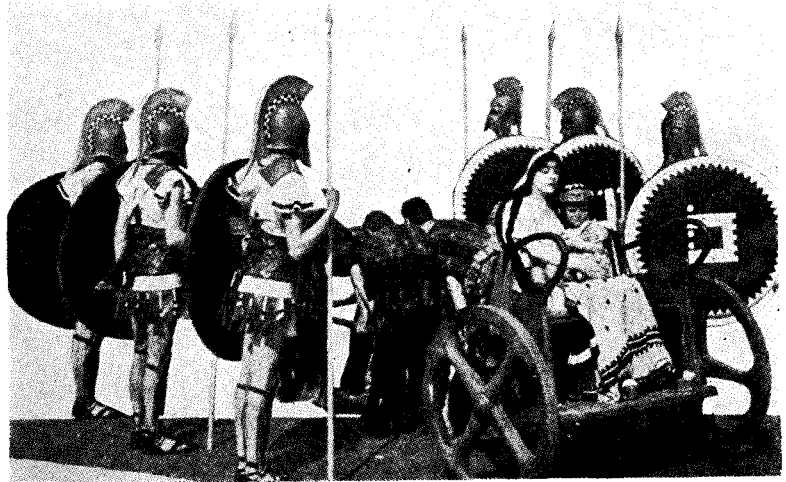


The First Anti-War Play

BY EDITH HAMILTON



Underwood & Underwood

*"THE TROJAN WOMEN," Produced by Granville Barker (1915)
Edith Wynne Mathison as Andromeda, Richard Ross as the child.*

THE greatest piece of anti-war literature there is in the world was written 2,350 years ago. This is a statement worth a thought or two. Nothing since, no description or denunciation of war's terrors and futilities, ranks with the "Trojan Women," which was put upon the Athenian stage by Euripides in the year 416 B.C. In that faraway age a man saw with perfect clarity what war was, and wrote what he saw in a play of surpassing power, and then—nothing happened. No one was won over to his side—no band of eager disciples took up his idea and went preaching it to a war-ridden world. That superlatively efficient war-machine, Rome, described by one of her own historians as having fought continuously for eight hundred years, went on to greater and greater efficiency, with never a glimmer from Euripides to disturb her complacency. In the long annals of literature no writer is recorded who took over his point of view. A few objectors to war are known to us. They crop out sporadically through the ages, but rarely and never with Euripides's deliberate intention of showing war up for what it is. And except for Christ, to whom non-resistance was fundamental, we do not know of anyone else who disbelieved in violence as a means of doing good. None of Christ's so-called followers followed Him there until comparatively modern times. Not one medieval saint stands out to oppose the thousands of saintly believers in the holiness of this war or that. One soldier there was in the early days of Christianity, a simple, uneducated man, who refused to fight when he was converted, because, as he explained, Christ did not approve of men killing each other. But he was easily silenced—and the Church never denounced his executioners. He never came near to being made a saint. His very name, Maximian, is known only to the curious. That was doctrine too dangerous for the Fathers of the Church. Christians refuse to fight? Rather set up a cross as the banner of a triumphant army,

conquering under that standard, killing in His name.

The men of religion, along with the men of letters, passed by, unseeing, the road Euripides had opened, and each usually vied with the other in glorifying and magnifying noble, heroic, and holy war.

Consider the greatest of all, Shakespeare. He never bothered to think war through. Of course, that was not his way with anything. He had another method. Did he believe in "Contumelious, beastly, mad-brain'd war"? Or in "Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war"? He says as much on the one side as on the other.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers," King Henry cries before Agincourt:

This day is called the feast of Crispian;
And gentlemen of England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they
were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles
any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

And then a few pages on:

If impious war
Array'd in flames like to the Prince of
fiends,
Do, with his smirched complexion, all
fell feats
Enlink'd to waste and desolation,—

It is not possible to know what Shakespeare really thought about war, if he really thought about it at all. Always that disconcerting power of imagination blocks the way to our knowledge of him. He saw eye to eye with Henry on one page and with the citizens of Harfleur on the next, and what he saw when he looked only for himself, he did not care to record.

In our Western world Euripides stands alone. He understood what the world has only begun today to understand.

"The burden of the valley of vision," wrote Isaiah, when he alone knew what could save his world from ruin. To per-

ceive an overwhelmingly important truth of which no one else sees a glimmer, is loneliness such as few even in the long history of the world can have had to suffer. But Euripides suffered it for the greater part of his long life. The valley of vision was his abiding place.

He was the youngest of the three Greek tragic poets, but only a few years younger than Sophocles, who, indeed, survived him. The difference between the two men was great. Each had the keen discernment and the profound spiritual perception of the supreme artist. Each lived and suffered through the long drawn-out war, which ended in the crushing defeat of Athens, and together they watched the human deterioration brought about during those years. But what they saw was not the same. Sophocles never dreamed of a world in which such things could not be. To him the way to be enabled to endure what was happening, the only way for a man to put life through no matter what happened, was to face facts unwaveringly and accept them, to perceive clearly and bear steadfastly the burden of the human lot, which is as it is and never will be different. To look at the world thus, with profundity but in tranquillity of spirit, without bitterness, has been given to few, and to no other writer so completely as to Sophocles.

But Euripides saw clearest of all not what is, but what might be. So rebels are made. Great rebels all know the valley of vision. They see possibilities: this evil and that ended; human life transformed; people good and happy. "And there shall be neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain: for the former things are passed away." The clarity with which they see brings them anguish; they have a passion of longing to make their vision a reality. They feel, like a personal experience, the giant agony of the world. Not many among the greatest stand higher than Euripides in this aristocracy of humanity.

Sophocles said, "Nothing is wrong which gods command." Euripides said, "If

gods do evil, then they are not gods." Two different worlds are outlined in those two ideas. Submission is the rule of the first. Not ours to pass judgment upon the divine. "There are thoughts too great for mortal men," was ever Sophocles's idea, or, in the words of another great Greek writer, "To long for the impossible is a disease of the soul." Keep then within the rational limit; "Sail not beyond the pillars of Heracles." But in the second world, Euripides's world, there can be no submission, because what reigns there is a passion for justice and a passion of pity for suffering. People who feel in that way do not submit to the inevitable, or even really perceive it. But they perceive intolerably what is wrong and, under that tremendous impetus, they are ready to throw all security aside, to call everything into question, to tear off the veils that hide ugly things, and often, certainly in Euripides's case, to give up forever peace of mind.

Two years before the end of the war Euripides died, not in Athens, but away up north in savage Thrace, lonelier in his death even than in his life. The reason he left his city is not recorded, but it was a compelling one. Men did not give up their home in Greek and Roman days unless they must. All we are told is a single sentence in the ancient "Life of Euripides," that he had to go away because of "the malicious exultation" aroused against him in the city. It is not hard to discover why.

Athens was fighting a life-and-death war. She did not want to think about anything. Soldiers must not think. If they begin to reason why, it is very bad for the army. Above all, they must not think about the rights and wrongs of the war. Athens called that being unpatriotic, not to say traitorous, just as emphatically as the most Aryan Nazi today could. And Euripides kept making her think. He put play after play on the stage which showed the hideousness of cruelty and the pitifulness of human weakness and human pain. The Athenians took their theater very seriously, and they were as keen and as sensitive an audience as has ever been in the world. It was unheard of in Athens to forbid a play because it was not in accordance with the ruling policy, but many a politician must have felt

very uneasy as he listened to what Euripides had to say.

The war lasted twenty-seven years. Thucydides, the great historian of the time, remarks that "War, teaching men by violence, fits their characters to their condition," and two of his austere black-laid-on-white pictures illustrate with startling clarity how quickly the Athenians went downhill under that teaching.

They had been fighting for three years only when an important island in the Aegean revolted. Athens sent a big fleet against her and captured her, and in furious anger voted to put all the men to death and make slaves of the women and children. They dispatched a ship to carry the order to the general in command, and then, true to the spirit of the city that was still so great, they realized the shocking thing they had done, and they sent another boat to try to overtake the first and bring it back, or, if that was impossible, to get to the island in time to prevent the massacre. We are told how the rowers rowed as none ever before, and how they did arrive in time. And Athens felt that weight of guilt lifted, and rejoiced.

But as the war went on men did not feel guilty when terrible deeds were done. They grew used to them. Twelve years later, when the war had lasted fifteen years, another island offended Athens, not by revolting, only by trying to keep neutral. It was a tiny island, in itself of no importance, but by that time Athens was incapable of weighing pros and cons. She took the island, she killed all the men and enslaved all the women and children, and we hear of no one who protested. But a few months later one man showed what he thought, not only of this terrible deed but of the whole horrible business of war. Euripides brought out the "Trojan Women."

There is no plot in the "Trojan Women" and almost no action. After a ten-year war a town has been taken by storm and the men in it killed. Except for two subordinate parts the characters are all women. Their husbands are dead, their children taken from them, and they are waiting to be shipped off to slavery. They talk about what has happened and how they feel, and this talk makes up the substance of the play. They are very

unlike each other, so that we see the situation from different points of view. There is the wife of the king, an old woman, whose husband was cut down before her eyes, in their home as he clung to the altar; her sons, too, are dead, and she, a queen, is to be a slave to the conquerors. There is her daughter, a holy virgin, dedicated to the service of the god of truth, now to be the concubine of the victorious commander-in-chief. Her daughter-in-law too, wife of her dearest and most heroic son, she is to belong to the son of the man who killed him and misused him after death. Helen, the beautiful, is there as well, maneuvering to regain her power over the husband she betrayed, but, in the play, unsuccessful and led away to die. And there are a number of other women, not great or impressive at all except through their sufferings, pitiful creatures weeping for the loss of home, husband, children, and everything sweet and pleasant gone forever.

That is the whole of it. Not one gleam of light anywhere. Euripides had asked himself what war is like when one looks straight at it, and this is his answer. He knew his Homer. It was the Greek Bible. And that theme of glorious poetry about the dauntless deeds of valiant men, heroically fighting for the most beautiful woman in the world, turns in his hands into a little group of broken-hearted women.

A soldier from the victorious army, who comes to bring them orders, is surprised and irritated to find himself moved to pity them; but he shrugs his shoulders and says, "Well—that's war."

The pomp and pride and glorious circumstance are all gone. When the play opens it is just before dawn, and the only light in the darkness comes fitfully from the burning city. Against that background two gods talk to each other and at once Euripides makes clear what he thinks about war as a method of improving life in any way for anyone.

In the old stories about what happened after Troy fell, told for hundreds of years before Euripides, curiously the conquering Greeks did not come off well. They had an exceedingly bad voyage back, and even those who escaped storm and shipwreck found terrible things waiting for them at home. In those far-away times, long before history began, it would seem that some men had learned what our world hardly yet perceives, that inevitably victors and vanquished must in the end suffer together. It was one of those strange, prophetic insights which occasionally disturb the sluggish flow of the human spirit, but seem to accomplish nothing for centuries of time. Euripides, however, had discovered the meaning behind the stories.

He makes his two gods decide that the fall of Troy shall turn out no better for the Greeks than for the Trojans. "Give

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Some Recent Anti-War Plays

The success of the play ["What Price Glory?"] resulted in a flood of moving pictures, treating war realistically rather than sentimentally, and there was a time when I believed that the far-reaching effects of this play and Sherriff's touching play, Journey's End, together with such books as All Quiet on the Western Front, would do much to lessen the war spirit in the world. I am less optimistic now.

Only recently I produced another indictment of war, Humphrey Cobb's shattering book, Paths of Glory, ably adapted by Sidney Howard. Its chief reaction seemed to be a disclosure of impotence, an "I know, but what can you do about it?" attitude. There was little of the fine, jeering indignation awakened by What Price Glory?

FROM "TO A LONELY BOY" BY ARTHUR HOPKINS (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN.)

Second Wind

THE SOUTH WIND OF LOVE. By Compton Mackenzie. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE DANGERFIELD

THIS novel covers a period from 1913 to the middle of the war. It is the second in an ambitious and, up to the present, successful tetralogy. Whether or not it is successful as fiction—that is, as portraying the character of an impressionable young man—admits, at least, of some doubt. Personally, I don't think that the John Ogilvie of this novel is nearly so vital as the John Ogilvie of its predecessor. But one has to disentangle an author's intentions from one's own predilections; and it becomes clearer and clearer that Mr. Mackenzie is attempting, in his own way, a history of the twentieth century. His own way is the romantic way, and therefore the century is chaotic; and John Ogilvie becomes a commentator, a choregus, a means of throwing some light on this tragic chaos. Mr. Mackenzie makes his central character interpret, but does not interpret his central character: he throws himself headlong into the whirlpool, and round they go together—he and John Ogilvie and such fragments of an abolished world as come within their view.

John Ogilvie as playwright, John Ogilvie in America, in the arms of Gabrielle Derosier, in the last days before the war, is like an actor in some clever but too lengthy curtain raiser. The novel really gets into its stride when, in 1915, and not before page 261, he enters the British Secret Service and is sent out to do counter-espionage work in the Aegean and to play his part in those sanguinary events which led eventually to the abdication of King Constantine of Greece.

Once upon a time, the authorities prevented the publication of Mr. Mackenzie's "Greek Memories" and "Aegean Memories." Time has its revenges, for these forbidden memories underlie the greater part of this novel—giving it the value, not of autobiography (Mr. Mackenzie maintains, and the atmosphere of the book supports him, that it is not that), but of authenticity.

The story wanders to and fro in the Aegean; delaying in Salonica, returning to London, diving into the bloody complexities of Greek politics, it is only incidentally good fiction. The lesser characters are warmly and richly and often brilliantly portrayed: but how they clutter up the scene! They get lost, they reappear, they vanish altogether, until the reader's mind begins to turn. Mr. Mackenzie has poured everything into this book. Profuse and formless, it is less a novel than an undisciplined congregation of events and people.

And yet, oddly enough, it takes on an historical form. There is something in it—some integrity of observation—which, after you have read it and perhaps con-



THEODORE DREISER, ELLA WINTER, SAMUEL ORNITZ, LINCOLN STEFFENS, MRS. TOM MOONEY, AND ORRICK JOHNS. From "Time of Our Lives."

demned it as fiction, reshapes the picture in your mind. It has no hero, but it has a villain. From it there emerges—with his departmental jealousy, his greed for promotion, his stupidity, pettiness, arrogance—the Military Man. Individually he may sometimes be pleasant, but collectively he is terrible. It is he who really gives the picture its coherence. He is the agent of destruction, who cannot build where he destroys. His was the hand, though not the brain, which ruined a world that Mr. Mackenzie loved. If Mr. Mackenzie were a genius, he could have welded his mass of ideas and experiences into a great novel. As it is, he has produced only a lengthy and bewildering picture of a minor phase of the war. But Mr. Mackenzie is an artist, and an artist of real integrity: and, whatever the novel may be, the picture is unforgettable.

Father and Son

TIME OF OUR LIVES. The Story of My Father and Myself. By Orrick Johns. New York: Stackpole Sons. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

HERE is a dual autobiography, for while Orrick Johns is the first-person narrator he has drawn heavily on manuscript reminiscences of George Sibley Johns, for many years editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "We require of the new and popular autobiography," he observes in his preface, "more than the story of personal delights and sorrows; it must be a criticism of its times." The criticism is implicit but devastating, for the story of George Johns, fighting editor in later nineteenth-century Missouri, is swell stuff; the record of his son, by contrast, is only a pallid shadow. The contrast is not to be explained in terms of personal endowments; too many of Orrick Johns's generation feel that their lives make far less sense than did those of their parents. Orrick Johns sets down the record, very well indeed, and lets you interpret it to suit yourself.

The one thing clear is that the life of George Johns was both useful and satis-

fying; fighting with the beasts at Ephesus, he stood them off pretty well and had a lot of fun doing it. Unfortunately he had a prejudice against nepotism so his son could never get a job on the *Post-Dispatch*. Orrick Johns worked a while on *Reedy's Mirror*, came to New York in 1913—and the rest of the story is familiar, though he has an objectivity in the discussion of his work and a reticence about his sex life that are rare and gratifying in an autobiographer. But it is a twice-told tale—the pre-war Village, the then new poetry; writing advertising copy, making money at it, and hating it; the flight to Europe (Florence for a change, not Paris) in search of "roots"; the return, the depression.

But there is a climax; in 1932 Mr. Johns was under conviction of sin by the Holy Ghost, and after much mental wrestling found assurance of salvation in Marx and Lenin. On this note of high purpose an autobiography should logically end, but he is scrupulous enough to carry it on to date, through his supervision of the Federal Writers' Project in New York; about which he says just enough to make you wish he had said a good deal more. It seems he is no longer a member of the Communist Party; he still professes the faith, or most of it, but he can't stick the comrades.

One cannot go through life worrying about the political interpretation that Comrade Ivan, eighteen years old, will put upon one's slightest acts. . . . I very sincerely believe, however, that Comrade Ivan owns the future.

Grounds for this faith are not apparent; it is conceivable that a hundred million Americans are about as fed up with Comrade Ivan as is Mr. Johns. Conversion obviously did Johns's soul good when he needed it, but that the medium was communism instead of Methodism may be merely an accident of chronology, and it is all to his credit that he is sick of Comrade Ivan. He has done a good job of writing, and his comments on the Writers' Project suggest that he has the capacities of a good city editor. It seems a pity that his father wouldn't give him that job on the *Post-Dispatch*.