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No sooner had the Groups begun their work in Norway than the chief organ of the Labour Party, *Arbeiderbladet*, issued a solemn warning to the faithful against Dr. Buchman. The leaders of the Groups, it appeared, were trying to poison the honest minds of the proletariat with the deadly drug of an upper-class myth. The Party, it was declared, would have to take steps to counter the subtle moves of the enemy. The bitterness of the class-war in Norway, bred in the ruthless atmosphere of early-century American capitalism (many Norwegian Labour leaders spent their early years in the United States of America), is another factor which contributes to the general feeling of political malaise from which Norway suffers.

Most interesting were the reactions of the Radicals to the Group Movement. Included among the Radicals, which are an important force in Norwegian politics, are the "intellectuals," who, under the shadows of Ibsen and Brandes, have become a sort of inverted aristocracy, fly-blown but influential, more influential, probably, than are intellectuals in most other countries. Their uncritical acceptance of all that is new in science, an attitude which died a natural death many years ago in the great centres of learning, is dangerous because their intellectual

tyranny so easily imposes itself on untrained minds. Their worship of Freud, to take a recent instance, has had disastrous effects on much of Norwegian literature and drama, which now purveys eroticism with a self-confident music-hall snigger to mobs of adolescents. They have accepted William Blake's Proverb of Hell at its face value—"Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires." To them the work of the Groups is an outrage and an offence, not only because it may lead to the revival of the religion of a dark and distant age, but because it has the support of so many Conservatives and traditionalists.

It is too early yet to analyse the work of the Groups. All that can be said is that the results of their first two months in Norway have been interesting. They have brought many people within the fold of Christianity. It would be sanguine to expect any great change: but if the Groups succeed in imparting new values or new ideals to the political and social life of the country—and it is on this aspect that the "converts" seem to be concentrating—much will have been gained. Is it just a coincidence that the campaign in favour of the legalization of abortions died down to a mere trickle after the work of the Groups had begun?

THE SNOWS OF SPRING

By H. E. BATES

IN England the snow more often than not comes late, so late that we may talk of the snows of spring. In the south country snow and flowers are common enough together; in April the wallflowers will often be laid like corn, the plum-blossom dissolved and the tulips transformed to satin snow-cups by sudden blinding storms of white driven against the sunshine. And earlier, in March or even February, the crocuses are caught wide open, like ground stars of purple and gold and white, catching the first flakes in their orange hearts before suddenly shutting up, stiff and tight, like flowers of coloured glass, imperishable and unearthly. Snow, next to flowers and sunshine and perhaps the rainbow, is the loveliest of all natural events, certainly the loveliest of all winter happenings, lovelier than frost or winter moonlight. And in England it comes seldom enough to be a rare joy and never lingers long enough to be wearisome. It falls and performs its brief white miracle of transformation and vanishes again before the senses have grown used to that amazing whiteness, the beauty of blue bays of sky opening above the snow-lined trees, and the strange stillness of the silent land.

I am not speaking here of the snow which falls in towns, and which is not the most lovely winter phenomenon but probably the most depressing and the most hated: only of snow which falls in the country, opening out in a wonderful way its distances, creating a feeling of great light and tranquil spaciousness in its open fields and a strange softness and silence in its woods, the trees never moving under the weight of snow, the bird-life suspended except for the dainty pattering of pheasants over the snow-sprinkled chestnut leaves and the wild cry of a mad blackbird escaping through the hazels. There is no stillness in the world like the stillness of the world under snow. The stillness of summer is made up in effect of sounds, of many little drowsy sounds like the warm monotonous moan of pigeons, the sleepy changeless tune of invisible yellow-hammers, the dreamy fluttering

of thick leaves, sounds which together send the air half to sleep and create that singing silence which is almost a tangible thing in the heart of warm summer afternoons.

But the silence of snow is absolute; the silence of death and suspense. It is as though the snow has a paralysing effect, deadening the wind and freezing the voices of the birds. It is a silence which is absolutely complete in itself: not an illusion like the summer silence, not made up of sounds somnolently repeated. It is pure tranquillity and soundlessness, profoundest and most wonderful when the snow has finally ceased; full of expectancy and broken by the occasional uneasy cries of rooks when snow has still to come. And the fall of snow on snow, through the silence of snow, is the perfection of beauty: a lovely paradox of silence and movement, of stillness and life, the twinkling and fluttering and dancing of the new snow against the old.

As the day goes on the effect of tranquillity and softness lessens, and a feeling of wildness, increasing rapidly as the light dies, begins to take its place. The silence is still there, but the deadness has gone. There is life in it, a wild feeling of desolation. The air is alive with frost. Little sudden ground winds spring up with the twilight, and in the half-light the land is more than ever a white wilderness, a bitter desert of frozen drifts and dark spaces from which the snow-dust has been driven. On the conland and the colourless empty land broken up in readiness for spring sowing, where the snow is thinnest, a mere dust of whitest ice clinging to the dark clots of earth and the wind-flattened cornshoots, great dark prostrate steeples and balloons of snowless earth stretch out like shadows across the fields wherever trees have broken the force of the wind and have kept the snow from the land.

The lovely white morning snow-stillness and snow-light have gone. In their place there is a desolation of wind and cloud and frost and suddenly upscattered snow, an altogether new element of wildness and bleakness,

wonderful and invigorating. The old premature spring lassitude and melancholy have gone, too. The snow has transformed everything. The half-spring-like colours of the green land and the warm red trees have been covered or washed out, the fields turned to white pastures, the branches of trees bearing nothing but snow-leaves and snow-buds, the hedges covered with a light spreading of snow that is like a delicate blossoming of false black-thorn.

In the day time it was the little things that gave delight: the leaves of primrose and violet and the transparent lemon cups of winter-aconite embalmed in crystal, the dead seed-plumes of grass and flowers transformed to little trees of silver, the tender blue of the snow shadows, the lace-patterns of birds' feet, the whole transfiguration of leaf and twig and stone and earth. In the twilight they have no significance. The little things are blotted out, the world is wilder and altogether grander. The tearing passage of dark cloud against the orange sunset is desolate and strange and powerful. The orange light that falls on the snow and the snowy branches and the torn edges of cloud is almost savage. The snow gleams softly orange and then pink as the west changes its light, and then blue and dark as though with smoke when the light dies at last.

And there is also no longer an absence of life or movement or sound. Starlings fly constantly over in low and disordered flocks, dipping and fretting and straggling with evening fear, the multitudinous dark underwings turned briefly orange or pink by the wild sunset light, the crescendo of the flight startling in the silence. And on the cornland or ploughed land a hare will come out and lope along and pause and huddle dark against the snow, and watch the light, and then limp on again, stopping and huddling and watching until lost beyond a ridge of land at last. And in the woods there is a constant settling and unsettling of wings and feet on frozen twigs and leaves, the pheasants croaking mournfully and beating the air with frantic flapping wings, the unseen and unknown little birds fluttering in half-terror at the night and the snow.

And in the west, above the savage orange pinkish light, the first stars are more brilliant than frost against the mass of travelling cloud. The twilight under snow is of surprising length, and the first stars seem to prolong it, shining like fierce gold flowers in the wastes of sky. And then, as the twilight lessens, the shining of the stars in the darkness above the snow creates the ultimate effect of loveliness. It brings about an effect of eternity: of eternal star-light and snow-light shining for ever one against the other in the snowy darkness, reflecting each other, fixed in eternal wonder.

It is, in actuality, a brief wonder; and, for us, a rare one also. The shining of stars on snow is an everyday event for the Russian or the Austrian; whereas for us it occurs far more rarely than a rainbow. And whereas for the Russian the coming of snow and the ultimate coming of spring are as certain and fixed as dark and daylight, for us there is no certainty of snow at all.

There is instead the consolation of a score of little sudden springs before the spring itself, the knowledge that the snow will scarcely have created that paradise of whiteness and frost and silence and star-light before the primroses and the singing thrushes and the sun are beginning to destroy it again and create another.

MARGINAL COMMENTS

By ROSE MACAULAY

THE Secretary of the Lord's Day Observance Society has been remonstrating with the B.B.C. for tarnishing its tradition of the Unsoiled Sunday. Once more the ancient enquiry, debated since the first Christian century, arises—what soils Sunday? Practically anything, was the ancient answer. The Emperor Constantine declared the witnessing of all Sunday entertainments except public executions and tortures to be penal offences. The Church, in fact, took over most of the taboos of the Jewish Saturday. The Middle Ages resounded with stern ecclesiastical and literary denunciations of Sunday mirth. The Elizabethan puritans, heirs of this tradition, cried out against the Sunday of their countrymen, spent so cheerfully at May games, church ales, piping, dancing, carding, bowling, bear-baiting, cock-fighting, hunting, football, bawdy plays and wanton books, "whereby God is dishonoured, his Sabbath violated, his sacraments contemned, and his people marvellously corrupted." "You will be deemed too-too stoical," another speaker in this dialogue replies, "if you should restrain men from those exercises upon the Sabbath, for they suppose that that day was ordained and consecrate to that end and purpose . . . and was it not so?" Most certainly not, has been, down the ages, the Christian answer to this ingenuous enquiry. The Lord's Day Observance Society has an unimpeachable pedigree for its theory of the so easily soilable Sunday.

Nor does its most recent reply to the enquiry, what soils Sunday, lack precedent. Sex does so, it says. Its ancestors, the Church teachers of early and mediaeval centuries, went further. They held that this (apparently) necessary, but distressing, biological division of the animal kingdom soiled, also, weekdays; soiled, in fact, the whole of terrestrial life. They were probably right. They certainly would not have stopped at saying that sex soils Sunday. They would have proceeded through the week, maintaining that matrimony mars Monday, trothing tarnishes Tuesday, weddings waste Wednesday, trousseaux trivialize Thursday, family life fritters Friday, and sweetheating sullies Saturday. And very courageous they were to stick to their guns in the face of a stubborn and recalcitrant world which has always pursued, with such unflagging ardour and perseverance, these activities. Worse, humanity has always been inclined to regard its weekly holiday as a peculiarly favourable day for such pastimes—almost, in fact, "consecrate to that end and purpose"—so that, on a summer Sunday evening, you will see youths and maidens dallying on stiles, field paths, lanes, and street corners, cheerful and untimely exponents of this tremendous biological solecism.

I assume that the Lord's Day Observance Society would wish to prohibit these Sunday pastimes. Or is it only their presentation on stage and screen, in literature and in public discussion, that it deplores on the first day? Very certainly there are many topics of greater and rarer interest than these crude and well-nigh universal human affections. The arts, for instance, and the stars; the navigation of sea and sky; the discovery of strange lands and strange facts; the curious customs of gods, men, and beasts; the surprising celestial antics of the planet Venus and of the moon; the curvature of space; the beauties of literature, the excitements of history, and the vegetation of tropical islands; with a thousand more such delightful phenomena. But, attend to these as we may, the great solecism will keep breaking in, stale but ever fresh; yes, even on a Sunday.