



My Current Reading

SRL's report on the current reading of well-known figures comes this week from **Harold L. Ickes**, columnist and former Secretary of the Interior:

- THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY, by James Barke
 PRESIDENTIAL MISSION, by Upton Sinclair
 YOUNG HENRY OF NAVARRE, by Heinrich Mann.
 INSIDE U.S.A., by John Gunther
 REVOLUTION BEFORE BREAKFAST, by Ruth and Leonard Greenup
 PRINCE OF FOXES, by Samuel Shellabarger
 THE MONEYMAN, by Thomas Costain
 GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT, by Laura Z. Hobson
 BEHIND THE SILKEN CURTAIN, by Bartley Crum
 DARK DECEMBER, by Robert E. Merriam

and sure. Whether in judging the "spun sugar prose" of MacLeish at his worst or comparing the novels of the "gaulliste" Malraux with those of the socialist Silone, Mr. Wilson sees straight and speaks true.

His final reflections I found pleasantly provocative. He admits enjoying the advantages of living as a foreign spectator. He understands that giving democracy to the unprepared underprivileged (as in America) almost inevitably results in an untrammelled grab for money and in the deterioration of standards. "The bourgeoisie, before they took over officially, were a well-educated group, with plenty of experience of handling property and of discharging public responsibility."

He notes the similarity (despite the differences) between Stalin's ruling group and the worst type of American millionaire. Despite the Russian failure, he still believes that socialism is compatible with democracy. (So do I. But I am beginning to wonder if state socialism that lumps the eco-

conomic power on top of the political, is the answer.) Mr. Wilson thinks—as I do—that the passive Russians more or less allowed Stalin "to become their tyrant."

He has a faith in eugenics which nothing that I have yet learned enables me to share. "The ideal of equality on a low social level" is not only impossible, as he opines, but it seems to me, undesirable. Either the level must come up or equality must go. He gets a curious kick out of considering man as "himself an animal" and enjoys contemplation of the anthropoids. (So does Edmond Taylor.) Finally, Mr. Wilson finds, "the United States is at the present time politically more advanced than any other part of the world." I, too, believe this. But I submit that before this belief can find general acceptance, it needs further demonstration.

Confused and Menacing

I WANT TO BE LIKE STALIN. By B. P. Yesipov and N. K. Goncharov. New York: The John Day Co. 1947. 150 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by JAMES MARSHALL

"NOTHING could be more comforting to the Soviet teacher," says this leading book on pedagogy used in the great Russian teacher training institutions, than to hear the sincere expression by his pupils, "I want to be like Stalin." For "Comrade Stalin himself is a model of humaneness." He is, moreover, "beloved father of the workers, leader of the people, organizer of victory over the fascists and enemies of our Motherland."

It is no surprise to Americans that Stalin, the "beloved father," has succeeded Czar Nicholas, the "little father," much as the secret police of the proletarian dictatorship and the imperialist ambitions of the Soviet Republic have assumed the cloak and dagger of the czaristic police and the mantle of imperialism of the empire. What will be new to most of us is that American educators could sit down with Soviet educators and—up to a point—speak a common language of pedagogy.

Here, as in the fields of science, technology, and music, there could be a common meeting ground for men of good will if they could come together. That they cannot get together is the logical result of the aggressive drive behind that portion of the book which is foreign to American ears. It is as foreign, as frightening, and as laden with sulphurous threat as were *bushido* and the Nazi "education for death."

Uneasy

By Agnes Rogers

A SCEPTIC I, by reason ruled,
By logic disciplined and schooled,
Telepathy and second sight,
The fears and fancies of the night,
Accounts of visions and clairvoyance
I greet with ill-concealed annoyance.
I laugh more noisily than most
At tales of warlock, werewolf, ghost,
Resisting all such foolishness
Unto the point of mulishness.

There are, however, I'll admit,
Some things I do not like one bit.
I hate it when a rocking chair
Begins to rock with no one there.
I don't like furniture that creaks,
I do not like a cat that speaks.
And certain recent incidents
Have gravely shocked my common sense.

For instance, just the other night
I chose to read by candle light,
And though there was no draught
about
The light turned blue, and then went out.

And last week Tuesday on the lawn
My shadow flickered—and was gone.
(That was the day an extra pair
Of footprints followed mine I swear.)
This morning when I stirred in bed,
There sat a toad beside my head,
And just as I was wide awake
Across the ceiling crawled a snake.

I wonder if it's getting nearer,
The time when, glancing in a mirror,
I see reflected—not my face
But SOMETHING HORRID in its place.

The authors emphasize the fact that each pupil has his own peculiarities, that no children are identical, and that the living child, not some abstraction, must be the center of educational attention. American teachers would not contradict this. They would agree to the importance of the teacher consulting with parents and with the close relationship between patriotic sentiments and feelings of love for friends and family developed in early childhood. The importance of cultivating sound and orderly habits and much of the analysis of habit formation and the teaching of habits contained in this Russian manual would be acceptable to Americans. Corporal punishment is not permitted; shaming pupils frowned upon. One of the greatest tragedies in the world today is that such common ideas cannot be discussed and developed joint-

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ly by educators from all parts of the world.

It is when we come to such matters as the goals of communist education and the kind of discipline which is emphasized in Russian education that we meet matter which is disheartening in the context of international relations. Here the emphasis is on Soviet patriotism, the Communist Party, the Red Army, and the almost deified Comrade Stalin, the "beloved father." "Already in the primary school work is conducted for the purpose of equipping the pupils with those elements of general knowledge which are closely related to the military preparation of future warriors." And discipline in children is cultivated, among other reasons, to prepare them "for organized and disciplined labor in high schools, in production, and in the service of the Red Army."

Hatred gives birth to class revolutionary vigilance, creates a feeling of irreconcilability toward the class enemy, and is therefore a part of the educational scheme. Children are to be taught to "tell" on their classmates who are guilty of pranks and delinquencies. Moral education as a whole is directed to teaching the authority of elders and respect for them, and the breach of the "rules for school children," aimed principally at maintaining order and unquestioning obedience, is to be severely punished.

The inconsistencies in the books are themselves interesting, and evidence of ideological and educational conflict. Thus while conscious discipline which cannot rest on fear is advocated, threats and punishments are recommended if regulations are violated. Independence of moral judgment is to be developed but the teacher must use and lean on his authority. It is important for pupils to behave in a disciplined way when "away from the supervising eye" but responsibility is developed through control and checking. A teacher must make "exactions and not coax his pupils." "He demands obedience." Over and above the teacher-disciplinarian we find that the "Stalinist directive must be an inviolable law in the work of every Soviet teacher, in the work of every school from lowest to highest, and in political work with the entire Soviet people."

It is interesting to note in this textbook of a classless society the constant reference to the "best people." It is amusing to see recommended the educational value of walks and talks with old Bolsheviks. One wonders how many Stalin has left alive unpurged for this purpose.

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Personal History.

Edith Wharton and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., were both masters of the high art of conversation; indeed, Holmes is largely known for his wittily conversational "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table." But here the parallel ends. Holmes as a literary figure seems to have slipped from the pinnacle of renown; but Mrs. Wharton, author of the haunting "Ethan Frome," is ascending steadily to new heights. It may be that the sparkling little doctor (whose story is retold in "Amiable Autocrat," to be reviewed in these columns early next month) was too delightfully enmeshed in the hurly-burly of his times to comprehend "the deadly conflict between the American materialism" of his day and "the finer instincts of American life"—to quote our reviewer. This understanding was the strength of Edith Wharton.

Great Talk

PORTRAIT OF EDITH WHARTON.

By Percy Lubbock. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc. 1947. 249 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THIS book is exactly what its title states—no more, no less—and within its narrow limits as perfect a piece of writing as has been done in our decades. It is not a true biography; it is not a literary critique; it is a portrait of notable character and personality such as was written more often in the eighteenth century than today. For in that age it seems to have been easier for the clear, rational intellect to separate the eminent person from his work or his sources in social history and display him as an example of what the human race could produce.

Edith Wharton was such a person in the society which seems to be disintegrating (one hopes only changing) after the Second World War. Her importance as a novelist has not yet been finally assessed, and is not even estimated by Mr. Lubbock. It is sufficient to say for his purposes and the purpose of this review that she was one of the fine American minds that brought into the open the deadly conflict between the American materialism of the last half of the nineteenth century and the finer instincts of American life—also that she was one of the great craftsmen of her day, as skilful as Willa Cather, as penetrating down to a certain level as Henry James, to whom she owed so much, and more readily intelligible. Finally, that she was able—as James, the greater artist, never was—to keep to the highest standards, while capturing the interest of the innumerable readers of the women's magazines.

All this does not much concern Mr.



"Edith Wharton could best be described as a character in a Henry James novel."

Lubbock. He was her close friend, and what he has quite triumphantly done is to display, not the novelist, but the woman he knew. And to give the portrait dimensions and perspective he has skilfully woven into his own composition the tributes and descriptions of other friends as closely related as he was, but with different viewpoints and opportunities. Somewhere he says that Edith could best be described as a character in a Henry James novel. Actually, what he describes is the character which in her nonworking but not noncreative hours she made of herself. This sometimes arrogant aristocrat, this rich woman who knew how to use riches but did nothing without them, was as different from the novelist who studied the decadence of old New York as a financier inside his office and out of it. In her circle of intimates she created a ranging mind as much her own, and hers only, as the houses and gardens she built and organized with such loving care in Lenox and the North of France and on the Riviera. When she was not writing, two in-