



SALVATION ANN

Philip Reisman

Philip Reisman's Paintings

THE deep-bosomed society lady with the thunderous voice who holds conversations with pictures at art shows, announcing that this "says something to me," and that "says nothing to me," was absent at the opening of Philip Reisman's show. (Guild Art Gallery, 37 W. 57th St., N. Y., on till April 25.) Her critical method would have been applicable here, however, for these pictures say something clearly and directly. They speak of the workers and for the workers; and if the fish handlers' union, the food workers' union, the laundry workers' union, the drug clerks' union show some really good sense they'll try to get hold of Reisman's fish market scenes, the hotel-basement-kitchen picture, the laundry chute and the drug store panorama, and let them speak to the workers in the union halls.

These pictures tell stories, though I say so with fear and trembling, knowing how you can sometimes bring a painter to the verge of suicide by the incautious suggestion that his work "illustrates" something, or has a subject matter that a good novelist would also be likely to make use of. In Reisman's pictures you don't think of the subject first; it is derived from the painting rather than the other way round. The elaboration of detail is as intimately observed and as carefully done as that of our aforesaid good novelist.

What I found most remarkable in Reisman's paintings is his warm feeling for the workers whom he paints. Expert matters of craftsmanship I leave to more erudite critics, assuming that, like the prose of Dostoevsky, since the technique doesn't get in the way,

it must be good technique. Reisman's workers seem more actual to me than those of almost any other painter I've seen. Here the worker is not presented as the horse's human cousin, nor as a symbol with mechanical limbs and a face like an automobile dashboard; he is portrayed in his own setting, in his own clothes, his own face, all showing the actual conditions and ravages of his life.

Even in Reisman's relatively few pictures where symbolism enters, the human figure retains its humanity and the allegory is a setting. In the hymn-howling "Salvation Ann," what holds the attention is the anguished look of the deluded face, not the cross forming from her breath on the frosty air. There is no outright symbolism in the show-window picture but it is one of those scenes as packed with meaning as any allegory. Here are two workers pottering around the undressed and partly dismembered papier-mâché mannikin; and in their laborious attitudes you suddenly feel the human fact of the sweating and indignity of the labor that goes into the construction of capitalist daintiness and beauty. It is decisive irony.

Here is proletarian art achieved without straining in the simplest and most direct fashion. It needs no labelling.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Current Art

LOUIS LOZOWICK (Weyhe Galleries). Lithographs of the Soviet Union and of industrial America by one of our ablest performers in this medium.

GRANT WOOD (Walker Galleries). See America first through the eyes of a well-advertised Mid-Westerner.

FORAIN (Durand-Ruel). Paintings by one of France's best satirists. If you have seen his lithographs and drawings you'll know that you don't want to miss this.

MODERN FRENCH TAPESTRIES (Bignou Gallery). The best artists of the "School of Paris" translated literally in a new medium by an ancient school of tapestry makers.

FEDERAL ART GALLERIES. The government getting its money's worth from 162 W.P.A. artists.

WAR AND FASCISM (New School for Social Research). Cartoons, drawings and prints by old and new masters who have expressed their resentment against war and fascism in one of the outstanding displays of the current season. Callot, Durer, Goya, Daumier, Cranach, Posada, Rousseau, Breughel, Dix, Grosz, Masereel, Gropper, Kent, Art Young, Robinson, Minor and Fitzpatrick are just a few of the outstanding names represented.

AMERICAN ARTISTS' SCHOOL. Work by members of the faculty and five new lithographs by Kunioshi, Stuart Davis, Harry Gottlieb, Raphael Soyer and Eugene Fitch.

R. T. L.

Mencken, Nathan and Boyd

(Winken, Blinken and Nod)

ROBERT FORSYTHE

WHATEVER else may be said for a Presidential election year, it invariably succeeds in reviving a lot of old gaffers who have been lingering in the shadows. The first reaction at seeing the old gentlemen bouncing about again in the world is comparable to the merriment which follows the fox-trotting appearance of an octogenarian at a New Year's Eve party, but pity comes soon behind. There is something proper and dignified about Mr. H. L. Mencken in his Baltimore exile hovering over his eternal word game with true German pedantry, but when he forsakes his American language passion for the public arena, he resembles nothing so much as an old fire horse who jumps the fence of the pasture upon hearing the sudden ringing of a bell. The conditioned reflex which accounts for the leap is not, however, sufficient to keep him going. Fifty yards of freedom and he realizes that he is even more spavined than he imagined.

Naturally we expect a statement from Mr. Elihu Root along about July of an election year, but when Mr. Ernest Boyd rears himself aloft and breaks into print with his third article in fifteen years, it is a sad augury. What it means of course is that either the Republic is in danger or that Mr. Boyd's meal ticket has run out. The point is of some importance in determining the state of mind of our better people. As one who has been known to come for a week-end and stay six years, Mr. Boyd is in a position to know how things are working out. If, at his age and with his reputation for leisure, he comes forth with all the rage of a cop hit by a spitball, it is a sign that all is not well with the nation.

As an artist with an antique reputation for erudition, Mr. Boyd has always picked

his spots. That he should have an article in the first issue of *The American Mercury* was entirely proper. That he should return to the wars with an article for the first issue of *The American Spectator* was equally fitting, but that he should turn up in the dreary wastes of *Scribner's Magazine* with an article which might as well have been written by James Truslow Adams is cause for alarm. His subsequent appearance in an extraordinarily dull number of *The Atlantic Monthly* can only be regarded as symptomatic of something dreadful. One can only view with sympathy the spectacle of an aged gentleman with his beard standing forward aggressively and on his face the annoyed and sudden alertness of a hound suddenly separated from his bone. Something is wrong with Mr. Boyd and it is not a pretty sight to see him, at his time of life, compelled to go to work again. More than that, he is obviously not a pleasant visitor for any editor in his right mind because, assisted by his friends, Mencken and Nathan, he has generated an amazing capacity for ruining magazines. His share in the foundering of *The American Mercury* (hobbling along now under new management) was perhaps slight, but he is said to have done a superb job on *The American Spectator*.

However, I must be fair about it. The fate of *The Spectator* under the Nathan-Boyd management is a matter of dispute. According to the statement issued by George Jean Nathan upon its decease (also now under new management), it was at the top of its success when it died. It was making money so fast, according to M. Nathan, that the editors were weary of counting it and hence anxious to be rid of the burden. In the case of M. Nathan this form of reasoning seemed to have its limitations, for it was

difficult to understand a brain which would object to taking a fortune from his own magazine and prefer to get it from *Vanity Fair* (which died under him, as is the custom), from *Life* and from a weekly syndicated page for *King Features* (Hearst).

The ancient gods are never grateful for pity and I state the facts only for the record. If I feel sorry for men who were once important in the Republic, it is with no intention of reproaching them. Age and flabbiness of mind have not yet become crimes. If the three old gentlemen spring forth now like the false twilight of a summer night, hoping that somebody will accept them as the bright sun of high noon, I am not one to laugh. From the very first they have had a difficult time and their end is hardly less tragic. Mr. Mencken progressed from *The Smart Set* to *The American Mercury* to *Liberty*. Mr. Nathan progressed from *Smart Set* to *American Mercury* to *Judge* to *Vanity Fair* to the Saturday magazine section of *The New York Evening Journal*. Mr. Boyd has progressed scarcely at all because of a constitutional aversion to progress. If he comes forward now to denounce the masses for their presumption in questioning their betters, it is because he knows to a nicety how far a court buffoon may go in his audacity. His intentions are undoubtedly of the best.

The case of George Jean Nathan touches me most deeply of all because the fates have never been kind to him. As the rear-end of the Mencken-Nathan combination, he suffered always from the realization that the fame was going to Mencken. Mencken could be rambunctious and vulgar with success. When Nathan tried it, he merely seemed shrill and second-rate. In many ways he was more brilliant than Mencken, but he never

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