

## Fighting to Live

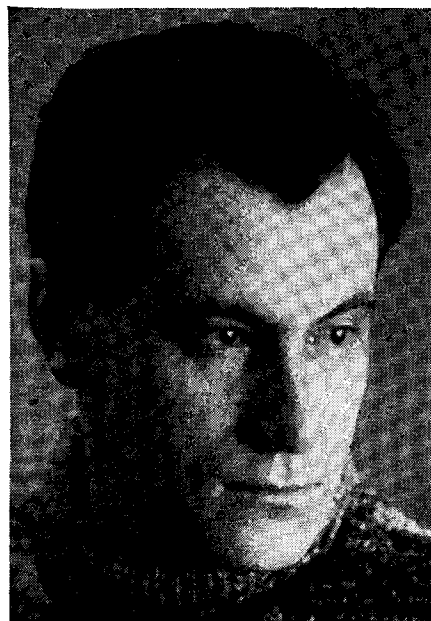
PEACE IS WHERE THE TEMPESTS BLOW. By Valentine Kataev. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SAMUEL NOCK

ALEXANDRA KOLONTAY once said, "You can't make a revolution. But give people the choice of dying, or fighting for a chance to live, and they'll fight." Of what caused the revolution in Russia, we in America know comparatively little, but perhaps not entirely through our own fault. If the conditions that caused the revolution were presented to us we should either refuse to consider them, or else fail to understand them, because they were too far outside human life as we know it. It is nevertheless unfortunate if any of us continue to regard the Russian Revolution as something manufactured by Lenin, Trotsky and Company.

Valentine Kataev is far too shrewd a writer and far too artistic a creator to give any detailed account of what followed in Russia the mutiny on the *Potemkin*. He evidently knows that documentary evidence is not worth much either as propaganda or as entertainment. Yet he manages in this tale to convey to his readers the full tragedy, the full despair of 1905, and all its implications. This he accomplishes by a method simple in appearance yet really so difficult that only an artist can manage it: he looks at the whole situation through the eyes of children.

An ordinary child in an ordinary and respectable home, Petya played and went to school. He also went on mysterious and sometimes terrible errands with his pauper chum, Gavrik. What the errands were and why they had to be done, Gavrik knew. Petya did not; yet dimly he realized that the times were out of joint.



VALENTINE KATAEV

The torture and sudden death that he witnessed, the violence and the unreason, opened in his mind the bud of doubt. They could do no more in any boy of nine, well protected and well fed; but this little was enough.

Petya, delighting like his author in the Russian countryside and Russian water, engaging in pranks of childhood, and thinking Russian thoughts—somehow Petya came to know the other, deadly Russia. This was the Russia that Gavrik knew, the Russia that tortured his grandfather into imbecility, that destroyed the happiness and even the lives of those who had the courage to think and to speak and to act. Although Gavrik was a child he suffered as a man. Yet it was between Petya and Gavrik, a whole civilization apart, that there existed an almost Tom-and-Huck friendship. Russia could rejoice in that friendship—later.

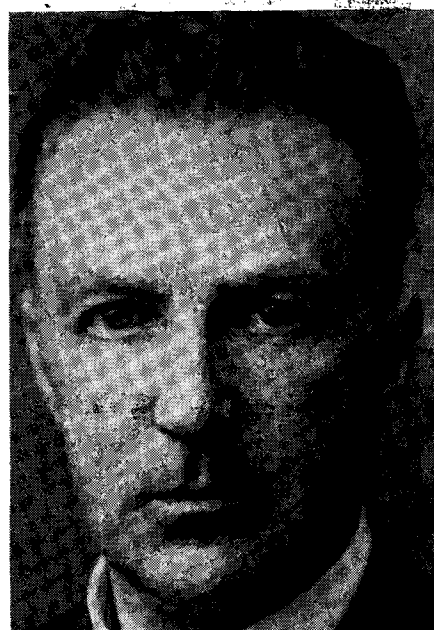
This book is not propaganda: it is a beautiful and thrilling story of Russia, the Russia that crushed the revolt of 1905, but that would welcome the revolt of 1917. It is the story of two boys; but it makes clear why, when they came of age, they would fight to live—in the Russia they loved.

## Good Conversation Preserved in Ink

AS I WAS GOING DOWN SACKVILLE STREET. By Oliver St. John Gogarty. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JAMES WHITALL

THE title of this factual phantasy by the many-sided Oliver Gogarty is as inadequate, despite its being the first line of an old Dublin ballad, as was Joyce's for the monumental work in which the present author was a front row figure. The fabulous Buck Mulligan of "Ulysses" does stroll down Sackville Street, and I like him best in his mood of anecdotal *flânerie*, but he has many other activities and he is at last, as his introducer Francis Hackett writes, "now on paper." This fact is unquestionably a piece of great good fortune for all those with even the most tenuous interest in Irish literature and politics; and for me it has revised a shamefully deficient estimate formed during a speakeasy luncheon in the east Fifties some years ago. Mutual affection for George Moore and my delight in hearing a really great story-teller in action made the occasion memorable for me and I believe not without enjoyment for him. On quitting the smoky little room I asked myself the inevitable question: could the savor of Gogarty's talk be transferred to the printed page? Now I know that it can and that the savor is thereby heightened; this magnificent transference is an accomplishment which alone places his book among the precious



OLIVER ST. JOHN GOGARTY

few of its very special kind. In many other ways it is a book that resembles no other that I have encountered, for its author's methods of presenting a personality or an occurrence are as varied in manner and technique as the color mutations upon the mountains round about Dublin.

In one of his moods Gogarty recalls the genius-stricken author of "Ulysses"; but he is always essentially Gogarty. I suspect that the book, particularly its opening chapters, will find its way into many Joycean sanctums and there be furiously discussed. I will not venture upon that thin ice, because of space limits and a desire to say something about another of Gogarty's moods, to me more appealing: the one in which he produces pure evocative English.

There are two conversations with Yeats, one concerning George Moore's alleged impotence, and another in which Gogarty attempts to persuade Yeats to attend the Governor-General's Spring Show by suggesting that they should both wear high silk hats, the only ones that would be seen at the first official function of the Free State; with Yeats still recalcitrant he has only to mention the butter-churning that is to take place and to intimate that he himself is "deep in the folk-lore of the churn." The recreation here is sheer delight and tells more about Yeats than many chapters from another pen might do.

Gogarty performs similar miracles of character revelation with AE, Moore, Griffiths, Collins, and Talbot Clifton; and there is an abundance of lesser subjects, cunningly and wittily dealt with, among which a delving into the etymology of the word "pettifogging" should not be passed over. It is a vigorous book, often beautiful, and full of subtly flashing wit.

James Whittall is the author of "English Years," a book of reminiscences in which George Moore figures prominently.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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### Enlightened Research

**I**N establishing a Ph. D. degree in "The History of American Civilization," Harvard University has had in mind primarily the man who wants to study American life in terms of American thought, art, history, and social institutions without wasting his time in work irrelevant to his purpose but hitherto required for the doctorate. But it has incidentally wrought a revolution in the study of literature which is certain to be imitated by other universities and to have a considerable importance for the national culture.

The candidate for the new degree must satisfy the general requirement for admission to the graduate school. He must also satisfy the committee which administers the degree that the research he proposes to undertake is important and that he is competent to do it. The committee's approval will not be easy for him to get, for it intends to accept only the most promising candidates. But once he has been accepted he will have a greater freedom in his work, may pursue it more consistently in its own terms, and may employ a greater variety of instruments than has ever before been possible in the doctorate in literature. All the facilities of the university, so far as they bear on his investigation, will be at his disposal, but he will not be subjected to the taboos and fetiches usually associated with the Ph. D. in literature.

The candidate must master six fields of study. Of these fields three will be a common requirement for all candidates. The remaining three will be optional—and the candidate will select them not because they satisfy some formal scheme or precedent but because they have a direct bearing on his research. The three fields of the common requirement are the social and economic history of the United States, the history of literature in the United States, and the history of political theory in the United States. This intelligent and invariable minimum is aimed at a glaring weakness of the system under which most

graduate degrees in literature have been awarded. The young Ph. D. in literature has seldom been required to know anything about the social matrix of literature, and the average dissertation has existed in a medium peculiar to the species, completely insulated from the society of which literature is a part and an expression. The new degree recognizes that literature is a social phenomenon; that fact alone marks a revolution in education.

The freedom granted by the remaining requirements is also revolutionary. The candidate may choose his other three fields from: the history of religion and theology in the United States, the history of philosophy in the United States, the history of science, the history of the fine arts, the history of religion and theology, the history of philosophy, the history of political theory, the history of European literature (especially English), and "any other subject or subjects, knowledge of which is in the opinion of the committee desirable for the student's successful carrying on of his thesis." In addition, "the committee will be free to add to the requirements in cases in which the subject of investigation demands special knowledge of a sort not covered by the ordinary minimum requirements . . . a student investigating a problem primarily concerned with social history may need extra work in sociology, labor economics, or kindred fields . . . or a student primarily concerned with literature may need special training in the theory of criticism and esthetics." In other words, the program is realistic, pragmatic, and *ad hoc*. The committee will sanction or prescribe whatever the candidate's investigation requires. If an intelligent research can be facilitated by anthropology, sociology, climatology, abnormal psychology, statistics, numismatics, or agronomy, the committee will sanction the program and provide the facilities. The research itself will determine the instruments of research and there will be no surplus requirements, no wasted effort, and no tribute to academic theory, tradition, or vested interest.

Ostensibly the degree is established to recognize and legitimize the indefinable field where history and literature meet. Thus one of the first candidates accepted by the committee is a man whose research both the history department and the English department of a leading university refused to sanction because each felt that it came within the other's jurisdiction. But it does more than recognize that hitherto unrecognized field. It asserts the interdependence of history and literature, it extends the academic franchise to values in the study of literature that have so far had to be cultivated outside the universities, and it strikes a heavy blow at the worst tyrannies and absurdities of the doctorate in literature.

One immediate effect is to deliver the study of American literature from the

English departments. In most universities American literature is still regarded as a stepchild, even an illegitimate stepchild, of English literature, and the man who is primarily interested in it can get his degree only by doing a lot of work in English literature that has no necessary bearing on it. The new degree allows him to ignore English literature (provided that he enters the graduate school with a decent knowledge of it) when it has no relation to his research. More important still, he is liberated from the philological requirements which have been the worst obscenity in the academic study of literature and have forced the student to spend from a fifth to a third of his apprenticeship on work that has nothing whatever to do with literary values. The man who is interested in the novels of Herman Melville may now get to work on them without first torturing himself with Gothic, Gaelic, Frisian, Erse, Icelandic, the history of English grammar, and other academic grotesques of which Melville never heard.

There is the possibility that he may, if he likes, get to work on Shakespeare's plays with a similar disregard of philology. He could probably phrase his research problem to bring it within the terms of the degree in the History of American Civilization—and so waste less time than the English degree now requires him to. At any rate, the realism and the liberality of the new Harvard degree will force other committees on American literature to modify their procedure in imitation, and the English departments must consider a similar renovation in order to prevent a stampede of graduate students to American literature.

The innovation has an even more important bearing on criticism. The weakness of the academic study of literature has been its failure to make critics of its practitioners. Criticism is the proper end of all literary study, but the system has produced specialists in trivial, factual, purely literary information. The new degree breaks the insulation between literature and life, and implements criticism by means of history, philosophy, science, sociology, and economics. This is, in effect, what extra-academic criticism has been trying to do for a quarter of a century but has failed to do because its practitioners lacked both the knowledge and the accuracy that systematic graduate training is intended to produce. The breach between academic and non-academic literary thinking may thus be closed; if it is, a richer, broader, more profound criticism will be possible, one that is based on the present state of knowledge in its entirety. Such a development would work powerfully to produce a literary climate in the universities, which they now lack, and to make them once more a force in American literature, as for almost a century they have not been.