

## NEW BOOKS

LES FOSSOYEURS, by "Pertinax." Editions de la Maison Française. New York 1943. 2 volumes. 376 - 311 pages.

Since the day of its publication, *Les Fossoyeurs*, in which Pertinax, great French and European journalist, gives his account of the fall of France, has been the object of many a criticism. But the book, packed with facts and ideas drawn from first-hand information and deep knowledge of French history, can defend itself very well.

To the objection that it is temerarious to try to present and explain, two years after it took place, an event of such magnitude as the fall of France, Pertinax answered in advance in his introduction: "This," he says, "is a 'temporary synthesis'". To write another "temporary synthesis" rather than to question the patriotism of the author would be the only fair criticism.

It is equally easy to point to the general title, *Les Fossoyeurs* (The Gravediggers), to the division of the first volume into three sections (named *Gamelin*, *Daladier*, *Reynaud*), to the sub-title of the second (*Pétain*) and then to reduce the complex wealth of the book to a somewhat elementary syllogism; Pertinax accuses these men; these men were the government of France at that time, therefore Pertinax accuses France, making himself the echo of those who cannot forgive France for having been defeated. Such hasty conclusion certainly shows more anxiety to oppose the attitude and the ideas of Pertinax than serious reading of his book. Perhaps it would suffice to say that Pétain or Vichy is not France, and also that the spirit of Pétain and Vichy could be found in other countries. But an attempt to analyse the main themes of the book might serve our purpose better.

There are three questions indirectly but constantly under examination in *Les Fossoyeurs*. One is: How did France fall? Or: What is the concatenation of events that led the country from September 1939 to June 1940? The other, quite different, is: What were the causes that made possible the fall of France? And the third: Who is responsible for the enforcement of the Armistice of June, 1940, that condemned the French people to the hard labour of non-belligerency?

Gamelin is guilty of having lost the battle of the frontier, Daladier of his failure to create a completely united front inside France, Reynaud of having accepted the capitulation before *all* hope was lost. But not the lack of military genius nor a vacillating will nor the fact that Reynaud was too logical and ill advised can explain the fall of France and convict these men of full responsibility. In fact, they appear on the stage at a moment when a great fatality created by forces originating everywhere—and not only in France—was reaching its first climax; and indeed they fell first victims. Not that we believe that man is impotent in front of historical determinism: but when a world had been for years "appeasing", that is voluntarily blind to the historical reality of Pan-Germanism, and when a country is caught without the protection of geographical accidents or a respite of several years to arm itself, what can be expected?

And thus, behind the dramatic story of the fall of France, the writer invites us to read the general causes.

It is a fact that already, on the eve of the first World War, the French economic system was out of date. A régime of small territorial properties and industrial monopolies meant, in the long run, an immense loss. Elsewhere, mass production and collective discipline were installed. A general reorganization was needed. But the great ruling class that had shaped the "fifty just" of the Third Republic seemed to have died out, extinguished by personal profit-minded groups, both in trade and in liberal professions. However, experiences like the one of the *Front Populaire* shew that neither imagination nor devotion to the good of the people was lacking. It will be for ever a reason of sorrow for the French people that the external danger interrupted the effort and actually changed it into a menace for the near future. Having taken place before, the reorganization would have strengthened France; at that time intensive rearmament was the only thing to do.

But more important than the economic and social readjustment coming to paralyze the defence reflex was what Pertinax calls the gradual deterioration of the *Entente cordiale*. Lord Tyrrell could say, when already it was too late: "Our small mistake was to take the Germans for the English and the French for the Germans". The imperialism of Louis the 14th and Napoleon the 1st corresponded to only transient moments in French history; national unity and consciousness were created in France centuries before the Armies of the Revolution brought nationalism to Germany. That is to say that France is an old country, in every sense self sufficient, on the defensive on the Rhine since 1815. What the British may have mistaken in 1918 for imperialistic views was—the very word of "security" was telling enough—the expression of an old instinct won by many a sad experience.

But about the last question implied in the book: Who is responsible for the Armistice of 1940—The answer is: Petain. There is no "other story" (at least now acceptable) to be read behind the volume entitled: *Petain*. The vanity and pettiness of the hero of Verdun are exposed, and the great and irreparable damage caused to the French and the Allies by the decision of June, 1940, boldly brought to light. Many grievous problems turn around Petain and the Armistice. About none of them does Pertinax hesitate. The assumption of power by Petain was not a legitimate procedure but a "coup d'état" since, under the pressure of the German army, the majority of Senators and Deputies who gave their adhesion to the Petain government were not acting as free representatives of the French people but rather as prisoners of war. Not one argument can justify the Armistice. Keeping a "free zone"? Ask the French before December, 1942, about the difference in life under Paris or under Vichy. That carrying on the war in Africa would have been impracticable? No decisive proof of it can be given. And future events were to show the importance of having the whole of Africa in the hands of the Allies.

That the cessation of hostilities would ensure physical survival, that carrying on by the side of England would mean irreparable loss in the French population hardly recovering from the bloodshed of 1914? It may have sounded reasonable at a time. But now we know what physical survival means under the Nazis, and what bitter derision

it is to speak of non-belligerency when to a million of men toiling to death for Germany the lot of the Fighting French is only an impossible wish. Pétain is certainly sincere when he proclaims his devotion to France; but these declarations, as the pretentious and almost, they remarked, sacrilegious gift of his person to France—as if the person of a Marshal could be put in balance with France—sound irrelevant. Is there a Frenchman worthy of the name to whom the love of his country does not come first? And is France becoming senile, that she needs to be told which of the many philosophies and institutions she learned to know in the past will be the best for tomorrow?

The error of Pétain was a paralysis of the imagination: he still was thinking in terms of a world when the ideas of legitimacy, the prevalence of Christian principles and above all the absence of the immense mechanical power of modern times acted as a check on the action of one country against the other. His crime is to have exploited the defeat in favour of a so called "national restoration"; in fact a rising up of the "other France", the France of the counter-Revolution never completely gone since the days of the *Emigrés*, triumphant during the first part of the 19th century, recurring in 1870, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, again in 1934. A phenomenon perhaps politically healthy in time of peace, and of which other countries might find the equivalent among themselves. But when the "other France" follows on the steps of the conquerors, and imposes on an intelligent and suffering people parades and ceremonies, servile copies of Fascist ways, and when soon the two policies become one, then it is no more the other France, but the enemy under a mask.

But again, Pertinax points out that the failure of Pétain does not involve the responsibility of the French people, nor does he share in the pessimistic views of some concerning the future of that people. One should read over the pages of the conclusion where the author, considering the successive assaults of the Germans against the French, four times in a little more than a century, three times successful, wonders whether the vitality of the French people can have decreased—and looking at the French, in the past and the present, his conclusion is a solemn affirmation of the ancestral and ever living greatness that gave the world so much, with so little noise.

More than ever, in the world of tomorrow, will the salt of France be needed.

G. LA FEUILLE

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MAN AND LITERATURE. By Norman Nicholson. Macmillans in Canada (for S.C.M. Press). Pp. 218.

Mr. Nicholson has written from the point of view of Christian orthodoxy a very stimulating and challenging evaluation of literature since 1900. The book falls into three sections: Liberal Man, Natural Man, and Imperfect Man. The classical and Christian conceptions agree that man is composed of warring elements—good and evil; according to classicism, the victory can go to the good elements through the exercise of the human will, whereas for the Christian the "civil

war in the cave" is settled by divine grace. With the 18th century began a shift in the interpretation of man; according to the new theory man was innately good, only outward forces, such as kings and priests, being responsible for his downfall. Along with this comfortable and comforting doctrine came the cults of primitivism and the perfectibility of man. The remarkable progress in science and invention during the 18th and 19th centuries helped to make the new views of man predominate. In the book under review the author tests the fruits of these theories. The liberal writers—or we might better call them the perfectibilians—are represented by Shaw, Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett. Natural man, on the other hand, is the fruit of the primitivistic strain; he is found in the works of D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley (in part), Hemingway and Faulkner, but for Mr. Nicholson he reaches his complete development in the works of the French novelist Henri de Montherlant. The common bond among the writers about Imperfect Man—Joyce, Powys, Kafka, and T. S. Eliot—is awareness that man is not nearly so simple as the liberals and primitivists fondly imagined. All see in him strange, contradictory, warring elements, and present these honestly. The author feels that while none of these men, except T. S. Eliot, is orthodox, there is hope for the future in that we are no longer satisfied with very partial depicting of man. It is good to see orthodoxy taking up the challenge of heterodox literature in such spirited and intelligent fashion.

B. M.

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BASIC ENGLISH AND ITS USES. By I. A. Richards. W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1943. \$1.00.

Since Mr. Churchill's address at Harvard last year, with its commendation of the new "medium of intercourse and understanding", everyone is interested in Basic English. This book clarifies the subject. It explains what Basic English is, and what purposes it may serve, especially after the war. An appendix enumerates various books that can easily furnish the nucleus of a Basic library for the enterprising.

In a chapter on *The Simplification of English*, Mr. Ivor Richards makes quite clear what is puzzling at first glance, that is, how 18 verbs can do duty efficiently in a vocabulary of 850 words; and he gives illustrations elsewhere by slipping into Basic once in a while without warning. He also says much in a page or two about prepositions, those "simple-looking little words" which the learner finds it hard to handle. The process of simplification he traces back to the intercourse of Angles and Danes, but it may well date to the intercourse of the original Britons with Teutonic settlers. The original Britons were far from exterminated; they must have outnumbered the invaders even in eastern England, if women are counted as reasonable beings endowed with the use of speech. Celt and Teuton trying to talk together would be more likely to shed inflections than Teuton and Teuton.

The author uses epigrams freely, and their neat wisdom gives a good idea of his somewhat trenchant quality. Here are a few: "The remedy is not in controversy . . . but in the growth of informed

opinion." (Page 69) "But, alas, in no department of human affairs is the most usual thing necessarily the thing most used." (99) "Writing is a minute form of dancing." (99) "We are aggressive, intellectually, rather than meditative." (114) "Many people expect words to do their thinking for them." (116)

Occasional analogies elucidate the abstract by the homely and mechanical. In one analogical paragraph (106), which mounts quietly to a significant climax, Mr. Richards makes the best statement of his case. "Basic," he writes, "has no magical powers. It is a tool with certain uses which derive openly and evidently from its construction. Like all tools, it can be misused. It is not a foolproof apparatus. It is more like a hammer than a nutcracker. It cannot be guaranteed to extract meanings from sentences undamaged. It is useful in cracking hard shells, but we have to learn how to use it. And that very learning is in a large measure its value. We learn how the kernel of meaning is related to its verbal container."

SISTER MAURA

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"AND FROM THAT DAY." By Alan Sullivan. Ryerson Press. Pp. 195. \$2.25.

Mr. Alan Sullivan has taken an old story and treated it from a most unusual point of view. The Gospels tell us the story of the last days of Our Lord from the point of view of the early Church; Mr. Sullivan has given us the story as Pontius Pilate and the other outsiders felt it from day to day during the actual course of events. This approach raised for the author the same problem as the Greek dramatists faced: how to create suspense and keep interest in old, well-known material. Mr. Sullivan has almost completely eschewed, unlike the Greeks, the use of skilful handling of plot; indeed, one might say that there is no plot. Rather, in modern fashion, our interest is centred on the emotional reactions of the small group. Pontius Pilate and his wife Procula are by far the most complex and subtle of the group; to the end, the former is a sadistic voluptuary, uneasily aware, however, of something deeper in this simple Galilean prophet; Procula is made to move toward the acceptance of Christianity after the Resurrection, under the guidance of her masseuse, Miriamne (Mary Magdalene). Three defects may be noted: the first two sections move very slowly; a lack of continuity from section to section results from the minimizing of plot; and throughout there is a tendency to give too consciously modern a tone to the discussions, for example, on pp. 126-7, 133-4, and 150. The most beautifully conceived and written scene is between Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus as they go to recover the body for burial. One might add that there are a few misprints and two or three slips in English usage, but these are unimportant details in the novel. To sum up, this is an unusual, stimulating, interesting novel, that by the very nature of its material was not likely to achieve the complete artistic success of *Three Came to Ville Marie*.

B. M.

A BOOK OF RUSSIAN VERSE. Edited by C. M. Bowra. Macmillans in Canada. Pp. 128. \$2.75.

Can poetry be translated? Probably not perfectly; still, for many, a half loaf is better than none. Since so few of us know Russian, this volume should serve a useful purpose, especially as we have the editor's assurance that most of the translations retain the original metres and forms. The volume covers the period of Russian poetry from 1800 to 1922. Naturally Pushkin, Lermontov, and Alexy Tolstoy bulk large in the collection; to many Alexander Blok (1880-1921) will be a very pleasing discovery. The themes are varied, religion, patriotism, and Russian landscape being the dominant ones. A characteristic of all the poems is a tendency to a quiet statement—almost understatement—of emotion, which causes the poetry at first to seem flat to the English reader accustomed to Elizabethan and Romantic fulness of writing. The collection is preceded by a very concise but illuminating introduction by the editor.

B. M.

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FAITH, REASON AND CIVILIZATION: An Essay in Historical Analysis. By Harold J. Laski. New York: The Viking Press. 1944.

This is a fascinating book; with fascination, however, different from that which the author intended or desired. Mr. Laski has long been well known to us, as an incisive critic of popular enthusiasms, and a mocker of the leadership in "capitalist" countries whose prestige—for peace or for war—has been high. A Left-Wing publicist, in short, of the class often described by the unsavoury name "debunker", and for this service naturally a favorite with insurgent youth. Especially as he has been contrasted, by richness of knowledge and a real talent for expression, with the general run of debunking publicists over whose satire—supposed by themselves to resemble that of Swift or Junius—one so often yawned in the early nineteen-thirties.

In his latest contribution we have the work of a startled writer—one for whom the startling of others, however enjoyable be the exhilaration such an exercise brings, has yielded for the time to a grave sense of need. Mr. Laski now wants to find a new sort of worship that will serve mankind better than the various sorts which have been displaced. He has been driven to think about Christianity again—not considering it among the possibilities that such outgrown doctrine about God and Mankind and Destiny will ever come back, but haunted by the suspicion that something else, something with more inspiring force than, for example, the publications of the *Rationalist Press Association*, must be worked out to act upon the world as Christianity acted after the debacle of the Roman Empire. Like Auguste Comte, Mr. Laski is brooding over the essentials of some sort of new religion. It is well that something has impelled him that way, and one may hope that he will be led, by his habitual practice of research into the real

origins of what has been popularly misunderstood, to study a little the form of Faith which had most to do for centuries with the civilization of Europe. He may even discover that the collapse of this civilization in the period which followed the most effective discrediting of this Faith was not mere coincidence.

He deserves our best wishes as he sets out, like several other notably negative thinkers whom the horror of our time has stirred, upon this quest. His provisional conclusion, what Bacon would have called the "first vintage" of his research, does not seem to me very promising. He proposes to find in Russian Bolshevism at least the essence of the creed on which Europe can make a new start. Its discovery, he says, "may well prove comparable in importance with the effect upon mankind of the Christian claim that all men may be saved." If Mr. Laski's book is reproduced in certain Central European languages, especially in the tongues of Poland and Ukraina, this passage will be noted with some surprise. I cannot refrain from adding that the author's account of what the Christian religion historically meant shows no trace of the scientific thoroughness with which he would investigate, for example, a period of economic history. A ready acceptance of popular summaries, with no sign of reference to the real sources or acquaintance with the products of recent learning, amazes me—not in some of his associates, but in Mr. Laski. One remembers the complaint of a character in *Coningsby*, that history is a hard thing to use if you are not accustomed to it, and that for his own part he was never "any good at charades".

All the same, this is a deeply thought-provoking book, with Mr. Laski's old brilliance of critical expression, and with an earnestness which, however belated, and in its first objective misdirected, it is very encouraging to observe.

H. L. S.

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CONTEMPORARY ITALY: Its Intellectual and Moral Origins.  
By Count Carlo Sforza. 1944. New York: E. P.  
Dutton & Co.

There are few indeed whose capacity for informing us about Italian problems is comparable to that of Count Sforza, and the book from his pen just off the press is one to be not merely read but re-read. True, an occasional fellow-countryman such as Professor Salvemini warns us of the Count's disposition still to "run with the hare and hunt with the hounds" in the field of politics. Yugoslavs, too, such as Mr. Louis Adamic, recall with anger the "Italian imperialism", so regardless of Yugoslav aspirations, which—they say—marked the Sforza administration of the Foreign Office at Rome in the years just before Mussolini's entrance upon power. But one must make allowance for extremely difficult situations, which the Foreign Minister had to confront in 1920 and the exile has to confront in 1944. Reserving judgment on such matters, we may welcome in the book *Contemporary Italy* a most valuable and timely account of what we

all need to know of antecedent circumstances if we would form trustworthy judgment on what to do next with the people that Mussolini so corrupted.

Count Sforza is, first and foremost, an Italian patriot. He gives us in compact, readable chapters, beginning with the fifteenth-century Renaissance in which Italy played so great a part, an account of the leadership—political, social, literary, religious—which set his country on her way. He tells, of course, in richness of detail about the unification of the separate States in the nineteenth century, and here casts a flood of light on difficulties arising from rival interests (geographical, economic, traditional) which keep different sections of the peninsula still apart. He passes then to the years just before the First World War, setting before the reader the strife of Italian parties, the rise of Italian Socialism, the conflict in Italy as elsewhere between clericalism and anti-clericalism. Finally we have the story of how the *Duce* arose—a story written by an observer on the spot, with the eyes of one already long experienced in the political tempests of different countries where he had represented Italy as Ambassador.

I quote here just one passage, for its timely contrast with what a multitude of propagandists had dinned into our ears before "the incomparable leader" of the British press picture twenty years ago became "the jackal" of Mr. Churchill's present rhetoric:

Some day, when time shall have allayed hatreds, it will perhaps be realized that the orgy of bloody brutality, which for years made a prison of Italy, and the insane war of 1940, both had their origin, in great part, in an almost unique case in history that is, the pathetic disproportion between the legend artificially created about a man raised to the rank of a demigod and the actual capacities of this same man. By what I know personally about him, by his naive certainties as regards foreign affairs as he expressed them to me during our conversations in November, 1922, I am tempted to believe that when Mussolini came to power, armed with the encyclopaedic knowledge (drawn from the dictionary) that every mediocre journalist possesses, he was convinced he could easily solve all the problems about which he had written a thousand times with so much assurance in his facile articles. When he discovered the truth about the complexity of political phenomena, and about himself, he had already become the wretched prisoner of the myth woven about him.

To all tourists, who came back with such glowing reports of what the Duce had done (for holiday-makers from the American continent) the above is respectfully—or perhaps disrespectfully—submitted.

H. L. S.