

What the Workers Want

What the Workers Want, by Arthur Gleason. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe.

THIS book is the ablest piece of reporting I have seen in several years. It is vivid, singularly intimate in its knowledge, and with a frank recognition of the problems involved that gives it an objectivity rare in books of the kind. Mr. Gleason has had a preparation unparalleled among American students for this work. For the past five years he has lived in England; and four of them were spent in careful study of British trade-unionism. An Englishman may well envy the ease with which Mr. Gleason moves among men and ideas, judging here, casting a shrewd question there, inevitably sane and balanced. Every student of his problem has reason to be grateful for his analysis.

What, broadly speaking, Mr. Gleason has to record is the breakdown of capitalist economics. Shop-stewards, the Coal Commission, the rapid growth of guild socialism, all of them point in a single and inevitable direction. What they mean is that the old motives to production are no longer available. The possession of property without the performance of function has lost its magic influence. The workers have ceased to believe in what, at bottom, is the commodity-theory of labor. They have acquired a new sense of the inherent dignity of human personality; and they are insistent that new institutions are needed for its adequate recognition. That, as Mr. Gleason makes clear, is the motive underlying the movement for nationalization. The coal miner is interested in production not as a process of wage-making pure and simple but as a profession in which his personality secures a full response. He no longer believes that this is possible under private ownership. The evidence tendered to Mr. Justice Sankey was final in that regard. Public ownership and public management afford him, as he believes, a channel in which his special experience can be turned to genuine account. He wants the sense of self-government without which no man can attain to the full height of human stature. Nor is that true of the miners alone. Railwaymen, engineers, dockers, all of them in more or less degree respond to similar motives. They do not, Mr. Gleason insists, want nationalization in the old sense of state-management. Government by a public official is no more attractive to them than government by a private owner. And Mr. Gleason rightly urges that the problem of production hinges most largely upon an adequate response to this demand.

Fundamentally, that is to say, Mr. Gleason makes out a case for the primary creed of British labor. He yet recognizes that the problems they face are by no means easy. The frontier of control has still to be determined. The movement has to percolate down from a minority of brilliant leaders like Mr. Smithe and Mr. Hodges until it sways the thinking of the more slowly-moving masses. There must be a far greater eagerness for education. There must be a genuine revivification of the Parliamentary Labor party. The thinking of the movement must be done far more in the solid administrative terms of which men like Mr. Webb and Lord Haldane know the difficulty, and far less in the brilliant but sciolistic generalizing of the guild socialists. The latter is at once easier and more attractive; but I think Mr. Gleason would agree with me in the estimate that of those responsible for the propaganda of guild socialism only Mr. Cole has really thought through the essentials of the problem. The others are full of an eager simplicity about the phenomena they

confront that is at every point misleading. While, it is true, for example, to insist that the breastworks of capitalism in England have been stormed the citadel remains intact. The trade unions have to make up their minds about direct action. They have to develop a journalism of their own competing upon terms of equal capacity with the press of men like Lord Northcliffe. They have to develop a social context to their economic theory which makes impossible the educational backwardness of the cotton-operatives, on the one hand, and the moral blindness of men like Mr. Havelock Ellis upon the other. They have to turn the Parliament Committee into a general staff for labor, thinking out its tactics and its strategy with the same infinite care for detail as characterizes the work of the imperial General Staff. The relation of the shop-steward movement must be worked out. The tragic wastage of jurisdictional disputes must be eliminated. The proper cooperation between workers by hand and workers by brain must be considered; a movement which does not know how to make consistent use of men like Mr. Webb and Mr. Tawney condemns itself beforehand to failure. Nor is it less important, as Mr. Gleason makes clear, for a general *modus operandi* to be worked out with the Cooperative Movement. The great problem of most schemes of social organization which lay their emphasis upon the producer is that they tend to assume that the consumers' interest will be ipso facto safeguarded. But the truth surely is that in the play of actual forces the only safeguards which are acceptable are those of a definitely institutional kind. Mr. Gleason's enthusiasm for British labor does not for a moment mislead him as to the significance of these problems. He faces them with frankness; and they have an obvious influence upon the chronological estimates he is inclined to make.

Not the least fascinating portion of his book is his admirable portrayal of the leaders with whom he came into contact. Here, it may be suggested, is the greatest difference between American and British labor. The vision and tenacity of Robert Smithe, the finesse of J. H. Thomas, the idealism of George Lansbury, the shrewd sagacity of J. R. Clynes—a combination of such qualities makes the statesmanship of labor more than comparable with the statesmanship of capital. American labor has, of course, its outstanding figures; of men like John Walker among the miners and Sidney Hillman among the garment workers any movement has the right to be proud. But taken in the mass, the distinct impression left by Mr. Gleason's book is that the leadership of American labor has neither the imagination nor the broad experience of its British analogue. Not, indeed, as Mr. Gleason freely admits, that British labor is herein without its difficulties. Men like Mr. Havelock Wilson and Mr. J. B. Williams are as backward as even Mr. Gompers could desire in realizing the advent of a new world. They belong essentially to the type of glorified walking-delegate by whom the ranks of the American Federation of Labor is so largely infested. They greet the idealism of a new epoch with the same helpless wonder as the heads of the Railroad Brotherhoods greeted their own essential movement towards industrial unionism.

Yet, with all the immense difficulties ahead, the basic impression Mr. Gleason leaves is one of profound hope. He does not claim for British labor either a logic unity of purpose or a definite agreement upon method. What rather he depicts is a vast welter of enthusiastic movement, with here and there a widening eddy of distinct tendency

perceptible in the vaster scheme. He can draw the broad conclusions for which we have been waiting. He knows that the movement has passed from demands for shorter hours and increased wages to the wider problems of control. He knows that any synthesis, like that of the Whitley Councils, which is based upon the mere amelioration of the present system is already condemned. He knows that the stage is set for an ultimate political control of the state by the labor party. So long as these factors are definitely discernible the future of British labor is very largely the future of representative government, at least for Western civilization. That is why a book which so skillfully analyzes the forces as work is a public document of the first importance.

H. J. L.

Baudelaire Translated

The Flowers of Evil, translated from the French of Charles Pierre Baudelaire. New York: Brentano's.

TO the American public Baudelaire is little more than a name, in spite of the several attempts which have been made to introduce this poet to the English speaking peoples. A new edition of *The Flowers of Evil* has just come out of the Brentano press, with a lengthy introductory preface by Mr. James Huneker. It is doubtful however whether Baudelaire's popularity will be increased thereby: this translation does not evidence any of the qualities which were lacking in the others and presents all the faults which were to be found in its predecessors.

It seems that all the translators of Baudelaire start from the same false point of view: they try to adapt this very Latin writer to the Anglo-Saxon mind; they dress him up—or rather they try to conceal what they take to be his deformities under conventional draperies. Each sentence seems to be an apology for the French text, which is so smoothed, so toned down, so trimmed and polished, that it is difficult to recognize the real Baudelaire in his new garb.

Anyone who attempts to translate Baudelaire ought to have constantly in mind this statement of Barbey d'Aurevilly, who besides being a good critic was at the same time a personal friend of Baudelaire: "Each poem (in *Les Fleurs du Mal*) has a value d'ensemble et de situation which it loses when considered separately. The poems lose also—especially in their moral effect—when they are not read in the order in which the poet has placed them."

The anonymous author of the translation we are considering took the liberty to select fifty out of the hundred and fifty poems contained in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and to place them in an order which no principle seems to have guided except arbitrariness. The grouping of the poems is not preserved, and the sub-titles of these groups are suppressed as well as the dedications.

As to the text itself, some examples will show through what *bain de vertu* Baudelaire was passed before he was considered presentable to the candid eyes of his American readers.

One of Baudelaire's most famous poems is entitled: *Une Charogne*—an ugly word, I confess, and an ugly suggestion. Yet, such was the choice of the poet. It was meant as a challenge, taken as a challenge, and it made quite a sensation when it appeared. Later, it was this poem and a few others like it which became, so to speak, the banner of the Baudelairean School. With all this

history attached to the poem, it is evident that a translator had no choice but to carry out Baudelaire's intention and to use the corresponding English word "carion" which Shakespeare never hesitated to use as often as he needed it. However the translator thought better of it and promoted the "charogne" to a "corpse," thereby losing the whole point.

A number of expressions are to be found *ennobled* in this way. All we are allowed for the French "volupté" is "pleasure" or "delight." A "libertin" is kindly called a "sot," and an odor characterized as "fétide" by the author is made "stale" by the translator. The most pitiful of these euphemisms is that of the word "courtisane" which—of all banalities—is rendered as "woman frail." Poor Baudelaire!

It is clear that in the mind of Baudelaire's translator, the American public is so sensitive that they cannot stand the sight of such improper terms as "libertine" and "courtesan." I think that he is wrong, but I can understand his scruples in a certain measure. Where I cannot follow him at all, however, is when he applies his policy to terms which are by no means improper, but which, according to his conception, are what he would probably call unpoetical. This conception is not a new one. In fact it flourished several centuries ago.

One may imagine with what anger and disgust Baudelaire would read the so-called translation of his works, were he living in 1919. In fact, to anyone who knows the real Baudelaire at all, nothing can be more incongruous than to see him disguised in the antique veils and the foppery of a bygone age. One could as well imagine Racine's *Bérénice* on the moving picture screen, or Mark Twain transposed in classical style. In this translation, Baudelaire is spared none of the rhetoric, of the conventional phrases, of the commonplaces of old-fashioned poetry: "eves of gold, azure skies, sweet souls and bodies fair, faint bosoms and languid brows" abound at every page. The noble "couch" takes invariably the place of the plebeian "bed"; the hardworking "ox" is simply put aside and the aristocratic "deer" cavorts in its place. The *Mendiante Rousse* has her red hair turned to brown, and we are sorry for her.

A stanza taken from this last poem will give a good idea of the general difference of style between the original and the translation:

Baudelaire says to his red-haired beggar-girl:

Que pour te déshabiller
Tes bras se fassent prier
Et chassent à coups mutins
Les doigts lutins.

Our translator says to his brown beggar-maid:

Let your white arms uncovered shine
Polished and smooth and half divine
And let your elfish fingers chase
With riotous grace.

The comparison hardly needs a commentary. It will be noticed that the second line is entirely the invention of the translator—a line which we could well do without. It will be noticed also that the meaning of the last two lines is quite misunderstood. The change may be due to a lack of imagination or to a fear of impropriety, but the fact remains that Baudelaire never meant to speak of the girl's fingers but of his own.

Some of Baudelaire's most beautiful lines are rendered so meagrely that they make no impression at all.