

Pamphlet Literature, George Orwell

One cannot adequately review fifteen pamphlets in a thousand words, and if I have picked out that number it is because between them they make a representative selection of eight out of the nine main trends in current pamphleteering. (The missing trend is pacifism: I don't happen to have a recent pacifist pamphlet by me.) I list them under their separate headings, with short comments, before trying to explain certain rather curious features in the revival of pamphleteering during recent years.

1. Anti-Left and crypto-Fascist: A Soldier's New World. 2d. (sub-titled, 'An anti-crank pamphlet written in camp'; this wallops the highbrow and proves that the common man does not want Socialism. Key phrase: 'the Clever Ones have never learned to delight in simple things'.) Gollancz in the German Wonderland. 1s. (Vansittartite). World Order or World Ruin. 6d. (Anti-planning; G. D. H. Cole demolished.)

2. Conservative: Bomber Command Continues. 7d. (Good specimen of an official pamphlet.)

3. Social Democrat: The Case of Austria. 6d. (Published by the Free Austrian Movement.)

4. Communist: Clear out Hitler's Agents. 2d. (Sub-titled, 'An exposure of Trotskyist disruption being organized in Britain'; exceptionally mendacious.)

5. Trotskyist and Anarchist: The Kronstadt Revolt. 2d. (Anarchist pamphlet, largely an attack on Trotsky.)

6. Non-party radical: What's Wrong with the Army? 6d. (A Hurricane Book, well-informed and well-written anti-Blimp document.) I, James Blunt. 6d. (Good flesh-creeper, founded on the justified assumption that the mass of the English people haven't yet heard of Fascism.) Battle of Giants. Unpriced, probably 6d. (Interesting specimen of popular non-Communist russophile literature.)

7. Religious: A Letter to a Country Clergyman. 2s. (Fabian pamphlet, left-wing Anglican.) Fighters Ever. 6d. (Buchman vindicated.)

8. Lunatic: Britain's Triumphant Destiny, or Righteousness no longer on the Defensive. 6d. (British Israel, profusely illustrated.) When Russia Invades Palestine. 1s. British Israel.

The author, A. J. Ferris, B. A., has written a long series of pamphlets on kindred subjects, one of them enjoying enormous sales. His *When Russian Bombs Germany*, published in 1940, sold over 60,000.) *Hitler's Story and Programme to Conquer England*, by 'Civis Britannicus Sum'. 1s. (Specimen passage: 'It is a grand thing to "play the game", and to know that one is doing it. Then, when the day comes that stumps are drawn or the whistle blows for the last time:

The Great Scorer will come to write against your last name,
Not if you have won or lost; but How you Played the Game.'))

These few that I have named are only a drop in the ocean of pamphlet literature, and for the sake of giving a good cross-section I have

included several that the average reader is likely to have heard of. What conclusions can one draw from this small sample? The interesting fact not easily explicable is that pamphleteering has revived upon an enormous scale since about 1935, and has done so without producing anything of real value. My own collection, made during the past six years, would run into several hundreds, but probably does not represent anywhere near ten per cent of the total output. Some of these pamphlets have had huge sales, especially the religio-patriotic ones, such as those of Mr Ferris, B. A., and the scurrilous ones, such as Hitler's Last Will and Testament, which is said to have sold several millions. Directly political pamphlets sometimes sell in big numbers, but the circulation of any pamphlet which is 'party line' (any party) is likely to be spurious. Looking through my collection, I find that it is practically all trash, interesting only to bibliographies. Though I have classified current pamphlets under nine headings they could be finally reduced to two main schools, roughly described as Party Line and Astrology. There is totalitarian rubbish and paranoiac rubbish, but in each case it is rubbish. Even the well-informed Fabian pamphlets are hopelessly dull, considered as reading matter. The liveliest pamphlets are almost always non-party, a good example being Bless'em All, which should be regarded as a pamphlet, though it costs one and sixpence.

The reason why the badness of contemporary pamphlets is somewhat surprising is that the pamphlet ought to be the literary form of an age like our own. We live in a time when political passions run high, channels of free expression are dwindling, and organized lying exists on a scale never before known. For plugging the holes in history the pamphlet is the ideal form. Yet lively pamphlets are very few, and the only explanation I can offer - a rather lame one - is that the publishing trade and the literary papers have never gone to the trouble of making the reading public pamphlet-conscious. One difficulty of collecting pamphlets is that they are not issued in any regular manner, cannot always be procured even in the libraries of museums, and are seldom advertised and still more seldom reviewed.

A good writer with something he passionately wanted to say - and the essence of pamphleteering is to have something you want to say now, to as many people as possible - would hesitate to cast it in pamphlet form, because he would hardly know how to set about getting it published, and would be doubtful whether the people he wanted to reach would ever read it. Probably he would water his idea down into a newspaper article or pad it out into a book. As a result by far the greater number of pamphlets are either written by lonely lunatics who publish at their own expense, or belong to the sub-world of the crank religions, or are issued by political parties. The normal way of publishing a pamphlet is through a political party, and the party will see to it that any 'deviation' - and hence any literary value - is kept out.

There have been a few good pamphlets in fairly recent years. D. H. Lawrence's Pornography and Obscenity was one, Potocki de Montalk's Snobbery with Violence was another, and some of Wyndham Lewis's essays in The Enemy really come under this heading. At present the most hopeful symptom is the appearance of the non-party left-wing pamphlet, such as the Hurricane Books. If productions of this type were as sure of being noticed in the press as are novels or books of verse, something would have been done towards bringing the pamphlet back to the attention of its proper public, and the level of the whole genre might rise. When one considers how flexible a form the pamphlet is, and how badly some of the events of our time need documenting, this is a thing to be desired.

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