



PAUL HERVEY FOX

Mathematics vs. Sex

THE ANTAGONISTS. By Paul Hervey Fox. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THIS novel is the story of an obsession. Joseph Sheppard, dedicated to the discovery of a new mathematical principle, ate, breathed, and slept mathematics at a small college. Subject to dreadful attacks of migraine, he is stricken down by one just after a crucial lecture and later his theory is challenged by a retired scholar who for a generation has dominated mathematical thought. Sheppard, therefore, on his recovery, pays a visit to Otto Weyler, to confound his arguments; and from that visit springs his meeting with Julia Daly and a complete change in his life.

The chief character is a man sexually innocent, because of his intense concentration upon the work of his mind, who by chance meets a woman of insatiable sexuality. She is married to a shady Irish promoter, and she takes her fun where she finds it. Sheppard really falls in love with her, the first time he has experienced that emotion, and the bulk of the book describes the struggle between the two. Mr. Fox has presented Julia unsentimentally, even with cruel clarity, and yet has made convincing her hold over Sheppard.

This is definitely a tragedy, but no maundering one. Sheppard is a sensitive man of unusual intellect in one direction who suddenly finds himself at grips with a life-force that for long baffles and bewilders him. When he at last opens his eyes to reality, he meets it like a man, though his real life has been irremediably invaded and ruined. The book is highly readable; it shows much understanding of human strength and weakness. The author possesses a good, terse, direct style.

A Sentimental Journey

FORWARD FROM LIBERALISM. By Stephen Spender. New York: Random House, 1937. \$2.

Reviewed by GEORGE C. HOMANS

STEPHEN SPENDER says in his book of its purpose: "I do not write to give information. I am trying to do a portrait of the mind of a person whose sympathies are idealist and liberal in the present moment of history. In my opinion the mind of that person should be directed towards communism." This purpose is fulfilled, and the portrait is a good one. It is the portrait of the type sentimentalist. To quote out of context is always unfair, but I must. Mr. Spender says among other things: "Half the population of capitalist countries lives in a state of semi-starvation." Even President Roosevelt has claimed no more than one-third of our people as underfed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed, but perhaps here in America we are better off than in the average capitalist country. No matter, the point is this: Mr. Spender does not say what he means by semi-starvation, and no one else has devised either a definition of the word or a means of testing whether people are half-starved. His statement is not right or wrong; it is meaningless, and all the important statements of his book are of this sort. They are true for him because he wishes them to be true. But he argues in another place: "I am a communist because I am a liberal. Liberalism seems to me to be the creed of those who, as far as it is possible in human affairs, are disinterested, if by disinterestedness one understands not mere passivity but a regard for objective truth. . . ."

I have two main objections to make to the arguments of the intellectual and literary communists of our time, of whom Mr. Spender is one. First, they assume that the violent overturn they propose in the present organization of society is sure to be for the best. They forget that other reforms put through out of the most idealistic motives often (not always) have left us worse off than when we started, because the reformers have consulted only their own sentiments and have left out of consideration certain forces inherent in the social organism which make the result they desire unobtainable and the effort to obtain it positively harmful. Prohibition, which was designed to make America dry, left it wetter than ever. The literary communists are like desperate gamblers who always think that the next throw is sure to win—only they are playing with other people's lives. Second, they assume that its economic organization is immediately responsible for the present ills of society, that if they change the economic organization everything else—and they agree there is plenty else—will come right. In

this I think that they are naive, but I have only space cryptically to recommend to Mr. Spender, who is an Englishman, some sentences of Benjamin Disraeli's in his novel "Coningsby":

It is an age of social disorganization. . . . It is not in the increased feebleness of its institutions that I see the peril of England; it is in the decline of its character as a community. . . . Rely upon it, that England should think more of the community and less of the government. . . . There is no error so vulgar as to believe that revolutions are occasioned by economical causes.

Parochial Messiah

FOOL'S MELODY. By the Author of "Miss Tiverton Goes Out" and *Michael Cape-Meadows.* Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

THE persistently anonymous lady-author who made her American debut some ten years ago with "Miss Tiverton Goes Out" has produced a lengthy new novel, this time with a collaborator. Her earlier books were successful and penetrating character studies, not very important, perhaps, but of interest to anyone requiring a modicum of good writing with his dose of psychology. Nearly all of them depicted a sensitive young girl in revolt against the tyranny of an uncongenial family and surroundings. The strongest element in their composition was the vigor and accuracy with which the Philistines were pilloried. While "Fool's Melody" is fuller in plot than these books, and more ambitious in implications, its viewpoint is the same, with the author's savagery unfortunately somewhat tempered by the years.

It is in effect the story of a parochial Messiah, a musician hovering on the verge of madness, who influences the people about him to realize something of their finer possibilities. The other characters are represented as firmly rooted materialists, most of whom believe him a harmless lunatic. One, a servant, keeps faith and assists in the eventual triumph of his "unworldly wisdom." Owing perhaps to collaboration, the narrative proceeds in arbitrary fashion at times, and in spite of three deaths and a brace of marriages leaves many problems unsolved at the end. Nor is the metaphysical element, necessarily so important in such a story, particularly well handled. The hero, in fact, remains an ambiguous personage: though his function is clear enough, the authors are unable to carry off the difficult job of making him believable. As a result the whole book is lost in a vague No Man's Land somewhere between fantasy and acceptable philosophy. Over-sentimental in spots, it nevertheless contains some excellent writing in a precise, analytical, slightly academic vein. If "Fool's Melody" is not a complete success, it is at least a brave attempt to treat high matters, and is worthy of study.

The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

Gilbert and Sullivan

"Their foe was folly, and their
weapon wit"

(For the Gilbert and Sullivan Festival at
Wesleyan University)

WHO cleaned the tortoise with
a scoop
By that experiment empiric
Not only had his turtle soup
But used the empty shell for lyric.

The world's tough carapace of bone
Is still just thick enough, and hollow
To render perfect tune and tone
For the devices of Apollo.

Between its horny armatures
Of heavy tortoise, slug and stupid,
A double counterpoint endures:
As old as Art, as young as Cupid.

O Gemini of clef and stave,
Who quarreled, and were proud as
Phaon—
His whiskered godsons, the god gave
A bony instrument to play on!

Small Wares. II

We spoke of the idea of using manuscript sheets as a lampshade. That reminds me of a fine old study-lamp, with green glass canopy and nickel oil-cylinder, the admiration of my early childhood. It was my father's study-lamp and I regarded it with great reverence; by its light, I knew, he performed the orisons of mathematics. It was a matter of high importance that it be justly filled and trimmed; so much so that if the maid was inept my mother often did this herself, and I remember admiring her fine violinist's hands at the task. An interesting aroma of kerosene exhaled from this operation. It pleases me that I use an oil-stove for heating the Knothole, for the task of filling it also has that Smell of the Lamp—a phrase which can mean little to those reared entirely on electricity. The oloroso of kerosene will always have for me a suggestion of strong study.

But I meant, while we were along the shelves, to say something of a book given me some years ago by one of this Green's earliest patrons, Mr. Wilbur Macey Stone. He may well have wondered that I have never mentioned it, though it is a high spot among a valued assortment of works on the good life. *The Epicure's Almanack*; or, *Calendar of Good Living*, published in 1815; "A Directory to the Taverns, Coffee-houses, Inns, Eating-houses, and other Places of alimentary Resort in the British Metropolis." No small amount of social and literary history can be learned, or guessed, in the anonymous editor's notes.

Did you suppose, as I did, that broccoli was quite a modern dish? It is listed here, at 6d., on the menu at Pagliano's, an Italian house esteemed at the time. The dishes cooked and sold along the pavements of humbler streets were "hot soup, baked faggots, grey peas boiled, and peas-pudding." Faggots, a favorite dish of poor George Gissing, were a baked patty of chopped liver. How exciting (at Chalk Farm near Primrose Hill) to come upon "a stock of milch cows for the supply of milk for syllabubs." (Syllabub, I think, was a kind of whip of milk and wine; whether hot or cold I know not. Something like zabaglione, perhaps? It was a syllabub of "verjuice" that the singing milk-maid promised the Com-pleat Angler.)

It is interesting to look up the Epicure's comments on inns that were famous in 1815; equally interesting to hear of places that were soon to be famous and didn't guess it. The *Salutation*, so often and affectionately recalled by Lamb, where he and Coleridge sat in the "nice little smoky room with pipes, tobacco, egg-hot, welsh-rabbit, metaphysics, and poetry" was evidently a quite humble place. Of the *Cock*, near Temple Bar, soon to be frequented by Alfred Tennyson, we learn "it has the best porter in London, fine poached eggs, and other light things . . . one box at the end of the room is occupied by a knot of sages, who admit strangers into their fraternity on being presented with a crown bowl of punch." It is not the *Cheshire Cheese* but the *Mitre* that recalls Doctor Johnson's memory to the Epicure. But even in 1815 the Cheese was in high favor: "So great is the afflux of diners to this house, between noon and six in the evening, that many persons order their dinner an hour or two beforehand, go out to transact business, and then on returning, their dinner is instantly served up smoking. The brandy, rum, and rack, vulgarly called gin, of this house, are pure and genuine."

What these dinners were like any reader of Dickens can pretty well guess; or even anyone who sat three years at an Oxford table near a hundred years later. Epicure quotes with relish a meal so supremely British that I dare say it

was being served about that time to Bonaparte on his way to St. Helena—the first horror of his downfall—

Boiled fish (skate)

Stewed rump steak and turnips

Bread and porter

Epicure is proud that the butcher shops of London are "the wonder and admiration of all foreigners. The delightful order in which they are set out, are such that they resemble rather the dissecting-room of a lecturer on anatomy than the shambles of a butcher." He particularly commends the shop of (appropriately) Messrs. Giblet and Son as "in the highest degree exemplary." By the way, among

his list of what were then called "Italian warehouses" Epicure mentions the excellent name of Fortnum. I wish he could have lived long enough to enjoy that high-spirited catalogue-book (1930) of Fortnum and Mason, called *Let's Forget Business*. One humorous boast in the latter I always remember: of the size and tenderness of their asparagus, "We do not cut it. We fell it. White as a debutante's shoulders." Or perhaps the picture of "The Nobleman who preferred wearing our Prawns in Aspic to his own Coronet."

When, I suddenly wonder, did the sacred Brussels Sprout come to England? I see no men-

tion of it in this book. Was that also one of the conquests of Waterloo?

The favorite tavern of the booksellers, Epicure tells us, was the *Chapter Coffee-House*, just off Paternoster Row. "This place may be considered as a repository of food for the mind, as well as of the body. Here are daily found and filed all the British newspapers, and the most considerable monthly journals. The usual refreshments served in this house are tea, coffee, chocolate, with muffin, toast, and pure butter, the best of wines and foreign spirits." The booksellers were temperate fellows in those days. Rather different are the Thames-side houses, such as the *Town of Ramsgate* (which I think I visited once with H. M. T.) and the *Subterranean Tap and Gin Dispensary*, "frequented by sailors of every nation, and by lady abbesses and nuns from

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MILKMAID CUP, TIME OF
CHARLES II. (Wine Trade
Exhibition, London, 1933.)