

Books of the Quarter

Man's Fate, by André Malraux. Smith & Haas. \$2.50. A deeply moving novel of the Chinese revolution in 1927, written from the point of view of a pessimistic but intensely sympathetic observer. It must not, however, be taken as history, since on a number of vital points it is inaccurate and misleading. An article in the *Daily Worker* of September 8, by Doonping, corrects Malraux's inaccuracies.

A Chinese Testament: The Autobiography of Tan Shih-Hua, as told to S. Treitakov. Simon & Schuster. \$3. Another fine book about China, giving a rich and vivid picture of Chinese life and revolutionary activity.

Exile's Return, by Malcolm Cowley. Norton. \$3. One of its ablest members tells why, in terms of American culture and its social bases, the lost generation was lost.

Labor Fact Book II. Prepared by the Labor Research Association. International Publishers. \$.95. An invaluable handbook for those who want to know about the New Deal, Fascism, the labor movement, the farm situation, and radical activity in the United States.

Rock and Shell, by John Wheelwright. Bruce Humphries. \$2.50. Poems that show a fine technique and a growth towards the revolutionary attitude.

Dialectical Materialism, by V. Adoratsky. International Publishers. \$.50. A brief but brilliant introduction to the study of Marxist philosophy.

Property or Peace, by H. N. Brailsford. Covici-Friede. \$3. What happens to the liberal mind when it catches a glimpse of the truth about capitalism.

With a Reckless Preface, by John Howard Lawson. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.50. One rather good play and one rather bad one, together with some lively comments on the capitalist press and the possibilities of revolutionary drama.

The Berlin Diaries, edited by Herman Klotz. William Morrow. \$2.75. A nauseating exposure, written by a Junker, of the role of the Socialist Democrats in Germany in paving the way for Hitler; an unpleasant but informing book.

And Quiet Flows the Don, by Mikhail Sholokhov. Knopf. \$3. In the first volume of a splendid trilogy Sholokhov depicts the Don Cossacks in peace and war. Highly recommended.

Three Plays, by John Dos Passos. Harcourt, Brace. \$2.50. The experiments of a talented novelist in the theatre.

The Road Leads On, by Knut Hamsun. Coward-McCann. \$3. Mr. Hamsun describes, with his usual deliberate care, a nest of simple folk in Norway, with some atten-

tion to the impinging forces of the machine age.

Life and Teachings of V. I. Lenin, by R. Palme Dutt. International Publishers. \$.50. One of the clearest of Communist writers offers an incisive introduction to the revolutionary theories and activities of Lenin. Highly recommended.

The Planned Economy in Soviet Russia, by Edward Lamb. Dorrance. \$1.75. A sympathetic but superficial study.

Boy and Girl Tramps of America, by Thomas Minehan. Farrar and Rinehart. \$2.50. A liberal sociologist takes a look at America's *bezprizorni*. The book is pretty good until Prof. Minehan gets round to proposing remedies.

A House on a Street, by Dale Curran. Covici Friede. \$2. A careful and convincing novel of the progress of an ex-bond salesman towards Communism.

The Coming American Revolution, by George Soule. Macmillan. \$2.50. The astute reader will be able to discover much material of value in this book if he doesn't get lost in Mr. Soule's liberal morasses.

Hitler Over Europe, by Ernest Henri. Simon & Schuster. \$1.90. An anonymous author, obviously well-informed, gives an exciting analysis of the rise of Hitler and the future of Europe.

The Burning of the Reichstag, by Douglas Reed. Covici Friede. \$3. An able but inconclusive account.

On the Volga, by Panteleimon Romanoff. Scribner's. \$2. Mostly second-rate stories by a writer of real but limited talents.

Economic Handbook of the Pacific Area, edited by Frederick V. Field. Doubleday, Doran & Co. \$5. A book with plenty of useful figures, a certain number of omissions, and no conclusions.

Slim, by W. W. Haines. Little, Brown & Co. \$2.50. Vitiating by the absence of revolutionary awareness, Mr. Haines' novel nevertheless gives a memorable picture of the daily life of a lineman.

Love on the Dole, by Walter Greenwood. Doubleday, Doran & Co. \$2.50. By all odds the best novel on the depression that England has produced and a notable contribution to the literature of the crisis.

Veterans on the March, by Jack Douglas. Workers Library Publishers. \$1.25. The full, dramatic story of the treatment of the Veterans before, during, and after the murders in Washington.

Those Who Perish, by Edward Dahlberg. The John Day Co. \$2. A novel of Hitlerism in America written with sharp awareness of the significance of Fascism.

The Chinese Soviets, by Victor A. Yakhontoff. Vanguard Press. \$2.75. The first full story of Communism in China, rich in material and sound in interpretation.

The Naked Truth, by Luigi Pirandello. E. P. Dutton Co. \$3. Fate triumphs over everything, including the author, in these stories by a writer too clever for his own good.

I Am a Cossack, by Boris Kamyschansky. Longmans, Green & Co. \$2.50. Another *Escape From the Soviets*, pretending to be the human interest story of a "liberal" who found the Soviets an uncomfortable place for a bourgeois to be in.

The Lummi Indians of Northwest Washington, by Bernhard Stern. Columbia University Press. \$2. A valuable contribution to the growing literature on the American Indian showing the part exploitation by the European races has played in the disintegration of their culture.

Slow Vision, by Maxwell Bodenheim. Macaulay Co. \$2. Bodenheim's best novel. A novel vividly describing the growth of class-consciousness in a pair of frustrated working class lovers.

Now In November, by Josephine Johnson. Simon and Schuster. \$2. The story of a Missouri farming family's struggle against drought and debt told with extraordinary sensitivity, a sensitivity which includes an understanding of economic factors. Comparison with Emily Bronte is not amiss, in this remarkable performance.

Science for a New World, Edited by J. G. Crowther. Harper & Bros. \$3.75. In effect an apologia for Capitalism by the bishops of science, offering a new spiritual hereafter in pseudo-scientific terms.

The Ways of White Folks, by Langston Hughes. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50. Excellent short stories in which the illusion that through "culture" Negro intellectuals at least, can solve their race problem, is shattered.

The Foundry, by Albert Halper. The Viking Press. \$2.50. A great advance over the author's previous "proletarian" novel, *Union Square*, and demonstrating still more strikingly his substantial fictional gifts, but in its attitude still on the fence.

China's Red Army Marches, by Agnes Smedley. Vanguard Press. \$2.50, International Publishers, \$1.60. The story of the Chinese Soviets as seen through the career of the Chinese Red Army from 1927 to the first Congress of the Chinese Soviets. Superbly told. An epic narrative on a level with Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

Proletarian Literature Today

MAXIM GORKY

THE role of the labor processes which have transformed the erect animal into a human being and have created the basic foundations of culture has never been investigated as comprehensively and profoundly as it deserves. This is natural, since such an investigation is not in the interests of the exploiters of labor, who, transforming the energy of the masses, like raw material, into money could not, of course, in this case raise the value of the raw material. Beginning with antiquity, from the time of the division of men into slave-owners and slaves, the living power of the toiling masses has been used, and is being used, as we are now using the mechanical power of the current of rivers. Primitive men have been described by historians of culture as philosophizing idealists and mystics, creators of gods, seekers of the "meaning of life."

You know that the data of archeology and reflections of the ancient religious cults served as the material for the history of primitive culture, and these relics were considered in the light and under the influence of Christian philosophic dogmatism, which was not alien also to atheist historians. This influence is quite clear in the theory of super organic development of Spencer, and not only with him; it is also not alien to Fraser and to all the others. But none of the historians of primitive and ancient culture has utilized the data of folklore, the oral creativeness of the people, the evidence of mythology, which, in general, is a reflection of the phenomena of nature, the struggle with nature and the reflection of social life in broad artistic generalizations.

The historians of primitive culture were entirely silent about the completely clear signs of materialist thinking, which were inevitably initiated by the processes of labor and the whole sum of phenomena of the social life of ancient man. These signs have come to us in the form of fairy tales and myths in which we hear the echoes of the work of domesticating animals, the discovery of herbs, the invention of implements of labor. Men were already dreaming in the era of antiquity about the possibility of flying. This we may see from legends about Phaeton, Daedalus and his son Icarus, and the tale of the "flying carpet." Men were dreaming about acceleration of movement over the earth in the tale about "seven-league boots," and mastered the horse. The desire to float down the river faster than its current has led to the invention of the oar and the sail. The striving to kill the enemy and the beast from afar has been the motive for the invention of slings, bows and arrows. Men meditated upon the possibility of spinning and weaving a huge quantity of material in one night, of building a good habitation overnight, even a "palace,"

i.e., a habitation fortified against the enemy. A spinning wheel, one of the most ancient implements of labor, and a primitive handloom for weaving were created and the fairy tale about Vasilisa the Wise was invented. One could cite dozens more proofs of the purposiveness of fairy tales and myths, dozens of proofs of the farsightedness of the imaginative and hypothetical, but already the thinking of primitive men along technological lines rises to such modern, to us, hypotheses as, for example, the utilization of the forces of rotation of the earth on its axis or the destruction of polar ice. All the myths and tales of antiquity are crowned, as it were, by the myth about Tantalus. Tantalus stands up to his neck in water, he is tortured by thirst but he cannot quench it—such is ancient man among the phenomena of the external world that are not understood by him.

The ancient tales, myths and legends are known to us, but I should like their basic meaning to be understood more deeply. This meaning amounts to the striving of the ancient workingmen to lighten their labor, to increase productivity, to arm themselves against four-legged and two-legged enemies and also to influence the elemental phenomena of nature, hostile to men, by the force of the word, by the method of "pleas" and "invocations." The latter is particularly important since it signals how profoundly men believed in the force of their word, and this belief is explained by the clear and perfectly real advantage of speech, which organizes the social interrelations and labor processes of men. They even tried to influence the gods by their "invocations." This is quite natural, since all the gods of antiquity lived on earth, were man-like and also behaved like men: well disposed to the obedient and hostile to the disobedient; like men, they were envious, revengeful, ambitious. The facts that the gods were man-like is one of the proofs in favor of the opinion that religious thinking did not arise from the contemplation of the phenomena of nature but arose on the basis of the social struggle. It is quite admissible to think that the "notable" people of antiquity were the raw material for the manufacture of gods: Hercules, the "hero of labor," and "master of all trades," was eventually raised to Olympus among the gods. In the imagination of primitive men, god was not an abstract conception, a fantastic being, but a perfectly real figure armed with one or another implement of labor; god was a master of one trade or another, a teacher and co-worker of men. God was an artistic generalization of the successes of labor, and the "religious" thinking of the toiling masses must be placed in quotation marks, since it was a purely artistic creation. While idealizing the capacities of

men and having a presentiment, as it were, of their powerful development, the creation of myths was fundamentally realistic. It is easy to discover in every flight of ancient fantasy its stimulus, and this stimulus was always the striving of men to lighten their labor. It is quite clear that this striving was introduced into life by people of physical labor. And it is quite clear that god would not have appeared and would not have existed so long in the every-day customs of men of labor if he were not exceedingly useful to the lords of the earth, the exploiters of labor. In our country, god is becoming obsolete, so rapidly and easily, precisely because the reason for his existence has disappeared: the necessity for justifying the power of man over man, since man must only be the collaborator of man, his friend, his comrade-in-arms, his teacher, but not the lord over his mind and will.

But the more mighty and powerful the slave-owner became, the higher have the gods risen in heaven, and there appeared among the masses the struggle with god, as embodied in the images of Prometheus, the Estonian Kaleya and other heroes, who saw in god a lord of lords, hostile to them.

Pre-Christian, pagan folklore did not preserve any clearly expressed signs of the existence of thought about the "essences," about "the first cause of all phenomena," about "things in themselves" and, in general, into signs of thought which became organized into a system in the fourth century before our era, by the "prophet of Attica," Plato, the founder of the conception of the universe abstracted from the processes of labor, from the conditions and phenomena of existence. It is known that the church stubbornly fought from the beginning the "survivals of paganism," and these survivals were the reflections of the labor and materialist conception of the universe. It is known that as soon as the feudal lords began to feel the power of the bourgeoisie, there appeared the idealist philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, the reactionary significance of which is elucidated by V. I. Lenin in his militant book against idealism. It is known that on the eve of the French Revolution, at the end of the 18th century, the bourgeoisie utilized materialist thought for the struggle with feudalism and its inspirer—religion; but, having conquered its class enemy and in fear of its new enemy—the proletariat—the bourgeoisie immediately returned to the philosophy of idealism and to the defense of the church. Feeling more or less alarmingly the illegitimacy and precariousness of its power over the toiling masses, the bourgeoisie tried during the course of the 19th century to justify its existence by the philosophy of criticism, positivism, rationalism,