AN AMERICAN HUSBAND

AN AMERICAN IDYLL: *The Life of Carleton H. Parker. By Cornelia Stratton Parker. 12mo. 200 pages. Atlantic Monthly Press. Boston.*

THE CASUAL LABORER AND OTHER ESSAYS. *By Carleton H. Parker. With an introduction by Cornelia Stratton Parker. 12mo. 199 pages. Harcourt, Brace and Howe. New York.*

CARLETON PARKER was for several years a teacher of economics in the University of California, and later head of the department of economics at the University of Washington; he very quickly reached national prominence in his profession, served the State of California in various investigations into the western labour situation, and during the last two years of the war was successful in adjusting several labour disputes for the Federal Government. He was a keen student of some of the psychological effects of the existing industrial system and social organization on special classes of workers; the points of view toward these problems he developed during the last two years of his life are extremely suggestive for the growing application of the results of modern psychology to the social question. As a teacher and a man he was a personality unusually stimulating and ingratiating.

These outstanding facts about the man may be set down in advance without serious danger of the inaccuracy that attaches to almost any statement about another's life; but neither they nor any elaboration of them would much illuminate any of the questions these two volumes are likely to raise in the mind of any reader with a certain sharp modern sense for problems. For, if one shares at all any of the disrespectful inquisitiveness of the day, Parker's life and work will inevitably present more than a single simple and comfortable matter for discussion, and these bare facts about him will bring one scarcely to the threshold of a number of problems that are likely to seem speculative as well as embarrassing, because they are the product of a new and indecorous attitude toward human biography

—an attitude which Carleton Parker himself in no small way helped develop. The first problem one encounters here is that of this book itself, Mrs. Parker's record of her life with her husband that bears the disturbing title of An American Idyll, and it is in a sense the key to all the succeeding problems that Parker himself suggests.

The Idyll belongs apparently to that class of "interesting" books into the sources of whose interest the reader—at least the American reader—is careful not to inquire too pertinaciously. But that such a book should be found pleasant or unpleasant reading by anybody to-day, and why, is a matter not without interest in itself, and one in very pertinent connection with Parker's own work.

To take our reader of The Idyll at his very best we may suppose he is a sober student of the labour problem or of some other phase of social science, and has come to the book in search of some plain information about Parker's work. As he submits himself to Mrs. Parker and is scudded rather undignifiedly along in the breezy pages of this memorial to her husband, he will be very likely to experience a disconcerting sense of "estrangement." He will shortly feel that he is really out of place, that his mind is not tending strictly to business, and that he had better go home at once. His conscience will complain, of course, that he—and Parker—are concerned with a problem of great importance for social theory, and that it is a rare personality cut off in its prime he is reading about. But other matters will intrude upon his attention, and he will surprise his thoughts at most impudent and indecorous holiday pranks.

He will catch himself musing over western college life, with its wide, ingenuous vacuity; over the rosy-cheeked, healthy hysterics it produces; over its sororities and student social life, with the patterns they impose on American culture; over especially its girls and "co-eds," with their emotional puffs and breezes; over, in brief, this whole splendid culture ground for all the paradox and pathos of American romance. From here he will find himself galloping behind wild horses through hilarious but sombre reflections on American honeymoons, American matrimony, the American birth-rate, American housekeeping, American domestic morale, and on the tortuous personal undercurrents of American life, domestic and academic. These and many other mischievous nixies of suggestion will beckon him away from the serious concern to which he set himself, and despite all his inhibitions of politeness, decorum, or

scientific attitude, he will gradually find his interest in Parker the social scientist, or even in Parker the teacher and man, overwhelmed by a piquant and sympathetic interest in Parker the American husband.

Anyone with a previous appreciation of Parker's work and a knowledge of its very general pertinence to all phases of the social situation will see at once that some aspects of Parker's life so inescapably and insidiously suggested by Mrs. Parker's record, so far from being irrelevant to his work, are most intimately connected with it, if his method and point of view have any validity at all; that they are but special angles of a new general method of approach to the study of modern society, one aspect of which Parker himself was interested in. He will see that Parker, the professor and husband, and his intense interest in and sympathetic devotion to the hobo, the blanket-stiff, and the wobbly, are as much part of the total picture of the stresses and strains, the frustrations and balkings in American life, the individual gestures and group movements of compensation, as are the I.W.W. and the reactions of the casual labourer of whatever type. Parker himself was this fearless kind of social student, with a keen eye for these new intimacies of sociology, and no one would have enjoyed more or gotten more out of An American Idyll than he—if it had been written by some other man's wife.

He would have admitted quite freely that even a university professor's dominant interest is no more casual than the fall of a sparrow is unobserved; that man does not become enthusiastic over Freud accidentally, nor exhibit unusual industry in understanding and explaining the state of mind of the American hobo only for patriotic or scientific motives, and that these things in human behaviour are quite as problematic and quite as worthy of explanation as a riot of hop-pickers, because they are no less real and influential for the social problem. Parker and the hobo are parts of the same situation; if Freud's doctrines have any validity at all in application to social psychology they must be true for everybody; we cannot have one Freud for the hobo and another for the professor.

Every level of life in modern society, domestic, industrial, or professional, has its own way of walking the ties of freedom, and its own hobos; and every level has likewise its universities and its

professors. At any given moment each individual may belong to more than one level, and the stresses of all the levels combined will determine his own special picture of compensation or sublimation, whether it be crop-burning or the study of the psychology of crop-burning. But the stresses of the predominant level are determining for his general behaviour.

If we recognized this we would not, of course, find it necessary to make such a fuss over the balked instincts of this or that class. We would have regarded it, as we still do, as a novel and abstruse discovery that at least some people are human beings; and we would not suppose that a syndicalist is necessarily more of a human being than a stock-broker, nor that he is possessed of the most terrific instincts which must be satisfied forthwith while the stock-broker's may go hang. Before venting a bellow for the free and unlimited coinage of instinct satisfactions we would probably feel obliged to at least institute a census of instinct expressions and base our redistribution or socialization of contented instincts on some such scientific ground. And when we got out of the present stage of such crude romanticism about instinct we might find that the professor is living nearer the minimum limit of instinct subsistence than the hobo.

The use of the psychoanalytic approach, the behaviouristic or functional points of view, or in general the whole attitude of what is called "the new psychology" in the interpretation of individual and group behaviour is the essence of the social and cultural revolution that is going on before our eyes; but unless it is used as a general and comprehensive key to the social problem in all its aspects and with full cognizance of its focal relation to all the currents of the times, it slips readily into a ridiculous over-emphasis of parts of the picture. This was, of course, inevitable in a man who was, as regards the deliberate application of this method to his field, a pioneer.

Parker's attention was fixed from the very first on certain outstanding things in the life of the American wage-worker—the extreme mechanization of his labour, the subjection of his freedom of movement and work to the capricious impersonal forces of our industrial organization, the domestic and social conditions associated with his birth and occupation—all of which led to a balking of what Parker considered the fundamental and imperative instincts of any

human being—of sex, family life, and so forth. He studied these frustrations quite minutely in certain occupations, such as meat-packing and steel-working, and among the vagrant labour of the West, and reached conclusions regarding the influence of emotional frustrations in these classes which he would doubtless have developed into a more complete and satisfactory theory had he lived. But as his discussion stands and so far as it has been carried on it is so fragmentary and one-sided as to appear somewhat crude and far-fetched.

Parker did not see clearly what is revealed in the life of any man, including himself—that these things are true of all levels of social life to-day and that the phenomena of creative frustration are beautifully complementary in all classes. They are of course always less obvious in a bank president or in a lively young western personality like Parker, but they are none the less there if one has the eye for them, and biographies like the Idyll to help. The forces that led a band of plundered, starved, and driven hop-pickers to the violences of the Wheatlands riots are the same in every essential respect as those that led the ranch owner to his oppression and exploitation and the sheriff's posse to its cruelties. Mr. Palmer suffers as much from a balking of creative expression as any "Red"; it merely happens that he is constrained to exhibit his frustration in opposite ways.

What is more important, Parker did not apparently see that any or all of these modes of expression or any of the list of motivating inherited tendencies to action which he, like all psychologic enthusiasts, had to compile and pin to the American worker are quite relative and not in the least final or imperative. Not only do they modify each other in endless variation in the individual and in the group but they are purely instrumental, in even their most fundamental forms and most constant manifestations, to the basic, creative, life or growth forces in the individual and the group. It is this protean creative force that motivates the conflict in any individual and its mode of expression will depend upon the special problem of adjustment with which the individual is concerned and upon the carriers—of action, thought, habit, idea, ideal, convention, custom, or institution—that one's life history and environment provide as media of discharge. It is absurd to analyze the process of life or growth or creative expression into any number of definite

acts or typical kinds of behaviour. Instincts are not things in themselves any more than political institutions; they are modes of discharge of power, instruments of a creative activity, but not in themselves final or essential. If this were not true there would be no such phenomenon as sublimation, which, so far as society is concerned, is the crux of modern psychology.

For this reason any list of fundamental imperative instincts is a testimony to a deficient sense of humour. It is no more illuminating to say that people live in cities because of their "gregarious instinct" or that the I.W.W. loves to start a row because of his "pugnacious instinct," than to say that men like automobiles because of an "automotive instinct" or marry because of a "matrimonial instinct." Men are gregarious, sexual, pugnacious, or anything else only because that is the mode of response or expression or growth their environment and character happen to have established in them. To set down on the basis of certain laboratory experiments a list of instincts which must be satisfied by all classes lest society perish is a return to the naïve romantic naturalism of Rousseau. The modes of creative expression in any living thing are fortunately infinite, and the problem of society arises from the fact that it establishes through use certain types of creative discharge which in some way are originally instrumental and adaptive but eventually become rigid and purely formal, and in any stage never quite fit all individuals. A society is fortunately not composed, as Parker pictured it, of bundles of specific distinct desires which must be satisfied or it goes to pot. The process of association, like the process of individual life, is in a sense one continuous sublimation or transformation of energies. The task of a creative society is to devise possible sublimations or carriers which leave the least recoil. That is the best it can do. No human individual can ever slake his quenchless thirst for life and more life, and it is problematic whether, as an atom among myriads, he will not always have to go to some extent thirsty.

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