

Nana.

THE other night I went into a café in Seville. It was a dust-coloured place, full of the adorable men bred of that burning country planted with golden cornfields that stretches from the bare dark hills to the Guadalquivir and the barer, darker hills beyond. In their quiet, hideous dress of tobacco-coloured Cordovese hat, short coat, and tight trousers they might have been Pennsylvanian farmers; but animation throbbed through their bodies, their brown faces were patterned blackly with merry wrinkles, their awkwardness reminded one that their proper place was astride and suggested a background of adventure. Among them a few disreputable women, all bearing the resemblance to the late Queen Victoria which early overtakes ladies of evil life in Spain, preserved a sediment of gravity under the conversation which flowed through the room in the rasping, quickening Andalusian voice as new wine flows through the veins. They sat with their faces turned towards a wooden stage that projected from a maroon curtain which told one in corruptingly vulgar advertisement, where to buy beer; many kinds of beer. High up in the wall on each side of the stage was a little window. Through one we saw three women in loose ballet-shirts rolling up their shining black hair: from their averted faces, romantic in deep shadow, glowed a delighted knowledge of the many eyes that lay on them. But the stiffness and commonness of their self-consciousness broke as something burst into the room behind them and burrowed among their skirts, and they became three jolly girls. With round arms they lifted it high, a brown little boy, heavy with sleep, and played with him and enjoyed the smoothness and softness and warmth of his drowsy little bodily in the candidly animal way of the Spaniard with children. Then a masculine voice shrieked maledictions from within, and the window was slammed: behind the frosted glass three docile shadows powdered their noses. The audience now fell to discussing the double-page photograph of that day's Spanish *Daily Mirror*. Some days before a military gentleman had invited his daughter's lover to tea and after dividing him into manageable joints had walled him up in the drawing-room. The photographer had been present at the discovery: the remains were shown tastefully arranged in the middle of a courtyard surrounded by policemen, who were evidently having the time of their lives, in appropriate attitudes of horror and dismay. With great veterinary knowledge, with wit and really beautiful vivacity, these Andalusians were identifying the joints. . . . Above us, facing the stage, half-a-dozen girls leaned from the shadows of a gallery, their faces flower-like with gravity. Through the stone tracery of the balustrade they put their narrow little feet: the white stockings and black shoes looked like delicate hoofs. The rhythmic line of their bare arms lying along the balustrade, the glimmer of their stiff print dresses and the tempered bronze of their flesh through the darkness, the sleepy backward droop of their long throats, made them seem a band of holy women set apart, whose contemplation caught passion from the universe, whose benevolence showered it on these men below and made them live so wonderfully.

The badness of my drink convinced me that this was an extremely disreputable place: and when the curtain lifted it disclosed one of those mysterious family jokes of vice which baffle the innocent. For though three of the four dancers who bounded out were clad in chiffon skirts of a pillar-box red, the other, a woman of about thirty-five with a likeness to the Emperor Trajan, wore a white silk shirt and black satin trousers. God knows why: like the rest of their gambols it made no allusion to either beauty or sin. This magnificently eupeptic exhibition was strange for both time and place. There are moments

when one watches with delight a horse full of beans rolling about a loose-box: but only the Spaniard, with his splendid indifference to noise and their insatiable appetite for physical vigour, could enjoy such a spectacle at eleven o'clock at night in a hot, excited place. As the curtain fell the men clapped the dancers and cried out to them as they might have clucked approval at a thick-fleeced flock of sheep, and the women returned once more, chastened and beautified by shadow, to those romantic little windows. The Emperor Trajan came forward with her mouth full of hair-pins, which she spat out a little carelessly when an admirer handed up a glass of wine. She drew her dark hand across her mouth and leaned over her folded arms to watch the turn that followed. Six men stood in a row blaring at cracked cornets and shouting a song whose humour had swept Spain, which I had already heard in a cornfield in Old Castile, in the dry courts of the Escorial, in a grey crumbling arcade at Valladolid. A man complains that he wasted a year in courting Mariquita, who insisted on dying five days after they were married and had to be put into a big black box. "A box, a box, a *black* box!" the six men sang furiously, their lean arms whirling the battered cornets above their heads. "A big black box!" It was a good song. One had not even to be specially alive to the beauty of coarse and simple things to perceive its goodness, which was sanctified by literary precedent: for Stevenson has described this irritation which we feel at the sickness of our loved ones and all our artists have treated death with laughter. What a crown jewel of wit was made by Henry James when he called death "the extremity of personal absence"! And this gaiety which flashed from the performers to the bright mirror of the audience's attention was not merely the good joke and much manzanilla wine warmly irrigating veins chilled by dusk. It was the pretty expression of an untimorous attitude to death that is as strong by sunlight. The Spanish woman goes out to the peril of child-birth as a galleon goes out of the harbour to sea: her courage guards her, she returns unshattered, unsoured by its injustice, miraculously uncorrupted by its pain. And since civilisation has robbed man of war, that elaborate device which for a time made his life as hazardous as woman's, the Spanish man tries fantastically to recapture that adventure in the bull-ring. Once one sees past their noisy hatred of pain, which is only the healthy rage of the personality against mutilation, one finds something that is almost the instinct for death in which Metchnikoff thinks the race will find its happiness: a sense of decency which perceives the loveliness of timely mortality, of a proud withdrawing of the soul from matter. So their joy rippled on untroubled from those well-nourished dancers past this song of death to the chief excitement of the evening. The curtain was down for a long time. The bright-eyed men began to clap their hands rhythmically so that their expectation was itself as entertaining as an overture before the curtain rose on the woman of their worship and of mine.

I love shiny things: the glossy tiles in the corridors of the tubes, the gleam of the water as it slides to the weir, well-polished boots. So I love this lady. In all directions she presented smooth white surfaces and pleasant bulges; her hair rose from bright low forehead like a solid and newly-blacklead iron fender; her shoulders beamed like a newly-enamelled bath. And this amazing incandescence was only the glittering façade of an attractiveness whose rich texture pleased the eye as the pile of a Benares carpet pleases the finger. She was the original model of the full-bodied young women who, bearing scrolls marked "Wisdom" and "Science," float on the ceilings of the younger Universities. Now I knew what was in the heart of the elder Dumas when he wrote of "an opulent female." Moreover, the indestructible dignity which made her short blue satin skirt as seemly as a bishop's apron told me that this comeliness was the envelope of something of value.

A sudden generous smile of the big brilliant mouth showed it to be something of the very dearest charm. For about her glowed the rarest warmth in the world, the comfortable warmth of hot bread-and-milk consumed beside the nursery fire : and in that bosom which should have been sheathed in starched linen one would certainly find the sympathy that gives its kisses freely and barges no price of repentance. It was Nan : not Zola's Nan, but the Nana who bathes one before one is ten.

She could not sing : Nana, you remember, never could. But she pleasantly halloed a tale concerning her love of P  p   the matador which told us on what diet she had been nourished to her present health, by how many embraces she had been kneaded to this ripe and wholesome consistency. So might the hostess of an upland inn sit by the fire roasting chestnuts and with good jokes as raw as her wine encourage a ring of young men and maidens to carry on the torch of merry living : any winter night since there were fires or men. That song ended she retreated no further than the shelter of the back-cloth. We saw the blue satin frock flash to the ground and she frolicked forward in a baby dress of pleated tulle clipped to her by a scarlet sash. As some light great lady of the middle ages might gambol with a pretty page she now sang to us that Mother wanted to marry her off but she would rather stay single, and betrayed an excessive delight in the flesh which one would not call grossness : for it made her the more tender to the warm little bodies of children. Indeed, it was from this blending of her vitality with the liberal contemplation of country matters that sprung her Nanahood, as plump strawberries lie on good earth and dung. She stopped and smiled a bountiful, promising smile. Behind her a bare arm gripped aside the back-cloth and revealed a hole of darkness patterned with women's faces, dirty with shadow, that interest stirred like a little wind. She clapped her broad hands to her waist. The scarlet sash streamed over the heads of half-a-dozen men and floated across a marble table mottled with spilt wine, where men caught it up and munched it with mock kisses. Then the fleece of tulle too she ripped from her and cast backwards to the darkness. And there she stood.

I have had dreams of a Godiva who should be more than tax-resister : a virgin of the mountains who should perceive the loveliness of her body to be an incarnation of the divine principle come to earth to convert men to beauty. On her dark mule she should ride white to the plains, herself her gospel. That was a literary imagination. This was inspired nakedness. As the gaslight glowed off her body, whose wholesomeness immediately frustrated her attempt at indecency, and the lines of her trembled because she continued to sing deeply from the chest, I remembered how I once saw the sun beating on the great marbled loins and furrowed back of a grey Clydesdale and watched the backward thrust of its thigh twitch with power. I was then too interpenetrated with interests of the soul and the intellect to understand the message of that happy carcass : if my earliest childhood had realised that the mere framework of life is so imperishable and delicious that with all else lost it is worth living for, I had forgotten it. Now Nana's dazzling body declared it lucidly : " Here am I, nothing but flesh and blood. When your toys of the mind and the spirit are all broken, come back to my refreshing flesh and blood ! " I clapped my hands, I wanted to touch her, I wanted to rub my tired face against the smooth downs of her shoulders as though I was a child. But when the curtain cleft my Nana from me I did not grieve : I felt myself heir to the earth's multitudinous treasure of humanity. At my applause the men beside me turned smiling faces to offer friendship that could have been worth nothing, being based on a misunderstanding. So I went out into the sickle-shaped streets whose darkness ached with romance : castanets chattered in courtyards where the girls

were dancing all night because it was the Virgin's month, mules cornetted from the shadows, and in that tower which grows from Seville like a tree there rioted many bells.

REBECCA WEST.

Towards Reconstruction.

AN eminent French occultist who realised the help- less muddle into which civilisation had drifted, declared that the world could be saved by finding a single answer to all the vexed questions of the day, an universal dogma to settle all doubts, and a cure for all diseases. We might venture to add that whoever can comprehend all the questions in one question, all the doubts in one doubt, all the diseases in one disease, has already found the one answer, the one dogma, and the one medicine. I would even go so far as to say that we shall hardly discover the cause of our many difficulties or be able to explain what they exactly are, and how they exactly oppress us, until we have accidentally and almost automatically stumbled upon their solution.

It is a strange fact, but illuminative of modern complexities, that, in spite of all the analogies which history and nature are ready to supply, our " progressive " movements miss the preliminary condition of all possible reformation. The first step to take in order to put things right is surely to find out when and where they went wrong. The cause of all our degradation, mental and physical, public and private, is loss of Life or Feeling. When a man dies, life or feeling leaves his body entirely ; when a man is born into the world his life or feelings enter his body ; when he does a courageous act it is because his feelings were too strong for his ordinary powers of resistance ; when he does a disgraceful thing it is because his feelings, being few, have run away with him. Feelings, the stronger and the more the better, are life, are everything that is worth having ; we can give them no greater praise. Death, disease, cowardice, cruelty, commercial civilisations such as ours, are want of life or feelings. That is all one can say for them.

All really great Movements are Revivals, are, as the word shows, inrushes of life, restorations of feeling. Nature abhors a vacuum. Such a civilisation as ours has become is a vacuum, clamorous for some reassertion of feeling.

The two great Movements—if we may separate them—the Democratic Movement and the Woman's Movement, seen in their true light, are reactions in favour of life and feeling against the an  mic degeneracy of the present day, but both of these movements must shake off the symptoms of the prevalent and contagious an  mia before they can commence any really reconstructive work. Both must learn to distinguish between cause and effect, means and end. At present, in common with all the world, they put the cart before the horse and mistake the power for the product. They suppose Life and Feelings are the *outcome* of just institutions. They are not, they are the *origin* of them. When we have all got Life and Feelings again, we shall get living and sensitive institutions. What is the use of tinkering with moribund Politics? A great teacher has said, " Let the dead bury their dead ; come and preach the good and *new* thing. "

The official leaders of progressive movements welcome enthusiasm eagerly, but it is only to enlist it for inadequate ends and forlorn hopes. In the interests of the Labour Movement, for instance, an able and quite disinterested editor wrote, " What Mr. Snowden must make up his mind to fight for if he wants to break the workers' ultimate bonds, is the abolition of the Wage System. " I don't know what Mr. Snowden wants to fight, but if Mr. Snowden were I, he would feel depressed by this sort of advice. Similarly in the Woman's Movement