

John Locke

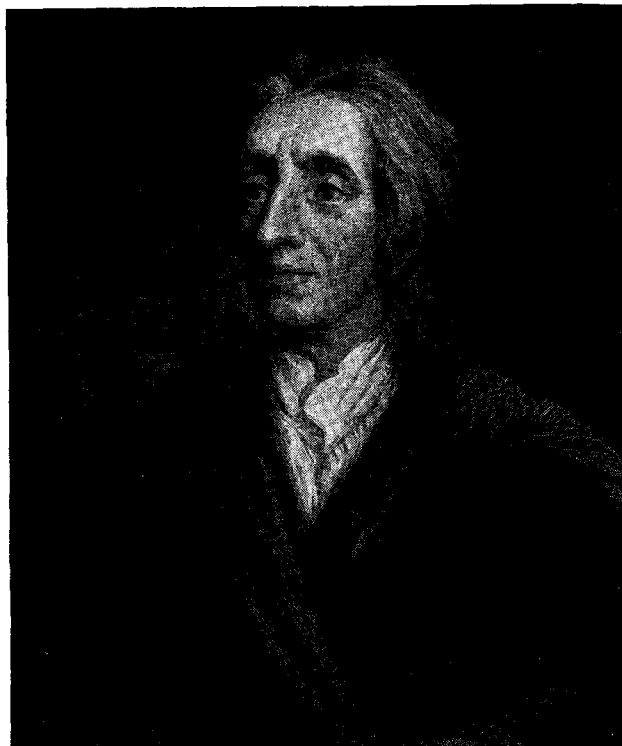
BY LLEWELYN POWYS

ON the island of Capri not far from the Piccola Marina there is an almost inaccessible cave that was once used by Tiberius for a boathouse. The floor of this cave is thickly covered over with sand which if allowed to run carefully through the fingers exposes morsels of the mosaic with which the Roman Emperor two thousand years ago embellished the cave's roof. I have spent many hours searching for these bright chips and still treasure nearly fifty of them.

On one occasion when I was so employed my solitude was disturbed by the figure of a stranger darkening the cave's mouth. He was a German professor. During the conversation that ensued he remarked that there was no greater English thinker than John Locke, asserting that this seventeenth century philosopher from Somerset had had a deep and lasting influence on the metaphysical thought of Europe, well meriting the honor of being the "evil genius" of the rationalism of the eighteenth century.

Locke was born six years after the death of Bacon and three months before the birth of Spinoza. His accidental birth at the house of a relation at Wrington was duly recorded in the register of the beautiful parish church of "that praty market townlet," "1632 John the son of John Lock."

From the first the philosopher's championship of broad conclusions was obnoxious to all who favored unexamined traditions, and it has been objectionable ever since to those who look for our betterment from obedience to blind custom. Anthony à Wood, who was Locke's contemporary at Oxford, did not scruple to leave behind him this crabbed word: "John Locke of Christ Church, now a noted writer, was a man of turbulent spirit clamorous and discontented. When the rest of our Club took notes deferentially from the mouth of the Master, the said Locke scorned to do so, but was ever prating and troublesome." Nothing but the grossest political bias could possibly account for such a commentary. It is clear as day that, both in his writings



JOHN LOCKE

From the portrait by Kneller.

and in his life, John Locke was very especially distinguished for his tolerance. At the University he was as friendly with King'smen as with Roundheads, with Boyle as with his "fanatical tutor," John Owen. As a member of the Royal Society he was acquainted with eminent persons of every opinion and party, and in his last happy retirement at the house of Sir Francis Masham at Oates, in Essex, he would entertain Sir Isaac Newton, Anthony Collins, the free-thinking young squire, and visiting High Churchmen, with an urbanity equally smooth. Atheists alone, of all men, he seems to have been careful to keep outside the pale of his plenary indulgence, declaring with emphatic asperity that "the taking away of God dissolves all," and that for this reason social obligations could have no possible hold upon gentlemen of so blunt a persuasion.

Even the authorities of Oxford, with whom Locke had spent so many happy years, eventually turned against him, his celebrated thirty-pound essay so offending their "vermiculate" schoolmen's learning, that they placed it on their index, forbidding the Heads of the Col-

leges to allow it to be even so much as read to the undergraduates in their charge, an affront which Locke himself made light of, merely observing, "I take what has been done as a recommendation of the book to the world." It is true enough that the "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" has never lacked its defenders. Voltaire said of it, "Many have written the romance of the mind; a sage has modestly written its history."

We may assume that John Locke's academic unpopularity rests largely upon his famous contention that nothing ever enters our minds that was not first introduced by one or other of our five senses. "I see no reason, therefore, to believe that the soul thinks before the senses have furnished it with ideas to think on." Continuing to follow out his argument the philosopher concludes that "all those sublime thoughts which tower above the clouds and reach as high as heaven itself,

take their rise and footing here. . . . In all that great extent wherein the mind wanders . . . it stirs not one jot beyond those ideas which sense or reflection have offered for its contemplation." How far we, notwithstanding "all that is boasted of innate perception," are in knowledge and intellectual features "above the condition of a cockle or an oyster" he leaves to be considered. Any investigation of Locke's writings ought to reassure conventional people that the practical philosopher was by no means pulling up the foundations of knowledge but rather laying "those foundations surer." He asserts, for example, that the certainty of the existence of God is equal to a mathematical certainty, contenting himself with re-

Next  Week

T. E. LAWRENCE BY HIS FRIENDS

Edited by A. W. LAWRENCE

Reviewed by Selden Rodman

ORCHIDS ON YOUR BUDGET

By MARJORIE HILLIS

Reviewed by Agnes Rogers

marking that it is a proposition that demands for its solution "careful attention."

My own disagreement with Locke is on very different grounds. Though his writings on education contain much sound advice, as, for example, that every child whatever his station should learn a manual trade "if practicable two or three but one more particularly," they also include a passage lamentably revelatory of the limitations of the old match-making bachelor. The treacherous sentences to which I refer discover Doctor Locke as being indifferent to the true secret of life, to a sure golden clue in its entangled labyrinth!

If a child have a poetic vein, it is to me the strangest thing in the world, that the father should desire or suffer it to be cherished or improved. Methinks the parents should labor to have it stifled or suppressed as much as may be . . . for it is very seldom seen that anyone discovers mines of gold or silver on Parnassus. It is a pleasant air, but a barren soil; and there are very few instances of those who have added to their patrimony by anything they have reaped from thence.

Nothing is easier than through too much worldly wisdom to miss all. Small advantage it is to a bat to clutch at a rafter when the building totters; far better to fly free, snatching at a scant diet in marginal twilights. John Locke throughout the course of his seventy-two years never lost sight of his "hair portmanteau" and little "red" portfolio full to the brim with business papers hidden away in some death-watch-beetle-cupboard down at Beluton in Somerset. He bestowed the same cautious care upon each undertaking of his stately days. He saw to it, for instance, that his annuity purchased from the first Lord Shaftesbury was well secured by the solid acres of one of the best of the farms on the Wimbourne St. Giles estate. The lean, lantern-jawed countenance presented to us in his latter portraits is therefore not altogether to be relied upon in its suggestion of ascetic unworldliness. He was a Jack that was feign to eat his cake and to have it as well. "John Locke lives a very cunning, unintelligible life here," writes an Oxford acquaintance. "Certainly there is some Whigg intrigue a-managing; but not a word of politics comes from him." Locke's very last utterance as he lay on his death bed, his creature wants so tenderly cared for by Lady Masham and her stepdaughter Esther, seems still inspired by considerations of a comprehensive prudence. He was dying, he said, "in sincere communion with the church

of Christ, by whatever names Christ's followers call themselves."

When I was a boy the late Lord Strachey was the popular Parliamentman for South Somerset. This distinguished Liberal peer was associated in our childish minds with riot and revolution. Mr. Strachey regularly won at the polls, and the Conservative failure would be as regularly commemorated by a faint sound of cheering that would come wafting across the West Drive to the Vicarage garden as Mr. Imberterry or Mr. Peake Mason took a formal departure from his Montacute House supporters. One of Locke's closest friends was a John Strachey, the first of that family to come into possession of Sutton Court at Chew Magna. His letters to this childhood friend are amongst the most lively that he ever addressed. He wrote to him from Paris inquiring how he could possibly expect to learn anything of the fashionable world of Paris "by living at Sutton Court and eating crammed capons and apple pies?" Locke could also pass off one of those labored, indelicate pleasantries so dear to the eighteenth century with Mary Jepp, Strachey's stepsister, whose marriage with his diligent correspondent, Edward Clarke of Chipley, he himself had arranged. She was apparently a great favorite with the precise old bachelor; indeed it would seem sometimes that the young lady "whom methinks looks prettily for a mother" was almost in as high a place of esteem as Damaris Cudworth

(afterwards Lady Masham), the gifted daughter of the Cambridge neo-Platonist, Ralph Cudworth, a native of Aller in Somerset. "If your lying in," he writes to the young wife, "will, as you say, produce long letters as certainly as I find it does fine children, I advise for my own sake as well as that of your family, that Master and you would get to work again as hard as you can drive, that you might lie in again as soon as may be." His letter to his Quaker friend of Rotterdam also goes to show that the society of prominent people he had been accustomed to meet at Exeter House had never succeeded in entirely seducing him from those more sober tastes becoming to a philosopher.

Do not think I am grown either Stoic or a mystic. I can laugh as heartily as ever. . . . You may easily conclude this writer in a chimney corner in some obscure hole. . . . I live in fear of the bustlers, and would not have them come near me.

In our present turbulent epoch it would be impossible for our politicians to study Locke's Essays "written by incoherent parcels" with too much assiduity. He had been early taught the value of compromise. "I no sooner perceived myself in the world, but I found myself in a storm that has lasted hitherto."

His "incoherent expression of sensuous empiricism" was peculiarly native to our English genius of illogical adjustments, clearly encouraging our bent for the practical application of Montaigne's judgment that the "For and the Against are both possible." Locke regarded nothing as being more dangerous to the health of any Commonwealth than the spirit of fanaticism rooted in some faultless speculative theory. He was a pragmatic opportunist who recognized that all human cogitation is fallible and that always there remains at the bottom of life's problems a residue of "irreducible and stubborn facts." "God," Locke declared once, "has not been so sparing to men as to have made them barely two-legged creatures, and left it to Aristotle to make them rational." He distrusts the claims of intuition even more than those of subtle syllogisms. "It is no small power to give one man over another to have authority to make a man swallow that for an innate principle which may serve his purpose who teacheth them." The conclusion of the whole matter is that we are fully justified in putting our confidence in the rulings of ordinary good-natured common-sense. We have no safer nor no surer way. It is indeed a paramount (Continued on page 12)

The Two Triumphs

BY LYTTON STRACHEY

TIS true that I have never touched your hair;
Perhaps, indeed, 'tis not for me to touch.
He touches it; but then he does not care.
I touch it not; but then I care so much.

In this wrong world was it not always so
Since Adam plucked our deep-desired woe?

Why do you let him love you? Why not me?

Am I less worthy? Ah! That I am more

Is why I still must lose you, and why he

May taste the sweet fruit to the bitter core.

So from great Moses was the promised ground
Exhibited, which little Joshua found.

Yet listen; you are mine in his despite.

Who shall dare say his triumph mine prevents?

My love is the established infinite,

And all his kisses are but accidents.

His earth, his heaven, shall wither and decay

To naught: my love shall never pass away.

For, as in mummied sepulchre unseen

The planted grass Osiris' name expressed,

So shall my love's dim seed with living green

Inform at last your mortuary breast:

And in your sealed-up heart there shall be read

The mystic resurrection of the dead.

*This hitherto unpublished poem was recently released
by Lytton Strachey's literary executor.*



A NORWEGIAN TOWN

Woodcut by H. Glintenkamp, from
"A Wanderer in Woodcuts."

Norwegians in the Sun

NORTHERN SUMMER. By Gosta af Geijerstam. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1937. \$1.50.

Reviewed by AGNES ROTHERY

THIS is the cheerfulest and the sunniest book which has come out of Norway in a long time. As simple and palatable as bread and clabber is this brief record of a Norwegian father, mother, and five youngsters who move out from their winter home on the mainland to spend their summer holiday on an island farm, accompanied in the motor boat by "a cow which we had just bought, a squealing pig in a sack, and a yowling cat in another."

The fields and the fjords: sunlight and gulls: the pig and the kitten who are inseparable friends: mother learning to milk and father to scythe and the little boys to fish—it is all here in a hundred and twenty pages.

There is nothing precocious about the children. They are sweet sometimes and a nuisance sometimes and sometimes they are quite funny, particularly Pelle who "had the habit of sinking into an imaginary world of his own and becoming lost to the actual world around him. . . . Once when Papa had called him several times without getting an answer, Pelle had finally said, in great irritation: 'Be still, Papa! Can't you see I am sitting here falling to pieces?'"

The family all make hay together; they bathe together with great shouting. They follow the lives of the various animals on the farm with absorbed attention. One boy has a birthday. Father tells fairy stories. It is the simplest tale—simply told but drenched with humor that does not strain and sentiment that does not cloy.

"Northern Summer" is such a small book that one fears it may become lost behind bigger volumes, and the tone is so unpretentious one fears it may be drowned by more strident voices. This would be a pity for it is, in its modest way, quite a little gem.

A Son of the United States

AMERICAN DREAM: A NOVEL. By Michael Foster. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

MR. FOSTER'S novel may be called an American story-of-the-generations book told in a series of lengthy cut-backs from the base line of the latest generation of the Thralls. At the opening of the story Shelby Thrall, sick of the clatter and hypocrisy of newspaper work, has resolved to chuck it for a printing venture of his own; when he is cleaning out his house in San Francisco, preparatory to moving, certain old letters come under his view, and his speculation as to what manner of persons his ancestors were is the excuse for the successive returns to previous generations of Thralls. The device is not new, but the manner of treating the glimpses one is vouchsafed of past generations has the speed, the acrid strength of the present mode in fiction. The title of the book signifies that the Thralls, ever pushing westward and ever dissatisfied, have pursued the American dream of a better life somewhere, somehow to be found.

Whether this manner of telling the story is the right one may be debated, but the successive episodes are presented with a

sense of drama and power which makes Mr. Foster a novelist worth reckoning with. The defeat of generations of idealists might be monotonous, were it not that the author has wonderfully vivified his historic episodes. The story of the first Thrall who crosses from Ireland, single-handed quells a riot among the immigrants, tries vainly to settle down in respectable Boston, and finally takes to the sea again, a queer little romantic woman having hidden herself as a stowaway on his ship, is absorbing narrative, and quite as vivid is a fragment of Indian fighting which appears later in the tale. Somehow, as the book approaches the years of the World War it seems to lose validity. The Thralls make some odd marriages, and the gallery of female portraits in the book, some successful and some not, are possibly the most debatable matter in the novel.

But one reads "American Dream," not, as is too often the case with that harmless, necessary drudge, the book-reviewer, from a sense of duty, but because the novel moves. With all its faults, it has life, color, interest, and meaning. Not only are the episodes in the main well worth reading, but the implications of the theme have moment. The book really illuminates the significance of human life in the United States.

In the Delta Country

SON OF HAMAN. By Louis Cochran. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LUCIA B. MIRRIELES

THE Caxton Printers have launched upon a trilogy, and again the life of a crude country boy fills the first volume. But unlike the neurotic hero of Vardis Fisher's much disputed tetralogy, also a Caxton publication, Mr. Cochran presents in the post-Civil War years, when Freud was unknown, a hard-headed, stalwart, illegitimate youth of the delta lands in Mississippi, Lije Smith, who is possessed of purely practical desires. He boasts of these when he has drunk too much: he means to own timber, amass wealth, and marry 'Lisbeth, the well-to-do daughter of the only "quality folks" in this community of poor share-croppers.

Mr. Cochran, Mississippi lawyer and G-Man, known for his magazine articles on Southern politicians better, perhaps, than for his first two novels, seems to be thoroughly familiar with the life of which he writes. He, too, like Lije's rival in love, hung up his shingle and practised law on the Yazoo River, where, at least in the 1880's, the community preferred swift justice by personal encounter to the law.

Mr. Cochran tells the story of "The Son of Haman" in simple, sometimes awkwardly simple, style. Occasionally the reiteration of the lunch pail contents recalls the overconscientious report of a social worker, but to one bred on frontier tales, whether of Mississippi delta lands or Western prairie, much of the book rings true. The drinking, fighting, heavy joking of the men, the proximity but intangible distance between "good" and "bad" women, the distrust of city men, the "shotgun wedding" at the end all bear the authentic stamp of frontier life. Showboat, country dance, religious revival, work in the cotton field and at the gin provide a picturesque setting for the ambitious Lije. Least convincing are the "quality folks"; most colorful is the revival conducted beneath flaming torches by Brother Raccoon Watkins, kin to all the Billy Sundays of a later day.

This first volume of the trilogy from the Caxton Printers, far less beautifully written and far less provocative of thought than Mr. Fisher's first volume, presents, in a rapidly moving tale, several convincing characters, Lije among them, shown against the comparatively unknown background of the Mississippi delta country.