

JOSEPH FURPHY AGAIN.*

Some years ago, the "Bulletin" Newspaper Co. published "Such Is Life," by Tom Collins (Joseph Furphy). The book went out of print, Joseph Furphy died (as he lived—philosophically!), but his work won the regard of its readers to an extent that seems to justify Bernard O'Dowd's description of it as "on the whole our finest production of prose literature up to the present." That word "our," inferring no parochial limitations, perhaps adequately implies the distinctive Australian quality of the writings of Tom Collins, permeated, as these writings nevertheless are, by a steady altruism. It is unfortunate that one should need to stress the congruity of nationalism with altruism. It is also unfortunate that, when one speaks of Tom Collins as a writer of the "Bulletin" school, one should have to disclaim in his case a certain odium of facile vernacular. The literary purist will find here the freest rhetorical style ascending often enough to heights of the best in prose.

"Such Is Life," apparently a fortuitously-composed, rambling kind of book, with no worked-out scheme or plot, is yet threaded through with finely co-ordinated incident sustaining clear characterisations. The book goes on, as life goes on, with a continuous interest and little violence of action, giving rise to all kinds of philosophic discursions, with complete, though almost incomprehensible relevancy. The writer manages to be at once whimsical and earnest—prophetic, and with a very deft wit! He brings to bear upon the economic conditions of our country the searchlight truth of "a human equality, self-evident as human variety, and impregnable as any mathematical axiom," involving an indictment of ecclesiastical Christianity as "a failure of the first magnitude." "Better silence than falsehood," he declaims; "better no religion at all—if such lack be possible—than one which concedes equal rights beyond the grave and denies them here." He extends these considerations to the pastoral atmosphere, pointing out that "in the accurately-graded society of a proper station you have a reproduction of the Temple economy under the old Jewish ritual"—from the manager's house, "wherein no one but the high priest enters," to the Court of the Gentiles, represented by the nearest pine ridge. He contrasts this with the custom of the medieval baron, part of whose religion it was "to wolf his half-raw pork in fellowship with his rouseabouts; hence he could bash the latter about at his pleasure, and they in return were prepared to die in his service." This has all changed as the sum of cultivated intelligence became higher. "The squatter," says Collins, "cannot spring to the strain"; and he presents these alternatives: "Either the anachronistic tradition must make suicidal concessions, or the better-class people must drown all plebeian Australian males in infancy and fill the vacancy with Asiatics."

Collins presents the Australian feeling in an eloquent passage which identifies Australian consciousness with the natural characteristics of our plain-lands—"an ideographic prophecy, painted by Nature in her impres-

* "SUCH IS LIFE," by Tom Collins (The Specialty Press; obtainable Cole's Book Arcade, 5/-).

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sionist mood, to be deciphered aright only by those willing to discern through the crudeness of dawn a promise of majestic day." Equally eloquent is his appreciation of the power of music—"a mere ripple of sound-vibration, called into existence by human touch; a creation, vanishing from its birth, elusive, irreclaimable as a departing soul, yet strong to sway heart and hand as the tornado sways the pliant pine." The book holds much else of the same quality. Throughout it has an easy and amazing versatility, linked to that penetrative sympathy which alone can make culture human.

—FREDERICK T. MACARTNEY.

THE BOLSHEVIKS.

"The suppression of newspapers has thrown idle the majority of journalists. In addition, army and municipal employees are without work and professors, lawyers, and notaries are idle. In fact, the whole thought-producing system of Russia is in abeyance."—Cable.

The Bolsheviks still carry on their capers,
The scoundrels have suppressed the lying papers;
No more the jingo-journalists are able
To fool the people with a timely cable;

Or legal lights expound inhuman laws.
The notaries' accommodating pen
Decides no more the destinies of men.
Professors, too, it seems, have been annoyed
At being placed among the unemployed;
And workers, cap in hand, no longer greet
Their masters from the gutters of the street,
But lift their voices in a cry for Peace—
That this and even future wars may cease;
And all these mighty wonders have been wrought
Because the Bolsheviks discourage thought!

The moral and the paradox is plain:
The less we think the greater is our gain;
Heaven only knows what wonders will befall,
When we have lost the power to think at all!

—R.H.L.