

CURRENT MAGAZINES

Satan Among the Biographers:—Mr. S. M. Crothers in the March *Atlantic*.

The Teaching of History in German Schools:—Mr. T. R. Dawes in the February *Contemporary*.

The Ruhr and the Need for Plain Speaking:—Mr. J. St. Loe Strachey in *The Spectator*.

The Caste System of North America:—Professor Rameay Traquair in the March *Atlantic*.

HOW should biography be written? This is the problem to which Mr. Crothers has addressed himself in the March *Atlantic*, and he has been roused to discuss it by the appearance of a new type of biographer. His article is one of very exceptional suggestiveness and power.

It is Mr. Lytton Strachey who is compared to "Satan", but the comparison is not so offensive as might be thought by those who had forgotten the Book of Job:

There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

Bible students are always warned that "Satan" does not here mean the Prince of Darkness, but "the adversary", "the accuser",—as Mr. Crothers puts it, "he belonged to the assembly, but he sat on the opposition bench". The gathering in which Mr. Strachey has presented himself is that of the biographers, and he comes to challenge generally received estimates of great historic figures. Much that is sceptical has occurred to him as he walked up and down in the earth. No doubt it is a little difficult to keep in mind this novel sense of a familiar word. One has heard how a Nova Scotia student recently shocked his examiner by writing, "In the book of Job "Satan" is not the *ordinary* devil; he is rather the Crown Prosecutor, the Attorney-General!"

In the article admirable use is made of this analogy, with special reference to two famous books, *Queen Victoria*, and *Eminent Victorians*. Mr. Strachey set out to write these in a temper of ruthless analysis. To him the long established fame of national heroes and heroines was as little to be revered as were the supposed virtues of the man in the Land of Uz when "Satan" came to re-scrutinize this character. Mr. Strachey had no pious purpose

of praising famous men and our fathers who begat us. He rather thought that these famous men—even our fathers—had been praised more than enough already, that their foibles had been too long kept out of sight, that it was high time for a more inquisitive eye to peep underneath the kindly disguises and to report exactly what it saw. Mr. Crothers points out that he has not even been contented with “peeping in”, but has “taken to breaking and entering”. He “penetrates”. Not only the conscious but the subconscious fields, those parts which were dark to the hero himself and which psycho-analysis has just begun to uncover, must be explored by a critic who is up-to-date. “It is the era of the X-ray, and human character cannot escape the methods of research”.

To illustrate this point, Lord Morley's *Life of Gladstone* is contrasted with Mr. Strachey's *Queen Victoria*. We are reminded how much Lord Morley left out, how no attempt was made to divine the ulterior motives of the hero, how Gladstone's convictions were set forth while the processes by which he reached them were not guessed, how the reader is invited to look *at* him,—not *through* him. “As for exploring Gladstone's subconscious mind, his friend would as soon have thought of poking about in his host's pantry without asking leave”. So, too, Trevelyan's *John Bright* aims to make us know Bright as his constituents knew him; there is no purpose of making us know him better. On the other hand, Mr. Strachey's *Queen Victoria* professes to reconstruct the Queen not only as she appeared to her contemporaries, not only as she knew herself, but as she would have confessed her own inmost soul if she had been as clever at self-analysis as Mr. Strachey is in analyzing her.

Mr. Crothers introduces here some excellent reflections on confessional literature. St. Augustine and Rousseau, he says, tried to tell the whole truth about themselves, but we doubt whether they succeeded. One recalls Carlyle's warning that no task is more difficult than “to read one's own consciousness without a mistake.” It is here that—in the view of Mr. Crothers—“Satan” comes to the aid of an ineffective introspector. Mr. Strachey knows just where Queen Victoria was mistaken about herself. He points out her limitations, the mediocre quality of her middle-class virtues, her well-meant but not always successful efforts to live up to her station in life, her judgments often shrewd but sometimes muddled about problems and persons. He makes her a clear-cut figure, like Becky Sharp or Mrs. Proudie, showing us why she did what she did, and why she failed to do more. He makes us feel it no mere coincidence that she lived in the Victorian Age.

The work of the newest kind of biographer thus becomes like

that of the printer who "must first redistribute the type and then set it up again to form new words and sentences." Mr. Crothers sees this clearly exemplified in *Eminent Victorians*, where the "facts" constitute the type, but are rearranged in a new significance. For instance, Mr. Strachey does not challenge the outlines of the familiar story about Florence Nightingale. But, as he tells that story, we lose the features of the traditional "lady with the lamp, the gentle, ministering angel", and we watch emerging on the canvas "a formidable person, abrupt in manner, often bitter in speech, the terror of evil-doers, and still more the terror of incompetent well-doers":—

This is a triumph of biographical reconstruction. We see Florence Nightingale as great and good, though with very different virtues.

A like transformation scene is enacted in the cases of Arnold of Rugby and General Gordon. The Arnold of Stanley's *Life* was a great man, but it is littleness that we see in Mr. Strachey's picture, and we are left to wonder how contemporaries were so much impressed.

Mr. Crothers begins to get angry when he passes to the portrait of General Gordon. It was drawn, he thinks, by one who had no sympathy with Gordon's enthusiasms. To Mr. Strachey the old General was a fanatic, and we are actually told that when his head was presented to the Madhi "at last the two fanatics met face to face!" The biographer rises to a dramatic climax when he relates the story of the "avenging" of Gordon thirteen years afterwards at Omdurman. This passage offends Mr. Crothers extremely:—

It was thought proper that a religious ceremony in honour of Gordon should be held at the Palace in Khartum. The service was conducted by four chaplains and concluded with a performance of "Abide with Me", General Gordon's favourite hymn. General Gordon, fluttering in some remote Nirvana the pages of a phantasmal Bible, might have ventured a satirical remark. But General Gordon had always been a contradictory person, even a little off his head perhaps—though a hero; and, besides, he was no longer there to contradict. At any rate all ended happily in a glorious slaughter of twenty thousand Arabs, a vast addition to the British Empire, and a step in the peerage for Sir Evelyn Baring.

Mr. Crothers remarks that here is no recognition of the real heroism alike of Gordon and of those British imperialists who are touched with a sense of responsibility for the government of the world. "We have broken with the imperialism, but we ought to be touched by the heroism".

Perhaps the most subtle thing in this article of amazing subtlety

is the comparison Mr. Crothers institutes between Mr. Strachey's method as a biographer and that of some American medical men who have tried to diagnose the illnesses of historic sufferers in the past. One of them has actually produced a series of books called *Biographic Clinics*. And another publicist, Mr. Frederic Chamberlin, has written *The Private Character of Queen Elizabeth*.

This last is a perfect parallel to the analysis of Queen Victoria. Elizabeth is treated "as if she were an out-patient in the General Hospital". The items of her health history are collected, and the opinions offered upon these data by such medical experts as Sir William Osler, Sir Clifford Allbutt, and Dr. Keith are set forth. The replies given by these men to Mr. Chamberlin's questions are particularly suggestive of that caution which Mr. Strachey should have shown in similar judgments about Victoria. Sir William Osler objected that "the descriptions are too indefinite" and that to Mr. Chamberlin's query he must answer "Impossible to say". Asked whether, on the facts stated, "it would be too much to say" so-and-so about Elizabeth's condition, Sir Clifford Allbutt replied laconically "It would be too much". Dr. Keith went so far as to decide that she must have had anaemia, stomach and liver derangements, septic condition of the teeth, and something that looked like rheumatism. But he added that he would have been surer if he had had an opportunity to make personal examination, and that it was hard to be dogmatic when separated from the case by three hundred years! Mr. Strachey can draw the moral for himself. For most of his speculations about Victoria's motives he has no safer ground than had these physicians for diagnosing the physical state of her great predecessor.

The general upshot of this article is to warn biographers against that straining after sensationalism, novelty, originality, which makes some of them put forward the wildest personal guess as if it were the assured result of investigation. They have not the apostolic "discerning of spirits", and their adventurous ramble into the sphere of the subconscious may be far more interesting, but it is far less informing, than the prosaic and humdrum methods of an earlier time. Among the many attacks that have been made on Mr. Strachey, none of which the present critic is aware can be said to have hit the mark like this one. In Mr. Crothers our new biographer will find a foeman worthy of his steel. No doubt he would retort by saying that he did not set out to write biography, but just an impressionist sketch. He assumed that the general facts were fairly well known, and had no need to be re-told, but believed that some problems remained obscure, and suggested an hypothesis by which

they might be explained. His *Queen Victoria* was thus like Carlyle's *French Revolution*, no systematic history, but an estimate for those to whom the general history is known, and to be judged by its capacity of bringing together some facts into a more intelligible significance. Of course there is much guess work, but are the guesses such as make the parts of the picture cohere? And do not the traditional eulogistic records leave us with the feeling that the figure they present is artificial, with something wrong about it somewhere? "Satan" has thus his part to play in seasonably disconcerting us about some dogmas of the past.

THE effort now being made by the German Republican Government to transform the teaching of history in schools is very vividly described by Mr. T. R. Dawes. The first Minister of Education under the Republic was a Socialist,—Hoffman. Like the Bosheviki, he declared war against religious textbooks, issuing a decree that under the new order these could have no place in a State school. But Hoffman misjudged the spirit of his public, and was quickly driven from office. He was succeeded by another Socialist, who concerned himself with the sort of teaching in citizenship that he found in vogue, and began by ordering all pictures of the ex-Kaiser and other royal personages to be removed from the school walls. As no textbooks of history were available, except such as applauded the Hohenzollerns and glorified war, the teachers were notified that they must dispense with textbooks altogether until those inspired by a proper spirit could be written and sanctioned. To the protest that teaching would be impossible without books, it was replied that pupils might read at home whatever books they liked, but that none dealing with the dangerous subject of history could be used in the schools.

In the common schools, Mr. Dawes tells us, this decree met with little opposition, as most of the staff were Republican in sentiment. But in the secondary—what would here be called High Schools—the case was different. The German Press is now much occupied with discussion of the "passive resistance" by teachers. A member speaking in the Prussian Diet has protested that children are being secretly encouraged to keep turning back their eyes "with sentimental longings for an irrecoverable past". The Minister of Education complained that he had found a state of things which could not possibly be allowed to continue; for the text books in history, in German, and in religion were "full of praise and admiration for the Hohenzollerns". Yet the prohibition of these books had been

largely ineffectual. Booksellers and publishers were catering to a public feeling which they knew to be against the Government. They tried such a dodge as to issue a manual which was itself within the law, but was accompanied by a "supplement" in the contrary direction.

One schoolmaster, whom Mr. Dawes thinks typical of his class, has written a defence of the passive resistance. He argues that it is absurd to forbid a picture of Frederick the Great, whose influence upon Europe was so decisive, and who cannot be just left out of historical teaching without a falsification of the whole story. Under the old tyrannical régime one was allowed to teach children the truth; in the "People's State" indisputable facts must be manipulated! And it seems quite clear that the reforming decree is being fought by the same kind of forces which elsewhere fight Prohibition. "There are plenty of instances", says Mr. Dawes, "to show that changes will not come from decrees alone". In one school where the visitor noticed that pictures of the ex-Kaiser were absent, the Headmaster told him with a laugh that he should come back on any festival—such as Sedan Day—and he would see scores of portraits which the pupils had brought themselves. In another school transports of joy welcomed a telegram-card from the ex-Kaiser. There are secret celebrations, "patriotic" songs, saluting of the old imperial flag, obeisances before Hohenzollern busts, "exhortations from pastors to remember the quiet sufferer in Doorn who denied himself the joy of dying on the battlefield in order to live for his people". And there is fierce abuse of "the Jewish Republic".

Yet, Mr. Dawes thinks, the new régime is gaining ground. Internationalism is being taught under Government sanction. Pupils are enjoined to appreciate the spirit and character of each foreign nation whose language they learn. Teachers of religion are instructed to dwell upon that side of the teaching of Christ which effaces national difference and stimulates the ideal of peace. Even in Nature-study classes the struggle for life is to be shown as accompanied by that principle of mutual help which should be carried forward into human relationships.

The experiment is full of interest. Mr. Dawes believes that the effort is well-meant, and that in the end it will succeed. The reactionaries will die out; as new textbooks are written and diffused under State authority, it is fair to expect that the propaganda of international good-will may be not less effective than the old propaganda of hate. And, if it is, we may well be satisfied. But for a time the obstacles are serious enough. Whatever books are placed in their hands, teachers will teach what they like, and to present the

official creed with a cunningly disguised and yet subtly insinuated contempt may be the most powerful sort of counter-agitation. A teacher is, no doubt, under contract to his employers, and the contract can be enforced. But here, if anywhere, it is idle to attempt the enforcement of what lawyers call "specific performance".

THE London *Spectator* has always been a good friend of France, and in recent days has been particularly indignant with Mr. Lloyd George for his supposed imperilling of Anglo-French amity. But it feels that the time has come for "plain speaking" to those responsible for the invasion of the Ruhr. The *Spectator* maintains that France can do no good for herself and will certainly do a great deal of harm to the general interests of Europe by her daring step. The commercial revival of the continent will be stopped:—

The jack to lift the overturned engine which blocks the line had with infinite difficulty been got into place, and there was a chance, or more than a chance, of getting the wreckage out of the way. And now France is busy pushing the jack aside, driving away the breakdown gang, and insisting on the use of high explosives which, instead of clearing the line, will blow it to pieces and make the work of reparation impossible!

These are strong words, and the article goes on to insist that mere neutrality on the part of Great Britain is not enough. It is even like President Wilson's effort to remain neutral in the Great War. "You do not escape from a flood by watching or lamenting its rise". When the inevitable failure has become obvious, blame will be laid on the onlookers who contented themselves with disavowing responsibility. To interfere would, no doubt, be provocative to France. But will matters be helped by waiting until European commerce has been ruined, and Germany has fallen—like Russia—into revolution, chaos, and Sovietism?

The *Spectator* foresees that the first comparatively mild measures of compelling delivery of coal will lead to demands by the French Army of Occupation for a deadlier policy of attack as the military position becomes less and less secure. The financiers will be driven out of their wits to find funds for a plan that is costing a hundred million francs daily and producing in coal in one week only half as much as was formerly produced in a single day. The passive resistance of the population will be called "sabotage", and will be treated as such, with measures of ever increasing ferocity. Then there will be on all hands a cry to stop the new Great War. "Rough" Notes, and rougher ultimatums will be sent from London to Paris,

and the irritation we might expect to provoke in France by obtruding good advice now will be as nothing when compared with French wrath at our interference when the conflict grows hot. The writer demands that Great Britain shall speak out plainly at once, condemning the French policy root and branch, and announcing the intention of taking all necessary steps to secure British interests. The argument is that this will have to be done sooner or later. If it is put off, as the British Government unfortunately put off the frank declaration to Germany in the summer of 1914, the task will be made in the end far heavier. France will have a disillusionment that will drive her mad:—

She, unfortunately, does not yet know our mental attitude,—our incurable unwillingness to say disagreeable things to our friends, our hesitancy, our weakness of purpose, our impotence of mind, up till the very moment when we suddenly change from what sounds like snivelling hypocrisy to the fiercest and most persistent exhibition of force of which human beings are capable.

This is "plain speaking" indeed. The *Spectator* has taken the risk of prediction, and time will soon test its sagacity.

HERE and there one finds among the western peoples a writer who tries to construct a defence for the Hindu system of caste. Professor Ramsay Traquair, of the Department of Agriculture in McGill University, pushes the argument a stage further than most of these apologists, for he contends that in North America to-day a social system closely resembling that of the Hindus is developing with general approval, and that herein lies an important safeguard for the valuable traditions of each separate race now inhabiting our continent.

He defines caste as "the natural protection of a higher race in the presence of a lower", and declares that this is seen whenever two races are compelled to live intermingled. All the inhabitants of North America, except the Red Indians, were originally aliens. But the tradition of the country is now English, and "alien" is the epithet applied to all whose tradition is different from this. These last fall into three quite distinct types,—the Oriental, the Eastern European, and the Jew. According to the last census in the United States, there are 426,574 Orientals,—Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Professor Traquair thinks that the proportion in Canada must be about the same. They concentrate in cities, do not intermarry with the white population, and pursue specially such callings as those of laundryman and market-gardener. One

hears much of their "Americanization", and some of them undergo this process easily. But it is precisely with such Americanization that "caste" begins to appear.

For, so long as an alien remains alien,—a possible citizen of the land of his origin—he and his fellows are not made the objects of any systematic exclusion. And, though they may become "Americanized", they have cultural and political ideals of their own which they will not give up. "Though they may learn to speak English and to use electric toasters, that will not make them New Englanders". To Americanize the alien is a long step on the road towards alienizing the American. And if this last is to be prevented, the only method of doing so is by instituting "caste". Already the working-man in the United States is refusing to work beside "Dagoes", and—if rumour be correct—some of the universities are attempting to limit their students on racial lines. Professor Traquair appears to sympathize fully with this attitude, for he thinks that Americanization would mean "throwing into the melting pot the whole constitution and ideals of historic America." The alien would be assimilated only in a superficial sense. The negro has refused to lose his racial culture, and how shall we suppose that vigorous races like the Slavs or the Jews would sacrifice theirs? Even where there is no suggestion of racial inferiority, the special characteristics of a people are preserved only by strict segregation, as in French Canada. "Members of the English community who settle in Quebec tend to become French",—e. g. the French MacDonalds and Rosses who settled there at the English occupation.

This writer thinks that even as caste in India gave stability and tranquillity to the mixed races of Hindustan, so that racial exclusiveness of which one sees increasing tokens in North America will help to preserve the distinct cultural values. He does not quote Rabindranath Tagore, but what he says about caste is very similar to that Hindu poet's defence. One recalls how Tagore contended that the caste system of India was the outcome of her spirit of toleration, how she "tolerated difference of races from the first" and how she endeavoured to keep her so varied classes together without compelling any to give up its own peculiar type of life. There is, of course, another side to all this, but it is the unfamiliar side to which we need to have our attention drawn. Professor Traquair warns us not to suppose that his article is a plea for more legislation to intensify racial separateness. He is content to await the natural evolution. "It is all coming of itself."

H. L. S.