

View without Vision

THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE. Edited
A. K. Wickham.

THE POLAR REGIONS. Edited by J. M.
Scott. Numbers I and II, *Life And Art*
In Photograph Series. Oxford University
Press, American Branch. Each \$2.

THERE are a hundred and four large, full-page, half-tone plates in the first of these volumes; a hundred in the other. The series is to be extended to include other aspects of life and the arts accessible to the camera. From the examples before us, the series will be of great value from the technical point of view. Rarely has it been possible to present large books so amply, clearly and well illustrated, at such a price. The selections in the Italian Renaissance volume follow the standard, which means that it is an eclectic choice and has no unity. But one hundred and four well-photographed masterpieces of painting, sculpture and architecture are good to have in any sort of assemblage. The photographs of Arctic and Antarctic scenery, animals and the figures and equipment of the human beings who live or visit there, similarly lack unity; but each photograph is interesting and all together make up a highly interesting adult

picture book which very likely will become one of the volumes most frequently returned to in a library.

It is in the brief introductions to these volumes that one finds the most serious shortcomings. In the polar volume, the motive of trade which has dominated polar exploration since the first attempts to reach the Indies through North and South Sea passages, is ignored; and thus this whole important activity lasting through centuries is practically reduced to the semi-lunatic ardor of sportsmanship. Similarly, in the volume on the Italian Renaissance, no attempt is made to give the social setting or to place the energetically developing movement of art among other social forces. Instead, we have such explanations which explain nothing: "It is time to ask what *spirit* inspired this *outburst* of genius." When a writer sees "spirits" and "outbursts," his eye is obviously not focused on realities. It seems strange that at this time, when Marxian literature and the Marxian method have proved so invaluable in the analysis of culture, and at least economic and social references are generally considered indispensable, such explanation-avoiding explanations can still be complacently offered.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Brief Review

WINDFALLS, by Sean O'Casey. The Macmillan Company. \$1.75.

In this collection of poems, plays, and stories the author of *Within the Gates*, further proves the versatility of his genius and the difficult confusion of his point of view. O'Casey is consistently an anarchist who wastes his seed on the pointlessly mystic *weltanschauung*. This is more obvious in his plays, but even here the same defeating hopelessness is evident. The short stories which are the best part of the collection shows this especially. In "The Job," he describes the bitter insults which a chorus girl has to take to keep her position. The pungency of his comment is dissipated when the story turns into an O'Henry surprise package, and he leaves you with the feeling that her whole effort was wasted because her sweetheart failed to keep a date. "I Wanna Woman" and "The Fall in a Gentle Wind" are two other very good stories which seem to be spoilt by the same lack of consistency. Some day Sean O'Casey will see through his "pessimism" and he'll deliver a first rate work of revolutionary art.

TENTS IN MONGOLIA, by Henning Haslund. Translated from the Swedish by Elizabeth Sprigge and Claude Napier. With 64 plates and a map. E. P. Dutton Co. \$5.

The author was one of a group of Nordic agriculturists who set out to establish a profitable model farm in a fertile Mongolian valley

upon the development of which, as a nucleus, unemployed Scandinavians could settle in the country and prosper. The sovietization of the country interfered with this scheme and with their nearly successful attempt to make a fortune in furs. They have, as a consequence, nothing but harsh words for the Soviets. The quality of the author's mind may be indicated by his respect for medicine man magic. His observations of Mongolian life suffer from this primitive type of mentality. While some of the adventures are interesting, the manner in which they are told is of the strenuous and wearying "us boys" variety.

WOMEN IN THE SOVIET UNION.

The Role of Women in Socialist Construction, by F. Nurina. International Publishers. 15c.

Women in the Soviet Union combines a brief sketch of the status of women in a socialist society with comparisons between the rights of women in various countries. It also includes notes on the lives of many Russian women, prominent and otherwise. Since the data presented is in accordance with the observations of Western sociologists who have studied this aspect of Soviet life, the pamphlet contains no factual additions to the material already available in English but it presents this material at a price and in a form which makes it available to all. It is, moreover, a real contribution in that it is an excellent example of what Russian women are reading

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about themselves. This is the type of literature which is being distributed in the U. S. S. R. wherever women gather together and it is intended to stimulate pride in the advancement of women since the Revolution and a desire to make still further progress. Propaganda it may be called, but since it is also the truth, it and hundreds of pamphlets like it must inevitably and quite rightly play an important role in forming the opinions of women throughout the Soviet Union and throughout the world.

The editors of the American edition would have been wise had they put the first chapter (How the Woman Question Is Treated by Communists, Social-Democrats and Fascists) at the end instead of at the beginning because for those who are not entirely familiar with the Communist position regarding women, international comparisons are more easily understood as conclusions than as premises to a discussion.

THE WESTWARD STAR, by Frank Ernest Hill. New York; The John Day Company. 275 pages, \$2.50.

"We are in the vastness of the prairie," the jacket tells us. "It is 1847; the twisting line of white-topped wagons crawls towards the Pacific." Directions for the opening shot of a Hollywood covered-wagon saga? This long poem reads pretty much like it.

Emmet, the buckskin hero, is a young man with a staunch Irish republican background and a dour colonial upbringing, who got lost before he was taller than a Kentucky rifle, and went to live with the Indians. When his Indian wife died, Emmet started to wander over the plains,—looking for Gary Cooper, perhaps.

He came across a wagon-train, just in time to save it from an Indian attack; shortly after which his eyes met those of Fay Wray, or Celeste. It looked like a clinch until Emmet, making a clean breast of his life, told Celeste he had once had an Indian wife.

With Emmet acting as scout, the prairie-schooners take to a sure groove of banalities which leads to Oregon. They are snowed in. Emmet does some more saving, but not quite enough. He freezes, not before he has "criminally" known Celeste, and left her bearing his child into the country of sunsets and oranges and little gray homes.

This poem is meant to be taken seriously. It is overcharged with the author's efforts to give epic depth to its painfully idle symbolism.

Although most of the lines are written in a quiet and flowing way which sometimes touches the submerged lyrical springs of Arlington Robinson, the spirit which drives them and the author on to the end of the book is fundamentally forced. It is as if Hill, fumbling about for an American symbol, had fixed on the covered wagon. The reader comes across lines and passages which are genuine poetry with a feeling that almost amounts to pain.

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The Dance

OF THE three recent premieres Fe Alf's recital (Feb. 24, Little Theatre) was by far the most interesting and promising. Eleven solos constituted a difficult program. And while her overwhelming charm may lead one to pass over certain inadequacies of craft, one can only regard these dances as experimental. Least successful of all were the pure decorations. And the fragments from her "Birds and Man" suite, despite their substance, lacked the immediate and vibrant qualities of "The City" suite. The first of these, "Slavery," created an unmistakable picture of the worker mechanized, but its dependence on shrewd and sometimes obvious devices deprived it of full success as a proletarian dance. "Degradation," on the other hand, developed entirely from its inherent content a rapid, rich image-sequence—a brilliant, unequivocal depiction of the degradation of woman under the system of private property. Her decorative and nature dances can probably be counted on for box-office success, but artistic fulfillment is promised only by her experiments with revolutionary themes. By their intellectual clarity and emotional force they show beyond question that her future lies in the revolutionary direction.

Both Fe Alf and Kohana (March 10, Guild Theatre) are threatened by too literal dependence on music for timing. Although this may be traced to understandable artistic timidity, such dependence if unchecked leads to a fatal monotony. Just as blank verse is an unpredictable pattern of variations superimposed on a theoretical iambic pentameter line, the tempo of the music furnishes a theoretical basis for the plastic tempo. Kohana, though perhaps less musically literal, is far behind Alf in creative originality. When not remote, her compositions are either intolerably confused or frankly insignificant. All of which is disappointing in a dancer gifted with a sense of costume, choreography and two-dimensional plastic design.

The second program of the American Ballet, except for George Antheil's music, Paul Haakon's momentary appearances and some excellent costumes and sets, was an insufferable artistic fiasco. Ten years ago "Alma Mater" might have been valid, but today such satire on collegiana is nothing more than inane. "Dreams" is similarly obvious, its episodes lit-

tle more than anachronisms—knaves, buffoons, pages, prince and fairy queen. And "Transcendence" if it has anything to communicate by its "Mephisto Waltz," "Ballades" of mesmerism, witches, and "Resurrection," chokes it in the swamps of mysticism. Except for William Dollar and a few others, the dancers are incompetents—which has not prevented the terrific ballyhoo, chiefly composed of blurbs by theatre critics, music critics and other "experts" on the dance.

STANLEY BURNSHAW.

Symposium: The Dance in the Theatre. (March 17, Studio 61, Carnegie Hall, New York.) John Martin is chairman; Doris Humphrey, Tamiris, Lillian Shapero, Sara Mildred Strauss, Stephen Karnot, the speakers. This is the first program of the newly formed Dance Guild.

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