

A View of Business as "Rule Maker"

TOMORROW'S BUSINESS. By Beardsley Ruml. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1945. 238 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PAUL M. O'LEARY

MR. RUML is one of those rare and fortunate men who can find time in a strenuous business career to reflect upon broad social problems, come to firm conclusions, and present them to the public in simple, lucid English. His influence upon our Federal tax system is well known though not universally appreciated at this time of year. His views on post-war taxation are a subject of lively controversy in many quarters. In "Tomorrow's Business" he has given us a calm, good tempered, clearly written book covering a range of problems where calmness, good temper, and clearness are all too frequently absent.

Mr. Ruml is principally interested in freedom as an end and government as a means of establishing, maintaining, and fostering freedom. His theory of government is pluralistic. He chooses to treat business in its governing aspect, that is as a "rule maker," or form of private government, the three other such agencies being the family, the church, and the trade-union. Business has three functions: to get things ready for use, to provide people with purposeful activity, and to give people a way to save productively a part of what they earn. But the ultimate validity of business as a social institution depends upon whether it "helps or hinders us in the attainment of personal dignity and freedom." Mr. Ruml devotes the first twenty-six pages of his book to defining freedom the essence of which he finds to be a condition under which people "can realize, with reasonable completeness, the potentialities as persons that inhere in their capacities as individuals. The demand for freedom is a demand for fulfilment, for growth, for life—not in the material or biological area alone, but also in the realm of mind and spirit."

This concern with freedom as the end and government in its plural forms as means is far too rare in most current economic writing which all too frequently takes "full employment" as the end and everything else, including in many instances the sacrifice of considerable freedom, as the means. Mr. Ruml believes ardently in the necessity of maintaining full employment and he presents a program for doing it but he is sharply attentive at all times to the impact of economic controls upon freedom. He is optimistic as to the possibility of maintain-

ing the health of business at a level where as a form of private government, a "rule maker," it can both preserve and foster freedom, and insure full employment. Bold use of the greatly enlarged post-war Federal budget, scientific reform of Federal taxation, and stabilization of the construction industry through reforms of its own restrictive practices accompanied by carefully planned public works are the principal weapons he would employ to maintain a high level of business health.

Every one of Mr. Ruml's proposals in regard to government fiscal policy, taxation reform, and stabilization of the construction industry raises a host of controversial questions, each one of which could be discussed at great length. In fact they are being so discussed in economic journals and elsewhere. Mr. Ruml makes out a persuasive case for his program, though he probably underestimates the difficulty of actually putting it into effect in view of the way the Federal government operates. There is a vast difference between a fiscal program which is good on paper and one which has much chance of actually emerging from the numerous executive and legislative agencies which assist (though they do not always cooperate) at the birth of any fiscal measure, whether it be an appropriation bill or a revenue bill. Furthermore, I suspect that part of Mr. Ruml's success in making his fiscal program seem more financially "respectable" than it has appeared in other guises and under other sponsorship as "government spending" and an "unbalanced budget" is due to his adroitness at assuming a high level of



Beardsley Ruml

national income to be taxed (140 billion dollars at 1943 prices) and a lower Federal post-war budget than we are likely to have (18 billion dollars).

Nowhere in "Tomorrow's Business" is adequate attention given to the efforts of private governments or "rule makers," that is business and trade-unions, to capture public government and devote it to their own purposes—the problem of "pressure groups." Supremacy of public government is assumed. The private governments are subordinate and assumed to be generally acquiescent in their inferior positions. Actually the efforts of Mr. Ruml's private governments to dominate public government constitute one of the most crucial social problems of our time. He indicates his awareness of the problem but does not really come to grips with it. This defect should be borne in mind by readers of Mr. Ruml's eminently readable and stimulating book.

Crosses in the Desert

for Pte Eric Barnes, R.A.S.C., d. in action near Mareth 1943

By Edward Fenton

OTHER voices lying here
have no words left to say;
and now, no way
to have or hear this clear
incredibly quiet day.

Wind and the weeks will soon retrieve
these footprints, where I stand—
life in my hand—
and by my breathing, wreathe
the impenetrable sand.

Within my wordless thoughts, I know,
wondering, that I seek
out of this bleak
sharp blazing scene to learn:
whose time to listen, now?

Whose, now, to speak?

An Interpretation of Gogol

NIKOLAI GOGOL: By Vladimir Nabokov. New York: New Directions Books. 1944. 162 pp. \$1.50.

Reviewed by MANYA GORDON

NIKOLAI GOGOL, the great Russian realist, is not unknown to the American reading public. Before World War I "The Inspector General" was a favorite comedy on our college campuses, and "The Overcoat," "Taras Bulba," and "Dead Souls" were available in translation. Peter Kropotkin's "Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature," which has remained popular among discerning readers, contains an excellent chapter on Gogol. To be sure, he is not of one mind with Mr. Nabokov about "the pure realism" of this Slav genius who, according to Kropotkin, "was the first to introduce the social element into Russian literature." The poet Pushkin was the first of all Russian realists. Gogol was the first to bring the social trend into fiction.

Mr. Nabokov does not agree with the accepted interpretations of Gogol. He endeavors to prove that Gogol was neither humorist nor realist and that the so-called social aspect of his work is only the invention of sociological critics. It is a formidable task which leads the gifted author of this little volume into strange paths and many extravagances. At this point it is fitting that the reader should have at least a passing acquaintance with the author of "Nikolai Gogol." Mr. Nabokov is a man of high culture and a gifted poet in his own native Russian. He has written several novels and numerous short stories, some of them in English. He is a very good conversationalist and is not lacking in humor.

But for some inexplicable reason Mr. Nabokov informs his readers that he does not like humor: "The clown who appears in a spangled suit never seems as funny to me as the one who comes in wearing an undertaker's striped pants and a dickey." He insists that "had Pushkin lived to read 'The Overcoat' and 'Dead Souls' he would doubtless have realized that Gogol was something more than a purveyor of 'authentic fun.'" He will not agree that Gogol, like Dickens and other distinguished writers, could be funny and serious or tragic. Regionalism is another of Mr. Nabokov's aversions, and Gogol was an Ukrainian, although he wrote in Muscovite Russian.

Having thus created for himself four handicaps, namely, that Gogol was not a realist, that he was not the pioneer of the social element in Russian literature, that he was not a humorist as well as a tragic writer, and that in

some of his stories, "Taras Bulba" for example, he suffered from his Ukrainian locale, the author sets out to prove that Gogol was for other reasons a great genius. In order to accomplish his purpose with the material in hand Mr. Nabokov is compelled to resort to a bit of Freudism which he subsequently warns the reader not to take too seriously. Gogol's amazing characterization of the people whom his hero, Chichikov, meets in "Dead Souls" is thus lost in a maze of Freudian vapors and Mr. Nabokov's own lively fancy. In "The Overcoat" the deeply tragic fate of the poor clerk is merely mentioned while the author spends himself on excursions into the supernatural with the ghost of Akaky Akakievich. It is a valiant effort in which Mr. Nabokov's learning and skill are revealed to advantage, but in the opinion of the present reviewer the whole argument is beside the point.

Gogol was in fact deeply stirred by the poverty of his clerk and the tragedy of the lost coat, and he employed the local superstition only as an instrument of retribution. It is necessary to bear in mind that Gogol's Ukraine is the very cradle of the Slavic

folk tales, and also that Russian folk lore, whether it deals with ghosts or heroes, is always utilitarian. The sun-god in the fairy tale who courts the peasant widow's daughter warms, through a chink in the wall, the bath house for his prospective mother-in-law, and bakes her pancakes for breakfast in the same fashion. Death is perched on the thatched roof of a hut sharpening his scythe and explains to a passing peasant woman that he is preparing to decapitate the village butcher who shortweights his customers. One could go on indefinitely citing similar examples of realism in Russian folk tales. Consequently it is not at all singular that Gogol should have employed one of his own Ukrainian ghost tales or invented one, as Shakespeare used the ghost of Hamlet's father, in order to drive home his point against a callous bureaucrat. But whatever the purpose, Akaky Akakievich's ghost is not the part of the story that makes "The Overcoat" immortal. Gogol's genius is revealed in the deeply human description of the lives of the characters who people the story.

For all that, this little book is interesting as a new interpretation of Gogol and as an example of what a gifted writer may do with an impossible task.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

BIRDS IN POETRY

Miss Harriet A. Tomson, of Topeka, Kansas, is the compiler of this week's quiz. You are to fill in the blanks in the quotations below with the names of birds. Allowing 5 points for each correct answer and another 2 if you can also identify the poem and its author, a score of 50 is par, 60 is very good, and 70 or higher is excellent. Answers are on page 27.

1. Thou,! in thy green array
Presiding Spirit here today.
2. Sweet sits on the bush,
Singing so rarely.
3. The clamorous, that all day
Above tree-tops and towers play.
4. And the plays but a boxwood flute,
And I love him best of all.
5. From their shadowy cots the white breasts peep
Of in a silver-feathered sleep.
6. To the 's way and the whale's way when the wind's like a
whetted knife. . . .
7. The moping does to the moon complain.
8. The chirped as if they still were proud
Their race in Holy Writ should mentioned be.
9.,
Spink, spank, spink.
10. Ere the first his matin rings.
11. As the secretly builds on the watery sod,
Behold, I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.
12. The, though he's very shy, will sing a song for London.
13. While the sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!
14. The, still bravely singing, fly.
15. A single on the tree-top bleak
From his shining feathers shed off the cold sun.