



The Battle of the Books

YOU can stroke even a wild animal, unless you frighten him; then he will bite. The masses of men and women in the so-called civilized world have been frightened for the last ten years; their books, even their moving pictures, have not. That is a strange circumstance of the present, not often noticed. Our world has not been panicky, except in Germany under inflation, or in the bombed areas of 1938-1939, or in Europe generally last Autumn, where even in France and Great Britain, active fright was not far under the surface. But millions have been frightened as Americans have been since the depression and probably all sensitive people in the world for a decade now, which means uneasy, suspicious, self-distrustful, afraid for their jobs or their comforts or their childrens' future.

Fright, active or passive, was the steady condition of the earlier world, except for briefest periods of assurance. You can read it in the words of the litany, see it painted into the great religious pictures of the Christian tradition, find it described in every history. The peasant was always a little afraid, and so was the knight.

The short-term reaction was violence, the sudden violence of knife-thrust, pistol shot, treachery, and rebellion, which had so generally disappeared from our society, except among groups which were themselves essentially afraid—gangsters, thieves, racketeers.

The long-term reaction was intolerance. Every village regarded every other village as "foreign," every city distrusted every other city, every race or nation thought every other race or nation was treacherous, wicked, inhuman. The Gothic West of Europe thought that the more cultivated East of the Greek empire was degenerate, traitorous, a polluted and a polluting race and nation. Even the hearty English novels of the eighteenth century are full of contempt and intol-

erance for the French, who were rivals, outlanders, different in their ways, and so alien and dangerous.

It is unnecessary to point the moral. Europeans, and particularly those countries that suffered most during and after the war, have fallen back into self-distrust and fear of the alien. Every speech of Hitler states hysterically the superiority of the German to other races and nations, and the need of protecting the Reich against strangers, inside and outside of its boundaries. The bunk about racial purity and national purity is not new—it is as old as humanity and springs from exactly the same causes which have always produced intolerance—the dangers threatening the racial group, the fear, and hence the hatred of those not in the group, who, if feared and hated, can be held responsible for failures at home as well as menace from abroad. This new intolerance, so strong in Europe, and already aroused in America, is one of the plagues that have always been just around the corner in human history. Stop sanitation and the black death will be here again; renew fear of the alien and you get intolerance.

There is one antiseptic against these bacteria of fear and intolerance spreading through the world, and that is, fortunately, easily available in literature. The wise, the good, and the most competent writers of the post-war period have not gone back to the dark ages. There has never been a more impressive testimony to the need and possibility of tolerance than in the important books, in all the great languages, written since 1918. Galsworthy, Wells, Hardy, Shaw, Mann, Remarque, Romain, Undset, Lewis, Buck, Cather, Dreiser, Santayana, O'Neill, Ortega, Croce, Zweig—the list could be tripled of writers in all countries, who, however they differ otherwise in philosophies, have devoted their finest energies to a better understanding of the differences among men. That kind of romance which made triumphing over "inferior" breeds of men romantic, has almost disappeared, even from the movies. It is hard to see how any intelligent person, reading the twenty best books written in the last twenty years, could fail to emerge with a mind cleaned and cleared of the ancient slime of intolerance and ignorant jealousy and lurking fear of the stranger. Not that this alone would solve the world's problems, which are much too complex to be set right quickly, even by good will.

And yet in this time of backsliding, it is well to remember that substantially all the important poets and playwrights and novelists, and all the journalists who are more than hacks or propaganda writers, are on one side—all defenders of tolerance and

understanding and belief in the common traits of humanity, which are good as well as evil. Against the persuasive ignorance, and hatred based on fear, and special pleading, of a "Mein Kampf," there is an array of witnesses that only need to be known in order to be heard.

H. S. C.

Archibald MacLeish and the Library of Congress

THE opposition to the appointment of Archibald MacLeish as Librarian of Congress is understandable, but not any too well understood. Those who charge him with being a communist are, of course, talking nonsense, or using that familiar red herring for their own concealed ends. MacLeish is an outspoken liberal, a lover of humanity, a courageous fighter in good causes. If these are traits opposed by some in a candidate for the executive head of a great national library, so much the worse for their conception of the job and of the nature of their country.

The real question raised by MacLeish's appointment is much more concrete, and in answering it an honest difference of opinion is possible. Should the executive head of a great library be a librarian specializing in the technique of book-getting and book-keeping, or should he be an executive, broadly trained, who has demonstrated his scholarship, his ability to organize, and his capacity for representing a great storehouse of intellectual energy? Now library work has become as technical and as specialized as research in electricity or the production of automobile engines. The expert librarian is indispensable in a library, but by the very specialization of his training he has tended to become more and more the technical expert, and less and less the executive. The situation is almost exactly parallel to the problem of a General Electric Company or an American Telephone and Telegraph Company. It is the research men and the technicians who carry these great businesses; but executives, not themselves scientists, direct them. Granted that if a librarian, the product of a life-long specialization, could be found to direct the vast organism of the Congressional Library, he would be a good choice, but not necessarily a better choice than a scholar and executive who has made his mark as one of the leading contemporary minds, like Archibald MacLeish. Yale University, last year, faced the same problem, searched the library field and went outside of it to choose for university librarian a lawyer, who was also a scholar and an executive, with results, so far, conspicuously successful.

H. S. C.

Letters to the Editor:

Mrs. Humphry Ward's Poem;
A Reply to Crane Brinton

Pp.

SIR:—Stop me if you've heard this. I wonder if I am alone in wishing that in addition to the conventional announcement of a book's debut: Title, Author, Press, Price, you might add: Pp.

HAROLD F. SMITH.

Kalispell, Mont.

(This practice is inaugurated in the current issue.—ED.)

Emily Brontë and Mrs. Ward

SIR:—"Wuthering Heights," now imminent over northern Vermont, has had the curious effect of causing my mind to run on Mrs. Humphry Ward. It is one of Emily Brontë's posthumous triumphs that she moved Mary Augusta Arnold Ward, for the first and last time in her life, to verse. George Smith, Charlotte's publisher, printed the result in the *Cornhill Magazine* for February 1900. It is a sonnet addressed to Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and begins:

*Pale sisters; reared amid the
purple sea
Of windy moorland; where, re-
mote, ye plied
All household arts, meek, passion-
taught, and free,
Kinship your joy, and Fantasy
your guide!—*

Mrs. Ward's verse, one fears, would have as deleterious an effect on Rebecca West as her prose style, that style which "in the utter wrongness of all its ingredients," reminded Miss West of nothing so much as grocer's cake.

E. F. WALBRIDGE.

Montgomery, Vt.

"What's the Matter with Sociology?"

SIR:—I am rising to the bait, and submitting some comments on Crane Brinton's recent article on "What's the Matter with Sociology." It is a rash thing to do, for the subject is one in which the line between destructive truth and debonair generalization is thin and unstable. I am inclined to agree with the implication in Mr. Brinton's opening paragraph that the chief difficulty with sociology is its name. When you create a name, you create the thing of which it is an appellation, and I am afraid that there is no such thing as sociology. There is a scientific or philosophical attitude toward the phenomena of social life, and this attitude is "sociological." The observation of the innumerable ways by which human beings live in groups, and seek their satisfactions, provides the material for the social sciences or for the philosophical contemplation of human society. All this may be sociology. In that case, sociology is a family name



"I'll say business is good! We've been open only two days and we've already had an inquiry for a Gutenberg Bible!"

for the social sciences and has some sense; and in that case economics is sociology; and political science certainly is, history is, law is, psychology is. So far, therefore, as there is anything the matter with "sociology," I agree with Mr. Brinton that it is chiefly in that it made itself a specialty: it built up its votaries and exponents who wear the distinctive colors of the special stable from which they make the race against their fellow social scientists.

The second and perhaps chief difficulty that troubles Mr. Brinton is the tendency of sociologists to be partisan. I should like to come back to this in a minute but would like first to look at the last dart directed against sociology, where Mr. Brinton says, "If the world is afire, the tiny nozzle of sociology pointed against it may look heroic, but the stream that emerges just doesn't carry far enough to do much good." If this refers to sociology as the special "ology," I fall in step with Mr. Brinton, but not otherwise: for example, I consider the Marxian doctrines as sociology. I would put anarchism and the political theories incorporated in present-day Italy or Germany in the same category—that is, that part which is theory. It so happens that these theories are also being carried out by entire national sovereignties but they are primarily sociological theory. No one would say that the streams issuing from these sociological nozzles are

negligible forces—which brings me back to Mr. Brinton's second point, that the trouble with sociology is the tendency toward partisanship which prevents a truly scientific attitude and is correspondingly reflected in its literature.

I won't dwell on the fact that even the physical sciences have "schools of thought," diverse theories held by men who have access to the same data, the same laboratory procedures, and the same observations, and might be assumed to be guided by the same scientific motivations. Chiefly I wish not to dwell on this point because the disagreements may be technically assigned to variations in hypothesis and in inference rather than to diversity of motivations. We have comparable differences of opinion in the purely theoretical phases of sociology with their corresponding technical labels: accommodation, assimilation, conflict, consciousness of kind, etc. And while in this descriptive and hypothetical stage, partisanship is limited to the usual paper warfare among academicians with their seething polemics and mutual disdain. But when we issue from the purely descriptive area, we find that the significance of material in the social sciences arises not from their descriptive truth but from their meaning for the direction of human life and social objectives. That is why such seasoned scholars as Henry W. Farnham, who devote a life-

(Continued on page 19)