

## 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)

# Nobel the Prize-Giver

BY HARLAND MANCHESTER

ONE day in 1861 a group of Paris bankers gave impatient audience to a young man who said he had a big idea. Neither he nor his hearers connected his idea with an annual accolade to distinguished writers, yet today his name looms large in the field of literature. He was a Swede; a thin, sickly, nervous chap, with penetrating blue eyes and plenty of assurance.

"Messieurs," he announced dramatically, "I have an oil that will blow up the globe!"

The bankers jumped, but he produced no infernal machine, and calmly went on to explain his new explosive. Shortly his hearers cut him off. The whole thing was impossible, and anyway, who wanted the globe blown up?

When Napoleon III heard about the young Swede, however, he spoke to a financier, and Alfred Nobel went back to Stockholm with a draft for 100,000 francs. Within a year, he and his father were manufacturing nitroglycerin for commercial use. Soon the world was startled by a new word: dynamite. And the foundation was laid for the Nobel fortune, the income of which is now distributed annually to workers for peace, to scientists, and to gifted writers.

To Alfred Nobel, there was nothing sinister about powerful explosives. His father, Emmanuel Nobel, an architect turned inventor, had been tinkering with them for years, and had invented a naval mine used by Russia in the Crimean War.

Emmanuel's income varied as much as his ideas. Despite the patient efforts of Mrs. Nobel, the family was often in hot water. They moved a great deal, and not by choice. When the landlord wanted cash, Emmanuel showed him blue-prints. His enthusiasm was contagious, and sometimes the landlord forgot that the sketches were not legal tender. The year Alfred was born — 1833 — was one of those times when his father couldn't pay the rent. This time the creditors were not beguiled, and Emmanuel was thrown into bankruptcy.

Alfred was the third of four brothers, and the puniest of the lot. As a baby, he had convulsions, and for years his mother fought a constant

battle to keep him alive. He had a weak spine, and when other children were playing, he sat on the sidelines and envied them. He had nervous headaches and a poor digestion, and was extremely sensitive to criticism.

Ludwig, the second son, was the apple of the old man's eye. Ludwig had genius, said Emmanuel, but Alfred worked harder. This talk got under Alfred's skin when at the age of seventeen his father sent him to New York to study a new heat engine invented by John Ericsson, who had migrated to New York and who was soon to revolutionize the world's navies with his iron-clad *Monitor*. He sailed willingly, but no one knows how long he stayed in the United States or what he did. Soon he was back in Europe, rambling aimlessly here and there. He explored Paris night life, turned from it in disgust, and met a young girl with whom he fell desperately in love. She died, and he walked the streets all night, saw the sun rise, and wrote a long, introspective poem which he was to treasure all his life and to read to people who seemed sympathetic.

At the age of twenty-one the prodigal returned to his father's factory. Bitter, disillusioned, and hardened, but cherishing secret ideals which seemed impossible of realization, he went resolutely to work, for work, he decided, was all that life held for him.

Emmanuel Nobel was already convinced that nitroglycerin had great possibilities as an explosive, though it was used then chiefly as a stimulant in heart ailments. Under certain conditions it would explode, but no one knew just what these conditions were. Sometimes a container of the stuff would fall to the ground with a thud, and nothing would happen; sometimes a small jolt would cause a shattering explosion.

Some time during Alfred's four unexplained years, he had picked up a good working knowledge of chemistry, draftsmanship, and mechanical engineering. Gradually he took the lead in the experiments, and arrived at the



Alfred Nobel: "he predicted that his high explosives would put an end to war sooner than peace meetings" . . .

theory that the only sure way of exploding this soupish liquid was to confine it in a stout container and set it off with a sharp primary explosion. A match wouldn't explode nitroglycerin; it took force. He evolved the blasting cap—an invention still the basis of the whole nitroglycerin and dynamite industry.

After securing Louis Napoleon's help, Alfred and his father went hopefully to work, but nitroglycerin still would not behave. Neither Emmanuel nor Alfred was in the shop one morning in May, 1864. The youngest son, Emil, and four workmen were there. An explosion killed every one in the room instantly. Old Emmanuel was prostrated; he had a paralytic stroke from which he never recovered. He lingered for years, and from his bed or wheel-chair continued to turn out "inventions," which Mrs. Nobel faithfully recorded. Stockholm shook with terror at the news of the explosion. The Nobels had no permit to work with explosives, and the authorities cracked down. But meanwhile, engineers and miners everywhere heard of the new time-saving, money-saving blasting oil. Orders and inquiries came in from all over the world.

Alfred Nobel moved his plant to a barge moored in a lake. Within a year he had launched manufacturing companies in Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Germany, and the Swedish government was using his "soup" to blast a terminal railway tunnel under Stockholm. Chemist, manufacturer, bookkeeper, and salesman all in one,