

them—Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy—are professed reformers; but they do believe that the best is not far off. Nothing, certainly, is radically wrong in the scheme of things: a few generations more, a little more common-sense in the organization of life, and the conditions of human existence will be perfect. While Barrie and Kipling and Bennett are not far from believing that things are well-nigh perfect as they are.

In this they differ most strikingly from the one writer remaining of the generation before them—Thomas Hardy. Thomas Hardy was born and lived remote from the centres of high industrial civilization. He was unaffected by that curious, almost galvanic fervor, with which the dweller in a great city is infected. He was not distracted by the clamor of commerce, the whirr of machinery, or the multiplicity of mere invention, from regarding the substance of life; and from his saturation in the unchanging life of the English peasantry he had come to feel that life was too big, too formidable, and too inscrutable to be easily shaped according to man's purposes. The idea that the millennium might come the day after tomorrow was fantastic to one who, within the narrow circle of his experience, had intensely regarded human destinies. Guided by some sure instinct Hardy turned away from the all-comprehending and intoxicating vistas of a world united in pursuit of progress which a high industrial civilization seemed to offer, to the contemplation of a small part of life which he really knew. He did not concern himself with empires, like Kipling, or with universes, like Wells; but with a few square miles of the English west country. What his chosen scene lacked in mere superficiality, it gained a thousandfold in intensity. With the instinctive conviction that human life was essentially much the same in all its parts, Hardy surrendered himself to the task of knowing to the uttermost what lay to his hand and revealing what he learned. He did not gain much comfort from his study, save the one great reward of having served the truth. Having found no cause for overweening confidence, but rather some for dismay, he said so plainly, and was called a "pessimist" for his pains.

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Thereby he became unpopular, since his final and most outspoken word as a novelist was uttered at the beginning of the ten years, 1890-1900, in which English optimism and self-confidence reached an extreme. The English public turned away from him to a rising generation of writers more in harmony with its mood; it did not mind being joked at by Shaw, or preached at by Wells, because it knew that Wells and Shaw and itself were in fundamental agreement with itself on the cardinal point: that life, in the high mechanical perfection it had reached by the end of the nineteenth century, was a thing to be confident about. The edifice might need a little alteration here and there, but the alterations necessary would be in the spirit of the thing—a few extra machines and a few extra liberties—and, on the whole, it was a famous affair.

And, for the fifteen years or so between the beginning of the twentieth century and the outbreak of the war, that was the general opinion. The blatant excess of self-confidence which reached its apogee at the time of the South African war, when Kipling (in his most unchastened mood) was the sole spokesman of the nation, had been mitigated. It was not quite so easy as all that to run the universe. There had to be a certain modesty; some minor improvements were doubtless necessary: and the nation gave a half-serious, half-amused, but altogether sympathetic attention to the writers I have named, who in their various fashions assured it that, with the various improvements they suggested, life would be nearly all that could be desired. Ultimate problems of life and death of the kind that Thomas Hardy had raised disappeared from our literature; it was concentrated upon secondary problems—the "sex question," marriage reform, medical reform, penal reform—all excellent things, no doubt, but things having this shortcoming, that they might all have been secured tomorrow, without preventing the catastrophe or adding a grain of strength to man's power of resisting it.

The catastrophe was the war. Under its compelling influence, the writers who had superseded Thomas Hardy in the general esteem began to appear as tinged with insignificance beside him. He had dug his foundations deeper than they; he had built upon real bed-rock. Whereas they began to "date," he began to emerge as dateless, and to oc-

cupy his now unchallenged and unchallengeable position as the greatest of modern English writers. Therefore, though the greater part of his work—his novels—belong to the nineteenth century, he inevitably occupies the chief position in a consideration of the characteristics of English literature of the twentieth century. For he alone, of English writers living and famous in 1914, was adequate to that scrutiny of life which the war thrust upon the nation at large.

I would not imply that the experience of the war left the middle generation of writers undisturbed; they were disturbed—Wells was profoundly disturbed in "Mr. Britling"—but their attitudes to life were formed. They could not change essentially. Wells became a chief propagandist for the League of Nations—another mechanical improvement to prevent another conflagration: and when that phase was over, he turned to more education. Of them all perhaps Shaw was most deeply changed. His evolution from the nihilism of "Heartbreak House," through the merely scientific meliorism of "Back to Methuselah," to the religious mysticism of "Saint Joan," is significant enough. But even Shaw has not been able to transcend his own limitations: "Saint Joan" is rather an intellectualist's admission of the necessity of mysticism, than the active promulgation of a felt necessity.

For the youngest generation these comparatively superficial solutions were impossible. Its members themselves were involved in the war. If they themselves had the luck not to die, their brothers did. From the very beginning they had to face ultimate questions. That whole civilization which had been taken for granted by their elders was to them an object of suspicion and a cause of despair. A civilization which could culminate in the European war seemed to them by the very fact utterly condemned. The criticism of their elders appeared shallow, and the doctrine of amelioration by mechanical change illusory. They did not become revolutionary, for revolution seemed to them as futile as war itself. They became nihilists; they touched the bottom of an abyss of despair. They found but one contemporary hero. He was Thomas Hardy.

It is not easy to create out of despair. The most facile of the younger writers turned to a cynical hedonism which, though familiar enough out of England, was novel in English literature; and this cynicism proved to be the manifestation of the post-war attitude most popular with the general public, to whose war-weary nonchalance it makes the same appeal as the night club or jazz music. But even by the general public itself this literature of cynicism is felt to be somehow unworthy; no one would dream of mentioning its successful practitioners in the same breath as the older writers.

* * *

The real literary effort of the younger writers is more arduous. They are struggling to create for themselves a basis for creation—a philosophy of life by which they may live; they are trying to discover for themselves a justification of their own activity. Such was the effort of the most exquisite artist among them, the late Katherine Mansfield, whose death two years ago deprived England of her only short-story writer of genius since Kipling. No one was plunged deeper into despair than she: no one more evidently won a victory over it: she succeeded in justifying her exquisite art to herself only by transforming it into the utterance of a complete acceptance of human destiny. Mr. D. H. Lawrence, the most greatly gifted of all the younger English novelists, is less balanced and restrained, but his impassioned criticism of the sham idealism which contaminates English life and his advocacy of a return to the instincts, is at least adequate to the distress of his generation. He seeks to overcome a profound despair by a search for the profound springs of life.

One could multiply examples of this radical self-questioning; but the point is that the whole impulse of modern English literature is intensely critical, to such a point indeed that at the present time literary criticism, in so far as it is not merely day-to-day journalism, is an integral part of creative literature. The perennial academic question: What is the function of art? has suddenly taken on an almost agonized actuality. Among all the more serious of the younger writers the two incessant questions are: Why live? Why write? and all their energies are intent upon finding some answer to them. So long as this effort at criticism remains purely intellectual, a cynical pessimism is its inevitable conclusion, and the function of the writer is fixed as one of mere

amusement. That phase is the most obvious in contemporary English literature, and the one which would be most evident to the superficial observer. But the more important younger writers are precisely those who know that their attitude cannot be purely intellectual because their activity itself is not purely intellectual. Certain things have to be accepted as beyond the scrutiny of the intellect; chief among these is life itself. And by life I mean not merely the vast complex of human destinies, but also the vital urge within the individual himself. The system or the society of which the individual is a member is profoundly mistrusted; to it belongs the blame of the catastrophe of the war. But the individual himself remains. He cannot trust the system; he must trust himself. So that the great critical problem with which modern English literature is trying to grapple is two-fold. Is there a meaning in life? Is there a meaning in a man's share of it? Is there in the universe at large a general process man may trust? Has he a self which he can trust?

Such a search tends to become mystical or religious; and certainly mysticism or religion play a far greater part than appears at first sight in the thought of modern English writers. Even the older generation is by no means immune, as we have seen in the case of Mr. Bernard Shaw. But the younger generation is less intellectual and less tangible than Mr. Shaw, and it would be extremely shy of appearing under so definite and even sectarian a banner as that of Mr. Shaw's "Saint Joan." It mistrusts the old religious formulations quite as deeply as the old social commonplaces; its religion is most closely allied to the religion of the great individualists—something which is by nature inexpressible and can certainly not be fully expressed in creeds and theologies. It is along this path that the effort of the younger generation in literature seems likely to reach a culmination of permanent value.

Two Dublin Plays

TWO PLAYS. By SEAN O'CASEY. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.25.

Reviewed by JOSEPH CAMPBELL

AN American friend who was recently in Dublin made the remark to me: "Your capital, you know, is an eighteenth-century city, and many of its modern social problems must be approached from that angle." "How do you mean?" I asked. "I mean that the actual physical fabric of the city has served its purpose. It is outworn. Public buildings, rich houses, tenements are alike in this; a sort of psychic evil—it's worse than inertia—exudes from the walls."

The eyes of a stranger are sharp: I confess I never saw the city quite in that way before.

The past, of course, dominates Ireland; but in no country in the world have the people such a persistent vitality, such sheer animal youthfulness. One has only to meet them in a place where mixed nationals resort to see the truth of what I write. On a west-bound Atlantic liner, for instance, the deck where the reels and jigs are danced is the sun-deck of the ship, and dark-browed Italians, phlegmatic Germans, and querulous Poles will gather round to watch and applaud. Dublin's educated classes are wittily charming. Dublin's poor folk are cheerful in the face of a political history and of economic conditions that would make of any other slum-dwellers a race of morons and suicides.

The action of these Two Plays is almost contemporary. "Juno and the Paycock" is dated 1922, "The Shadow of a Gunman," 1920; but in each case the setting is a Dublin tenement—antique, once splendid, the town-house, perhaps, of some buck of the wig and silk stocking period, but now squalid and tottering. Things are so bad, that it would appear difficult to make any improvement in such places, short of demolition. Both plays are labelled tragedies; rather are they ironic comedies. The fact that they mirror poverty, and poverty seen at its drabest in war, does not prevent them from being funny to the point of caricature. Hogarth might have written them, had he been a dramatist. The word tragedy, in the Aristotelian sense, implies something that cleanses through pity and terror. Shock—a thorough shaking out of my equanimity—was the vibration I got from reading the plays; Abbey Theater audiences have, I understand, laughed at them as they would at a farce of Lady Gregory's.

The plots are so immaterial, as to make one won-

der that so fragile . . . much robust flesh and blood of character. Certain critics will plead for the architectonic side of his plays, but to me it is in character-drawing that their excellence lies. Mr. James Stephens made the statement recently that Mr. O'Casey, himself, only a labor-worker unused to the handling of a pen, had taught the Dublin *littérateurs* how to write. While there is a deal of leprechaunish flightiness in what Mr. Stephens says, he is pretty near the mark here. To be able to evoke sentiment, breathing creatures—men and women with the impress of life upon them—out of blank space is half the creative writer's equipment. It is the touchstone of all the great literary artists from Shakespeare to Chekhov, and Mr. O'Casey is a juvenist of their order. High praise, but praise deserved.

The story of "Juno and the Paycock" turns on the hopes and ultimate disillusionment of a family of Dublin workers. Captain Jack Boyle, the father, might be described more properly as a chronic looker-for-work—a scrounger—rather than a worker. He has been left a fortune of about eight thousand dollars by a cousin, a Mr. Ellison, who has just died in the country. The fortune turns out to be mythical, and my brave Captain, having acquired a gramophone, a gaudily-upholstered lounge and armchair, cheap pictures, vases, and other impedimenta of the propertied on the strength of it, strikes his flag, and resumes his old cadging habits.

The Captain is a man on in years, with a bullet head and reddish-purple cheeks. He has been "wanst on the wather in on oul' collier" trading between Dublin and Liverpool; he habitually wears a faded seaman's cap with a glazed peak—hence the nautical sobriquet. He has an *alter ego* in one Joxer Daly. With him he goes "struttin' about the town like a paycock." An inimitable duo, comparable in their line with Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, or with Falstaff and Bardolph. Wherever Joxer is the Captain is—"drinkin' in some snug or other." "Now an' agen we have our differ," says the Captain, "but we're there together all the time." And Joxer answers: "Me for you, an you for me, like the two Musketeers." The Captain has a temperamental aversion to what he calls "climbin' jobs," that is, jobs involving the ascent of a ladder in building operations. But the mere suggestion of work of any kind (and Father Farrel, the local priest, occasionally gets him a start) brings on violent rheumatic pains in his legs. "That man'll be lookin' for somethin' on the Day of Judgment," says his wife, Juno, in Act I. And in Act III, "He'll be hopeless till the end of his days."

The father of the Karamazovs—aristocratic buffoon, drunkard, squanderer of the chances of life—in Dostoevsky's novel, is a tragic figure; Captain Boyle—a proletarian of corresponding type—in Mr. O'Casey's play, is not.

Joxer is a familiar Dublin specimen, but Mr. O'Casey's net has been the first to catch him. He looks a lot older than his butty. His face is a wisp of crinkled paper. He is spare and loosely built. He has a habit of constantly shrugging his shoulders with a peculiar twitching movement meant to be ingratiating. He has tags of proverbial learning, he quotes patriotic poetry on the slightest provocation, and in his sentimental moods he sings songs with his eyes shut. A foxy matterjack,—"past Chief Ranger of the Dear Little Shamrock Branch of the Irish National Foresters," a semi-political, semi-mutual-benefit organization, whose members parade on St. Patrick's Day in Robert Emmet costume. There is a scene in Act I between the pair which is the apotheosis of ironic comedy. The Captain is holding forth on his imaginary exploits when he went sailing from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean. He describes his alleged hardships and perils at length. Then there is a pause, and he says:

. . . an' it blowed, an' blowed—blew is the right word, Joxer, but blowed is what the sailors use. . .

Joxer. Aw, it's a darlin' word, a darlin' word.

Boyle. An', as it blowed an' blowed, I often looked up at the sky an' assed meself the question—what is the stars?

Voice of Coal-vendor, outside. Any blocks, coal-blocks; blocks, coal-blocks!

Joxer. Ah, that's the question,—What is the stars?

Between them, with their idle drinking habits and idler talk, Juno Boyle has an uncomfortable time. She is forty-five. Twenty years ago she must have been a pretty woman; but her face has now assumed that look which ultimately settles upon the faces of the women of the working-class. We know that look. We see it on the sidewalks, and

in trolley-cars and subway trains every day: care-tired beauty giving place to an expression of harassed anxiety and mechanical resistance. Captain Boyle explains to the schoolmaster, Bentham, who has brought him news of the legacy, how she came by her mythological name:

You see, Juno was born an' christened in June; I met her in June, we were married in June, an' Johnny was born in June, so wan day I says to her, "You should a' been call'd June," an' the name stuck to her ever since.

In another place he complains that "'tis n't Juno should be her pet name at all, but Deirdre of the Sorras, for she's always grousin'." But she has her *tu quoque*. "Ann't I nicely handicapped with the whole o' youse!" And she is, poor woman; for on her shoulders fall not only the consequences of her husband's and Joxer's misdeeds, but the troubles of her son and daughter as well.

Juno, being a woman, succumbs to the feeling of prodigality felt by her husband when the "banjax of a will" is first read to him. She launches on a sea of unaccustomed expenditure, while having (womanlike, again) a secret dread that it will all turn out badly. When the crash comes at last—when the very foundations of existence seem to be slipping from under her, it is then Juno shows her womanly mettle and rises to her true height. "Who has kep' the home together for the past few years," she cries with passionate remonstrance—"only me? An' who'll have to bear the biggest part o' this trouble but me?" and to her daughter, who in the lunacy of her grief denies there is a God—"there



Merry cupids were singing in the air.

"From the Fat of the Cat," by Gottfried Keller (Harcourt, Brace)

isn't a God: if there was He wouldn't let these things happen!"—she says.

Mary, Mary, you mustn't say them things. We'll want all the help we can get from God an' His Blessed Mother now! These things have nothin' to do with the Will o' God. Ah, what can God do agen the stupidity o' men!

"Juno and the Paycock" is a feminist document. Defenders of Art-for-Art's sake would, I suppose, protest that the dramatist is not concerned with the exposition of any special theory, or with putting before the public propaganda for any particular cause. They may be right; they may be wrong. But this play affects me in the same way that "Measure for Measure" does, or that "Anna Karenina" does. It points an accusing finger at men: it sets woman on a pedestal.

"The Shadow of a Gunman" is not, by a long way, as good as its fellow. It is a study of the Black and Tan period, when it was dangerous to be in the Irish movement and equally dangerous to be out. There is a raid by British Auxiliaries in Act II, which gives a thrilling picture of what Dublin had to endure in the cataclysmic years, 1920-21. Mr. O'Casey's touch is not so sure in this play as in the other; it bears the sign-manual of apprenticeship. Donal Davoren is such a poet as one never met on sea or land. But there is Mrs. Grigson, the cave-dweller; and her loyalist husband, Adolphus; and Mr. Gallogher and Mrs. Henderson—creations in the author's best comic vein.

And there is Minnie Powell, who stands up to the

soldiers when strong men blench and run away. The cloven hoof of feminism again!

I hope New Yorkers will soon have an opportunity of seeing Mr. O'Casey's work on the stage. They will admire his strongly-painted portraits. They will enjoy the humorous sallies of folk who, with true Irish paradox, live the saddest of lives. Dublin is a city of decay; the past dominates it like an incubus. Irish distressfulness still persists in spite of "articles of agreement for a treaty." There is hunger in Kerry and Galway and Mayo; unemployment is rife everywhere; and the banks are paying 25 percent dividends. But over all rings the amazing Irish laugh—oftentimes sardonic, oftener kindly—the laugh, particularly, of unconquered women working in their kitchens and of innocent little children playing in the streets and fields.

A Valiant Book

THE THREAD OF ARIADNE. By ADRIAN STOKES. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HULBERT FOOTNER

THIS remarkable book defies the usual categories. It is really entitled to two reviews of which this should be the second. It is a philosophical work (though the author denies it) and as such, should be brought to the attention of a learned doctor. Like David, the young author sets out to destroy the Goliath of scholastic philosophy. This Goliath will hardly fall so suddenly as his prototype; the learned doctors if they take any notice at all of David, will have little difficulty in demolishing him (at least to their own satisfaction) with their batteries of definitions, concepts, syllogisms, and all the strange weapons of the professional philosopher's terminology.

But supposing this to happen, the matter is by no means ended there. The book is also the autobiography of a soul, and may be judged in relation to other human documents. It is beautiful; poetic; charged with strong feeling restrained by art; it is therefore eligible to the lists of literature, there to contend with books as a book. The author's conclusions are perhaps not so important as he thinks; and his hot crusading spirit causes a man twice his age to smile in friendly fashion; but the fight he puts up is altogether splendid. He will not destroy "official thinking" as he so fondly hopes; one can hardly see him making a single convert from amongst the "mathematically-minded," but he has with him from the start all those who love valor. The fine thing about the show is not how he does in Goliath, but how he finds his own soul.

Battle is joined on the mental and spiritual planes, and this book is therefore not meet for the fluff-minded, as the author calls them. It is an attempt to speak that which is beyond speech. The author is forced to convey his new matter in the very phrases, outworn, which his new thoughts seek to destroy. All this makes difficult reading. If you stay with it, you will be repaid. Upon a second reading the book becomes luminous with the author's generous passion for right thinking. Like all strongly-felt books the fire that is in him transmits his thoughts into just and glowing phrases.

Mr. Stokes contends that Abstract Philosophy, hitherto regarded as the fine flower of the human mind, is sterile and false; worse than useless as a guide to the conduct of life. Many who know little of the questions of philosophy have felt this; but have not dared to enunciate it. Mr. Stokes speaks with the authority of an initiate. His book presents the piquant spectacle of a logical mind attacking logic. The whole body of man's thinking, he argues, in its preoccupation with coherency, order, and system, is false. False since the Greeks who established the forms of our thought. Man's very language obscures the real issues of life. "My struggle is with words." The whole "common heritage" must be thrown overboard, and man falls back on the "Great Commonplaces," by which, I suppose, he means the dictates of the heart. The reader may supply his own phraseology. This is the way I would put it: "That all thinking is sterile unless the heart shares in it, with the head."

A stimulating book! The reader is led to consult his own heart. He may disagree with the author on every page. What of it? If men were as honest and clear-sighted as Mr. Stokes bids them be, no two men would think alike, and that would be all to the good. The reader may easily perceive how fallible the author is, how inexperienced, but