

REVIEWS - OF - NEW - BOOKS

JOHN BURROUGHS ACCEPTS THE UNIVERSE

TO have lived more than eighty years in our peculiar corner of the universe and still be able to say, with valiant conviction, that it is the best possible world, and the "people in it are the best possible people," is no small achievement. And when it is no less a personage than John Burroughs who makes this assertion, the argument calls for a careful hearing, whatever one's point of view may be. To very many people, indeed, Burroughs speaks as one having authority; something after the manner of the Hebrew prophets, or, perhaps better, the Greek sage whose disciples held him almost a demigod. Now, in his collection of essays on "Accepting the Universe," he has put together a statement of modern scientific pantheism, or, as he prefers to call it, "Naturism," and the practical outcome of this attempt "to justify the ways of God to man on natural grounds," is the conclusion that "the universe is good and that it is our rare good fortune to form a part of it."

"Religion," says Mr. Burroughs, "as the world has so long used the term—that human mixture of fear, reverence, superstition, and selfish desire—has had its day." In place of it, in lieu of any "revelation" and any idea of a personal God existing outside of or apart from the world and creating, directing, or planning things, he asks us to face "the reality as science shows it to us," and admit that to the finite mind (the only mind we have) anything apart from scientific truth is absolutely unknowable.

Thus far there is nothing new in the argument. It is no more than a statement of the current agnosticism, which is, no doubt, the mental attitude of many to-day. But his deduction from it of a radical, even militant, optimism, an invincibly cheerful feeling that all is for the best despite the appearance of evil—wars, pestilence, greed, lust, cruelty, and stupidities—that is different, and of some novelty in his presentation of it. Nor does he shirk anything, or try to dodge the problem of evil. Says he:

"The naturist must see all things in the light of his experiences in this world. He experiences no miracles; he sees the cosmic energy as no respecter of persons; he sees the rains falling alike upon the just and the unjust; he sees the vast, impartial, indiscriminating movements of Nature all about him; he learns that the land can not sustain life without the fertilizing rains, yet he beholds the clouds pouring out their bounty into the sea just as freely as upon land; he beholds the inorganic crushing the organic all about him, and yet he knows that the latter is nothing without the former. If God and the universal cosmic forces are one, how surely is God on both sides in all struggles, all causes, all wars, righteous and unrighteous!"

Yet, he maintains, the naturist is not overwhelmed or bewildered; he can reconcile the contradictions. This is to be effected by getting far enough away from any particular portion of the universe to see the thing as a whole, or, at least, to see as much of it as our limited vision can encompass. The scheme of things, if we must call it a scheme, is, on the whole, good. The dark spots do not matter, if you get them in the right perspective. "In the

curve of the moon's disk," says he, "all broken or irregular lines of the surface are lost to the eye—the wholeness of the sphere-form subordinates and obliterates all." So, the only difficulty is to get far enough off to see nothing but the sphericity of it.

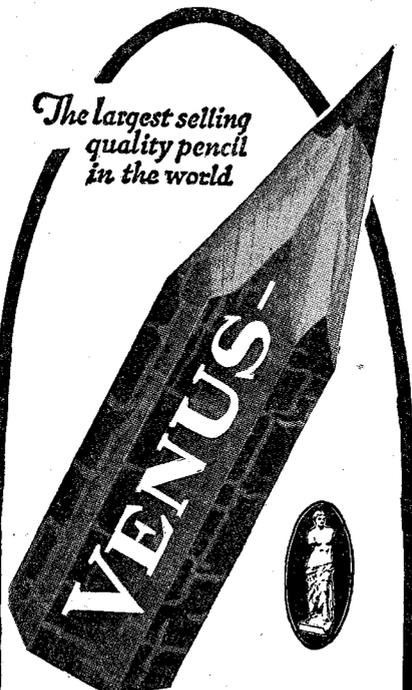
The individual does not matter; it is only the good—if it is to be called good—of the whole that counts. This individual, any selected atom, is only a momentary form of a bit of the world-stuff. Its apparent death is only a change, a resolution of elements into a new combination. It is the growth of the whole that matters. And herein he finds satisfaction. Thus—

"I behold the great scheme of evolution unfolding despite all the delays and waste and failures, and the higher forms appearing upon the scene. I see on an immense scale, and as clearly as in a demonstration in a laboratory, that good comes out of evil; that the impartiality of the Nature Providence is best; that we are made strong by what we overcome; that man is man because he is as free to do evil as to do good; that life is as free to develop hostile forms as to develop friendly; that power waits upon him who earns it. . . . Life would be tasteless and insipid without pain and struggle and disappointment. . . . The stars send their influences, the earth renews itself, the brooding heaven gathers us under its wings, and all is well with us if we have the heroic hearts to see it."

But we are not to suppose that man is the center of the universe, or that the world exists for him any more than he exists for it. The air is not made for us to breathe; rather, we have grown lungs because there was air eons before life was. "In short," says he, "nature is the primary fact and the forms and organs of life the secondary fact." Life adapts itself to the inorganic, and thrives in proportion to the success of such adaptation. Man is but a part of the whole; a part of God or Nature, whichever you prefer to call the Totality. And Mr. Burroughs finds ground for his optimism in the vast possibilities of the perfection of these adaptations. "We are embosomed in the Eternal Benificence whether we desire it or not. . . . To feel at home on this planet, and that it is, with all its drawbacks, the best possible world, I look upon as the supreme felicity of life."

The best possible world, that is, so far as it has gone. But it is growing better tho we can not imagine any ultimate end or aim, or conceive an end at all, any more than we can think of a beginning. The universe was not created; it *is*. The world as we know it is doomed to change, but to what aim, if there be any aim, we can not know. It is enough to know that we are "at home" here and now, and that we are capable of adapting life to surrounding conditions, and also capable of growth. "This," he admits, "may be a chilling gospel. . . . But how can we deny it? Can we refuse to face it?" And he believes that if we do face it, with rationally adjusted cosmic and natural-universal standards, we may do so not merely with equanimity, but even with "supreme felicity." ("Accepting the Universe." By John Burroughs. Houghton Mifflin Company.)

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## REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

Continued

### THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN

ANY ONE knowing vivacious and fun-loving Dyck Calhoun can not help expecting him to fall into mischief. This handsome and swashbuckling son of an Irish country gentleman has been leading a life of irresponsibility, roaming among the hills and valleys of his native heath, enjoying them with the fulness of his poetic spirit, and indulging more than is respectable in drink. Yet he is courageous and practical, and his morals are beyond reproach. Sir Gilbert Parker in his new romance, "No Defence," has tried to portray a genuine Celt in creating the character of Dyck.

But before the mischief begins he meets on his homeward path one bright, soft morning the girl of his dreams, a devilishly charming Irish girl whose eyes are bluer even than his own and whose luscious face captivates him. She is singing in Irish, too.

"Well, who are you?" she asked with a slightly southern accent in her voice, delicate and entrancing.

"My name? Why, it's Dyck Calhoun. That's all."

"Her eyes brightened. 'Isn't that enough?' she asked gently.

"She knew of his family. She was only visiting in the district with her mother, but she had lately heard of old Miles Calhoun and his wayward boy, Dyck; and here was Dyck, with a humor in his eyes and a touch of melancholy at his lips. Somehow her heart went out to him.

"Presently he said to her:

"And what's your name?"

"I'm only Sheila Llyn, the daughter of my mother, a widow, visiting at Loyland Towers. Yes, I'm only Sheila!"

In truth, Llyn is her mother's maiden name. Sheila has never known her father, whom her mother divorced by Act of Parliament against the wishes of the Church. Erris Boyne had been debauched, drunken, and faithless, and fifteen years ago, while Sheila was yet an infant, she freed herself from him.

"Oh, you'll be forgetting me by tomorrow," the girl said with a little wistfulness at her lips." He assures her he will not.

That evening at Playmore, the estate of Miles Calhoun, a summons comes from the Attorney-General to Miles to repair to Dublin and report on the state of affairs in his district. This is a troublous time, when plots are being brewed in Ireland to help the French revolutionists strike a blow at England. The Calhouns depart in the company of the messenger, Leonard Mallow, who is to act an important rôle in Dyck's life. Dyck, tho ready for adventure, is sorry he must part from Sheila.

Mallow has already made himself distasteful, and in Dublin Dyck finds him more obnoxious. They quarrel at cards—Mallow is at fault for his insulting insolence. Liquor loosens Dyck's tongue, and he challenges the man. But they continue their playing, for a duel can wait.

Mallow suggests swords, and so it is. In a secluded corner of Phoenix Park the next morning the combat of honor takes place. Mallow has a gift with the sword, but Dyck is more richly talented. He wins, but spares his opponent.

Dyck's weakness for the bottle draws him into further difficulties. At the Breakneck Club he chums with Sheila's father,