

ment permeating the leisure class among whom he chose to live.

Matthiessen could have gone more deeply into the actual political and economic background against which the James family played out its tragedy. Like James the novelist, he prefers to suggest, so that only the reader prepared to find will find. But he has seen and stated the problem, and he makes it pretty plain that for all the power of the Jameses, the health of American culture and society rests on the facing of the issues upon which the James family foundered. He has created a classic of American letters, and rubbed some of the gathering tarnish off American university scholarship.

Twisted and Abandoned

RED WINE FIRST, by Nedra Tyre. Simon & Schuster. \$2.75.

THEY are always wrong, those social statisticians who add up the opinions of the "ordinary" person and track down with a questionnaire what the "average" person has to say. Writers have always been wrong who have gone to the people expecting monosyllables, with a he-said and a she-said.

For the people are always more articulate than one imagines, and think far more profoundly. The simple are not simple-minded, and even the most unsophisticated struggle conscientiously with the riddle of life and offer insights which pain and joy and poverty have driven into them, sometimes in such moving authentic language that they become poetry.

Such are Nedra Tyre's people in this book, relief clients in three Southern states. Capitalism has put them through the wringer and left them, sucked dry, twisted, abandoned in that cold anteroom to starvation, "on relief"—that mocking term used to describe a state of prolonged dying. They are poor, often illiterate; they are old; and in a kind of summation of their lives they deliver themselves of their opinions and their conclusions to the case worker who takes down their histories. Nedra Tyre has recorded these unofficial case histories with enormous skill and profound sympathy.

"I ain't never wept no tears for myself yet and I don't intend to," one of her women says. "I did feel mighty sorry when maw and Willie died. . . . But I never begrudged a livin' soul death. I kep' on workin' at the mill and it kindly comfirted me to think of maw and Willie underneath the

ground by a ol' oak tree, no gettin' up in the mornings for them, no trudgin' all that way to work in the wind and rain, no more tastin' the lint."

When some landlady abuses a thread-peddler, she invites him into her room for a cup of tea because he looks "just like some pore millhand with the foreman bawlin' him out and knowin' he couldn't talk back." As he leaves, he offers her some of the thread he'd been peddling for her kindness. "My', I said, 'they're all mighty pretty, kindly hard to make up my mind but I believe I want the red, it's so cheerful.'" And thinking of him after he has gone, she keeps wondering (her own life a misery) "what put that awful hurt look on his face? Could he be layin' now besides some road hungry and tired? What happened to him to make his life nothin' but fear and pain?"

They are full of homely wisdom which their lives had taught them, little true coins they clutched tightly in their fists, unspent. "Folks need folks so bad." "A little livin' thing of any kind is sweet, seemed to me sometimes." Drawing her little abused child to her breast, a woman croons to it, "child, child, don't break yore heart, won't be so many years till you can leave."

Life was so hard for them as children: "Pore, God how pore we was, they wasn't nothin'—and nothin' had no color to it—the land, the house, us chilern's faces, paw and maw—can't remember nothin' but gray. . . ."

Being poor, nevertheless you had some rights. "Reckon a woman has a priviledge to run down her husband if she wants to and hasn't got much else to say." When the relief officials

turn her over to a psychiatrist because she wants to marry for the fifth time, she says indignantly, "Look here, doctor, even me and my husbands never discussed such things not even before or after we done them and it looks to me like you got a mighty long nose and a mighty dirty mind to be astin' a perfek stranger such innermate questions." And she was right, too, for she just wasn't happy living alone, and her first four husbands were all well accounted for, and none of them had ever complained.

A list of the chapter headings gives some further hint of what the book is like: "I Got to Talk to Somebody," "Honey Are You Saved?" "I Had to Jack Myself Up," "Courage to Endure," "We Written the Guvner," "Truckin' Is a Good Line of Work," "They Shouldn't Have Hung Willie," "You Feel Such a Fool of a Man," "Take a Message, Virgin Mary" and "A Contented Man."

No, they are not "hillbillies." Hollywood never met them. They are people in the struggle to survive. "Red wine first, Jessie," the character in Sean O'Casey's play says, "to the passion and the power and the pain of life; and then a drink of white wine to the melody that is in them all."

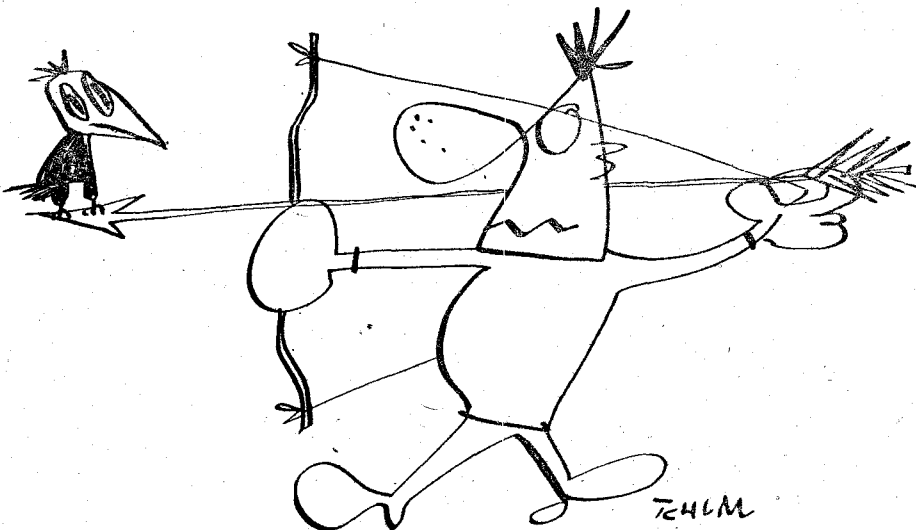
There is passion and power in these tales, and melody, too.

PHILLIP BONOSKY.

Blood on the Tapestry

CHINA AWAKE, by Robert Payne. Dodd, Mead. \$4.

THIS is the ninth book on Asia to be written by the incredibly prolific thirty-six-year-old Robert Payne. It is a journal of his days in Kunming,



where he taught in the university, late in 1944 and early in 1945, and of his travels to the North. It is filled with the sensuous response of a poet to the sights, sounds and action of Great China. Sometimes his sensitivity is so acute that it must be put down to the illness that Payne suffered even while he was teaching. Yet, recording the dirt and the glory, the special quality of Chinese life, the good humor of its common people, the high aspirations of China's great scholars, Payne brings deep sympathy and understanding to his record.

Especially in the final section of his journal, which deals with the liberated areas, do the people come to a vivid life of their own. They step whole and living from the pages. Such is their impact that they alone emerge from the tapestried background of Payne's journals as more than memorable—as unforgettable. In the background there remain the slender red-cheeked Chinese girls, the blue-gowned students, the lake scenes delicate as pastels, the old professors with their sparse beards.

Likewise the heroism that is a commonplace in China today comes through unforgettably in the earlier pages—the sections dealing with Payne's university life. It is whispered to Payne that a certain professor is "a member of the Democratic League," and therefore suspect—because the aims of the league, whose members are being jailed, are peace, an end to the Kuomintang dictatorship and a coalition government.

The students squat on their heels in the university courtyard, unmoving, as Kuomintang bullets whine overhead. The professor-speakers continue to address them from the flood-lighted platforms, aloof to the lead slugs slamming into the plastered wall behind them. The death of four student leaders becomes the occasion of a great ceremonial burial in which a mile-long procession of students, professors and townspeople participate. It is little wonder that a student tells Payne, when they are discussing the title for his China journals: "You must call it 'China Awake,' because the students—and all China—are awake today, and they will never sleep again."

Payne mourns with the Chinese people for those who died only half-aware that they were martyrs to freedom. But one gains the impression that he himself, even after the years he spent in China, is but half-conscious of what is involved there. He seeks

peace, and finds it only in the North, among the Communists. But though he qualifies as an "old China hand" he can still ask the leaders in the liberated areas when the war will end, as though that rested with them. And he seems to be amazed when they give him their answers—that the war will end "when China has democracy and a coalition government."

It is to be regretted that Payne's search for legends of past struggles prevented him from studying present developments. Those who hunger for news from Tartary that will enlighten and unify China's continuing struggle for democracy should supplement their reading of Payne's book with Israel Epstein's *The Unfinished Revolution in China*. Epstein's Marxist view of Chinese history and intimate knowledge of Chinese events will supply what the Payne tapestry—vivid, colorful and China-packed as it is—does not give.

RALPH IZARD.

In Brief

THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA, by Vera Micheles Dean. Harvard. \$3. It is refreshing to find a book on American-Soviet relations which, even though limited by certain misconceptions, is motivated by the conviction that "the war that should be inevitable is not the war on the field of battle, but the war against hunger, disease, illiteracy, poverty and fear. In this war there are no frontiers, and there should be no ideological differences. In this war the United States and Russia can fight side by side as peacetime allies." In addition to much valuable information in her book, Mrs. Dean has appended useful tables on Russo-American trade and an informal bibliography.

YOUR NEWSPAPER: BLUEPRINT FOR A BETTER PRESS, by Nine Nieman Fellows. Macmillan. \$2.75. A lively critical examination of our wayward press by newspapermen and women, under the auspices of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard. It notes the trend toward uniformity of class interest and expression which has resulted from the concentration of control. The faith expressed that this trend can be reversed is not so well documented as the analysis of the situation as it exists today. For good reasons. Apart from this, *Your Newspaper* is a good sister volume to A. J. Liebling's collection of *New Yorker* pieces on the same subject.

SELECTED POEMS OF FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA, translated by Stephen Spender and J. L. Gili. Transatlantic Arts. \$1.25. An American edition of the poems of Lorca translated in 1938 for the Hogarth Press, London. It includes some of the best known and most beautiful of Lorca's poetry: the

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