

SINCE THEN*

WHAT a whirl of memories are stirred up by this new book of Sir Philip Gibbs! To read its pages is to be confronted by forgotten hopes, by noble plans that failed of their purpose, and again by ignoble greeds that equally failed to secure the accomplishment of their designs. Even the mistakes of post-war policies are hardly less in evidence than the inability of selfishness to establish its controls. A cynic would have merely given a catalogue of the blunders of the politicians; a sentimentalist would have talked glibly of the records of disarmament, of the League of Nations, and of the increase of the standard of comfort of the working man. Sir Philip is neither cynic nor sentimentalist, at least he is neither for very long, though he is sometimes each by turns: however, he chiefly sets himself to the task of telling us the story of what has actually befallen our world since the war ended. By 'our world' is meant exclusively the world that went to war. Thus Spain, the first of the dictatorships, the earliest of the new fashion of government, gets no mention: Holland and Scandinavia are equally and deliberately ignored.

But the spirit in which the book is written is amply demonstrated on the front page of it: it is called *Since Then, The Disturbing Story of the World at Peace*. You realise that Sir Philip is considerably disturbed by what has happened since the war ended; and as you read the volume, and especially as you read the last pages of it, you also realise why he is disturbed. In part what has happened is disturbing to everyone, but in larger part it is most disturbing to those who believed in the old liberal tradition, for the war has put into eclipse everywhere in Europe and

**Since Then*. By Sir Philip Gibbs. (Harper Bros., London.)

America the comfortable doctrines of that political creed. The liberals grounded all their trust on the automatic value of democracy, and also on the inevitable progress of mankind. Sir Philip, with these as his life-long principles, is confronted with the political, social and ethical conditions of to-day, and is finely honest in reporting what he sees. Others of his friends shut their eyes to what is apparent, and still talk about democracy and progress. Consequently they see 'no disturbing story of the world at peace' in the record of these last years. Their blind faith is triumphant over experience and evidence. To them the world is progressing happily to admirable fruition. Even Sir Philip still falls back on phrases which show how hard it is even for a liberal, such as he is, to see the world aright. Was it not Stefanson who told us that only after his third year in the arctic regions did he see the real arctic world? During his first years he saw only what he had been told was there; afterwards, he realised that he had never looked with his eyes, but only with his memory—so long a time does it take for a pre-judgment to be expelled by facts. Thus quite at the end of the book Sir Philip states that the present generation has 'less ignorance, superstition, brutality' than the past. We believe that it would be quite easy to prove each class of society to be more ignorant, more superstitious and more brutal now than it was in the days of Victoria. Indeed, as far as brutality is concerned, Sir Philip is quite insistent that literature is more brutal now than it has ever been—not coarse, but brutal. We would ask him to ponder that fact. If literature is now more brutal, it can only be because readers love to wallow in brutality, or because writers, weaving ideas out of their inner consciousness, tend to settle on brutality spontaneously. In either case the world must be at heart at least as brutal as it was.

Blackfriars

Ignorance is one of the hardest things to define in practice. We no longer like to confuse the words 'illiterate' and 'uneducated,' and consider those ignorant who merely have no power to read. Since print can propagate ignorance as easily as tradition can, it does not follow that, since we all read, what we read really informs and instructs us. We are urged to recognise it as a modern fact that ideas spread very rapidly, but if these ideas are not true ideas, is the result enlightenment or deeper ignorance? That is the whole question. Does the information which is now within the reach of the masses, or is now given to the school children, dispel or increase ignorance? Or to put the question another way about, was the Victorian schoolboy or the Victorian lady more or less ignorant than the schoolboy or lady of to-day? The Victorian housewife knew how to make jam, the present-day housewife knows where to buy it cheaply, and in virtue of having that much more time on her hands is able to read more novels, more science of the popular inaccurate sort, and more psychological disquisitions on sex that are out-moded within five years. The question still remains unsolved, and will be answered without much agreement by any dozen people taken at random. The reason being that no one ever can tell.

Again, superstition? All ages are superstitious, and especially those ages which have less doctrinal religion than the normal. Doctrine gives reasons for the connection between fact and effect; superstition dissociates fact and effect. A lion's tooth given to a soldier, departing to the war, as a talisman against danger is an article of superstition, since there is no reason for connecting the thing and its supposed effect. A medal of the Little Flower given for the same purpose is not an article of superstition, for there is the distinct motive suggested to the reason, the power of

supernatural beings to shield their clients. A medal reminds the soldier to pray to the Saint, a tooth does not remind him to pray to the lion. The devoted client would be delighted if the Little Flower appeared to him in his moment of danger; the superstitious wearer of the amulet would be in increased terror if in his moment of danger a lion appeared upon the scene. But, though occasionally he cannot keep away from the shibboleths of a lifetime, really, as we have said, Sir Philip sees the world as it is, and not as the liberal thought it was: despite his occasional panics into cynicism and sentimentalism, he is normally a realist. Thus he is constrained now to believe that the comfortable world of his earlier dream is doomed, and that perhaps it never existed anywhere, except in dreams. The alternative forces that now confront each other everywhere and strive for mastery do not include democracy and progress, for they are ruthless efficiency and sentimental sob-stuff, the rationalised products of America, which has already conquered all our world. People have talked so long about this being an age of transition that they have lost sight of the fact that we have already 'transished.' We are already in a new age. We have left behind the old quiet domesticities. But we are also now leaving behind ruthlessness and emotionalism. We have emerged into a new type of life and of ideals.

We emancipated women, which means in effect that they are now more successful as typists than as wives. Indeed, they would prefer that people should account them rather efficient typists than efficient wives. Thus Ruth Draper mimics with tragic comedy the sharp contrast between the brisk and protective secretary and the selfish, slovenly wife. Once upon a time actresses became peeresses with monotonous regularity: now, as regularly, peeresses 'go on the stage.' This is not the same as saying that they become actresses,

Blackfriars

for in the present condition of the theatre that hardly matters. All that does matter is that they should 'go on the stage.'

Taking ruthless efficiency as one of the prevalent types, it will be seen that Mussolini, the Bolsheviks, and the modern industrialist are all of a piece: they are realists and represent the new ideal towards which Europe has been marching, and which America has already achieved. They are against whatever blocks the efficiency of the State. They are the symbols of the new world, the world where women predominate numerically and in quality, where bureaucracy is at home, and where the old freedoms are forgotten and not even missed. In the name of efficiency they would sterilise the unfit and control the number of births. Except for moments of emotional crises, they have nothing dear to them that they will not surrender at once to the call of efficiency. The world of women will always be a ruthless world.

Faced by all this broken disorder, which is not really disorderly but the normal results of a logic operative in a diseased mind, the modern liberal is bewildered: 'It is all very difficult,' is his verdict, saddened and disconsolate. He lacks decision because he lacks faith. It hurts him to see the exploitation of the dole, to see the public disesteem of Parliament, and the inefficiency of democracy, the scandals in the less ancient cultures of the world: but though he protests against the caricature reality has effected of his noble utopia, he has no real remedy. He is losing conviction of the truth of what he has preached for a life time. Even in this quite new world he has not yet learnt his lesson, that Christianity is still the only hope of mankind. I can guess that Maltese troubles must shock any modern liberal. He cannot bring himself to see that here is the beginning of a new, or rather very old,

concept of religion, something that not only inspires, but also limits the energies and ideals of man.

The modern liberal will, indeed, always be interested in religion. Thus Sir Philip construes the attitude of the young writers as a challenge to Christianity, and sees in their revolt against marriage and sex reticence a deliberate effort to establish a new form of faith : but what he does not see is that this is really no new form of faith, no faith at all, not even a challenge, merely a surrender to the lower forces of man's nature, to the beast within. The Brothers Huxley are no new phenomenon ; their ideas are perennial, are in literary clothing, in 'chrome yellow,' what St. Paul had already noticed and despised ; when compared with the more excellent knowledge of the Incarnation, he thought that stuff 'dung.'

The third real force to be noted is the growing violence of religion. Efficiency is already threatened in America ; it still lingers amongst the more excited and helmeted Germans, where it was in part begotten ; it is, of course, respected in England, and perhaps not unnaturally, for in England there is a persistent tendency to respect what among us is most rare.

Emotionalism might have been thought likely to gain on efficiency in these years ; for the rise of the Labour Party was a proof of the success of the political appeal to the emotions. Conservatives and Liberals quickly learnt that lesson and sobbed their way into votes by means of extravagant promises. The Press Lords, too, were swept by its sentimental value ; in unison Lords Rothermere and Beaverbrook were thrilled. Crusades and Crusaders seemed such fine names to conjure with. The figure of a crusader in red on the front page of *The Daily Express* was thought to be worth a dozen arguments. Most unexpectedly it was found that this did not pay. Men

Blackfriars

speak of a slump in net sales as the result of this violent crusade of Empire. Hence the crusade is only now *piano*. Perhaps it will be *pianissimo* at the next General Election, expected in the early year, for newspaper peers never for long continue a policy which reduces their sales. These two forces of efficiency then and emotionalism which between them followed hotly on the heels of the war, and governed the world, seem visibly failing of their power. The collapse of American industrial methods (mass production which leads to over production, hire purchase which is the denial of thrift, inflation of stock values which drained the resources of cash, and a high standard of living that was beyond the real wealth of the individuals, and only possible through hire-purchase) has ruined for the moment the good name of efficiency; it has shocked the Americans themselves. Our disturbed conditions were said by them to be due to our incompetence; but now that they are suffering they are not going to admit that business depression is always due to incompetence. After blaming the President, they are now in the mood to wonder whether their whole system (which is ours glorified) is not perhaps wrong after all. But what in our time needs correcting (and this is the particular work of religion) is the standard of values accepted in the world to-day. Two sayings of Sir Philip will help us to sufficient examples of what we mean: these are indicative of very much more.

Somewhere in the book Lord Rothermere is referred to as 'the great newspaper proprietor.' Notice this very common use of the word *great*. All that is meant is that he owns many newspapers or owns newspapers that have a large circulation. Neither Lord Rothermere nor his newspapers are 'great.' It is symptomatic of our time that even critics confuse the words *bigness* and *greatness*. Hence the vulgarity of our time goes unchecked.

Since Then

In another passage our author reports a conversation he had with an Under-Secretary of State for the Air, who had flown to India, in which conversation he sought a comment on his journey by so intelligent a man. The Under-Secretary of State's immediate reply was that it had made him realise how small were little countries like Greece and Palestine. Poof! Greece and Palestine small? That is the result of the aeroplane evidently on a mind that sees values in terms of bigness. His chief impression of his flight is one which reveals him to us as a speaker blinded to the proper value of what is of importance. All he sees is the littleness of Greece and the Holy Land. Though mechanical transport is admirably developed, and should be developed, we are personally convinced that it is this generation of motorists and aeroplane drivers which has increased considerably the ruthlessness and brutality of the modern mind and its false judgments. Cabmen were notoriously humane, the drivers of horse 'buses were famous for their genial wit; but who ever heard a good word spoken of motor cyclists, who are the motor mind in excelsis, noisy, heroic, mischievous, without pity and without fear; moreover, if anyone who drives a motor car has a tender heart he most certainly drives badly, and is all the more mischievous on that account.

The truth is that we are coming out of that nightmare into a new world.

The new women are spirited, but the new men are spiritual: and that is the whole difference between the age of transition and the new age. The age of the spirited has become jaded. Cocktails and night clubs not only 'date' them, but have undone them. They sought slimming; they are underfed, and so a pack of nerves. Out of all this will male youth emerge triumphant? Who knows? If it does it will show a revival of religion which will astonish the world. We

Blackfriars

think that here Sir Philip, who everywhere else has shown himself their friend and prophet, judges young men harshly, for he is almost convinced that they are wilting, that they have not the vigour of the women. What seems more likely to be true is that they have shot ahead of the old notions that have destroyed our culture, have outgrown the old fallacies of the industrialists, and no longer judge that to be valuable which the older generation still considers to be of importance in human life. They are setting more store by leisure and thought, and less store by the rapid multiplication of articles of trade and of rows of figures. They are the most sane members of a nightmare world.

We would much more prefer to defend two theses —first that the women are now using their powers in the fashion of the period during which they were emancipated and have not yet become sufficiently used to them to think out their purposes and their results (our women are old fashioned politically and on the wrong tack); and, secondly, that young men have more reticence, more morality, and more religion than any other section of the community, and that because of them we have great hope.

But we are grateful to Sir Philip for his fearless diagnosis of the disease and for his honest facing of the facts of life. His book has not given him the chance to tell us what he thinks to be the remedy for our troubles. Yet all he has by which to reassure himself is the existence of the Boy Scouts. We agree with him (we have always treasured the memory of the last pages of *The New Man*, a most valuable book, which he wrote before the war) that the Boy Scouts are one of the causes of hope in our world. But has he realised that it is a cause of hope because in a time when the Church of England is abandoning its schools and the Board of Education is opposing the public

Since Then

teaching of doctrinal religion to children, the Boy Scout movement is almost the only civil organisation founded upon religious faith in God and political faith in authoritative government. Without these there is no certainty in principles, no security in political parties, no basis for international morality, and no gain from peace.

We think that Sir Philip has set us all by the ears, but that also he has set us thinking. We believe that the ruin he sees is merely the ruin of what does not so much matter, external trade; that this ruin is due to a worse evil, the collapse of land-work, which must be the basis of society; and that the ruin of external trade will drive men back to the land. Lancashire will be forced back into cultivation. We shall one day appreciate contentment more than comfort, and happiness more than wealth. 'In that day there shall be a great light.' It looks as though religion is already taking a hand in this rejuvenation of the world. Always in the history of the cycles of culture architecture has been the first art discovered in a new culture. Already in the United States architecture has begun to show itself, vital, native, original and beautiful. This is another proof that we have already seen the dawn. We have this, too, to note that hitherto the great purposes to which architecture has been put have been religious in the beginning. We already see in America the new wealth lavished upon places of worship. It is indeed the worship of something, or someone, which has inspired, impelled, and sustained the artist. With the fall of the Empire, Chinese art has failed. Beauty must always be begotten of love and reverence.

Despite the late tradition of cock-sureness amongst Arnold Bennetts and post-war Wellses, reverence is noticeable in the younger writers. Out of that rever-

Blackfriars

ence, by God's mercy, faith will be born. Men will be interested later in *Since Then*.

Sir Philip's book will be an everlasting monument to the honesty of the pre-war mind at its best faced by the ruins of the post-war world.

But in criticising in this fashion what Sir Philip Gibbs has written, we have done so precisely because rightly and properly he has a considerable position in people's minds, and his books have very great influence on public opinion, especially in the United States. For the book as a whole we have nothing but praise. We hope it will have a large sale. It deserves to have a large sale, so smoothly and vividly is it written, so valuable is it because of the personal experiences it embodies, so well documented with names and dates and facts. We do not know any other writer who could have given us so complete and detailed a description of the various phases and moods of the belligerent countries since the War. Sir Philip is a shrewd because a sympathetic observer, and he has the special gift of observing what it is essential we should be told if we are to follow the intimate processes of the lives of these nations.

Since he is essentially frank himself, we feel sure that he will not resent our criticisms. The world is in too grave a crisis for men to dare to be afraid to speak the truth as they see it. Only out of our joint and conflicting judgments will the sane and balanced judgment that the world needs ultimately arise.

Since Then will have served the purpose of its author if, by provoking people to disagreement, or to agreement, it at least forces them to be interested in the problems it poses and to think out their solution in the terms of faith and reason, and in a spirit of enduring hope.

BEDE JARRETT, O.P.