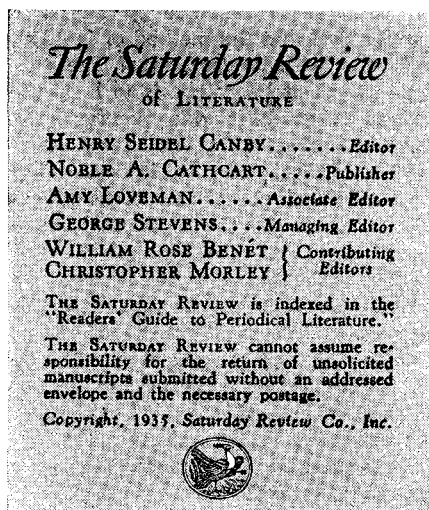
By what means, in what form, the forces of production are to be socialized Mr. Dewey refuses to say. He is concerned only to vindicate liberalism as a present-day principle of social action, and so far as this reader is concerned he succeeds. But those who want a program to implement the principle will not be satisfied. Jefferson and Bentham wrote their principles to vindicate actual programs. At the moment, Mr. Dewey leaves a gap. I urge him to weigh Consumers' Coöperation as the method of freedom in social action.

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The Empty Chariot

By WALTER DE LA MARE

AMID the wood's delicious green
While I dreamed the noon away
Saw I once how strange a scene!—
Fleet along the wooded way,
Rolling softly o'er the moss,
Drawn by fawns as white as may
Which upon the air did toss
Antlers white as mountain-spray
A small silver chariot!
Empty it was, save for a bow,
And a quiver, freighted not
For that small and slack-stringed bow.
Whose it was, ah! who may say?—
Save the nightingale alone
That upon a shadowy spray
Mused this drowsy scene upon;
Called on love melodiously,
Sadly as a hollow stone,
Love, love, love where art thou flown?
Empty flits thy chariot by,
Warriorless, solitary.



Life Out of Books

IN his essay upon best-sellers printed in this *Review* last week, Mr. Allen calls modestly for a scholar to continue his researches in best-selling popularity. A scholar, yes—but particularly a historical scholar of critical perspicuity—might find there a mine of unquarried social history. Consider that of the millions upon millions who read those books in the three decades covered by Mr. Allen's survey, all but the most insensitive carried away some impress upon the imagination which could very readily influence life.

No one, for example, who was in his or her youth at the turn of the century, can forget how those chivalrous, romantic, sentimental novels of the confident years of the Spanish War and afterward dramatized themselves in the personalities of hundreds of thousands of the young. Laugh if you please at the cartoons which pretend to recall that era—the tandem bicycles, the big sleeves, and especially the square-chinned young men in straw hats too big for them, and the “queenly” women who are so obviously honest, innocent, awkward, and very beautiful. Within the breasts of these romantic young people the naive expectation of success and the confident belief that good can always lick evil, at least in America, are almost visible, their imprint is so strong. And this expectation, that belief, had been dramatized for most of them by the best-selling novels of the day. For why did these sell so widely? Most certainly because readers found in them something that they wanted which answered the inarticulate aspirations of their own nature. The romantic virtue of Richard Carvel and the homely humorous virtue of David Harum created self-dramatizations of hundreds of thousands of Richards and Davids in real life.

Hence when the change of scene had come, with a new setting, new lighting, a new mood; when it was time for “Main Street” and “Babbitt,” the difference in books was no greater than the difference in what was drawn from them. It is a mistake to think of “Babbitt” as merely

satire. There were hundreds of thousands of Babbitts in the pre-War days, but they were not ripe for self-realization and hence not ripe for a best-selling book. Only when the type we now call Babbitt was triumphant in the United States, would hundreds of thousands read a book that dramatized this particular attitude of mind and made a character of it. Only then would they read this novel, not to jeer, or deny, but aware that some emotional insufficiency within themselves had been made articulate, which said that to be Babbitt was not enough. Smug, complacent men after the reading of that novel began to dramatize themselves as not smug, not complacent. The note of self-pity of those who wished to declare that they had sacrificed their souls to American prosperity begins to be observable in American fiction and drama from that period. Was it this that made American business so extraordinarily humble when the country turned upon it and its practitioners after the crash? We recommend to the ambitious social historian a study of the shades of meaning in the use of the words broker, banker, business man in, say 1900, 1920, 1933.

Another instance of book-induced imagination is the increasing coarseness and brutality of manners in the present decade. Here the best-sellers are not so significant as more sensational if less widely circulated books, and especially stories in the magazines. The idea that Victorian society had gentle, considerate manners is entirely drawn from books. There was more brutality and much more coarseness than now, but it was kept out of literary consciousness, and beneath social recognition. The brutal sex stories of the twenties and the sordid narratives of cheap life which began to be read widely at that time, and the flippant outspokenness of light fiction, were just as much cues for self-dramatization as those other far different pictures of society had been before. The tough girl stepped from the bar room and brothel into café and living room. The boozing woman-chaser dramatized himself as a leading libertine. Morals, fundamentally, were probably little changed. But their expression was violently changed. Lust became articulate. Hypocrisy became unnecessary. The tone of society was altered. And the oncoming generation had to face a set of values in which commendable honesty and a brutal disregard for what used to be called delicacy of feeling (and may again) were unhappily confused. It was a real confusion because it derived as much from books as from the new circumstances of a demoralized society. To be sure those books imitated the new manners. But they exaggerated them in the process of making them dramatic, and so became an important factor in social change.

Let us offer a thesis subject which, if successfully worked out, will deserve a good Ph.D. The candidate should take

such magazines as *The Atlantic Monthly* of the 60s to the 70s, *Harpers and Century* of the 80s, *St. Nicholas* of the 90s, *The Saturday Evening Post* of the 10s and 20s, the *New Yorker*, *Time*, and *Liberty* of the 30s, and investigate the reciprocal influences between society and their pages. He should not stop with the short stories and the serials, or the human interest narratives of the modern magazines. Editorials, essays, pictures—one might say especially pictures, advertisements—perhaps in the later period most of all advertisements, will contain invaluable clues. Letters to the editor, if any, are important. And a really penetrating study would succeed in describing the tone, which is to say the underlying philosophy, conscious or unconscious, of these magazines, and its relation to the manners, the attitudes, and the life of their readers.

More can be learned from such an investigation than from research in still unpublished documents. But the aspiring historian must watch his step. He will be close to the complexity of life itself.

Jane Austen Lovers of Jane Austen, who have seen the performance of “*Pride and Prejudice*” now holding the New York stage, will inevitably feel that some of the delicious charm of the book has evaporated in the transcription from novel to play. But perhaps even the most confirmed of Janeites will realize as never before how completely dateless fiction can be if a writer of insight into human nature, with an eye for the foibles of character and an ear for the realities of speech, lets the humor of a Jane Austen deploy upon the contemporary scene. When all is said and done, the one unchanging factor in life is the conduct of men.

Ten Years Ago

“I have almost come to where I shall flee a story that any critic recommends,” wrote a subscriber in a letter published in *The Saturday Review* for December 19th, 1925. He found his opinions so frequently varied from those of contemporary professional reviewers that he felt compelled to ask: “Are we, men such as my friends and I, wholly lacking in taste, wholly lacking in appreciation of literature, wholly unable to tell a good story when we read it, or, is there something wrong with the critics?”

Today

On the opposite page you will find two letters adding further fuel to this ever-present controversy. . . . Are professional critics unable to see the forest because of the trees, as these subscribers suggest? Should books be reviewed only for and by laymen? What is your opinion?