

'Gold and Silver' by the banks of the Suez Canal, and I, recalling a distant Eights Week, buried my face in my hands.

The New Statesman

NEW IDEAS IN ARTS AND CRAFTS

AMONG the immense fermenting desires felt, often obscurely, but more or less passionately, for 'a better world' which are rising all round us in this time of vast change and solution — this time when the old crust of things is cracked and broken by volcanic explosions, and the moment of undreamed of possibility is instinctively grasped at — the desire to take arms against the mean ugliness of life also claims expression. We look back over the century that began with Waterloo; and we see a gradual blight, a paralyzed inertness creeping over our towns and dwellings, as if those who built houses for men and women to live in, and made furniture for them to use, and plates to eat from, and cups to drink out of, had lost all interest in these things and continued to produce them in a sort of dull stupor, a half-awake condition, so that the things they produced were like dead things, cut off from the circulating lifeblood which in a healthy state communicates a human relation to everything of humblest use. The Industrial Age; the age of commerce! It was accepted as a fatality. Much prosperity benumbed the senses; seemed itself the compensation ordained for what counted with most for an inessential loss. Yet revolt came; a leaven began to work. Who can measure what intensity of fervor was poured into that revolt by the minds working, isolated or in little groups, about the middle of last century? What immense hopes for the regeneration of English crafts-

manship went to the founding of South Kensington Museum! As we wander to-day through those galleries, and admire the magnificent collections, we are apt to forget that the real object of the museum was to provide examples of beautiful design from the arts of all countries by the study of which the English student might bring back beauty into his own country's arts. If we ask dispassionately whether the museum has fulfilled its object, it is to be feared that we must answer 'No.' It has had some influence, some effect, but nothing at all proportionate to what it was hoped might be done in the way of getting the artist and the manufacturer into a living and effective relation with one another. That was the time when the Middle Ages, with their guilds of flourishing crafts and all their wealth of spontaneous design in every material, were looked back to with a passionate nostalgia. We had the Gothic Revival in architecture; we had the Pre-Raphaelite movement, out of which came in time the Arts and Crafts movement, still alive and active. And in certain ways, and within certain limits, there has been immense improvement. The houses of people of some means are far better designed and furnished than they were a generation or two ago. But in the matter of cheap and common things, whether it be houses, furniture, or utensils, as in the larger matter of town planning for the masses of the people, how little there is that shows healthy taste, or thought, or even common sense, and how little we seem to feel the injury to our national self-respect! All is left to the manufacturer and the commercial builder, who give what they say 'the public wants.' But really the public has no articulate wants; it takes the bad because it is used to it and has no means of knowing anything better. It would

take the good with equal cheerfulness; with greater, because what is well designed is better adapted for use and more serviceable. There is a vast amount of humbug talked by the typical middleman, glad to bolster his own mental inertia with a specious appeal to experienced worldly wisdom. The lamentable state of the theatre in this country at the moment is an instance in point. The contempt for their audience on the part of the managers is unlimited. And yet in the base camps in France Greek tragedies in Mr. Murray's translations are drawing delighted audiences of soldiers. Imagine what a London manager would say to such a mad adventure! Those who have lectured to the soldiers at the base camps all say the same: to try them high is to win them, to play down to them is disaster. We need more faith in our own people.

In a book, which came out the other day, *Fields and Battlefields*, by a sergeant in the R.A.M.C. — a book which interprets the British soldier with exceptional insight and sympathy — there is a description of a little French town which is apposite and worth remembering:

The little city had been built when men still took joy in the forms they created, and the harmony of these forms with the forms of Nature around them was not due to a trick of moonlight, but was unanswerable in the full light of day. And this harmony was not the work of one great mind, artist's or architect's, but the work of numerous common minds who had here made plans, raised scaffolds, baked bricks, learned the angles of roofs from the weight of tiles, the height of towers from the strength of masonry, learned to correct and to improve through the generations, learned above all to omit the ugly and increase the harmonious. Neither was the result that of the inspiration of a single genius, but of the continual discrimination of lesser minds; but the result was good. What beauty, therefore, must lie in the common minds of men.

That is a true saying. But how to liberate that beauty and make it active? How bring back the joy in making, which is so fundamentally human? Hitherto we have turned too fondly to the past; and the movements of revolt against the paralysis of ugliness have been too much in the character of forlorn hopes, desperate assaults against impregnable powers. The machine was cursed as the cause of all the evil; and we have turned our backs on the machine. But the machine is here, and has come to stay. It is idle to rebel: we must use the machine. After all, it can be put to good uses, just as well as bad. And its use comes in just where we want it most, in the production of cheap and common things which everyone must use. The craft of printing, in which the regenerative efforts of Morris and his followers have indirectly had immense effect, not only in England but all over Europe, is an eloquent case in point. The realization of this necessity has begun to permeate the most far-sighted workers and teachers of arts and crafts, and is giving a new vitality to the movement. Symptomatic of this new attitude was an address given recently to the Women's Institute by Mr. S. B. Caulfield, the architect. Mr. Caulfield pointed out that the Arts and Crafts movement, which William Morris had started with so splendid a grasp of first principles, lost an opportunity when it set itself against machinery. The machine had been allowed to become the master in its own sphere; with the result that the tendency in commercial production is to turn even hand work into an imitation of machine work. Our craftsmen must study machinery, not wash their hands of it, must use it, not disdain it; because, unless they are merely to touch the fringe, things must be cheap for the immense public that has but a small

price to give. The designing of the commonest things of use — pots and pans and crockery and fire-irons — has been left to men without training or gift for design, and a meaningless ornate ugliness is the result. We repeat, the well-designed thing is the simplest, most sensible, and most serviceable. Every Englishman recognizes, in the matter of sports and games, that the artist is the man who does things supremely well, without expenditure of useless effort. 'A real artist' is everyone's spontaneous tribute of supreme praise for the cricketer or the billiard player. We want English people to recognize art in every kind of production, in the same way, as a natural need and pleasure, an exhilaration we have a right to claim from our surroundings. Many people talk of these things as desirable; but now is a time for doing as well as talking. And Mr. Caulfield, in his address, had a practical scheme to propound. It is the war that has made the opportunity. 'Thousands went out machines, and came back men.' They have come back dissatisfied with the dehumanizing conditions of modern manufactory; they want to have some interest and pleasure in production. Mr. Caulfield's proposal is to have a permanent exhibition in London, not merely of finished things, but of active workshops open to the public; and to train a few hundred returned soldiers and sailors — to begin with — in these exhibition workshops. By such training they would acquire an interest in their work and a love for it. Machinery would be used both to do the dull work, and to make things cheap; and the men who worked the machines should be the designers. That is a notable and original feature of the scheme. In order to design for the machine, it is necessary to know it thoroughly, to know what it can do best and what

are its limitations; to use it as a servant and not let it be the master.

The vast scheme of housing which is to give us a million new cottages all over England during the next few years, is going to affect the whole face of the country: and all these cottages will want furnishing. Now is the moment for everyone who cares about our self-respect as a nation, who thinks it shame that inertia and commercial rapacity should combine to reproduce the old waste, the old inhuman dullness, the senseless ugliness that we have tolerated so long, to be up and doing. Now is the moment not only for speaking out, but for forethought, energy, and effort. Mr. Caulfield's scheme is a practical one: once started, it might spread far and wide. It needs financial backing; and we hope someone who has the means — no vast resources are required — will be found to back it. If large sums can always be found for the mending of bodies in hospitals, cannot a comparatively small sum be found for a work like this, which makes for health of mind as well as body, which has for its object the greatest need of modern industrial life — the humanization of labor?

The Saturday Review

THE WISDOM OF ANATOLE FRANCE*

BY J. MIDDLETON MURRY

How few are the wise writers who remain to us! They are so few that it seems, at moments, that wisdom, like justice of old, is withdrawing from the world, and that when their fullness of years is accomplished, as, alas! it soon must be, the wise men who will leave us will have been the last of their kind. It is true that something akin to wisdom, or rather a quality whose

* *Le Petit Pierre*. By Anatole France, Paris: Calmann-Lévy. 4 francs (75 cents).