

anything to unlearn like I do.
 not a headstart on me; they're open
 to it we get Granny Whittle's back-
 round as no case history could.

And there are many other illuminating scalpel dissections of the thoughts of the marching workers.

I have a feeling that when, in the future, a history of proletarian literature is written, it will date a certain period with this novel.

Truly, proletarian literature is marching. The momentum of the revolutionary movement drives it on, carries it on, makes it keep step with it. This novel would not

have been accepted five or two years ago. It wouldn't have fitted into the grooves carved out by would-be critics of proletarian literature. These prophets of "what is, is not, cannot be, may not be, literature of the class struggle" may not even accept this novel as coming within their strict rules.

But it was inevitable for this novel to be written. The workers won't have any trouble understanding it. And if they do stumble here and there, they won't mind learning because this is of them and for them.

EMJO BASSHE.

More Light on Mark Twain's Ordeal

MARK TWAIN'S NOTEBOOK, edited by Albert Bigelow Paine. Harper and Brothers. \$4.

IN HIS column in *The Daily Worker*, Mike Gold recently claimed Mark Twain as "one of ours," as a forerunner of the revolutionary movement in American literature. If one remembers the deadly attacks on imperialism, race persecution and militarism in "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," "War Prayer," and "The United States of Lyncherdom," the claim seems not unreasonable, for few writers have denounced capitalism more bitterly than Mark Twain did on one or two occasions.

But Mark Twain, as the *Notebook* shows, was a long way from being revolutionary. He was, indeed, in most respects a typical petty bourgeois of the late nineteenth century. It has been often pointed out that he was frantically eager to make a lot of money. The *Notebook* is full of reference to inventions, patents, investments and securities, and Mr. Paine says that he has eliminated many of the records of money-making schemes because they were so dull. If one can judge from his journals, Clemens was never so deeply interested in any of his books as he was in Paige's typesetter, and it is worth noting that, in listing the advantages of this machine he mentions the fact that it does not belong to a union. He was proud to have dinner with Andrew Carnegie and his gratitude to H. H. Rogers of Standard Oil was so strong that he damned to hell a man who wanted him to publish a book attacking Rogers' company.

Even in his moods of rebellion, Mark Twain was a petty bourgeois. The one political crusade in which he joined was the attack on monarchy: he wrote *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and the *Notebook* is full of eloquent denunciation of kings and nobles. The American petty bourgeois had had reason to denounce monarchy a hundred years earlier, but the issue was not altogether pertinent in the United States of the eighteen-eighties. Moreover, as the *Notebook* reveals, Mark Twain, like any other good petty-bourgeois democrats,

lost much of his anti-aristocratic bias when nobility started patting him on the head. The lack of enthusiasm with which he viewed a demonstration of the Berlin proletariat in 1892 contrasts unpleasantly with the warmth that enters into his description of his meeting with the emperor and, later, his meeting with a collection of princesses.

His other revolt was against organized religion, and there are many sharp and irreverent comments on churches in the *Notebook*. But it must be remembered that he dared publish few of these criticisms during his lifetime. His one strongly anti-religious book, *What Is Man?*, went unpublished for many years and finally appeared anonymously. And *What Is Man?* shows how confused and uninformed his opposition to religion was. To a scientific materialist, it seems not only sophomoric but largely irrelevant to the real issues religion raises. One can only compare it to some of the early attacks of the less-informed bourgeois rationalists of the eighteenth century.

There are two passages in the *Notebook*, both written in the eighties, that make clear just how typical of his class Mark Twain was. "We Americans," one of them reads, "worship the almighty dollar. Well, it is a worthier god than Hereditary Privilege." The other is: "Instead of giving the people decent wages, church and gentry and nobility made them work for them for nothing, pauperized them, then fed them with alms and persuaded themselves that alms-giving was the holiest work of God and the giver sure to go to heaven, whereas one good wage-giver was worth a million of them to the state." Aristocracy was always the villain in Mark Twain's mind and by contrast capitalist enterprise was the hero.

There is nothing very surprising about all this, but it is worth pointing out, not only because it ought to discourage extravagant claims, but also because it has a definite bearing on Mark Twain's literary development. Ever since Van Wyck Brooks published his *Ordeal of Mark Twain*, there has been a savage controversy, reaching its climax in Bernard DeVoto's diatribes against Brooks. Brooks' thesis is that Mark Twain's life

was a tragedy, that he had in him the potentialities of a very great writer and that these potentialities never came to fulfillment.

The evidence for this contention seems to me so overwhelming that I can only regard DeVoto's venomous objections as a defense of the right of an author to be immature. No one denies Mark Twain's genius, least of all Van Wyck Brooks, but Brooks does say that Mark Twain never grew up and the facts support him. There is nothing finer in American literature than a few scattered chapters of *Tom Sawyer*, the first two-thirds of *Huckleberry Finn*, the first half of *Life on the Mississippi*, two or three episodes in *The Gilded Age*, certain passages in *Roughing It*, half-a-dozen short stories and a couple of essays. But what can be said for the Injun Joe episode in *Tom Sawyer*, the rescue of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, the melodrama of *The Gilded Age*, the sentimentality of *Joan of Arc*, the slap-stick of *The Connecticut Yankee*, the low spots of *Innocents Abroad*, the flat stretches of *Following the Equator* or the sophomoric bathos of *What Is Man?* And what can be said for a writer who never wrote a single book that was good from start to finish, that did not demand apologies for a third or a half of its contents? All that can be said is just what Brooks did say: Mark Twain was a genius who never grew up.

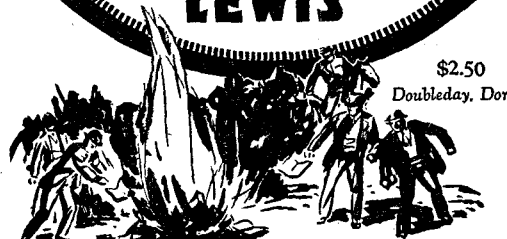
Where Brooks fails is in his explanation, which is idealistic in the bad sense. He does not take into account the effect on Mark Twain of the age in which he lived. And it is on that point that the evidence of the *Notebook* must be taken into account. We must remember that the world in which Samuel Clemens grew up was, to a great extent, actually a democratic world. In the Missouri of his boyhood, on the Mississippi River when he was a pilot and in Nevada and California of the sixties, class distinc-

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tions (except in so far as slavery was concerned) were few and easily overcome. It was only after he had come East, made his trip to the Holy Land, married the daughter of a wealthy man and settled down in Hartford, that he really saw the kind of exploitation that capitalist industrialism had brought about. His first thirty years were spent in a democracy; his last forty-five in a plutocracy. The plutocracy had grown out of the democracy; its seeds were in the ambitions of just such pioneer individualists as Samuel Clemens; but the democracy had existed.

This is significant. Mark Twain developed just as any man in his environment might have been expected to. The national transition from democracy to plutocracy corresponded to his own transition from relative poverty to relative wealth. In his own way he belonged to the gilded age. But he was not happy in it, for, though he approved its values as a man, he could not approve them as a writer. Plutocratic capitalism had nothing to give his imagination; he was not really at home with it; as a writer he could not come to terms with it. That is why, in his most successful books, he turned back to the Mississippi Valley he had known as a boy and young man.

To a certain extent, then, Mike Gold is right: Mark Twain is, if not exactly one of ours, then certainly not one of the enemy's. He belongs in the democratic tradition and to the extent that we are heirs of that tradition we can claim him. His best work, though it is not proletarian, is not incompatible with the proletarian spirit. His failures belong to the bourgeoisie, which could not nourish him, could not help him to grow up, could not give him any but pecuniary values. If he could have continued to live in the near-democracy of the mid-century West or if there had been a militant proletariat, the result might have been different.

The fact that Mark Twain is the most popular of American writers may be interpreted in many ways, but I suspect that Newton Arvin's explanation, presented in a New Republic article last June, is not far from the truth. "He is read," Arvin said, "not because he makes experience more intelligible or enriches the imagination with the possibilities of new experience, but because he cooperates with the desire to play hooky." But Arvin, though correct in saying that Mark Twain has provided his millions of readers with an escape from the complexities of modern industrial civilization, fails to ask one important question: escape to what? The answer is that he leads them not merely into

the personal past of individual boyhood but into the past of the nation, into the era of democracy, when classes were pretty much limited to the decadent old Continent and the effete East and effort and ambition meant something. Ever since Appomattox, the masses of the petty bourgeoisie and the more hopeful sections of the proletariat have been looking backward. They have had their moments of irritation and disillusionment, just

as Mark Twain had, but they find consolation in memories of the good old days of free competition and their most realistic hope has been, as in the muckraking era, to restore it. Only recently has the illusion grown that the future alone can cure the evils of the present. The Americans have had enough of looking back; the heirs of Mark Twain must teach their children to look ahead. GRANVILLE

Canal-Building "Aristocrats"

BELOMOR, An account of the Construction of the New Canal between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea (a collective work by 34 Soviet authors). Harrison Smith and Robert Haas. \$3.

"OUR world, that is, the criminal world, is going to pot. . . . The underworld is going to pot. I won't say as much for other countries, but it looks like this at home, and even if it isn't so just now, it soon will be."

The speaker is Abe Rothenburg, not long since an international thief and confidence man, now a shock-brigader at Belomorstroy. He is addressing a group of recalcitrant "Article 35 men," thieves and cutthroats of whom he himself had been one.

Here in America we've heard a lot lately about the "G-men" and their activities, through screen, radio and feature yarn. We've heard a lot about the "hot seat" and its socially-curative virtues—old Arthur Brisbane fairly glows and itches as he talks of it. Yet the Dutch Schultz headlines keep up. We've learned something, meanwhile, about the successful "underworld" bandit. We know that he plays golf and bridge and polo and may even read *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. In short, so far as social morality is concerned, there is not a hair's line of difference between an Andy Mellon and an Al Capone; one is in beer, the other's in steel and finance, that is all. And if Arthur B. is so excited over the salutary effects of a high voltage, it is because he is thinking of his own and his boss' pelf.

But what, in all this, of the criminal himself, as a potentially useful member of a decent society? Oh, yes, we have our "humane" and "understanding" wardens, our prison reforms, etc. We also have our chain gangs and our Angelo Herndons. And we all know what happened recently when a man from the Big House thought of making

a comeback by way of the baseball diamond. Intelligent penologists have long since moved away from the old Lombroso theory of degeneration. They know that thieves are social. The only thing is, you don't say it too loudly in a society that is in name only. Perhaps as typical an example as any is the old Italian variety of Signor Capone's forbear; and Ignazio Silone has pointed out that this type starts as a social rebel, by "taking justice into his own hands." We have also reread our *Hood* in the light of Marx. Maxim Gorky sums it up, when he says in his epilogue to *Belomor*:

This, of course, is romanticism . . . some believe that it is more profitable to be a thief than to be a lackey; others become "enemies of the people" because bourgeois life is boring. They see the painful antithesis—the dullness of the rich and the dwarfed and limited intelligence of the poor. To critical and active minds the antithesis is painful and obvious and so in some people the natural romanticism of youth is changed into the evil and desperate romanticism or desperation.

In other words, the thing that ails the criminal is the same thing that ails the artist: a romantic individualism, an overgrown ego. Klaus Mann brings this home in his just-published life of Tschaikowsky, speaks of how amazed Tschaikowsky must have been, had anyone attempted to put him into a discussion of a social or political question. The author adds: "The artist (for him) was as isolated from society as the criminal; his isolation merely took a different form. Upon the one the genius as upon the criminal society bestowed fame as a recognition of their perilous and abnormal existence. For the artist was the pariah's brand."

We all know by this time what capitalism has done to the artist and to the criminal. We are likewise aware of what

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