

of their contemporaries behind and, despising riches and vulgar honours, have consecrated their lives to the immortal cause of securing the triumph of equality. At the beginning of a political revolution it is perhaps necessary, even from pure deference to the real sovereignty of the people, not to care so much about getting ballot papers counted, as for letting fall with the least possible arbitrariness the supreme authority into the hands of wise and strong revolutionaries" (see "Conspiracy," pp. 132-140).

Beer maintains that this view of Buonarotti's had a far-reaching effect on the communist movement, and "indirectly on German communist theories."

REVOLUTIONARY POLICY

The following fragment of a draft, reproduced by Buonarotti (see "Conspiracy," II., pp. 301-3), is not without interest:—

"(1) The individuals who do nothing for the motherland cannot exercise any political rights; they are aliens to whom the republic grants hospitality. (2) Doing nothing for the motherland means not to perform any useful labour. (3) The law considers as useful labour: agriculture, shepherd life, fishing and navigation; mechanical and manual arts; retail shopkeeping; transport of passengers and goods; war; education and scientific pursuits. (4) Nevertheless, the work of instruction and science will not be regarded as useful unless those who pursue it get a certificate of citizenship. (6) Aliens are not admitted to public assemblies. (7) The aliens are under the direct supervision of the supreme administration, which can arrest them. (10) All citizens are armed. (11) The aliens must, under penalty of death, surrender their arms to the revolutionary committees."

In these revolutionary measures it is not difficult to find a strong analogy to the modern communist policy of disarming and disfranchising the bourgeoisie and arming the proletariat.

REPRESSION OF THE CONSPIRACY

Among the members of the secret committees was a Captain Grisel, who betrayed the conspiracy by disclosing the plans and date of the proposed insurrection to the Directory. The War Minister, Lazare Carnot, ordered General Buonaparte to dissolve the Societe du Pantheon and arrest the leaders of the secret committees. The arrests were made in May, 1796, and in March, April and May of the following year the trials took place, not in revolutionary Paris, but at the provincial town of Vendome. Babeuf and Darthe were condemned to death on May 26, 1797, and went to the guillotine net day; Buonarotti and others were sentenced to transportation. Some years later Babeuf's eldest son killed Captain Grisel.

Buonarotti was not transported, but suffered imprisonment at Cherbourg, rejecting the offer of an important post in the government made to him in 1801 by Buonaparte, now First Consul. On his liberation in 1807, he resumed activities in revolutionary movements, living in the south of France, in Switzerland (whence he was banished), and in Belgium (where in 1828 he published his book on the conspiracy).

The remainder of his life continued closely bound up with socialism until his death in 1837. He lived long enough to transmit his experiences and ideas to the revolutionaries who were to act from 1830 to 1848. "His 'Conspiracy pour l'egalite'," says Beer, "is at once the best commentary on the most vital problems of the French Revolution in the years 1792-1794 and the best introduction to modern communist tactics."

—G. Baracchi.

THE NEW REALISM

Every great work of art is a challenge to that familiar array of platitudes which the little man calls his philosophy of life. The popular work of art, on the other hand, is generally a representation of those platitudes, consciously or unconsciously pandering to his established conviction that art should be a panegyric on the world and himself in particular. Though in this age we are suffering from a veritable glut of new ideas most of us are content to treat them, as Samuel Butler says, "like bad sixpences and we spend our lives in trying to pass them on one another." We may be introduced to them through no wilful act of our own, but we steadfastly refuse to remain on speaking terms with them. We are by nature fearful of anything which might disorder or disturb our intellectual stock-in-trade, and ideas are disagreeable bedfellows. We would rather lie down with the king of beasts himself than with the veriest tweeny-maid of an idea. This is the reason why the great artistic works have produced so little effect on the human race, and until we reach that stage where

we prefer the true to the agreeable, our great artists will be but faint voices crying in a wilderness of banality.

Few of our critics realise this, and rarely can they be induced to believe that there are prophets of the present day as well as of the past. For the critic, says Professor Raleigh, is best typified by a picture of a lady in a hobble skirt laughing at a lady in a crinoline. There are some among us who are pathetically proud of the fact that they can be called advanced thinkers, though they do not always know that their advancement has very little to do with the process of thought, but a great deal to do with their parasitic capacity for batten- ing on the thought of others. These are little to be preferred to the hobble-skirted critics, for though they reject the easy platitudes of the commonplace mind, they are so familiar with the new and the unknown that their very familiarity becomes a form of indecency. The critic who can be called truly creative and a cause of creation in others must be willing to receive newcomers

with politeness and respect—neither to turn his back rudely nor effusively embrace. In criticism as in life the ordinary social virtues cannot be ignored with impunity for "it takes two to speak the truth, one to speak and one to hear."

An infant among new literary movements, what is usually described as Proletarian Art has not yet been accorded the customary civilities, for although we may agree that the basic principle of all art is an unhesitating acceptance of the realities of life, and the one blasphemy, a distortion of those realities, nevertheless the writer who is desperately in earnest thereby commits an act of indelicacy which we find it difficult to forgive. He is the death's-head at the feast. And when he further insists on revealing underground currents of social passion which may whirl us we know not where he doubles his offence. This new school of writers is a reaction against the introspective literature of our time. The highly sensitive and cultured characters of such a novelist as Henry James to whom most of our writers are directly related live lives of self-centred seclusion totally oblivious to the workaday world around them. An introspective blood-corpuscle, to quote Butler again, would be of very little use to the human body. Humble and not-so-humble working men and women, these writers assert, cannot be expected to take any deep interest in the complicated relationships and psychological reactions of their superiors. Individual problems, the personal experiences of separate egos may be of value at other times, but the living human experience of the workers is chiefly of another sort. Therefore Proletarian Art attempts to give vivid representations of social passions. The aim of such a literature is to reflect the forces conflicting in a revolutionary period, to look at life from the point of view of the masses—which is not the point of view of well-meaning sympathisers interested in what the Americans call uplift.

This is no place to attempt to deliver judgment on a small band of enthusiasts among whom are to be found such men as Upton Sinclair, Michael Gold, Ernst Toller, and a number of writers in Germany, America and Russia. But that we may see that such a literature is born of a passionate indignation, a hatred of social injustice which may often go hand in hand with a love of humankind (for the hatred of evil is not altogether incompatible with a love of good, as some sages seem to suggest), it were well to take a concrete example.

The flame that burns in Ernst Toller's plays is not an artificial flame fed with the dry chips of literary ambition. It is the flame that has nourished actual revolt. Toller, one of Germany's younger dramatists, has had no academic career. He was a leading representative in the Bavarian Soviet Government brought into being by the revolution of 1919; and when the Republic was overthrown, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in the fortress of Niederschönenfeld, where he wrote his play *Masses and Men*. Toller is a product of that four years of blood and disillusion which now we are pleased to call *The Great War*; and after serving for a year in the trenches he was invalided home where he attempted to organise the German youth

for peace. His first play was written in gaol after he had made his fruitless gesture against war by leading the munition workers' strike in 1918, hoping thereby to call a halt to the insane and merciless butchery of fellow-workers across the frontiers.

As may be expected, the plays of Ernst Toller do not make pleasant reading and comfortable people who do not want to grapple with ideas which are probably foreign to them would do well to avoid them. Whether we take the *Machine Wrecker*, *Masses and Men*, or *Brokenbrow*, in each we find ourselves in a grim world, for Proletarian Art is tragedy—there is no room for true comedy, only for the tragic ironies of life. Humour is born of detachment, the detachment of an onlooker who can laugh at the strange antics of human beings without feeling called upon to take an active part in their living drama; but Toller has attempted to identify himself with the proletariat which is too concerned with the struggle of life to be able to see the humour of it. To Toller life is a conflict between the individual and the mass, and human beings become "puppets dimly aware of the compelling fate that governs them." Like all proletarian writers, he attempts not to show the characteristics which divide men from men and make for individuality, as do many literary artists to whom we have grown accustomed, but to show the characteristics which help to mould men into groups, and to portray or symbolise the passions and aims of those groups. We can only become individual again, such writers say, when class passions and hatreds have disappeared, when the class culture of to-day has been replaced by the human culture of to-morrow.

In *Masses and Men*, which he describes as a fragment of the social revolution of the twentieth century, Toller gives a series of impressionistic pictures designed to express the realities which lie behind all revolutionary activity. The actors are not individuals but groups of workers, farm labourers, soldiers and bankers. No attempt can be made to describe a play which has its stage in the mind of man, where the spirit of the masses takes bodily form and for good or for evil dominates the lives of men and women. But no one who reads it can fail to be impressed by the fiery enthusiasm of the writer or fail to realise that, however crude it may be, however horrible, here is something thrown into artistic form by the volcanic energy of a mind that knows what it is to be but a fragment of that nameless, formless thing which cries: "The Masses count, not men," and looks forward to the time when all shall "live in love and work at will."

It is not easy for one who knows how to value the works of the Dantes and Shakespeares of this world to understand writing of this sort, much less appreciate it. But the attempt must be made, if we are to realise the significance of the times in which we live, for here we have writers whose aim is to place the stamp of proletarian ideals on the culture of the world. We may resist them if we will, welcome them if we can, but if we ignore them we will do no service either to reality or art, which is the expression of that reality.