

## Clarence Day

*The Crow's Nest, by Clarence Day, Jr. Illustrations by the author. New York: A. A. Knopf. \$2.00.*

CLARENCE DAY has a supreme quality among all the critics and essayists in America today—he thinks naturally, writes naturally, draws naturally. For this reason, of course, he is the enemy of his kind. What is the use of erudition and authority if Clarence Day can put all Maeterlinck in an eggshell? What is the use of going to Harvard and learning to be dove-colored if a blackleg like Clarence Day is to run loose? The profession of critic is gone, spurlos versenkt, if this creature is to be permitted to crow from his crow's nest like an ordinary bird living in direct relation with his feelings and his senses. We should rise against him, march to Riverside Drive and force the caitiff to confess that he is a disruptive influence in the pay of the Third Internationale.

Sometimes, I don't know why, he slips from his aware simplicity into a kind of bromidic simple-mindedness that is worthy of popular magazines. It comes, I think, when he feels it his duty to be light, judicious, sound and wise. At such times he writes like a sweet old gentleman leaning over the go-cart and trying to explain the choo-choos to a baby. He is capable of nodding his head and saying, "Ah, well, if we must romanticize something, it had best be the past." And, in another place, "Well, it's all very interesting. Will and Wisdom [capitalized by him] are both mighty leaders. Our times worship Will." He has an idea in this, though not very much of an idea, but the whole thing is in the style of the patient, benevolent teacher. I may whisper, too, that *Improving the Lives of the Rich* and *The Revolt of Capital* and *The Man Who Knew Gods* are also a little labored. Here the wingless critics have nothing to fear from C. D. Jr. The ideas are good enough. It's fairly funny to call Gary "President Albert H. Hairy," but the total effect is one of miscegenation, like a sermon turned sprightly or a library table that converts into a folding bed. If you felt that the author of the sermon (or the library table) couldn't help himself, it would be all right. But Clarence Day could have helped his *Revolt of Capital*. That essay was sapped from his brain, it did not spring from his spirit.

But when he teases old Fabre, the man who loved insects, and says, "you can see he has insect blood in him, if you look at his photograph,"—here he is really enjoying himself. And, like waiters or undertakers or dentists or kings, he does his work best when he is really enjoying himself. Mark Twain never wrote anything funnier than *The Enjoyment of Gloom*, the first four pages. But it isn't because Day is funny that this is so good. It is because he becomes all alive, personally incandescent and absorbed and wholly natural, in such a bit of narrative. He is equally natural a few pages later, writing of Conrad. Here he isn't trying to convert criticism into literary vaudeville for the gum-chewers. He is trying to condense all his own love of adventure, and fear of adventure, into a few luminous words. And how real, how secure, is the grip of Clarence Day's experience on our own inside experience which before had perhaps never met such an understanding: "There's one great man now living, however, who has almost too much of this sense: this cosmic adventure emotion. And that man's Joseph Conrad. Perhaps in his youth the sea came upon him too suddenly, or his boyhood sea dreams awed too deeply his then unformed mind.

At all events, the men in his stories are like lonely spirits, sailing, spellbound, through the immense forces surrounding the world. "There they are," one of them says, as he stands at the rail, 'stars, sun, sea, light, darkness, space, great waters; the formidable Work of the Seven Days, into which man seems to have blundered unbidden. Or else decoyed'. We all have that mood. But Conrad, he's given to brooding." Conrad is a Pole, after all, the kind of Pole that one of Lyman Abbott's ancestresses should have met up with, as Day suggests. Rev. Lyman, by the way, is handled very fairly.

Still, I like Clarence Day best when he takes things more in the wrong spirit. I like him about Kabir, about sex, about *The Turmoil*. Except that, as he gets weary, he gets wise and helpful. Then he peers into the reader's cradle and burbles, "So it goes, so it goes. And playing some game well is needful, to make a man of you. But once in a while you get thinking it's not quite enough."

These appealing homilies come from him when he is low-spirited. They never occur to him when he's writing of people or cockroaches, only when he is bravely trying to put an intellectual spit-ball across the plate, with every eye in the bleachers following him. In dealing with real people he becomes quite absorbed and absorbing, and this is when I like him best. Here his style is truly natural, informal, and to the point. If he is amusing here, it is not because he is afraid he won't hold his audience unless he is original and witty, but because he has really ripened and mellowed in the lovely perceptions and feelings out of which he speaks. *Portrait of a Lady* is superb, both as a likeness and as a painting. It is romantic, full of color, and true. *Grandfather's Three Lives* is a little ingenious but it is more to my taste than *Strachey*, and *Story of a Farmer* is a very pretty sketch, except for the last line. The last line has a kind of Hippodrome flourish, "His name was George Washington!!!" But the subject is one on which it would be enchanting to read fifty of Clarence Day's pages. And I hope some day he'll tackle Abraham Lincoln, the great American legend, and Alexander Hamilton, the great colonial legend, and Ulysses S. Grant. (What a name, Ulysses, especially for a babe in the cradle. And what a fine piece of old-fashioned human mahogany, or redwood, to be represented by a man who sees things for himself).

That, in the end, is what one means by saying that Clarence Day has so natural a style. He really convinces one that, without any stilts under him, he is able to see for himself. He sees very deeply. He sees more amusingly than our best fabulists. When he stands things on their heads, or reverses some customary viewpoint, I don't think he is seeing things for himself most naturally. He is best, I believe, in the straight portrait. But of course what one enjoys in these portraits, besides the rich play of sympathy, is the bright play of perception. "Whenever a parent feels blue, or is not making good, he immediately declares that his hopes are in his little son anyhow. Then he has a sad, comfortable glow at his own self-effacement." Such observations give one the delightful feeling of the living, unforced play of mind. The drawings add enormously to this result, being perfectly unstudied and personal in pattern. But "unstudied" is a poor word, suggesting that Clarence Day improvises. He does not improvise, he gropes around for a union between subject and spirit. When the subject comes right, then we see the spirit for what it is, in its serene wisdom, its honest simplicity, its even American temper, its gaiety, its beauty.

FRANCIS HACKETT.

## America and the Balance Sheet of Europe

*America and the Balance Sheet of Europe*, by John F. Bass and Harold G. Moulton. New York: The Ronald Press. \$3.00.

DOES anyone really wish to know the truth about the financial and economic conditions of Europe, and the political conditions inseparably bound up with them? Then he should not confine his reading, in the next few weeks, to the financial supplements which the editors of the leading newspapers are having prepared, under instructions to play up every possible factor of optimistic tendency. He should also read this book by Mr. Bass and Professor Moulton, prepared without any instructions except to get as near the truth as possible. Mr. Bass holds an enviable reputation as one of the clearest eyed of American students of European affairs and one of the most candid and courageous exponents of the facts as they are. Professor Moulton is one of the ablest of our younger economists, distinguished particularly for his level-headedness. We had a right to expect from these authors an extremely competent book. And they have fulfilled this expectation. I have seen no study of post-war conditions in Europe that approaches this book in its mastery of principle and its effective treatment of the essential facts.

But it is only fair to add a word of warning. This book is easy to read, and full of material everyone would like to have within reach. But the authors are apostates from the great American dogma that the cheerful is to be preferred to the true. When they have reason to believe that things are going very badly, and are bound to go worse, they say it. They even reject the dogma of the healing virtue of time. They point to the fact that time "healed" the disorders of the Mesopotamian empires by obliterating not the disorders but the empires. It healed the distress of the Roman Empire by turning the Roman Forum into a cowpasture. Time may be intending to heal Europe in the same manner, unless the patient insists on a consultation with some other doctor. Indeed, the facts marshalled by the authors raise more than a suspicion that such is time's intention. And everyone who feels that the truth, if cold, is too trying to his constitution had better avoid this book.

We all have had optimistic yearnings for European trade recovery, yearnings that we mistook for opinions. Is trade in fact recovering? No. It has been and still is in an unhealthy condition, in which it is impossible to find exports to balance imports. That holds true not only of Germany, France, Italy and England, but of the neutral countries as well. And if in late months the adverse balances have been shrinking, that is chiefly because it is impossible to make arrangements to pay for imports that are badly needed. The apparent improvement is nothing but proof of economic depression. We have been buoyed up by the hope that the European governments would be able to cut their expenses and increase their revenues to the point of balancing their budgets. Have they done it? No indeed. With the one exception of England, they are all sinking deeper and deeper in debt. French indebtedness has increased more than one hundred percent since the armistice. German indebtedness has been multiplied by how many fold it is unimportant to know, since it has long been far beyond any possibility of ultimate redemption. In 1920 not one single government on the European

mainland was able to cover its expenditures by its receipts. Sweden came nearest doing so, with receipts equal to ninety-five percent of expenditures; Poland stood last, with twenty-one percent. The average must have been between fifty and sixty percent. Our authors were not able to present figures for 1921, but we have reason to believe that such figures would show no improvement. Shall we say that the remedy is to spend less or levy heavier taxes? It is not politically possible for most European governments to reduce their expenses materially. They have to pay bread subsidies and unemployment benefits and run their railways and other public industries at a loss, on pain of very grave social disorders. They have to pay interest on their vast and steadily increasing debts. It might be possible to cut military outlays, especially for France and Poland. But the statesmen in control of those nations would not feel safe in doing so. As for increasing taxation, the burden on the Englishman is already three times as heavy as the burden under which we Americans are groaning. The French are near the limit of what the population will tolerate and this is even more true of the Italians. Perhaps the Germans could do better than they are doing, but it would require a stronger government than now is permitted to exist in Germany to make them do so. The bald fact is that there is no remedy in sight for the progressive malady of budgetary deficits.

Nor is there any remedy in sight for the malady of currency depreciation. When a country cannot balance its budget, what possible recourse has it but inflation of one kind or another? It may issue paper money directly or raise loans through the banks. Those are the only practical alternatives. And the one method disturbs currency values about as badly as the other.

It is sometimes urged that however unsound European finance may be, European production makes a better showing. Within limits that is true, no doubt. But the showing is far from satisfactory at best. The industrial machinery is everywhere deteriorating for want of adequate funds for repair and replacements. In this sense every European nation, including England, is running downhill, some of them very rapidly indeed.

But are we not ignoring the German indemnity, that is to restore the finances of France and Belgium and notably improve those of England and Italy? The authors have been at pains to calculate once more the ability of Germany to pay. Their results do not differ materially from those of Keynes. Since the publication of Keynes's estimate, Tardieu has published a calculation which seemed to indicate that German capacity to pay was far greater. But Messrs. Bass and Moulton show that Tardieu had unconsciously juggled his figures. Worked over by minds properly trained in economics, Tardieu's figures produce practically the same results as those of Keynes. The amount of indemnity Germany can pay, and the amount of goods the victors can afford to take in payment, are too small to offer any hope of the rehabilitation of European finance.

Europe is being drawn on steadily toward a terrific financial crisis. That crisis is likely to entail the repudiation of debts by all the nations east of the Rhine. It is not unlikely to entail the virtual bankruptcy of France and Italy. Is it to be supposed that such a crisis would be devoid of political consequences? Certainly not. Messrs. Bass and Moulton look forward with grave concern to the time when the French statesmen will have to admit