taire was no mere literary man. To the great problems of his day he brought, not a philosophic system of formulas and doctrines, but an attitude of mind which, he believed, would ultimately solve the problems of mankind. And this attitude may be best described by the word "toleration." However, like Voltaire's "simple" style, his simple solution was the outcome of a sophistication that plumbed the very depth of worldly wisdom, and of a passionate love of mankind that overflowed the boundaries of race, of faith, of opinion, of class, and of sex.

What was "toleration"? Behind that word was an interpretation of society and a philosophy of human nature that was distinctively Voltairean. Despite his frequent cynicism Voltaire was convinced that human nature was essentially good and kind. He declared that nature gave to man "no more weapons than she gave to pigeons and to rabbits"; and that man becomes wicked only "as he becomes sick." His explanation of the glaring contradiction between an evil society and the essential goodness of human nature was that, from the very dawn of history, man has been bewitched by an evil spirit, revealed religion. As a consequence man's natural goodness and common sense were atrophied, and he became a helpless tool of designing men who profited from the evil system. As long as people believed in absurdities, Voltaire maintained, they would always be moved to commit outrages.

Toleration alone would destroy such absurdities. In the religious field it would permit competing sects and faiths. It would permit free-thinkers to make successful raids on the faithful, thereby lessening the numbers and influence of the latter. In the secular field toleration would establish freedom of speech, from which would flow the countless blessings of increase of knowledge and greater enlightenment. Toleration would destroy political tyranny either through parliamentary opposition or through an enlightened monarch. It would promote prosperity by abolishing restrictions on labor and capital imposed by monopolies.

In the war for toleration Voltaire devised a new weapon which he wielded with such terrific effect that his opponents were left mute and helpless. And this new weapon was "satire of sincerity." The troubles of the world are due not only to the wicked but even more to those sincere, honest people who are so fanatical in their beliefs that they are willing to go to any length to carry them out. Hypocrites are not nearly so dangerous as fanatics. The former may be brought over to the "side of the angels" by appeals to self-interest, but fanatics are beyond reason, beyond fear, beyond self-interest, beyond mercy. From time immemorial satirists had used ridicule to expose hypocrisy, implying that if people were only sincere in their professions and honest in their conduct all would be well. This was the method of the two great satirists who preceded Voltaire, Molière and Erasmus. Voltaire's method was to admit fully the sincerity and good faith of his opponents, and then pour ridicule on what they believed. The atrocities related by Candide are committed by sincere men acting from secular as well as from religious motives, by Bulgarian patriots and English admirals no less than by Portuguese Inquisitors and Turkish Mohammedans.

The style of Voltaire was marvelously fashioned to suit its chief function of being a weapon of attack against the social order. The reader smiles his way through pages of airy, sparkling narrative and cynical comment, quite unaware that the author has any object other than to amuse him. Then he becomes aware that something is burning inside of him, and before long he is aflame with indignation at the senseless cruelty of man's inhumanity to man. A sentence, a phrase cunningly inserted in a smiling paragraph, or a home thrust given at the end of a tale insinuates the terrible implication that the real trouble is not that this man is a fool and that one a knave, but that the entire social order is a conspiracy against reason and humanity. The tale in "Candide" of a Negro slave in Surinam is a good illustration of Voltaire's method. The slave lacked a left leg and right hand. He explains to Candide how he came to be crippled in this manner. "If we should chance to have one of our fingers caught in the machinery of the sugar factory in which we work they cut off our hand; if we attempt to escape, they cut off one of our legs; and I was unlucky enough to be guilty of both of these offenses." And then comes the home thrust. "This is the price at which you eat sugar in Europe."

This "creature of air and flame," as Taine characterized Voltaire, captured the imagination of Europe as no literary man had done before him or has since. However, once the battle for religious toleration and intellectual freedom was won, Voltaire became a tradition instead of a battle cry.

The appearance of Mr. Brailsford's book is no accident. It is one of a number of books which have recently appeared on the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century, indicating a revival of interest in the origins of liberalism. And the reason is not far to seek. Many are listening intently to the maddening beat of the tom-tom of political fanaticism, which in some lands has already drowned out the silvery laughter of the mind.

J. SALWYN SCHAPIRO

Minority Report

IN DUBIOUS BATTLE. By John Steinbeck. Covici-Friede $2.50.

THE surface action of John Steinbeck's new book, which has already been acclaimed as a topnotch proletarian novel, moves about a strike in the California apple-picking country. A group of itinerant workers, dispirited and disorganized, are bullied, cajoled, and harangued by two Communist organizers into a sort of solidarity which enables them to fight a bitter battle for better wages and better conditions. The incidents of the strike are, of course, dramatic: murder, kidnapping, and arson scar its progress. Nevertheless, the novel which Mr. Steinbeck has woven about the events in Torgas Valley is, in an odd way, academic, wooden, inert. Mr. Steinbeck's novel is no strike drama but a kind of interior monologue on the part of the author about the technique of strikes in general. This interior monologue is not presented brazenly as such; rather, it is couched in the form of a Socratic dialogue between the two organizers—Mac, the elder, seasoned in party work, and Jim, the green recruit to the Communist Party, who is being initiated into its methods. Other characters join the conversation with occasional observations of their own; of these, London, the itinerant worker, the natural leader of men, and Dr. Burton, the philosophic, disillusioned observer of men, have the most to say. Almost the whole novel is in dialogue form. The dramatic events, the small, separate climaxes of the strike, take place for the most part off stage, and are reported to the conversationalists, as in the Greek drama, by a breathless observer.

It is quite possible that a successful proletarian novel could be written according to this classic scheme; but I submit, in this minority report, that Mr. Steinbeck was not the man to write it. If a revolutionary general with a talent for prose—say Trotzky—had cast his reflections upon the technique of class warfare into the form of a novel, though they would fall more

naturally, as did Caesar's, into the form of a memoir, the results might have been exciting. Caesar—and doubtless Trotzky—had something to say about the curious and wonderful behavior of embattled human beings; Mr. Steinbeck, for all his long and frequently pompous verbal exchanges, offers only a few, rather childish, often reiterated generalizations.

Mr. Steinbeck may be a natural story-teller; but he is certainly no philosopher, sociologist, or strike tactician. Mr. Steinbeck, for instance, is interested in crowds. Men in a crowd, he declares over and over again, behave differently from men by themselves. How a crowd is different, why a crowd is different, he cannot say; he is content to assert at great length that a crowd likes the sight of a little blood, that a crowd is certainly different, and no more. That the legitimately dramatic incidents of the strike should be subordinated to such infantile verbalizations is unfortunate. The reader who is not allowed to see the vigilantes burning a barn or the kidnapping of Doc Burton, and who is not given adequate, intellectual compensation for the loss, has every right to be annoyed. In several unpretentious scenes Mr. Steinbeck shows how well he can report the behavior of men dealing with simple, material things. His picture of two men eating hamburgers, for example, gives a suggestion of what this strike novel might have been like had he confined himself to the facts and restrained himself from ponderous comment upon them. For the most part, however, the author and his characters remind one of those tedious persons who in the theater indefatigably chat through the climaxes of the play, and whose vocal efforts have nothing to recommend them but their loudness. MARY MC CARTHY

Shorter Notices

THE BALCONY. By Adrian Bell. Simon and Schuster. $2.50.

A certain similarity of purpose has helped to link the name of Proust with this bemused little memoir, but Mr. Bell is not likely to benefit by such a comparison. It is clear that Mr. Bell has derived from Proust something more palpable than delight alone, and that, after a fashion, he too is concerned with the mystery that follows in the path of the dipped madeleine. However, it becomes a little absurd to impose Proustian touchstones upon a chronicle dedicated so obviously to trance and nostalgia rather than an integrated analysis of "things past." "The Balcony" is poeticized autobiography, with perhaps equal parts of poetry and autobiography. The fact that it confines itself to childhood alone may in itself be sufficient to suggest the mood of unhurried retrospect in which it is conceived and the andante temper of the writing as a whole. Mr. Bell leaves little to be desired in the way of stylistic ingratiation; but he hews to the turn of a phrase rather than the line of an idea, and in so doing is as likely as not to substitute rhapsody for experience. It is often difficult to trace the growing human lineaments beneath the façade of rhetoric. Moreover, his similes are at times touched by a preciosity not only enfeebling in itself but false to the child mind as well. When, for example, we find the young child likening the movement of a swan to a "melody through the vibrations of music," we are inclined to suspect Mr. Bell of a confusion of focus here. With less sophistication of ornament, he would have achieved a more credible compromise: his first snowfall, with the countryside "iced like a party-cake," and his grown-ups, "all stiff with clothes," are exactly as they should be, and instantaneously clear. Their rightness derives from the fact that they are literal transcriptions of phenomena—and this is not an unction to be laid to the book as a whole.