

# A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

## THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

By Wilbur Cortez Abbott

**T**HERE is one certain recipe for an interesting book. It is to get together as many great names as possible, persuade their owners to tell as much as they are willing to commit to print of what they know, or think, or believe, or what they wish others to know, think, or believe; interlard the result with some articles written by men who are not great actors in affairs but who have studied various phases of human activity; sprinkle well with pictures; bind; and serve as hot as possible upon the heels of the events.

This recipe the publishers of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* have followed with conspicuous success. In two huge volumes totaling nearly fourteen hundred pages they have presented not merely a sort of conspectus of the history of the past quarter of a century, with some glances backward and at least one look forward, but they have

brought together a series of opinions, prejudices, points of view, judgments, and a few obsessions, into an extremely interesting and informing book. Its value is considerable in the facts which it contains. It is still more important in the revelation of the men who have made the history which they now profess to write.

If one may judge from some of the articles which they have here set forth, these "makers of history" are not wholly, or even in great part, enormously pleased with the results of their activities. Indeed nothing is more extraordinary than the fact that even those who most bitterly bewail the existence of national hatreds in the world are precisely those who express most vigorously that unenviable quality. On this ground meet such different souls as Quartermaster General Ludendorff and H. G. Wells. The former — representing the nation which devised and sang the Hymn of Hate — complains bitterly that other nations were

taught by their governments to hate Germany. The latter — in preaching some hope of world association — fills his pages with hate and fear of France, with that entertaining ignorance of politics which he has always displayed. Bertrand Russell, who is nothing if not a propagandist, denounces government by propaganda — though propaganda is nothing new save in name only. Philip Snowden, who has done so much to produce the phenomena which he describes, tells us of social and revolutionary unrest, in moderate and, one almost inclines to suspect, somewhat disillusioned spirit.

In fact, not to linger too long over individuals, disillusionment seems to be a characteristic note of many of these articles. Mr. Wells has lost faith in Communism and the League of Nations. Maximilian Harden, who alone of all the world — he confesses it himself — foresaw everything in relation to William II, hopes without enthusiasm that the “new apocalypse” of a Germany devoted to sweetness and light “may not come too late”. Mr. Mavrogordato heads his article “Greece: A Record of Triumph and Disaster”. Sir Percy Sykes says of Persia that “until there is a change in Persian character, and until the ideas and customs of the middle ages are left behind, there is little hope”. Professor Chapman says of Spain that “socially and politically the country is still groping”.

Yet if there is evident in many quarters a spirit of depression, it is no less apparent that there is also in many others an even more powerful spirit of optimism. In Russia the abandonment of the Communist program, with, it may be guessed from what is not distinctly said, the rise of statesmen to take the place of the Bolshevik adventurers, offers hope. (Yet, so fast does the world move, all this seems

to have changed even since these lines were written.) Sir Horace Plunkett is still sanguine that Ireland may find sanity and sound government. There would seem much hope for Germany as soon as she finds real political life; and much for Italy. But it is evident that hope and optimism and all that goodly company find more congenial atmosphere in the new lands, in the Americas, in Australia, even in South Africa. Above all they find their real habitat in the realms of science and invention. It may be true that, in the words of the heading of one article, “Exploration Writes ‘Finis’ to Discovery” so far as geography is concerned; but the spirit of most of these interesting articles in the scientific field is that of “The Harvest Time in Medicine and Surgery”. It may be that we perceive the “Breakdown of International Law”, but it is no less evident that — despite Mr. Wells — no one can read the account of the League of Nations from the pen of M. Bourgeois, whether or not he be a “Leaguer”, without some feeling that, whatever the function of the League as the savior of civilization, there lies in the idea which it represents the hope of a newer, and one may hope a better, system of international relations.

The trouble about such a work as this is that it leads to endless reflections, and, unless one watches his pen — and his space — to endless disquisition on this fascinating subject of the world in which we live. For, with all due respect to similar publications, with all due allowance for the utter absurdity of some of the views here presented, and the spirit and ignorance of some of the writers — which are no less important as signs of the times than if these gentlemen were wise and well informed — there has not yet appeared a work which is so informing, so stimulating,

and so entertaining as this survey of the century in which, for good and ill, we play our part in history.

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These Eventful Years. The Twentieth Century in the Making. As told by many of its makers. Edited by Franklin H. Hooper. The Encyclopædia Britannica Co.