

able nostrum may be. Accordingly, I do not believe that a philosopher can properly try to link up his philosophical interests with his political views nor lay down principles for the explicit guidance of politicians. But I believe that his political views will be in part determined by his philosophical outlook ; to the extent to which his philosophy influences other people their political views will also be in part affected. Any form of political society which lays restrictions upon free discussion, which sets up prohibitions and attempts to induce its members to think alike is incompatible with the activities of a philosopher. A philosopher who has the misfortune to be entrapped in such a society has no alternative but to die. In such a society it would not be worth while for any human being to remain alive.

R. H. TAWNEY

It is asked whether *Scrutiny*, while remaining predominantly a literary journal, should give part of its space to political articles. The argument that the luxury of letters must be postponed in an emergency to the practical necessities of reconstructing society and organizing peace does not seem to me to hold water. There are moments, no doubt, when it is necessary to fill gaps in a thin line by throwing in the cooks and the orderly-room staffs ; but, whatever may be wrong with politics to-day, it is not a shortage of pen-power devoted to discoursing on them.

Au-dessus de la mêlée was a phrase which caused fury, when first coined ; but who can doubt now that we should have done better, while getting on with a necessary and disgusting job, to think twice before dismissing Rolland's words as an outrage? Crisis or no crisis, the world will go on. At a time when most of us find it difficult to keep our heads, it is not less important, but more important, that the permanent values of civilization should be brought to our attention. The question is whether a journal primarily concerned with those values has, in virtue of its concern with them, any special contribution to make to political sanity. If it has, let it make it. If it has not, it had better resist the temptation to darken the atmosphere and add to the din by joining the ranks of the blowers off of steam.

The answer to that question depends, it seems to me, partly

on the meaning given the word 'Politics,' partly on the manner in which it is intended that politics should be treated. There is no reason why a writer whose business is letters should not also speak with authority on some aspect of public affairs. In so far, however, as his knowledge of the latter is an individual *tour de force*—an addition to his principal activity, not an extension of it—a literary journal does not seem a more appropriate place than another to be the vehicle of his views, since it is not his work on literature which has caused him to hold them.

The same statement is not true of the more general conclusions which a man may reach, not through raids into regions remote from his main interest, but as its natural development. In spite of the absurd fetiche-worship surrounding them, what are called 'Subjects' are not independent entities, poised each in majestic isolation on its private peak. If not merely, as has profanely been said, departments of knowledge on which it is practicable to set an examination paper that can be done in three hours, they have often only recently been disentangled from each other. The sciences, in particular, which are concerned with man—consider economics, political science, sociology, anthropology and the various species of history—owe their separate existence to considerations with which practical convenience has had more to do than the articulations of the universe. Their boundaries are fluid and provisional; their frontiers intersect. The debateable land between them is not the least likely region for good sense to be concealed in.

It would be surprising, in such circumstances, if those engaged in one corner of the field had no conclusions to offer those working in another. It would be surprising—so it seems to a layman—if men whose chief concern is literature found nothing worth saying on the question of how to live sensibly together, without violence and cheating. There are, doubtless, many aspects of their work of which he knows nothing: but are these the most important? They learn, it is to be presumed, to know garbage by its smell, and sciolism when they see it. They acquire, one supposes, a habit of discriminating between the genuine article and merely saleable stuff. Since their job, or part of their job, is ideas, they are aware that those alluring wild-fowl are rarely what they seem, but sometimes more and often less, and develop, it may be suspected, a certain tact in stalking them. They can hardly fail

to be impressed by the interaction between the practical arrangements of a society and the quality of its culture, or to be struck by the extreme deviousness of the channels through which the influence of each upon the other makes itself felt. Would they not be more or less than human if the aptitudes acquired and habits formed in the course of their work did not suggest some opinions as to the management of the world about them, and the plans advanced for improving it? If so, can it be argued that such opinions are not worth stating, or that a journal of literature strays outside its province if it gives them an opportunity of being stated in its pages?

Possibly it can. If, however, the opposite view be taken, to what conclusion does it lead?

Not, it seems to me, to the offer of *Scrutiny* as a platform for the exposition of yet another set of water-tight philosophies, or for the discussion of political strategy and tactics, or for the advocacy of particular schemes or revolution or reform—not, in short, to its use as an additional vehicle for propaganda or system-mongering. The air is thick with birds of that feather, and the world deaf with their squawking. Both the function of *Scrutiny* and the work most worth doing are of a different kind. The former is a matter for its Editorial Committee ; the latter, it appears to me, can be pretty simply stated.

The events crowded into the last twenty years have widened horizons, but they have also scattered wits. Their effect on political writing has been that standards of thought and discussion have temporarily gone to pieces. The collapse is most conspicuous among the intelligentsia, part of whose business, it might have been supposed, is to endeavour to maintain them. Specialists, no doubt, at least when addressing-fellow-specialists, are as scrupulous as they were ; but almost anything seems good enough to be offered to the public. Catch-words are palmed off on it as arguments ; deductions from uncriticized assumptions as the rigours of logic ; mere appeals to the emotions, including the meanest, as political sagacity ; solemn absurdities as revelations. With consistency at a discount, and the truth of a case identified with its persuasiveness, nothing, it sometimes seems, is too fantastic to be believed, too dishonest to be proposed, or too atrocious to be contemplated. Anarchy is in the saddle, with clap-trap as its herald.

If the picture appears overdrawn, let the sceptic reflect on contemporary discussions, by men of opposite convictions, not of doubtful subtleties, but of such large issues as democracy, the social system, and international affairs. The nation, it seemed, felt no great astonishment when its leading statesman, after a lifetime of orations on the first, calmly announced that he had decided to conceal from the public the chief plank in his policy, for fear that, if he divulged it, he might lose an election. It is possible for a writer, in discoursing of the second, to refer, with the solemnity of one announcing a discovery, to the part played in it by the fact of social class—as though a premise were a conclusion ; as though Marx had said the last word on the subject, instead of the first ; as though sociology had begun in the forties of last century, and ended in the eighties. It is not only possible, but common, in connection with the third, for actions committed on one side of a frontier to be denounced as criminal by writers who applaud the same actions as virtuous when committed on the other. It is, doubtless, true that what makes the brew turbid is partly the mere mass of new ingredients tumbled into it, and that there are wholesome simples to be rescued from the rubbish. But, with every one stirring the pot, and no one skimming it, it is difficult to see how its contents are to become drinkable.

If such is the condition of political writing, what is needed, in order to improve it, is nothing abstruse or recondite. Its degeneration is partly due to causes of the same kind—competition for publicity, a large market for cheap wares, the belief that, provided that work sells, its quality does not matter—as have caused a similar degeneration in the case of literature. The cure, in so far as there is one, is much the same. It is not a new body of political doctrines, but a new rigour in dealing with all doctrines, whether new or old. It is to judge them by some standard more permanent and exacting than the fashions of the moment ; to distinguish between original and merely imitative work ; to be merciless to the superficial or pretentious, and call humbug by its right name ; to consider theories in relation to the realities of history and psychology ; to ask, if confronted by resounding generalizations as to the sanctity of property, ‘property in what?’ ; to consider, when the problems of proletarian existence are under discussion, of whom precisely the proletariates of different countries are composed

to-day. It is, in short, to assist authors and speakers to have a conscience in their work, by making them aware that they will meet informed criticism.

The effort to maintain standards by informed criticism, conveyed by pens sharper than a serpent's tooth, has been, I suppose, one of the notes of *Scrutiny*. An outsider cannot say if it is possible or expedient for it to attempt to do for political writing what it has done for literature, without—what would clearly be foolish—injuring its main work by assuming responsibilities which may over-load the boat. It would, in my opinion, be useful if it could.

LITERARY CRITICISM IN FRANCE (I)

I. INTRODUCTORY.

IT will be our criticism, perhaps, that will most fittingly last longest,' wrote M. Charles Maurras in a characteristic pronouncement. 'A Sainte-Beuve and a Renan will have a good chance of making posterity one day forget the Flauberts, the Leconte de Lisles and perhaps even the Hugos.'¹ Frenchmen are sometimes extremely modest about their poets, but they are seldom modest about their critics. They have long regarded themselves as the great critics of the modern world and until lately no one has ventured to challenge their supremacy.

There is of course a good deal of evidence to support the French claims. In France literature is, as it has long been, a *métier* and criticism is regarded as a part of the profession. It seldom occurs to a French critic to preface his first book with an essay explaining and justifying the function of criticism. He would scarcely think of describing his art as 'a charming parasite' or as 'books about books.' When he does discuss the value of criticism it is usually because he is hard up for a subject for his weekly *chronique* or he does it casually in an aside. Thus Rémy de Gourmont concludes a discussion of the respective functions of novelist and critic by declaring categorically: 'They must both be creators of Values' and leaves it at that.