

bers of their faith. They contend, after handling figures with prodigious dexterity that the most successful people at any given social level have the most children. What then is the meaning of all their clamor? "Economic pressure, industrialism, cities, freedom from class distinctions, freedom of divorce, the improvement of public health, the growing desire for self-expression, the cult of feminism, birth control, and various other factors have combined . . . (to bring about a condition in which) the upper classes are rapidly dying out, the lower classes are rapidly increasing." Therefore let the rich prevent extermination by having from four to six children per family, and thus save culture from extinction!

The authors never distinguish between biological and cultural heritage; they seem never to have heard of cultural accumulation, transmission and diffusion independent of particular races and individuals. For example, because a small number of artists, authors, actors, and musicians listed in "Who's Who" have not a large enough birth-rate to maintain their stock "we seem to be headed toward a state of society in which not only are beauty, art and loveliness being destroyed, but in which literature, science and other forms of intellectual effort are fast being degraded or even eliminated. . . . Unless art can be wedded to farming, music to religion, literature to commerce, and engineering to manufacturing, or some such combination, it is hard to see how a great débâcle of civilization — a great return to the Dark Ages — is to be avoided". No attempt is made to show what *gene* in the germ plasm conveys musical, literary or artistic ability. Nor is any suggestion given as to by what alchemy a Picasso can be a farmer as a side line, or how T. S. Eliot and James Joyce can become members of the firm of J. P. Morgan and Company. And the pertinent question remains: Is Bach played today because of his brood of children?

The program of the eugenists when rescued from the verbiage and the muddle-headed conceits of its proponents can hardly provoke antagonism from any intelligent man or woman. Of course it would be a good thing for society if those of culture and education

would have large families, though it seems more important that society should afford equal opportunities for culture and education for everyone, not only theoretically but actually. Of course the knowledge of birth control should be disseminated among the masses, not because they are incompetent but because childbirth should be a willed activity for all. It must even be acknowledged that sterilization is a crude expedient but is our only means of coping with certain types of family idiocy until science is able to meet the present distressing situation in a more satisfactory way through a knowledge of the etiology and treatment of the disease. Since these principles are widely accepted, it would be well for the eugenists to cease spoiling the chances for the realization of their program by such absurd books as this. Let them devote their religious zeal to patient scientific investigations in the fields of genetics so that they will have facts not prejudices about heredity. Before these men write again, they ought to learn something about contemporary psychology, physical and cultural anthropology, sociology and economics. Above all they ought to be aware that in reality their creed as they expound it is little more than a badly disguised and poorly constructed buttress for the established order.

## AN AMERICAN HERETIC

By Gerald Carson

THE HEART OF THOREAU'S JOURNALS. *Edited by Odell Shepard. Houghton Mifflin. \$3.00.*

HENRY THOREAU, THE COSMIC YANKEE. *By J. Brooks Atkinson. Knopf. \$2.50.*

WALDEN. *By Henry David Thoreau. With sixteen Woodcuts by Eric Fitch Daglish. Houghton Mifflin. \$3.00.*

**E**VEN in the 1850's, in a civilization still dominated by agrarian philosophy and domestic manufacture, Thoreau was standing athwart the time. He didn't like his world. Against the materialistic economics of his neighbors he cried: "If the getting of our living is not poetic, it is not life but death that we get". In this day of machines and mergers and fierce competition for mass markets, when industrialization has gone so far the times which Thoreau reprobated appear as a pastoral idyll.

Thoreau has been presented in a bewildering number of characters. His neighbors said he was an indolent crank. H. G. O. Blake, who supervised the appearance of much material from Thoreau's journals in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, created the figure of Thoreau as poet-naturalist and serious scientist. Emerson wrote of Thoreau as a memoirist writes of his friend, and Ellery Channing and B. F. Sanborn, "the last of the Transcendentalists", also interpreted Thoreau from a point nearby, and formalized his thought into teachings. Holmes, Lowell, and J. F. Clarke disparaged Thoreau, and Stevenson, following secondary sources, called him a "skulker". More philosophic, Havelock Ellis describes Thoreau as being "in the noblest sense of the word, a cynic". Norman Foerster considers him a mystic, bent on the mystic's quest for the Ineffable, and others have dealt with him as an anarchist, anti-Puritan, rural Diogenes and Horatian hero, as loafer, prig, and backwoods Pater preaching epicureanism, American style.

The place to find Thoreau is in his journals, for from them, like Emerson, he mined the raw material for his books. But Thoreau's journals come in fourteen volumes and contain, along with all their passages of strength and beauty, myriads of insignificant facts — statistics on snowfall and temperature and tree rings — presented in a purely Department of Commerce style. With the same purpose and the same admirable arrangement followed in 1926 by Bliss Perry in editing "The Heart of Emerson's Journals", Odell Shepard has published in one volume a careful selection from the Journals which gives in brief space the range and vitality and richness of Thoreau's inner life and thought.

With the Journals now accessible, with a new biographer, Mr. J. Brooks Atkinson, pledged to a modern and just interpretation, and with a sumptuous new "Walden" at hand, we have ample facilities for recovering the truth about this loafer-poet-naturalist-heretic-Platonist.

"Thoreau," says Mr. Atkinson, "perceived the general perennial joke of our manner of living. In our relaxed moments,

away from the office, most of us take that point of view now and then. To what purpose is this impatient, elbow-shoving scramble day by day, this worry lest someone be running faster; and why do none of us ever quite touch the goal?"

It is natural that a modern biographer should approach this theme. After the Civil War, when the possibilities of expansion were unlimited, a materialistic philosophy was completely satisfying. But now the pioneer has vanished. The land is taken up. The machinery of production has exceeded our capacity to consume, bringing forth modern publicity methods, sales quotas, a wholly new economic theory, a grinding competition of man against man, business against business, industry against industry. And yet we rebel, and rebelling, find Thoreau's sturdy and pugnacious individualism wonderfully attractive. "A man who," says Professor Shepard, "in spite of his many idiosyncracies and his bitter denunciation of much that America now stands for, was still as truly American as Abraham Lincoln, . . . a man who reminds us in many salutary ways of what we have been and must be again if we are to fulfill our national destiny."

Like Ethan Allen, like Franklin — in spite of his policy and success in the great world — like Margaret Fuller and the Abolitionists and the early feminists, Thoreau was clearly in the tradition of the American heretic. By this I do not mean he was a religious heretic — although he was that — or that he was a political or a social heretic — although he was both; I mean he was a true dissenter who hewed to the line of his own thought with independence and steadfastness, saying, "All fear of the world or consequences is swallowed in a manly anxiety to do Truth justice".

Hear him on the economic order:

"We can afford that railroads and all merely material stock should depreciate, for that only compels us to live more simply and economically; but suppose that the value of life itself should be depreciated."

On co-operation:

"Talking with Bellew this evening about Fourierism and communities, I said that I suspected any enterprise in which two were engaged together."

On conformity:

"I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead."

Upon putting one's roots deep in native soil:

"If these fields and streams and woods, the phenomena of nature here, and the simple occupations of the inhabitants should cease to interest and inspire me, no culture or wealth would atone for the loss."

A church notice:

"Lectured in basement (vestry) of the orthodox church, and I trust helped to undermine it."

Many French writers with a sophisticated Gallic taste for simplicity have studied Thoreau as a natural man, a naïve forest philosopher whom they have seen somewhat unsteadily through their Rousseau. As a matter of fact Thoreau was not wholly unlettered. He was a master of Latin, Greek and French. He knew his way around in German and Italian and Spanish, and possessed a library of several hundred volumes. In spite of the unpretentiousness of his learning, he undoubtedly had a scholarly foundation roughly equivalent to that of a well prepared candidate for the modern doctorate.

Thoreau's approach to nature is not the one made familiar to us through early nineteenth century poetry. Nature worship as a cult or movement, or, as we now see it in the summer time, a national migration, would have received scant courtesy from the man who spoke in his journal of "the mealy-mouthed enthusiasm of the lover of nature". Just as too much has been made of "Walden" as a book about social and economic experiment — which it is not — it is easy to fall into the error of supposing that Thoreau would foist nature upon his contemporaries as a spiritual panacea. As a matter of fact objection may be entered under the head of character: Thoreau was not capable of an objective so social. His study was first himself, and then nature only because it was important to him.

Always there is a humanistic quality in his approach to nature:

"I am not interested in mere phenomena though it were the explosion of a planet, only as it may have lain in the experience of a human being."

"Nature must be viewed humanly to be viewed at all: that is, her scenes must be associated with humane affections, such as are associated with one's native place, for instance. She is most significant to a lover. A lover of Nature is pre-eminently a lover of man. If I have no friend, what is Nature to me? She ceases to be morally significant."

Thoreau was a good Platonist. "I find the actual to be far less real to me than the imagined." Yet it is a part of his paradoxical nature that he should have been enamoured of fact, too; but always this "cosmic Yankee", as Mr. Atkinson calls him, searched behind phenomena for the "higher law", and never doubted that all facts have meaning. "I am eager to report the glory of the universe," he cried. And a generation much in doubt about glory, and about the universe too, listens wistfully.

## AN UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

By Lawrence S. Morris

NOTHING BUT THE EARTH. *By Paul Morand. Translated by Lewis Galantière. McBride. \$3.00.*

"NOTHING But the Earth" is a series of travel sketches, but the reader who has been deceived too often by the bright covers of travel books need not shy at this news. He can trust M. Morand not to bore him. It is true that much of the material here has been written about before, but M. Morand composes his travel notes with the adroitness of fiction, just as his fiction has always had the background of travel.

Readers who are already familiar with his sophisticated short stories will not be surprised to find themselves, in the present book, surveying Asia through the same indulgently ironic eyes which played over post-war Europe from Stamboul to Scandinavia. "The frightful beauty of our age,"