

Prophets at the Crossroads

BY ELMER DAVIS

IN these times of tribulation, when men in Spain and China call on the rocks to cover them, and the great and terrible day of the Lord may be just around the corner for everybody else, the most pertinent of all questions is "What shall we do to be saved?" Here come two evangelists* from England to show us the way of salvation; each knows what is the matter with us, and how to cure it. Unfortunately their diagnoses, and their remedies, are utterly different; and the resemblances between the authors only make life harder for the earnest truth seeker. Both Heard and Belloc insist that morality must have a religious sanction, both are rigorously logical, and both belong to the now popular either-or school of thinkers. Civilization, they agree, faces an inexorable alternative, either this or that; but their thisses are irreconcilable and even their thats are not the same. Heard sees civilization headed for collapse and chaos unless it accepts his gospel; to Belloc the alternative to salvation is communism, a fate worse than death.

Belloc's book is by far the easier reading, and may be more briefly dismissed since his remedy—the return to Catholicism, of course—is a familiar one; you take it or leave it, according to taste. But since he feels that the present crisis is immediately due to economic dislocations (hastened and intensified, but not, he concedes, wholly caused, by the Reformation) he would implement the Catholic philosophy by the economic reforms set forth last year in his "Restoration of Property"—a recreation of the (possibly somewhat idealized) fifteenth century world of guild industry and peasant-owned farms. The substance of the book was delivered as lectures at Fordham last winter, and naturally in addressing his coreligionists Belloc did not have to offer much argument for the truth and necessity of Catholicism. The reader not al-



GERALD HEARD

ready converted will be conscious of the omission. Non-Catholics will differ from many of his interpretations of history, but it must be remarked that he treats the Reformation, and the conditions that produced it, with an objectivity rare and admirable in a partisan of either side.

Not quite so much can be said for his treatment of current affairs. He is sure that the inescapable choice for civilization lies between Catholicism and communism; Cardinal Faulhaber might see it otherwise. It is fashionable nowadays to treat Protestantism, capitalism, parliamentary democracy, and other dominant factors of the nineteenth century as beneath discussion, but a book which never mentions fascism can hardly be called a complete picture of the contemporary world. To be sure Catholicism and fascism get along very well in Spain and Italy; but Belloc says nothing about Italy, and in his brief allusion to the Spanish war he is conscientious enough to mention the Moors, but not the Italians. Is it possible that he is ashamed of the company the Church keeps?

Mr. Gerald Heard is even surer than Belloc that unless we be born again we shall not enter into the kingdom of God—so sure that he makes only passing mention of economics, confident that if we seek the kingdom first, all things else shall be added unto us. This is, he holds, fundamentally a moral and religious crisis, but he dismisses Belloc's solution as no longer possible for thinking men. It was a mere phase of the Anthropomorphic Cosmology which produced the First Morality, the expression of a transcendent Creator's will. That picture of the universe was shattered by the successive blows of Newton, Darwin, and Freud. The destructive effects of "The Origin of Species by Natural Selection" were not at once apparent, because a generation brought up by pious parents retained their ethics, even after the ontological foundation was gone; but the second generation drew the logical conclusion and there followed the Second or Mechanomorphic Morality, seething with lust and red

in tooth and claw, by which we all now live—at least, if Mr. Gerald Heard is correctly informed. "Ethics," he says, "must be the logical system of action built up from such general truths as can be discovered from an unbiased observation of reality." Such observation, by the dimmer light which shone till lately, indicated a mechanical universe which logically imposed on its inhabitants a compulsion to unlimited money-grabbing and fornication; this we must do, whether we enjoy it or not, and (since everyone behaves logically in the world of Mr. Heard) this is what we are all doing. But—glad tidings of great joy—materialism has now been disproved, the latest unbiased observations disclose a very different cosmic picture; and on that firm foundation the Third Morality not only can but must be erected. If not, "what we have called

* *THE CRISIS OF CIVILIZATION.* By Hilaire Belloc. New York: Fordham University Press. 1937. \$2.50.

THE THIRD MORALITY. By Gerald Heard. New York: William Morrow & Company. 1937. \$2.50.

Next  Week

FALL ANNOUNCEMENT NUMBER

ethics will disappear and what we have called civilization will disappear with them." Either, or.

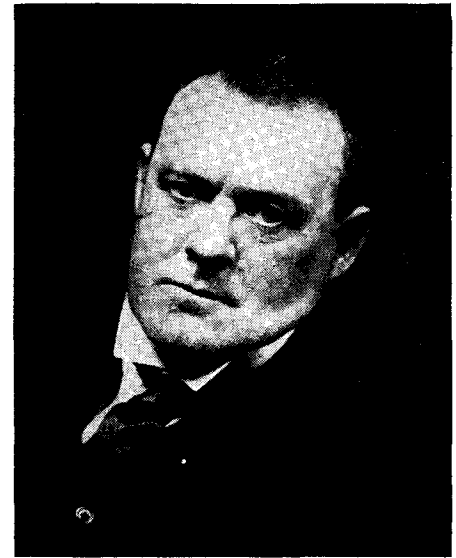
No sane man would hesitate long between such alternatives; but the penitent stumbling down the sawdust trail finds Mr. Heard detaining him. Since all morality must rest on a cosmological foundation, we must first learn what happy discoveries about the nature of the universe, discerned by the latest unbiased observation of reality, have delivered our souls from error's chain and made it logically permissible to sleep alone and like it. We know now that "the universe is simply a vast system of force-waves," and the world as we apprehend it is a mere mental construct out of such chips and splinters of reality as our senses are able to perceive—material selected under the influence of greed and fear; or, as they put it in India, an illusion based on desire.

Where Heard goes beyond India is in buttressing this view by the latest findings of Occidental science, or some of them. He has not much use for either the senses or the reason—the deeper truths lie in the unconscious; but it appears that scientific evidence which backs him up (unlike that which controverts him) is not a mere fallible selection based on greed and fear. The Principle of Indeterminacy plays a large part in it, and Rhine's experiments in extra-sensory perception, and a good deal of other material on which an unscientific reviewer is not competent to pass judgment. But its meaning is clear to the adept. Mr. Heard knows, for instance, that natural selection is only an exploded superstition; what causes the origin of species is cosmic rays from some super-nova, powerful enough to pierce, at intervals, the Heavyside layer. He knows, too, a good deal about what happens on the other side of Jordan—who is and who is not likely to inherit eternal life. He knows,

in sum, that the universe is essentially one, that human personalities are "not separate wholes but parts of a single state of being"; and that if we only get rid of craving and try to merge ourselves into the Larger Life, "man may make any universe up to the standard of which he is prepared to live. . . . The one fundamental objective fact is that the energy-radiation will sustain and substantiate any construction creative desire calls upon it to support and fulfil." Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Apparently thou canst, after indoctrination in the Third Morality.

Not even dialectical materialism offers so bright a prospect of making up your own world as you go along. If man will only "realize his unity with all life and being" the troubles of these times will pass away. But a generation of vipers must be converted, and in the time of transition it is the duty of the adherent of the Third Morality to lead the "rationed life," aiming at "efficiency and innocence." The innocence is not an eremitic virtue; "teams" of the efficient and innocent should be formed, nuclear cells for the evangelization of the world; and fortunately a technique is available for the practice and strengthening of virtue.

Vegetarianism is part of it, not only because it is wicked to take animal life (though Heard reluctantly admits that we may have to kill dangerous bacteria till we can think of some more fraternal way to treat them) but because "the reflective, controlled type is vegetarian, the impulsive and impatient is the high-protein eater." *E.g.*, those patient, non-impulsive vegetarians, Adolf Hitler and Bernard Shaw. It is curious that Heard sanctions, by implication, the eating of beans, abhorrent to some of his fore-runners. Deep breathing and correct posture, rhythm and the dance, are also conducive to virtue; omphaloscopy for



HILAIRE BELLOC

some reason is omitted. Teams of such mental-moral athletes, living "the life of interest-affection, a way of life which is a psychiatry, an economy, and a policy," may perhaps promote a new mutation in social evolution, even if no super-nova blows up in time to help them out. At least we must try it; "our choice is to go on to a new state of being, or end."

Thus the gospel according to Heard. It has its soft spots; in dealing with the problem of evil he has to come down to maintaining that outside of man, who causes evil by believing that the individual is an end in himself and not a phase of the Larger Life, there is really not nearly so much evil as people think. But all gospels have their soft spots, and this is no time to look a gift gospel in the mouth—especially a psychiatric gospel offered to a neurotic age teetering on the verge of lunacy. We have his word for it, however, that no morality is any good unless it is based on the latest cosmology; so it seems necessary to take another look at his unbiased observation of reality, even at the risk of being set down as what he calls a "rationalistic materialistic ethicist." (Belloc has too much respect for the English language to apply so barbarous an epithet even to the foulest heretic.)

There is a good deal of scientific evidence which tends to discredit a purely mechanistic interpretation of the universe; there also remains a good deal of evidence on the other side. Of the evidence cited by Heard, how much is fact, how much plausible hypothesis, and how much cockeyed error, no man yet knows (except Heard). The one thing sure is that, like all scientific evidence, it consists of selections from the phenomena of the universe apprehended by the human senses and integrated by the human mind. Heard's criterion is simple; such

(Continued on page 16)

Self-Knowledge

By CHARLOTTE WILDER

ON the strict boundary of farthest light,
There shows a hint of distance, opening clear,
Which is the vision's soon-exhausted sight,
Firing its own extension: so the deer

Might cleave himself a passage through the air,
Spurning the thicket, where his memories cower,
To seek a wider vantage; so the hare,
Startled from refuge by a chilling shower,

Tread down a bolder safety. Thus, I saw,
Truly, the self, move forward like a sun,
Shaking the shadows from its front of awe,
Itself, its movement and the vista, one:

Forced onward, like the hare, fleeing its fear,
Forever lured to freedom, like the deer.

paid. The oats and the sheep are not theirs to eat, and must be sent still across the Channel to that absent, mythical owner, while the people of Crom who raised these things die of hunger in the midst of their rotted potatoes. Such was the famine of 1845 and no one who reads of it here will fail to understand the conditions of Ireland's poverty as well as the roots of the rebellions which tore her free of England's landlords.

This is the broad pattern of the book. It is filled in with a wealth of native color, speech, and manner of living, as unsparingly fertile, often exalted, as the meaning of the book is bitterly realistic. There are a dozen first-rate characterizations the author has built up with ease. The characters are so thoroughly and unrestrainedly alive that they are able to reflect, in their diverse roles, the history that shaped their existence. "Famine" is much the best work O'Flaherty has done.

Ambitious Fishing Village

MONDAY GO TO MEETING. By Kenneth Payson Kempton. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

MR. KEMPTON has given in this novel a complete picture of the manner of life in South Tanisnot, Maine; a fishing village with mild ambitions to become a summer resort. He does it by interlocking the stories of widely varying types in the village—the delicate—except in spots—young love story of Cass and Allie; the less delicate but appealing love story of the widow who had to have a man to nurse, or not necessarily to nurse; the finely executed introspections of a supposed hypochondriac; the worries of the first decent banker in recent literature; the garrulous self-pitying of an old housekeeper; and eight or ten other stories.

This is a dangerous device. Stories designed this way are likely to separate like cheap French dressing, leaving some nourishing but wholly dissociated blobs floating around in a thin and unrelated medium. Mr. Kempton keeps his stories well-stirred and in a brilliant final chapter manages to bring nearly all of his characters on in one scene, the town meeting, where the significance of their various adventures to the inflexible social unity of South Tanisnot is made plain. The three characters who do not appear for this climax are the three foreigners

POINT NOIR. By Clelie Benton Huggins. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

GENIUS bridges everything, talent much, but mere promise little. An Emily Brontë can produce wild, warped, theatrical characters, and by the force of some inward fire, by some passionate wildness of her own, breathe a vivacity into her work that is imperishable. A Julian Green can present inhibited, hag-ridden lives and make their macabre antagonisms compelling and plausible. But a Clelie Huggins, dealing like them with personalities overwrought and ingrown, only succeeds in making melodramatic and incredible their antipathies and sullen maladjustments. And

the secret of Miss Huggins's failure lies in the lack of that quality which alone can make the abnormal take on the stamp of reality—a bold and vigorous imagination. Where she draws on experience for her material, as in the setting of her Louisiana plantation and in the dialect and mannerisms of the Negroes who serve the Sévigné family, her portrayal has freshness and interest. But the moment she strikes out on her own, when she begins to invent character and situation, she commences to flounder, and as her story advances to its grim conclusion it passes from ineptitude to improbability, and from improbability to melodrama. Moreover, it shifts its focus, for, having for its first third been centered about the child Ange-Marie, brought home from her convent school to attend the funeral of her grandfather, it becomes for the rest of its length a series of episodes in the life of her elders.

A stranger crew than the Sévigné family it would be hard to find. Madame Sévigné is so thrown from balance by the discovery that her husband had made unnecessary the sale of the home she hated by leaving her rich instead of poor that she dies insane. The elder of her sons is reduced to complete passivity by widowhood and the other so filled with pity for humankind that he kills the mulatto girl he loves rather than have her suffer the discriminations her race imposes. Her rigid daughter in her attachment to her home sacrifices all else to it, and her granddaughter, Ange-Marie, is baffled, as who would not be, by life as she sees it around her.

One need not be told by the publisher's blurb that Miss Huggins is young to feel complete immaturity in her writing. What makes that immaturity disturbing is not her failure to master the technique of her medium, not that she cannot dovetail the various elements of her story, not even that it has exaggerations of incident and characterization that are frequently absurd, but that it shows no sustained power of inventiveness, no grip on direction. Her characters create the impression of having outwitted their author; their actuality escapes her and their behavior, instead of appearing inevitable, merely is jerked into a false life by sensationalism. It would not be worth while to discuss Miss Huggins's book at length if it were all as bad as the worst of it, but there is a freshness and intensity to its opening chapters, a veracity to its description of locale, and a sincerity in its portrayal of the child Ange-Marie that make comprehensible the fact that Houghton Mifflin should on the promise of its beginning have awarded their fellowship prize to it. What Miss Huggins needs is more actual experience of living to correct her ideas of life.



From the jacket design of "Monday Go to Meeting."

from distant Southern cities like Boston. The village has unconsciously crushed or rejected all of them.

There is too much description of the beauties of the Maine coast and vicinity in the early part of the book. It slows the story exactly where the story should not be slowed and it is not necessary. After a summer of Chamber of Commerce advertising, New Haven time tables, and vacation folders hardly a man can well be alive who has not seen tourists and lobstermen in the water, near the water, or being pulled from the water at Old Penobscot, Old Kennebunkport, Old Bangor, or some other town with an odd name.

The pangs of conscience which some people feel over a bit of honest skipping will soon be forgotten, however, in the excitement of characterizations which are all subtle and convincing and robust. Even some bawdy, or at least ribald, implications are inoffensive because they are so natural to their people and so funny. Mr. Kempton is capable of such illuminating irony as the incident of Allie's shrewish mother, after having rated her daughter for a supposed moral offense, belatedly and cravenly putting a copy of "What a Young Girl Should Know" on Allie's pillow.

Mr. Kempton's first novel "Old Man Greenlaw" made him not quite the discovery the Discoverers' Club claims, but "Monday Go to Meeting" is a discovery.