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AN AMERICAN HISTORY OF EUROPE

A Decade of Revolution, 1789-1799. By CRANE BRINTON. Harper. 15s.

Reaction and Revolution, 1814-1832. By FREDERICK B. ARTZ. Harper. 15s.

The French philosophers of the eighteenth century—Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau—early imbibed the political ideas of Locke. Their speculations were concerned with the origin of government, with the relations of man and man from a sociological point of view; and from their inquiries they propounded, in almost identical language, the maxim that government existed for the good of the governed. In that age of reason and common sense their works spread rapidly and, besides readily converting the intelligentsia, had the effect of creating a new type of ruler—the benevolent despot. Since there was no question as yet that the governed should take a share in the government, it is not so surprising as it appears to be that Frederick, Joseph II, Catherine, and the others should fall in so readily with the views expressed in *Le Contrat Social*. The truth was that, in granting a measure of freedom to the Third Estate, these monarchs realised that they were providing themselves with a weapon with which to combat the power of the Church and the nobles. This is not to say that the benevolent despot was not a vast improvement on his predecessors. Joseph II was obviously a sincere disciple of the new humanitarian philosophy, but for the most part it is clear that self-interest and humanity happened, in this instance, to coincide.

It is not, perhaps, exact to say that eighteenth-century philosophy led directly to the explosion of the French Revolution, but by bringing about concessions to the bourgeoisie and peasants it certainly made a revolution in political practice inevitable sooner or later. That time came when on May 5, 1789, Louis opened the first States-General at Versailles. There was nothing here, as Professor Brinton remarks, to startle the orthodox. England already provided an example of constitutional monarchy. What is surprising, however, is the fact that this experiment failed so completely that in three years France was a Republic. The reasons for this collapse, and the history of the First Republic, are stated in a remarkably objective manner by Professor Brinton in this book; and while, as he explains, the greater part of this decade of European history can hardly be devoted to any other country than France, he is not oblivious of the reactions which the revolution in France and the long wars that followed had on England and the rest of Europe. Beginning with a study of the Monarchical Experiment, he devotes chapters to the Republican Experiment, Europe and the Revolution, the war, the Thermidoreans, and finally ends his period with the Directory. He does not omit a discussion on arts and sciences; and the last chapter in his book is an able summary of the whole of European civilisation during the revolutionary decade. It is possible that the orthodox will quarrel with Professor Brinton's historical exegesis. But to the present reviewer, at least, his approach was most stimulating. In the following quotation the reader may get some idea of what to look out for in reading this book:

Romanticism is, no doubt, in part the rebellion of an educated but uncultivated middle class against the formalised taste and rules of an aristocracy. It is also in part the revulsion of human beings from a life over-intellectualised, over-rationalised, at once over-complicated and over-simplified, towards a life more filled with the freshness, the uncertainty, and the consolation of emotion. It is, if you like, a return to the animal in man. But above all it is the acceptance of the inadequacy of any formal set of values, the free acceptance of the perpetual adventure which is the creation of values. Its logical end, perhaps, is the modern doctrine of relativity.

It seems to be a universal law for crisis to be followed by reaction. However far in one direction the pendulum may swing, its very momentum will bring it back again—but not quite so far back—in the other. The First Republic indeed gave way to the Napoleonic Empire, but politically the French experienced a far greater degree of individual liberty under Napoleon than under Louis XVI. It is not, however, with the period of the Napoleonic Wars that Professor Artz is concerned. He discusses in his book that time of reaction and abortive revolution that followed, in France, the restoration of the Bourbons and ended with the election of Louis Philippe as "king of the French." His method of writing history is one to which the general reader is more accustomed than that employed by Professor Brinton. He does not seem, as does Professor Brinton, to examine his material from a remote, Olympian attitude. He is a liberal, and his bias is that of

the orthodox liberal historian. Thus nearly half the book is devoted to a discussion of the state of European society after the Napoleonic wars, with a special regard for the degrees of liberalism to be found in each society. He has a chapter entitled "The Search for a Principle of Authority"; and ends this portion of his history with a most authoritative account of the various creeds of liberalism rife in Europe during the period under examination. He holds the belief that after the five years 1815-1820 liberalism became the dominant force which made a disintegration of the restoration of the *ancien régime* a practical outcome in the next ten years. In other words, the violent "enlightenment" of the revolutionary era had given place to a gradual but inevitable progress towards government of the people by the people and for the people which, in his period, achieved its apotheosis in the Reform Bill of 1832.

Professor Artz writes:

The liberals of the restoration wished not only to curb the power of absolute monarchs, and to take over the direction of society from them and from the nobles; they were also strongly opposed to the great power and influence exerted by the established churches. Their demand for religious freedom and for the limitation of the influence of the clergy in politics was by no means novel. It has been at the basis of much of the liberal thought of seventeenth-century England and of eighteenth-century France. In England, the landowners had long been Anglican, the men of commerce largely Nonconformist. Since Stuart times the latter had been distrustful of a government whose courts hampered the activities of trade and manufacture in the interest of religious conformity. The liberal tradition, therefore, involved the belief that economic, political, and religious freedom were but aspects of a single program for the emancipation of the middle class.

Professor Artz's book is, as it were, an expansion of this paragraph: a history of the rise of liberalism as a dominant factor in European politics after the fall of Napoleon.

These two histories are parts only of a twenty-volume work entitled *The Rise of Modern Europe*. If the other volumes come anywhere near either of these two in profundity of scholarship and clarity of exposition no historian will be able to do without the complete series. The bibliographical notes at the end of each book are invaluable, and a remarkably interesting collection of contemporary reproductions are included. These histories are very highly recommended indeed, both to students and the general reader.

RICHARD STRACHEY

FONTAMARA

Fontamara. By IGNAZIO SILONE. Methuen. 7s. 6d.

Fontamara is a novel, by an Italian, about Fascist Italy; but it is not a book, as might be expected, in meek and sugary praise of Mussolini's new world, but an extremely savage and bitter attack on it, as well as a tragic picture of the misery brought upon one section of a community by the stupid cruelty and corruption of another. The author of the book, Ignazio Silone, has been for some years in exile. Fontamara is a village in Southern Italy; possibly Silone's own village, more probably a composite picture of many such villages:

Picture Fontamara as the poorest, most primitive village of Marsica, north of the reclaimed Lake Fucino. About one hundred ragged, shapeless, one-floor hovels, blackened by time, worn by wind and rain, imperfectly roofed with tiles and slates of any kind, surround a dilapidated church on a stony hill-top. Most of these unpaved hovels have but one opening for door, window and chimney. Inside them men, women and children, donkeys, goats and hens live, sleep, eat, and procreate their kind.

In this village, except for one or two incidents, the whole story of Fontamara takes place. It is a story of supreme cruelty and stupidity: so fantastic and incredible that at times it would be funny if it were not so bitterly tragic. The characters in the story are simply the Fontamara peasants on the one hand, and the Fascist authorities on the other. There are no central characters, no love affairs, no feats of heroism. It is really the old story of the dog chained up: chained up and beaten and starved and reviled until finally in desperation and madness the chain is broken and the hand of cruelty is bitten. And the ending is, as always, Goldsmith's ending: the dog it was that died. In *Fontamara* the peasants are the dogs: simple, trusting, hard-working, half-starved, ignorant. They are up to their eyes in taxes, their impoverished strips of land are mortgaged. Every few weeks officials come round, present blank papers to be signed, and trick the peasants into corrupt agreements and new taxes. When the peasants complain of some injustice, the authorities

set it right. An excellent example of their methods is provided by the dispute about the stream. A stream flows through Fontamara, and a dispute arises as to how the water shall be divided for purposes of irrigation. One party demands more than the other. So the Fascist Solomons arrive and settle the dispute with a master stroke of wisdom: one party shall have three-quarters of the stream and the other party three-quarters of the stream. So it goes on: disputes, injustices, more taxes, more corruption, and finally physical cruelty in the shape of rape and soldiers; until the dogs, unable to endure it any longer, turn and bite the Fascist hand. And it is, of course, not those who are bitten who die.

The book may be criticised as being propaganda. There is certainly no denying that it is. But it is lifted right out of the ordinary propagandist class by Silone's art. His simple, bitterly humorous, savagely satirical style is without a flaw. And here, incidentally, the translators may be congratulated: they have understood Silone's purpose and have conveyed it admirably. Painted in tones of solid propagandist black, the picture would have not only been intolerable but ineffective. But painted as Silone has painted it, lightly, swiftly and almost mockingly, the effect is inescapable and terrible. Silone has kept up this tone of ironical, almost nonchalant detachment until the very end. The peasants are never sentimentalised; the authorities are never drawn with anger. Silone has rightly realised that one of the greatest weapons of the propagandist is ridicule, and the way in which he has used that weapon in *Fontamara* is smashing. In short, no one who cares at all about the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, or for art such as Silone's, or, in fact, for Fascism, can afford to miss this book.

H. E. BATES

GOLLY! WHAT A NATION

My Scotland. By WILLIAM POWER. *Porpoise Press.* 7s. 6d.

Scottish Scene. By LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON and HUGH MACDIARMID. *Jarrols.* 7s. 6d.

Scotland. By SIR ROBERT RAIT, C.B.E., LL.D., and GEORGE S.

best guide to the living Scotland of to-day. He is a stay-at-home and proud of it, but he contrives to breathe the world's air.

The gangrel Scot is largely, though it may be not completely, explained by the fact that, much as he may love his country, he fears it much more. There are, it is true, a few generous spirits like Mr. Linklater, who boldly go home, confident that they are proof against harm and that their presence may buck the old place up a bit. But that grace is not vouchsafed to many. For the great majority of us a visit to Scotland is a mixed experience. We cross the Border with a great uplift of heart, which may last for a week or even longer. But sooner or later the sinking feeling begins—a growing urge to escape from a land of shabby lotus-eaters who take it very unkind that any of their race should repudiate the habit. Conspicuous among these graceless creatures are Messrs. "MacDiarmid" and "Gibbon." The latter is frankly one of the *diaspora*, while the former, though an earnestly professing stay-at-home, is not, it is said, as punctilious in his observance as one might suppose. But with "James Bridie"—why have all these Scotsmen such a passion for pseudonyms?—they make a trio that leaves no doubt about the reality of what is called "the Scottish Renaissance." The conjunction of MacDiarmid and Gibbon in the same volume is highly diverting. They have little in common except a vision of Scotland as a wilderness of wasted opportunities that makes them scream with fury. So long as they scream they care little what of Scottishness they scream at. Hence, not infrequently and *more Scotico*, they scream their loudest at one another. In this regard Gibbon is the more aggressive. A radical sceptic, he nevertheless belongs to the sour Whig tradition of Scotland and can never resist a hyena snarl at the neo-Toryism represented by MacDiarmid, who incidentally happens to be an ardent disciple of Lenin, Major Douglas and the late Theodore Napier. A versatile fellow, MacDiarmid. Naturally the book this queer pair of cross-talkers have combined to produce is impossible to classify and difficult to describe. One can only say that *Scottish Scene* is a *satura lanx* of prose and verse, history, sociology and general invective, and a considerable number of newspaper cuttings selected on a principle that is familiar to readers of this journal.