

in the west end of Oklahoma before statehood.

He knew the farms, the small towns, the farmers, the people of the small towns of a region almost exactly like Seminole county. He couldn't quite join in the smiles of the city slickers, the wise guys, when they talked of the Green Corn fiasco. He kept remembering about the sort of folks who had made up the Working Class Union which staged the revolt.

Now, out of that sort of remembrance Bill has built his first novel. His knowledge of physical background, work, habits of living, thought processes of folks like the Green Corn rebels has enabled him to do a job that in many, in most, respects is fine, though there are faults. In a novel of wider scope he could have shown the relation of the Green Corn Rebellion to the whole sweep of agrarian unrest and revolt in the trans-Mississippi Middle West and specifically how the Green Corn rebels were the natural heirs of the old Oklahoma-Texas Tenant Farmers Union.

But there is one job he did very well. He has shown how revolt, rebellion, the joining together in organization, can enrich and widen lives which seem "destined to narrow-

ness and meanness." Jim Tetley finds through his part in the rebellion things which are richer, more vivid, more profound than he could ever have found in becoming a "good farmer." The love affair in which he becomes involved sloughs-off what might have been sordid and, because of the understanding which grew in him through his activity in the rebellion, it takes on tragic dignity.

Such scenes as that where Jim goes to Oklahoma City and encounters such city wonders as a hotel lobby, elevators and a cafeteria Cunningham manages to make both authentic and significant. The sway-backed horse yarns of Mack McGee put the real flavor of American humor into the tale. And they don't go in as folksy touches; they belong because old Mack was the kind of a stiff the others would depend on for just such homely humor.

By understanding real people, by writing of them in their own terms Bill Cunningham has built a fine novel. In future jobs it may be expected that he will hold to that understanding and go beyond it. Go beyond it by showing how such events as the Green Corn Rebellion are part of the whole flow and flux of working-class struggle.

KARL PRETSHOLD.

The Bourgeois Revolution

DANTON, by Hermann Wendel. Yale University Press, New Haven. 356 pages. \$3.75.

THE ANGEL OF THE ASSASSINATION, by Joseph Shearing. Smith and Haas. New York. 336 pages. \$2.75.

MARX, viewing the French Revolution as a whole, pays full tribute to the "heroes as well as the parties" who, whatever their confusions, "achieved the task of their day—the liberation of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of modern bourgeois society." But most historians cannot write on that colossal upheaval without being bitterly partisan towards one or the other of the two great Jacobin leaders, Robespierre and Danton. That species of hero-worship is perhaps inevitably to be found in writers on great movements; what is interesting is that the preference indicated is bound to be a product of the historian's own social philosophy. For the Jacobin Club was not a unified group of men with the same objectives.

At first, of course, their common enemies made their irreconcilable differences seem unimportant until the Republic was established in September, 1792 by the Convention. The fight was against the aristocracy and the wealthy bourgeoisie who wanted the Revolution to call a halt at the constitutional monarchy, for now the road seemed clear for their free (capitalistic) amassing of wealth. But with the abolition of the monarchy and the ascendancy of the Jacobin Club, the Republican parties were faced with their own internal contradictions.

The membership, in short, included varying degrees of middle-class opinion. The proletariat, as yet an unformed mass without self-consciousness, was of course unrepresented; and although it supplied the force behind the bloody activities of these years, its own interests were still, as Marx says, "coincident with those of the bourgeoisie" at that moment of history. Nothing is more incorrect than the notion propagated by the enemies of the Jacobins, that they were a ragamuffin lot. These men, Mr. Wendel reminds us, "included the elite of an educated and prosperous bourgeoisie, deputies of the National Assembly, writers, scientists, merchants, physicians, artists, and lawyers." Membership dues were the healthy sum of twenty-four livres a year.

How could there have failed to be conflict in such a governing body as this? There were: Danton's party,—moderates who wished now to discontinue the Terror and protect property; Hébert's party,—negatives without any concrete program, and who were satisfied to demand more Terror and a propaganda for atheism; Roux's party,—who espoused an agrarian communism; Robespierre's party,—who held up (what was actually a reactionary) Utopian return-to-the-land as the economic solution. As the battle thickened about Danton and Robespierre, they simplified the issue by sending to the guillotine the smaller extreme groups. Then these two stood confronting each other: Danton, anxious to compromise and to insure the gains of the bourgeoisie,—Robespierre, speaking for the starving petty bourgeoisie. The former, accused of speculation and shady negotiation

with the enemy, was able to silence his foes for a time; his vigorous personality and strong animal-spirits, his careless and expansive living—these insured his popularity. The latter, austere and impassive, depended only on the cold relentless logic of his dry speeches; he lived chastely as a Puritan, was unloved but feared.

But Danton had to go. To achieve the establishment of his present republic, the division of the land among the propertyless, Robespierre had to get rid of his bourgeois rival. He did. But his own solution was merely a Rousseauistic turning back of the clock, an impossible piece of over-simplified sentimentalism. Whether or not he be now judged worthy of his task, he stood nearest (for Marat was dead) to the crying needs of the masses. Within a few months of his triumph, however, the growing reaction swept him to the block too.

The bourgeois historian, therefore, is likely to be a Dantonist. Aulard, whose life work on the Revolution is generally considered in academic circles the most solid piece of scholarship on the movement, is an avowed admirer of Danton. His point of view being nationalistic, the class divisions of the struggle interest him little. Naturally, the magnetic son of the trading-class attracts him as one of the creators of France. His disciple, Mathiez, who shares esteem with him, nevertheless differs from him violently on the subject of the two leaders. For Mathiez, who was once a Communist, Robespierre is the great force, Danton a mere "bandit." And now Mr. Wendel, himself a reputable authority and a collector of Marx's writings on the Revolution, attempting objectively, falls a little between two stools.

Fully aware that the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie were worse off than ever under a Revolution that glorified the rights of property and unchecked capitalism, Mr. Wendel presents a full picture of the unrepresented masses and their sufferings. But he cannot avoid the spell of Danton's robust character, nor can he like the thin-lipped enemy of his hero. So that, giving with amazing clarity a full picture of 1789-94 with all its proletarian implications, he nonetheless voices, through emotional overtones, his affection for Danton. Danton had to be removed, yet he cannot help regretting it.

Still, this work is entirely worthy the attention of the general reader. Without pedantry, it gives a day-by-day account of those confused times in a style unexaggeratedly dramatic and abounding in flashes of biographical hints that heighten the whole picture. The book is something of a tour de force in its clarity and compactness.

Mr. Shearing's book, revealing more definitely bourgeois prejudices, is dealt with here only because it permits consideration of the third great Jacobin leader, Marat. The "Angel" is of course, Charlotte Corday. The episode which in Mr. Wendel's book is neatly disposed of in a paragraph, is here spun out to novel-length. Mr. Shearing's

grace and charm hardly make up for inaccuracies and misinterpretations to beautify the act of his angel Charlotte.

Marat, who fought by the side of the Jacobins until Charlotte Corday killed him, earned his title of "The Friend of the People" through his tireless journalistic outpourings, in which he never ceased to spur the masses to new dissatisfaction with their half-victories. He constantly held before the public the simple fact that when they pressed their governors, some gain was made, but that when they rested on that gain, their governors were busy depriving it of any value. A tortured life spent in hovels, hiding-places, in wandering, self-denial and want, did not improve Marat's good-humor; but it did not blight his devotion to the cause of the masses. Yet, giving some notice to his high moral nature, Mr. Shearing is so unfair as to say: "If he ever pondered over the reformation of society it was because he thought that an upheaval might mean an advantage to himself." He sees eye-to-eye with his subject: "Before the Revolution was well begun it was marred by the terrible excesses of the lowest classes." He is as little concerned with the outrages perpetrated on those lowest classes as was that Charlotte Corday whose angelic mission was to attempt in vain the cutting short of the great movement for freedom, by plunging a knife into Marat.

TONY CLARK.

Soviet Art

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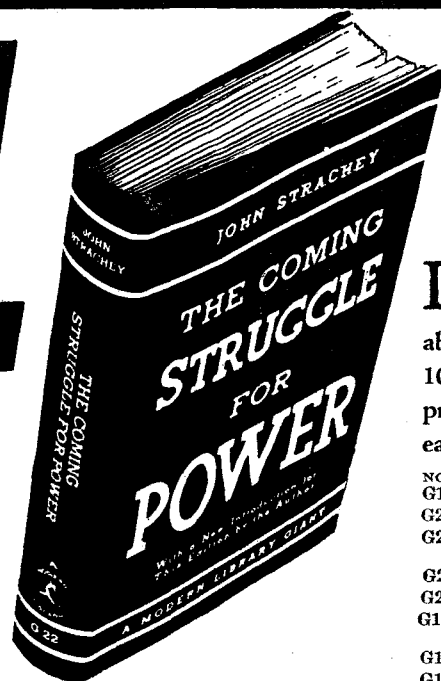
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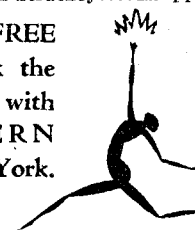


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