



Let Them Eat Cake

AFTER the Federal Theater Project was doomed by Congress, an editorial was published in the *New York Herald-Tribune* which sounded like a voice from the grave of all our Puritan-Methodist ancestors. At last, said the writer, we were getting back to practical realism. The principle that those on relief should be allowed to choose the nature of their work had been definitely repudiated. Unfortunately, he continued, other projects in the arts, and particularly in literature, had been left in the bill, but a victory had been won nevertheless. We were on our way back to the practical common sense of a nineteenth-century America which said to the worker, Root hog or die.

This is perhaps an overstatement of the editorial. The writer did not call relief workers hogs, nor did he threaten them with starvation. But the implications of his statement were quite as dangerous—and quite as unsound. He clearly believed that the great American public would agree with him that the arts—which contribute to pleasure of the senses, enrichment of the mind, rather than to food, shelter, and material resources—were not practical, not *work* in a man's world where there was no real necessity for such fripperies. He was right in one way. The great American public have, until recently, taken just that attitude. Their pioneering history conditioned them in the first century of the republic, in a society where art was at most an ornament, and usually a bad ornament. Their government, unlike other governments, did nothing or worse than nothing to encourage art and literature, either as a branch of education, or as a means of enriching the life of the state. Men and women not old now still remember in their youth the damning expression "not practical" applied by officials, parents, journalists, business

men, farmers, to any movement of the spirit that did not increase bank accounts or help to exploit the wealth of the continent. And here in 1939, when one would suppose we had learned something of the impermanence of material security and the futility of a drab money-getting life, with the ugly remains of nineteenth-century America all about us, the old cry goes up again! If we have to spend money on work, let that work all be useful, realistic, practical. Don't waste money on beauty.

The second fallacy seems even more dangerous, because more deeply rooted in human prejudice. The unemployed have no right to choose the nature of their work. Since all human rights seem today to rest upon a shaky basis, it is, perhaps, unwise to argue that any one has a right even to happiness and a reasonable liberty. But the inexpediency of such an attitude should be evident without dragging in the question of right. What has psychology accomplished in the last decades if it has taught editorial writers nothing at all about human aptitudes and how, rightly handled, they increase efficiency! Obviously, an overstrained government in time of crisis cannot give to some millions of workers each the job that best fits him. Obviously, also, government, worker, and work would all be better off if it could. Indeed, it may surely be said that the first duty of a relief administration, in its own interest, is to provide as far as possible the kind of work which each man can do, and wants to do; as it is clearly its duty to prevent, so far as possible, its workers from trying to paint pictures when they are better fitted for plumbing, or being used to dig ditches when they should be making music or writing books. The attack upon the very mild effort of Uncle Sam to provide for esthetics and intellectuals is inspired by no logic, but only by the old American prejudice against the intellect, plus the slowly dying Puritan idea that, as Thoreau said ironically, the more perspiration in labor, the more virtue accrues to it.

The merits of neither the actual Federal Theater Project nor of the Arts projects in general enter into this argument. In fairness it should be said, however, that competent observers generally agree that the Federal Theater has been successful in the best sense. That it has not merely provided the right jobs for many people, but has supplied entertainment of a high order, and, what is even more important, stimulus to useful and creative work on making good drama part of the imaginative life of the people. As for the literary projects, while there are too many people who want to write and cannot and should not, yet it does

not seem that relief in this direction is likely to burden the public with inefficient novelists, whereas such a contribution as the state guide book series, useful, excellent, durable, would never have been undertaken without government aid.

No, if we are to have unemployed, let us give them, when we can, the work they are fitted to do, and hence want to do. And, for heaven's sake, let us get rid at last of the sour and musty archaism that art is not practical, not useful, not work.

And let us realize once for all, that, however important it is to make relief economical, honest, and efficient, there is no excuse whatsoever for a patronizing attitude toward the unemployed. It is questionable whether a sociologist or a psychologist would admit that even the unemployables, so-called, are really responsible for their deficiencies. Certainly, capitalism can charge the unemployment of employables only upon its own lack of ability to make our economic system work. It is quite as foolish to remark, with a "sneer," let them do what they are told to do, as it was to say, let them eat cake. In fact, Marie Antoinette was less foolish than our supercilious grumblers, for those who have some hope of cake in their lives, may endure a shortage of bread.

H. S. C.

Havelock Ellis

HAVELOCK ELLIS considered the "Studies in the Psychology of Sex" the major work of his life, and this is the work that has been emphasized in most of the obituary comment. Enormous as the influence of this work has been, it is possible that he will be longer remembered as a man of letters than as a man of science. In thirty years the "Psychology of Sex" has been instrumental in revolutionizing the state of mind of the English-speaking—or English-reading—public; it paved the way for the reception of the work of Freud and Jung, which, in the field of psychological theory, has overshadowed that of Ellis, but which, without the pioneering of Ellis, would have met with even more popular and official resistance than it did. In literature, Ellis's contribution to the destruction of taboos made a reading public possible for writers like Joyce and Proust. It is the nature of an influence such as his that it comes to be taken for granted. But in literature Ellis was not only important as a catalytic agent; his "Study of British Genius" and "Dance of Life" are works of first-rate distinction. For six years before his death, at eighty, Ellis was at work on his autobiography; he finished it only in June. No other book is anticipated with more genuine interest.

Letters to the Editor:

*Moral Standards in Fiction;
Job and "A Book of Miracles"*

Potent Capsule

SIR:—Hurray for Margaret Culkin Banning! She has put the whole nauseous dose into a capsule, the contents of which are both pertinent and potent. Every serious reader of *SRL* will send her a mental vote of thanks for the power and timeliness of her appraisal.

Such articles help us to forget for the moment the offensiveness of your new Mother Hubbard; we simply turn it inside out with just a momentary thought of pity for poor Unc Quere—if the heat proves too much for him, you'll have to move him in.

Why, oh why, did you let L. J. H. Jr. review "Seven Grass Huts" when you have some such good reviewers on your list? He cannot see the wood for the trees nor the pampa for the dust in his eyes nor the jungle for the punkies; and to him an orchid is merely a form of plant life. Ugh!

LURA SOLLES COWAN.
Berkeley, Cal.

Job

SIR:—The *SRL* has been my most warmly welcomed periodical for almost as many years as it has been published, and its book reviews are read by me each week with close attention.

A review by Basil Davenport of Ben Hecht's "A Book of Miracles" in the issue of June 17th, has aroused my curiosity. This review contains a reference to "a saintly rabbi who, like Job, turned at last and died blaspheming Jehovah." I should be deeply interested in knowing where Mr. Davenport obtained the information that Job died blaspheming Jehovah.

MRS. H. L. MILLNER.
Morganton, N. C.

Mr. Davenport Replies

SIR:—Your correspondent is quite right in rebuking me for writing a sentence which could be supposed to mean that Job died still blaspheming. It did not occur to me that any one would take it in this sense, but I ought to have foreseen the possibility, and I have only to apologize for my carelessness.

Since, however, I have received a very courteous note from another of your subscribers, inquiring why I said that Job blasphemed, perhaps I had better take this opportunity to speak briefly of that point. The general purport of Job's speeches is that Jehovah afflicts the righteous, in his own person, and allows the wicked to flourish, an accusation that is made in the most bitterly personal tone. See, for brief citations, IX 17: "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without a cause"; IX 23: "If



"I don't know a damn thing about love. I only do detective and horror."

the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent"; XII 6: "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure," with other passages too long to quote. I think that these charges of cruelty and injustice against the Almighty can fairly be called blasphemy (I acknowledge that the word is perhaps too strong, but I am unable to think of a word that indicates a milder degree of the same thing); and I think it can be maintained that they are felt to be so in the Book of Job. For after Jehovah has spoken out of the whirlwind, Job's final speech is "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Of what does Job repent? Not of anything before he began to complain; both Job and his biographer are agreed that he was a perfect and upright man until that point. It seems clear that Job repents of the presumption of which he had just been convicted by the Almighty. I am aware that there are other possible interpretations of the Book of Job, but I hope this will serve to explain, to any of your readers who may be interested, why I wrote as I did.

BASIL DAVENPORT.
New York City.

Nobel

SIR:—Shortly after reading Harland Manchester's splendid article on Alfred Nobel in the *SRL* for June 17th, I came across the following interesting item in the old *Buffalo Express* for February 18, 1901:—

It is reported that the University of Chicago has been selected as one of the nine institutions which will choose the candidates for the Nobel

prizes. The other institutions are the universities of Berlin, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Rome, Leyden, London, Paris, and Zurich. Mr. Nobel was a Swedish millionaire who left a large legacy for prizes to the greatest benefactors of humanity. The prizes go to the greatest discoverers in the domains of physical science, chemistry, and psychology, also to the author of the greatest literary work in the realm of idealism and to the man who is the greatest promoter of peace. The honor was entirely unexpected at the University of Chicago, it is said.

ROBERT M. BOLTWOOD.
Buffalo, N. Y.

Edward Bellamy

SIR:—The undersigned will appreciate hearing from anyone who has letters from Edward Bellamy, the author of "Looking Backward," or who knows where any may be found, or who has any significant recollections or information concerning Bellamy or concerning the direct influence of his work.

ARTHUR E. MORGAN.
Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Jefferson, Hamilton, Burr

SIR:—This represents the concluding period in my search for material on my book dealing with the impact of Jefferson, Hamilton and Burr on American History from 1789 to 1804. Do you think it possible that the *Review* can inform its readers of a few of my necessities? I seek letters or other data written by:

a. Edmond Genet in the year 1800 concerning the national election.
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