

the Soviet Union, makes a voyage of discovery and inspection to the United States and is astonished and confounded at the things that are taken for granted here in the relations of men to men. The record of this visit thus becomes a record of our time and its travail: the incredible juxtapositions of poverty and plenty, the full measures of greed and cruelty and on the other side, the growing power of those with the will to life. There is the outline and it is filled in with a range of material that will amaze you in so short a book.

Second, the theme is realized by the use of the very essence of the picture-book form. The attack comes with alternate blows of the word, the picture, the word, the picture. (People who look at the pictures first and then go back and read the text are going to miss something and not know why.) The fibre of the book is in these interweavings, in the penetration of one by the other, in the completion of one by the other. The word does something to the picture, makes it more than what it is by itself; the picture creases the significance and effect of the text. You can't take one away and have left more than a very small fraction of the whole. Gellert has sensed this relation even more here than in his *Capital*. He has given us to the text those things for which it is

best fitted: the recording of the flow of time and space, the accumulation of factual detail, the reporting of actions and conversations. The drawings contribute the intensification of the action into the unforgettable image or symbol and by selection and exaggeration give significance to the detail. To the one point of question as regards basic structure lies in the difference in points of view behind the text and drawings. The words are Comrade Gulliver talking and the drawings are Gellert seeing; or to put it another way, the text is first-person singular and the drawings are third-person straight. The strength of the interplay between the two would have been greater had the text been in third person as well. Occasionally, too, the visual side seems a bit fragmentary, the text to have not quite enough meat in it. If this is a fault, it is because Gellert intended that they should be in certain instances fragments, not that he tried to make them more and failed.

Finally, the book is from every angle a completely honest statement. It is this that sets it so far above the first few comfortable books that come to your mind. There is no fuss and no floss, no recourse to trick devices or trick techniques. It has the unadorned power of the artist and the deep conviction of the man. It points the way to other artists—and for other men.

LYND WARD.

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No Tears For the Virgins

IT WAS all very tragic, with those little human touches of comedy and farce that lighten up even the pathetic lives of the "poor." But in the end, everything went wrong and the audience filed out of the theater, having been instructed in the psychology of the working class. Nellise Child's play, *Weep for the Virgins*, didn't suffer from the production: the Group Theater did a good job, the sets were admirable, the acting always adequate and in the case of Evelyn Varden cast as the fantastic mother of three lost virgins, truly excellent. But something was wrong. Miss Child, the playwright, sat down to picture working-class life. The locale is a bedraggled house in San Diego, just behind a fish cannery. At frequent intervals throughout the play the cannery whistle blows and the characters remark about it and I suppose the intention is to build up an atmosphere of dread and a sense of impending doom like the drums in *Emperor Jones*. That's as close to the factory as the audience ever gets. True, the characters have a hard time earning enough money to realize their ambitions and life is hard and here the psychology comes in.

For psychology is the basis of the play. Miss Child had a pretty valid idea. Screen magazines, the radio, the movies have given many Americans a false hope of romantic success. The mother of the three Jobs virgins has built her life on this illusion: her daughters must "amount to something," must have careers and fine marriages. And the girls blindly accept their mother's ambitions. Each yearns for money, for fame, for escape. A good idea—but *Weep for the Virgins* does no more than state it.

The action is in good old feature-picture style. The oldest girl, in order to earn more money than she can make at the cannery, takes a job in a dive. The first evening she meets a sailor, looks at him, drinks a cocktail or two, passes out, wakes up in a hotel with the sailor and finds she has fallen in love. He goes to Hawaii—she renounces him because she feels she must stick to the family. The baby arrives and there's scandal

at home. The second daughter tries stealing as a solution, nearly murders a man and runs away with the police after her. The third, at sixteen, diets so that she can become a dancer. A neighborly carpenter, age fifty or so, tempts her with food and persuades her to marry him. She discovers her mistake too late.

It all goes to prove that false ideals ruin the American proletariat. Miss Child has been quoted in the press: "I'm just a trade unionist, that's all." But though the characters live behind a fish cannery, it never occurs to them or to anyone in the community to consider that trade unions might improve their economic position. Of course,

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sell himself to big business as an anti-labor storm trooper, he will soon find that fascism destroys not only the rights of labor, but proceeds to destroy the rights of the salaried employe and small professional. As in Germany and Italy the destruction of the trade unions would be accompanied by the destruction of all independent organizations including those of the middle class.

Fascism has nothing to offer to the poor and middle farmer, the small salaried employe, the impoverished professional, the petty shopkeeper, all the lower sections of the American middle class. They are in acute distress and fascism seeks to turn their discontent against their own fundamental interests by mobilizing them against labor. In fighting against labor they would fight against everything that they themselves have struggled for all their lives: economic security, participation in cultural activity, peace and progress. For the success of fascism means the destruction of all of these middle-class ideals.

It is at this point that Mr. Corey makes one of his most important contributions. He traces the history of the American middle class—its struggle for a society of small property owners and enterprisers, and its crushing defeat by the trusts and the financial oligarchy. He reminds them of their revolutionary past and traditions, how they transformed economic and political grievances into revolutionary struggles and drove on to independence. They utilized demonstrations and boycotts, exactly the forms of mass action so distasteful to the property patriots of today. They boldly declared that "whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness) it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."

The lower middle classes must unite with the workers and conduct actions that are in line with the best revolutionary traditions of American history. The only chance of survival for the so-called small man is to break the chains of the capitalist relations that frustrate and enslave him, and go forward to the establishment of a new social order. These actions will take place under different conditions than those that prevailed in 1776. The middle-class people will be fighting for a different goal. But they can only be true to their revolutionary traditions and their old ideals of progress, democratic rights and liberty, if they ally themselves with the workers against their common enemy—capitalism.

Many middle-class people are still unconvinced of this. They point to the present lack of unity within the ranks of labor as proof that the middle class must look elsewhere for allies. The answer to this is a broad Farmer-Labor Party, a coalition party of workers, poor and middle farmers, and the masses of urban middle classes. Such a political party would be the practical expression of an alliance which would enable middle-class people to fight for their interests with the workers achieve the advance of

fascism in the United States. The workers are forging the unity of labor and therefore offer an alliance that will be of immediate benefit.

About such important tactical problems Mr. Corey is silent, usually mentioning them only in a footnote. But the whole line of the book leads to the fundamental question: what are middle-class people to do? and he fails to give a programmatic or a reassuring answer. There are other shortcomings in the book. For instance, Mr. Corey fails to define the middle class with any degree of exactness. Thus in one place he incorrectly lumps clerical workers with the middle-class groups. At another place he contradicts himself and goes to great lengths to prove that they are really members of the working class. He continues as in his previous book to at-

tribute the decline of capitalism to a mysterious exhaustion of so-called long-time factors of expansion. And in his treatment of fascism he makes some curious points that do not make for clarity.

But these are errors that do not lessen the value and wide appeal of the book for middle-class audiences. Mr. Corey has made many valuable contributions to the discussion of middle-class problems. The conclusions can be made broader and sharper by further discussion and above all they must be linked with the practical program of a farmer-labor party.

It should be emphasized that here is a book that you should get at once and one that you should persuade all of your middle class acquaintances to read.

DAVID RAMSEY.

The Eye and the Mind

COMRADE GULLIVER, by Hugo Gellert. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. \$2.50.

FOR years the dominant impulse behind the work of nine out of ten of our artists has been a decorative impulse. This is true both of the purveyors of simple rhythms in line and color and of those who, eschewing decoration as such, concern themselves with representing life or rendering form. In either case the prime aim is to call forth in the audience a sensation of beauty. This may be superficial or it may be profound, it may be obvious or obscure, but the differences are of degree and not of kind. Because of this domination, it is the rare artist today who does not find himself in a dead-end street, struggling with the surface of his time, bewildered by an onrushing world. Hugo Gellert is one of the rare ones. Long ago he found the one road that today can save the artist from the dead-end street: the will to understand the central fact of the life about us, the impulse to express that understanding, the conviction that in that expression lies one of the means of changing the world.

Anyone who builds on this foundation soon finds that the old vessels do not always hold the new fire well. He is faced before long with the necessity of developing new forms to work in, forms better suited to the expression of the life of our times and capable of reaching larger numbers of people. The picture book is such a form.

As a modern medium it is still young. On the technical side much more progress has been made in its use for children, but there are enough examples of its powers of communication for an adult audience to enable us to see that as it emerges it has definite characteristics. It is not to be confused with the illustrated book or the book of drawings or photographs done spasmodically on random themes, then edited, reproduced

and printed together. It requires judgment by its own standards and not by standards that may apply to prose or picture separately.

Comrade Gulliver is the most important picture book that our country has produced. This is a measured estimate and stands despite some defects which cause the book fall short of what it might have been.

Its importance rests on three things. First it encompasses what is by any man's standards a major theme. At a time when a whole of the capitalist world festers and erupts in a multitude of places and manners the easier thing to do is to take a corner a stick to it. But Hugo Gellert has made flank attack. He says in effect "Insanity can only be recognized through the eyes of the sane." And so he finds that the great Gulliver had a great grandson born and bred

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