

U.S. copyright law (title 17 of U.S. code) governs the reproduction and redistribution of copyrighted material.

this contrast more poignant, there may be observed in the same story the customary facile commonplace of Mrs. Watts's creation in the person of the artist lover, Donnie Meigs. The rich, sophisticated Ohioans of European travel and English butlers and sons-in-law, with whom this painter hero of the tale belongs, come off more tritely, as a whole, from her pen than her good, self-made young men and their plain environments. "Society"—even the best that Columbus or Cincinnati can supply—is the least convincing of her notes.

It is not that Mrs. Watts has borrowed her realism at the start with her manner from a noble Victorian, not that she has overdone her realism, but that for all her efforts she has thus far failed in being enough of a realist; not that she has posed her universe on the broad ground of Ohio, which may well be as fitted for contemporary chronicle as any Athens, but that she has not turned her spade deeply enough in her native soil to get its richest fruits. Therefore she remains for me the pioneer of happy promise of that larger day to come, when a modern realist of girth and insight shall put the spade down into the sub-soil, Ohio or other of America, delving beneath the conventional, the expected, the Victorian aspect of humanity.

ROBERT HERRICK.

## John Dewey's Philosophy

**N**OTHING is more symbolic of Professor Dewey's democratic attitude towards life than the disintegrated array of his published writings. Where the neatly uniform works of William James are to be found in every public library, you must hunt long and far for the best things of the man who, since the other's death, is the most significant thinker in America. Pamphlets and reports of obscure educational societies; school journals, university monographs and philosophical journals, limited to the pedant few; these are the burial-places of much of this intensely alive, futuristic philosophy. For the best educational essays one had to look until very recently to a little compilation made by an unknown London house. The "Educational Creed," in style and conciseness and spirit the most admirably popular of all his writings, is, I think, still lost in an out-of-print cheap bulletin in some innocuous series for elementary teachers. "School and Society," with some of the wisest words ever set to paper, frightens one away with its infantile cover and its university chaperonage. Only some heterogeneous essays, brilliant but not holding the exact kernel of his thought, and his "How We Think," in which is shown that

scientific method is simply a sublimely well-ordered copy of our own best and most fruitful habits of thought, have been launched in forms that would reach a wide public. No man, I think, with such universally important things to say on almost every social and intellectual activity of the day, was ever published in forms more ingeniously contrived to thwart the interest of the prospective public.

Professor Dewey's thought is inaccessible because he has always carried his simplicity of manner, his dread of show or self-advertisement, almost to the point of extravagance. In all his psychology there is no place for the psychology of prestige. His democracy seems almost to take that extreme form of refusing to bring one's self or one's ideas to the attention of others. On the college campus or in the lecture-room he seems positively to efface himself. The uncertainty of his silver-gray hair and drooping mustache, of his voice, of his clothes, suggests that he has almost studied the technique of protective coloration. It will do you no good to hear him lecture. His sentences, flowing and exact and lucid when read, you will find strung in long festoons of obscurity between pauses for the awaited right word. The whole business of impressing yourself on other people, of getting yourself over to the people who want to and ought to have you, has simply never come into his ultra-democratic mind.

This incapacity of imagining his own distinction has put him in the paradoxical situation of a revolutionist with an innate contempt for propaganda. His philosophy of "instrumentalism" has an edge on it that would slash up the habits of thought, the customs and institutions in which our society has been living for centuries. He allies himself personally with every democratic movement, yet will not preach. As we discover in the essay on Maeterlinck, where he shows himself poet as well as philosopher, his tolerant democracy loves all human values, and finds nothing so intolerable as artificial inequality. He hates nothing so much as the preacher who tells others how bad they are and what they must do to reform. Yet his philosophy is a great sermon, challenging in every line, in spite of his discreet style, our mechanical habits of thought, our mechanical habits of education, our mechanical morality. A prophet dressed in the clothes of a professor of logic, he seems almost to feel shame that he has seen the implications of democracy more clearly than anybody else in the great would-be democratic society about him, and so been forced into the unwelcome task of teaching it.

Orthodox philosophical thinking has usually gone along on the comfortable assumption

that words always have the same meaning, and that they stand for real things, that logic is the science of thinking correctly, that reason is eternal, that if you can only get your ideas consistent you have then a true picture of what you are trying to interpret. We have taken for granted the old view, which goes back to Aristotle's logic, that our mental life was a receiving and combining and storing of certain dead inert sensations and ideas of which words were the true symbols.

Professor Dewey's fundamental thesis has been that thinking is not like this. The mind is not a looking-glass, reflecting the world for its private contemplation, nor a logic-machine for building up truth, but a tool by which we adjust ourselves to the situations in which life puts us. Reason is not a divinely appointed guide to eternal truth, but a practical instrument by which we solve problems. Words are not invariable symbols for invariable things, but clues to meanings. We think in meanings, not in words, and a meaning is simply a sign-post pointing towards our doing something or feeling something or both. The words are the handles by which we take hold of these meanings which our intercourse with people and things presents to us. Our life is a constant reaction to a world which is constantly stimulating us. We are in situations where we must do something, and it is for the purpose of guiding this doing from the point of view of what has happened or what is likely to happen, that we think. We are not bundles of thoughts and feelings so much as bundles of attitudes or tendencies. We act usually before we "perceive"; the perception is only important as it enables us to act again. We remember what we use, and we learn what we occupy ourselves with. Our minds are simply the tools with which we forge out our life.

If we are to live worthily and happily, it is not necessary that we should "be" anything or "know" anything, so much as that we should be able to meet the situation in which developing life places us, and express our capacities in our activity. Our social problem as well as our personal problem is to understand what we are doing. This is almost the whole law and the prophets. In the ideal home we should have learned as children, through social converse and the household occupations and solution of the problems which our curiosity and our work brought us, how to adjust ourselves to the demands of life. But the home can no longer effect this and the school must step in. But the school is only really educative if it is helping the child to understand the social situations in which he finds and is to find himself, and to regulate his impulses so that he can control these situations.

The ideal school would be an embryonic community life, where the child would sense the occupations and interests of the larger society into which he is to enter and so have his curiosity and practical skill awakened to meet and conquer them.

In its larger social implications, Professor Dewey's philosophy challenges the whole machinery of our world of right and wrong, law and order, property and religion, the old techniques by which society is still being managed and regulated. Our institutions have been made as scales and measures to which we bring our actions, rigid standards by whose codes we are judged, frameworks to whose lines we strive to mould ourselves. All the revolutionary strivings of the past have been away from these institutional authorities towards greater freedom. But in spite of all the freedom we have won, society was probably never more deeply unhappy than it is to-day. For freedom is not happiness; it is merely the first negative step towards happiness. Happiness is control, and society, now intensely self-conscious of its imperfections, is still very helpless towards controlling its destiny. Life, Professor Dewey says, is a modification of the present with reference to the conditions of the future, a conflict between the habits engendered in the past and the new aims and purposes, clearly envisaged, to be worked for.

It is in showing the unity of all the democratic strivings, the social movement, the new educational ideals, the freer ethics, the popular revolt in politics, of all the aspects of the modern restless, forward-looking personal and social life, and the applicability to all of them of scientific method, with its hypotheses and bold experimentation, that Professor Dewey has been the first thinker to put the moral and social goal a notch ahead. His philosophy has the great advantage of making nonsensical most of the writing and thinking that has been done in the old terms. See how much of this can be truthfully called anything else than a "juggling with the symbols of learning." See how much of the energy of the moulders of opinion in politics, industry, education, religion, morality, goes to the squaring up of the activity of individuals and groups with certain principles which, however much they may once have been solutions of genuine problems and interpretations of genuine situations, are now mere caked and frozen barricades to activity and understanding.

Professor Dewey has given us a whole new language of meanings. After reading him, you can see nothing again in the old terms. And when I see college presidents and publicists who have cultivated the arts of prestige, expressing their views on every question of the day in the old caked

and frozen language, thinking along the old lazy channels, I feel a savage indignation that Professor Dewey should not be out in the arena of the concrete, himself interpreting current life. I am conscious of his horror of having his ideas petrified into a system. He knows that it will do no good to have his philosophy intellectually be-

lieved unless it is also thought and lived. And he knows the uncanny propensity of stupid men to turn even the most dynamic ideas into dogmas. He has seen that in his school world. Meanwhile his influence goes on increasing to an extent of which he is almost innocently unconscious.

RANDOLPH S. BOURNE.

## A COMMUNICATION

### Decorative Scenery

IN all the discussion of the scenic mounting of Mr. Granville Barker's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," one essential point has been, if not entirely missed, at least but dimly indicated. Perhaps this is natural, since we are so lacking in that public taste without which criticism performs in a vacuum instead of in an atmosphere. But however deficient we may be in that respect, it is a fact that we are recovering from the first shock of our surprise at the new methods of stage setting, are again breathing naturally and beginning to judge. And our judgment is not very likely to be too much affected by Mr. Barker's assertion of personal liking as a justification for that which fails to satisfy or even actively displeases us.

The trouble with the scenery of this piece is that much of it is ugly. Let that be said with all recognition of the intelligence and sincerity that brought it before us—with recognition and with gratitude. But that is not enough. The logic seems to be right, but the result wrong. Why?

We admit that the old efforts at complete realism have, with some large qualifications, failed. And yet as to these we must also admit that when great care, high intelligence, a sense of beauty, were expended upon them, they did not and would not now leave us cold. Irving's setting of "Much Ado" and "The Merchant of Venice" may perhaps be said to have broken down of its own weight, but it was no common weight.

If the fault was in the scheme, it was not in the execution. If the new scheme is right, and it seems as though it should be, it may not neglect execution. Whether or not we view it as a reversion to earlier days or as something entirely new, is beside the question; we are too complicated, too sophisticated, to accept with real pleasure any but the most subtle and sophisticated simplicity. If realism is to be eliminated in order that we may escape the distracting tax of its shortcomings, then simple convention must contain some element that will, by its presence, fill us with a delight that does not distract but leaves our imaginations free to follow happily the action of the play. It is hard to see what this element may be, if not beauty. Where is the beauty in this particular staging? (Be it understood, we are concerned now with scenery alone.)

A drop covered with a sprawling and rather awkward version of a common Greek motive, badly out of scale and jejune in color.

A dark blue affair with stars, which has the element of sombre splendor, defeated by its repellent coarseness.

A pink drop, which despite Mr. Barker's most justifi-

able fondness for the pink-washed walls of southern Europe, recalls them too little to bring them to our memories, except with pain.

A really charming and imaginative arrangement of the mound, surmounted by a doubtful mosquito refuge of portentous proportions, descending from a wreath which is swagger even in that obvious Welsbach light, but would be far more so had the lighting some dream-like quality.

Curtains which we are invited to consider an adequate suggestion of forest mystery, and of which it must be said that they obstinately refuse to be anything but curtains, poor in texture, uninteresting in pattern, and of color that is negative if not acid.

Of the palace it is hard to speak, vituperation being now almost exhausted. One must agree with Mr. Barker's logic again; the architectural scene lends itself to a realistic return. But why those awful colors? Why set Shakespeare's exquisite fancy in surrounding of vulgar vaudeville?

The new idea is correct: simple, imaginative, beautiful backgrounds can take the place, and far more than the place, of "real" scenes. But they are *not* scenery, they are decoration; and decoration must needs be made by those who are expert in that art, who feel and can produce color, who are as free from the limiting ideas and conventions of the stage as is this plan of setting. When their hands fall upon the task, and not until then, we shall see its realization and the full meaning of the intellectual perception Mr. Barker brings to bear upon his productions. This is so great and so welcome that anything which does not help it is worth discussion.

C. GRANT LA FARGE.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### The Inevitable in Mexico

SIR: Your editorial in a recent issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC, entitled "Blundering Into Mexico," is interesting and instructive.

As one of the "few downright fools who think they could get pleasure in staring at a map in which all of Central America was painted red, white and blue," may I be permitted to offer my humble opinion in the matter?

It may of course be quite practicable for the United States to come to some kind of an agreement whereby some sort of stable government could be secured for Mexico, but the only real, the only lasting guarantee of permanent peace in Mexico is American occupation.

What America has done for Cuba and the Philippines,