

SEPTEMBER 25, 1934

privy with a bullet in his brain. The implication is plain for anybody who wants to see: the factory can be run *without* the bosses. It makes very little difference if they sit in the front office or die in the men's room.

Halper is a fighter pulling his punches. I fear he writes with one eye on the Literary Guild, on Lewis and the Tribune. Why, in this day when one is forced to choose sides, does Halper introduce a nondescript and unreal "radical"—Karl Heitman, a "militant, intelligent workingman . . ." To many of the middle-class coming our way the working-class divides itself into two categories: the intelligent and the unintelligent. Workers are intelligent when they behave as the middle-class man feels they should.

With few exceptions, our middle-class sympathizers often lack humility, understanding, patience. They burn up when the worker doesn't get their messianic message at first reading. Impatience, arrogance are earmarks of the petty-bourgeois. A Communist's prime duty is "patiently to explain."

Let there be no misapprehension concerning Halper's ability. He is a first rate writing man. He can spin a yarn when he has a mind to: he can, more vividly than I have seen in any of our younger American writers, give the feel, the smell, the sound of our brick and electric jungles in which the industrial proletariat lives and dies.

But he must forget the plaudits of the outstanding bourgeois critics and writers. A true artist, he must experience the basic urge to go with the forces of creation. Halper is at the turning of the road. He must make up his mind. Although the proletariat cannot make him a best seller it wants and needs him. It wants and needs all men of talent. But it cannot wine and dine and flatter. And all men of talent must realize this: they need the proletariat in order to develop, to reach fruition. Their alliance with the only forces of light in a world darkened by the thunderheads of war and Fascism, is an absolute necessity. If they do not see this, then not only the annihilation of No Man's Land faces them, not only the barbed wires of concentration camps, but also moral and mental decay. It's a job, coming our way, coming all the way. There's poverty in it and endless struggle. There are concentration camps and there will be barricades. This Halper will find if he walks up the proletarian way. It's not primrose, Halper. But it is honest.

JOSEPH NORTH.

Not So Slow

SLOW VISION. By Maxwell Bodenheim. Macaulay. \$2.

Slow Vision is easily Maxwell Bodenheim's best novel, perhaps because he has now found something worth while writing about. This something is the class struggle, which not only is quite a different matter from the struggle to replenish Jessica, but is also large enough to include an understanding of "New York madness." What our liberal critics still can't

accept without gagging—they have such tender systems—has become a simple truth for many of our novelists, that the Marxian analysis of society, far from limiting the author's vision, opens up new possibilities for his talents.

The significance of Bodenheim's title for his new book obtains from the alleged slow process by which a realistic vision of life in the United States comes to his principal character. But considering that Bodenheim's hero is of that borderline unleavened lump most handicapped and most degraded by petty bourgeois illusions, and remembering that in less than a year's time this politically unborn boy is ready to join a red union and to strike, he's not so slow at that. Compared to the progression of most intellectuals to the left, and remembering their opportunities, Ray Bailey's pilgrimage has something of the velocity of a comet.

Bodenheim succeeds very well in giving us the children of the city's streets, the children of the anonymous millions who neither starve nor live decently, but somehow manage to struggle along, disillusioned and embittered Micawbers of capitalism. These kids want what any normal kid wants—a chance to work and play and live and love, a half-way decent break in life. Thanks to our economic barbarism, however, life for them is at best a confidence game, a matter of dog eat dog, and love something to be snatched in a dark hallway or a park bench. Bodenheim rightly presents the whole picture as a pretty heart-breaking affair, with all its tragic implications of human waste and corruption and suffering.

Ray works as a bellhop in a hotel; Allene as a stenog, when she can find work. They would like to get married, live like human beings, maybe have children. But the cards are stacked against them; they face blank, forbidding walls wherever they turn. When finally Ray tells Allene that he's going down to the red union to sign up for the hotel strike, the reader experiences a great relief, as in the play *Stevedore* when the white dock wallopers come to the rescue of their Negro comrades. This is the real release in our present stage of the proletarian novel, and we might as well stop talking about the Aristotelian virtues of pity and terror. When it comes to the P & T catharsis our embattled disinherited on the picket lines and in the streets could probably give the old Greek kulak lessons anyway.

EDWIN SEAVER.

No Salvation By Art

THE WAYS OF WHITE FOLKS, by Langston Hughes. A. A. Knopf. \$2.50.

Mary White Ovington is one of the prominent bourgeois Negro intellectuals. It was her task to review Langston Hughes' new book in one of the publications of the bourgeois Negro press, The Baltimore Afro-American, and she found the task an uncomfortable one.

The conclusion the book inevitably leads to,



Langston Hughes

distressed her. In a disheartened tone she writes "The two worlds (black and white) never meet in friendly sympathy." And she ends, "I especially recommend the book to the Caucasian reader."

That recommendation is an outstanding example of passing the buck. Why to the Caucasian reader, especially? Why not to all Negro intellectuals to remind them of the humiliating futility of their efforts to establish contact with whites on equal terms on the supposed antiseptic field of culture? Why not to the Negro bourgeoisie to reveal to them that they are used, as the Chinese say, as "the running dogs" of the white bourgeoisie? Why not to the Negro workers to show that neither the black woman, held in love in the arms of a white man, nor the devoted black servant allowing his white master to fall into a deep, unpayable debt of gratitude to him, can ever win decent treatment and respect for their race; that only his own unified strength, joined to his natural ally, the organized white worker, who has a similar fight on his hands, will ever win him freedom and equality.

The failure of the purely cultural contact between the two races is the central issue of the book, as it is the subject of most of the stories. It is this that makes the book significant. The Negro in America has passed, in his relationship with the white, through one humiliating sentimentality after another. Uncle Tom and Mammy have been succeeded by the transformed savage, still naked in swallowtails, recreating the Jungle in Harlem ballrooms, being the Embodied Pulse of the Dance. The white condescension has remained: the exploitation goes on. Just as, in

the Far East, the art of China and the "spirituality" of China were most in vogue in the West, when Western Imperialism was busiest in its work of dismembering China, so, too, exploitation of the Negro by white capitalism is accompanied by this condescending interest in the black man's soul. It is a titillating new form of exploitation for some, an occasion for easily achieved self-righteousness for others, the analogue, on the intellectual plane, of the white missionary.

Because, in his portrayal of nice white men and women patronizing the dear Negroes, Hughes is drastically ironic; because in his powerful, portrait of the white master unshaken by black love and devotion from his brutal consciousness of power, Hughes is unsparingly realistic, Mary White Ovington says, with a literary shudder, "Now we have the colored man's conception of the white man and woman and it is as severe (sic) as the picture the South once drew of the black. I use the word 'once' advisedly. Colored stories by white writers today are usually sympathetic."

Sympathetic! What a crawling word! How often it appears in the vocabulary of the opportunist Negro intellectual! What a state of mind this craving for "sympathy" indicates! *So Red the Rose*, by Stark Young, is an example of the "sympathetic" white Southern novelist. He pities the black man because in the unswayable course of history he will never be able to fall back into legal slavery, when, according to Young, he and the white master were both happier men.

Salvation by art has been an even greater deterrent to revolutionary action among the Negro intellectuals than among white intellectuals. Langston Hughes' work in shattering its illusions is of the first importance.

Some of the qualities of Hughes' fine verse appear also in his prose. There is, however, in many of the stories, a subjective quality in the approach and a resort frequently to melodrama, that Hughes can and should work out of. I hope, also, that he will go on from here, to what will constitute the next and greater task of the Negro writer, to deal with the heroic actions of Negro workers, among the sharecroppers, in the unemployed councils, in the I.L.D. There, on ground uncluttered by illusions, unstained by betrayal, the foundations of the new world of equality, and freedom, are being laid by Negro and white workers together. There, will be found the most fruitful, the most heroic subject, the Negro writer can look for.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Retreat to Faith

SCIENCE FOR A NEW WORLD, edited by J. G. Crowther. Harper & Bros. \$3.75.

The book under review, which was planned by the late Sir J. Arthur Thomson, is intended to be a survey of contemporary science. It is designed "to provide the serious but non-specialist reader with a series of discussions of the state and outlook of modern science in its

main branches." However, the reader will not find an exposition of the most significant developments in modern science in this book, nor of the relations established, nor the effects produced by such developments in the changing totality of social life. Instead, he will find a conscious effort by editor and contributors (except Hogben, Planck, and one or two others) to steer him past the turmoil of modern events into a blessed haven where nothing is intelligible. In other words, the contributors do not give you the benefit of their special knowledge in their respective scientific fields, but, pushing this hastily aside, confer upon you their personal contributions to a form of general ignorance of which most readers will find a plentiful supply closer to home. That is, as scientific salesmen of religion and capitalism they try to sell you theology as science.

A reading of this volume brings to mind those books of early science in which the expositor would point out how every natural manifestation was part of the handiwork of a divine Creator; consequently the author would direct "the attention of the reader to the Wisdom and Beneficence of the Great First Cause, and introduce those moral reflections which naturally flow from the subject."

Those moral and religious reflections which naturally flow from the subject—this is the real subject of the exposition in this volume. Accordingly the contributors were not picked so much for their eminence in exposition and learning as for their zeal and devotion as members of the theo-scientific priesthood. This comes out clearly in the choice of Mr. Christopher Dawson, one of Mr. T. S. Eliot's boys, as the authority on sociology as a science. His essay contains an ignorant attack on Marxian sociology for being "one-sided," and for neglecting the moral and spiritual factors in society. This neglect, it turns out, consists in the failure of the Marxists to describe the development of early capitalism in terms of the growth of a new religious attitude (the Protestant ethic) towards commerce and industry. Mr. Dawson has obviously not read the recent volume by the English scholar and non-Marxist, H. M. Robertson, who has exposed the fallaciousness of this view, which was propagated by Max Weber and his school. Mr. Dawson, like so many other contributors to this symposium of scientific confusion, dislikes Marxists because they intend to reconstruct society on the basis of rational science.

The insistence of the Marxists that the present social chaos can be scientifically analyzed is extremely distasteful to these scientists who have sold their intellectual heritage for the fleshpots of Oxford. Instead of showing the progress of man towards socialism, they speak of the Beyond that cannot be approached by science, and of a moral development that cannot stand scientific analysis. To R. A. Marett, rector of Exeter College, Oxford, the science of anthropology reveals the steady moral evolution of man towards the "upper deck" morality of the Oxford cleric. A materialist is so abhorrent to the worthy rector that he accuses him of being a "sub-human"

type. In his efforts to spiritualize anthropology, Dr. Marett gives an interesting practical application of his moral approach. He points out that this approach enables the anthropologist to assure the colonial administrator "that primitive folk may be trusted to be decent according to their own lights if left to manage for themselves." In other words, they can be exploited more if you utilize the native priests than if you arouse their antagonism by trying to jam Christianity down their throats.

Thus science is not presented as the key to the riches of a new social order, when it is utilized by men to build socialism as is being done in the Soviet Union. The new bogey of an indeterminate universe is dragged in to show that science is really irrational at bottom, and that after all God is the ultimate irrationality. But this paradoxical formulation may not be so easy to swallow, so the Rev. M. C. D'Arcy, an Oxford Jesuit, uses another argument in his paper on "Science and Theology." Science is rational, he says, and so is theology. In fact, theology is itself a science, and religion is therefore "rinsed by cold thinking." But after trying to establish this "science" the Rev. D'Arcy confesses that since God is the ground of all rationality, there can be no question of analyzing the nature of God or religious experience. He makes himself known only through revelation. Science is thus used to provide the latest scientific justifications for religion; and since this destroys the basis of scientific advance, the conclusion is that science becomes the unscientific handmaid of the Lord.

This symposium brings up an interesting point. Mr. Dawson, like all anti-Marxists, accuses Communists of trying to "sociologize" science; that is, of explaining the social origins and social basis of scientific development. This is most "unscientific." But Professor C. Lloyd Morgan can write a completely unintelligible essay on "Psychology and Beyond," in which he deals not with psychology, but with "Divine Purpose." This is "scientific."

The perversion of science as a direct and indirect apologia for capitalism will continue at an accelerated pace so long as capitalism, the existence of which is incompatible with truth and rational knowledge, is not overthrown. The silly notion that science and scientists are above the class struggle and that the scope and direction of scientific research is not socially determined is best refuted by the contents of this volume. The refusal even to discuss the facts of science, and the deliberate attempt to pass off theology and obscurantism as scientific are eloquent proof that scientists are class-conscious and that science is used as a weapon by the ruling class. The best answer to this book lies not in discussion as to whether or not science has a class basis and class utilization. This is established fact. What we need is concrete proof that the truths of science can be used as a boomerang against the men who try to distort these truths, and against the class they serve.

DAVID RAMSEY.