

most surgical finesse. Reality is hard to face and people seek evasions and dream refuges; these, though they act as opiates, are provided. The editing is done for tired people, for readers in their moments of fatigue rather than for their times of strength. The famous "tired business man" is the reader type visualized in the editorial offices; the name is a polite one for the tired mechanic and the tired stenographer. Reading is never considered as an *activity*; the reading public is made to feel that it has a purely passive and receptive function. A vital and creative audience-role is given no possibility of development.

The exploitation of the primary producer of literary culture, the writer, takes different forms. In the first place writing is degraded from the beginning by the fact that it is used as an adjunct to advertising. Writing is off-handedly cut or padded to fit the requirements of the makeup, which in turn is controlled by the advertising. The advertising control is exercised not only in the physical matter of space but through a number of psychological limitations. To maintain large circulations, no interest that can affect circulation must be offended. Literature is thus devitalized to soothe the sensibilities of spinsters, patriots, and busybodies in general. Large advertisers also must not be offended especially by any sort of writing that might question, challenge or weaken capitalist control. Writers for the popular press, therefore, begin their work under conditions not only inhibitory to, but destructive of, good writing. Again the moron-notions of popular taste make for deliberate lowering of standards. Another element is the speedup in writing which works in various ways. "Rationalization," whatever may be said of it in mass production under favorable social conditions, is fatal in what is likely to remain the last type of individual production—art. The successful writer is speeded up by the bonuses of high rates, with the result that talented writers, after they make a hit, write themselves out in a few seasons. Among the "rank and file" of the writing trades the speedup is forced by the opposite factor, starvation rates. In some sections of the pulp-magazine market rates have been reduced to a quarter-of-a-cent a word, which means a ten to sixteen hour day for an unskilled laborer's income. Numbers of pulp writers have been driven by these conditions to team up and introduce a rough sort of division of labor in their work, one doing the love passages, another the settings, and so on.

These conditions make good writing for the popular press impossible. Sometimes, as in the case of Ring Lardner, genius being a hardy thing, good writing can adapt itself to the most unwholesome conditions and survive. But more often the opposite is true; good writers are allured into the million-circulation magazines, or to Hollywood and rapidly degenerate. The fact is so fully and tacitly recognized that when literature is spoken of, or the word writers is used in any honorable sense, it is understood that the

literature and the writers of the shrinking book market are meant. But these serve less than a half of one percent of the population in the United States and this market of the leisured section of the nation supports no more than a handful of its writers, most of whom must take their living in other and, artistically, dangerous ways. To all this we must add the demoralized character of capitalist life as a whole, where civic conscience is dead, where the most consistent ethical principle is, "anything goes if you can get away with it."

Finally, for the purpose of instructive contrast, let us take a look at the one society where the profit motive has been abolished and social motives rule in the production of culture. There is no space here to go into detail; but barring Hearst and emigré reports, the evidence all seems to be that the highest, not the lowest, level is sought in the Soviet Union; and the mass demand for the best, in this socialist society, far exceeds what is supposed to be the mass demand for the worst in capitalist society.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

## The Hunger-Fighters' Next Battle

*WHY KEEP THEM ALIVE?*, by Paul de Kruif, in collaboration with Rhea de Kruif. Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$3.

THIS is the dramatic story of one of America's most renowned and popular—not to say pampered—intellectuals who discovered that for years a corrupt, vicious and altogether inhuman society had been fooling him: even that, for just as long he, with incredible self-satisfaction and pride, had been fooling himself. Paul de Kruif, romantic herald of the great names and honorable achievements of medical science, was challenged by "honest, cantankerous, deep-seeing Ezra Pound" to look that society full in the face, to submerge his complacent ego in the cleansing waters of direct contact with its myriad horrors. He did so: after the first flinching recoil he proceeded also to rip from its putrescent body the shimmering gilded tinsel of pomp and circumstance—and now, in a volume blazing with anger, warm with compassion for needless human suffering, edged with deadly sarcasm—every barb dipped in the caustic solution of exact knowledge: Paul de Kruif takes his revenge.

*Why Keep Them Alive?* might well be described as the medical counterpart for America of Zola's world-famous political document, *J'Accuse!* The tone of the book, and a big reason why it will be read by thousands for whom *Microbe Hunters* and *Seven Iron Men* are just pleasant memories, is set by the following passage. The author has just been describing the remarkable tannic acid cure for third-degree burns as developed by Dr. Edward Davidson of the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit: a remedy so effective that thousands of screaming victims (most of them children, but including large numbers of chemical and metal workers) are completely restored; so simple that it can be applied at home, often with the aid of a brew of strong tea. Appalled by the discovery that hundreds of the sufferers lack tea to brew, or gas to brew it on, de Kruif sets out on a voyage of medical inspection. And he writes:

What the devil was the use of my making an excellent living going on telling about death-fighting discoveries when I now knew that thousands were dying simply because they hadn't the

wherewithal to pay for them? . . . Why all this death in the midst of life-giving science? Why all this gaunt-bellied, red-nosed want in the midst of so-called overproduction?

So, on the initial stimulus provided by Ezra Pound and the Social Credit theories of Major Douglas, de Kruif proceeds to study, at first-hand, the actual life of the American masses—and to compare the monotonous, slow horror of this life, subject to every form of disease, destitution and outright physical agony, with the brilliant promises of health, abundance and security dangled before our eyes by Science. Dangled always just beyond the reach of all but the criminal few for whom science, like human beings, like the whole of nature, is a matter of dollars, dividends and planned destruction. Scouring the country between New York and the industrial centers of Ohio; stopping his car in dozens of obscure towns and villages; pestering scores of physicians, health inspectors, research workers, government officials, welfare and relief authorities; probing, questioning, challenging slick reports and misleading statistics—Paul de Kruif gets at the facts which have made the wonderful work of his "men against death" so barren of human consolation and social value.

This—in barest outline—is what he found:

In Pennsylvania—flatly contradicting the cynical optimism of Dr. Haven Emerson and U.S. Public Health Service executive Dr. Palmer—there are counties in which the mal-nutrition of children nearly doubled in one year, from 1932 to 1933. In "one of the most prosperous small cities" of this State a volunteer health investigation revealed an appalling death-rate among school children from diphtheria, plus an agonizing skin disease, incipient blindness—and an incessant hunger, which many of the teachers attempted to alleviate out of their own wretched salaries: "Of course, they're all hungry," remarked one teacher with a quiet simplicity, "but we can only feed the ones that look hungriest." It is known that by immunizing 60 percent of a community's children with the readily available antitoxin discovered by William Park, epidemics of diphtheria can be prevented. But in the wealthy state of Pennsylvania (residence of the Mellons), in 1933, only 20 out of every

hundred children under six were immunized.

Further afield, in Michigan, exposure to diphtheria, tuberculosis, smallpox and scarlet fever is a constant menace to a working population thousands of whom are on a relief budget of \$1.90 per week for each child of 17 and under. The death-rate has trebled from 1926 to 1933—even as the wages declined and the jobs disappeared. Westward again to Detroit, stronghold of the mass-production and mass-starvation industries, the "people's death-fight"—thanks to the efforts of Drs. Gudakunst, O'Brien and Evans—gained a few victories over tuberculosis and sharply reduced the mortality from diphtheria. But these triumphs have not prevented Detroit from becoming the ninth state in the number of suicides, nor made any inroads upon the colossal problem of industrial diseases, accident hazards and criminal negligence faced by the workers. And, for lack of \$200,000 a year (the hundred and seventy-fifth part of the cost of a battleship) medical science is unable to do its part in abolishing this white plague from the city of Henry Ford.

Read de Kruif's bitter chapter, "Drouth Is a Blessing," to understand the full social horror of a system which literally welcomes a natural calamity as a "way out" of its

intolerable contradictions. Cattle dying, and destroyed by the thousands; farmers and their families denying themselves the milk which must be sold in order to obtain a relief on which they starve anyway; children dying slowly of heart-break (known also as rheumatic fever), wasting away within reach of forbidden food and doubly forbidden science. Read about "Who Owns Our Science" to understand why this intellectual, turned reporter, saw first pink, then carmine, then a deep red; why smug "experts" suggested a trip to Moscow for "this burning Bolshevik wanting-to-tell-all-of-it"; why, at the end of his 18-months' sojourn in a hell that would have beggared the imagination of a Dante, this Dutch-American Hotspur wanted "to tell about these things in the strongest and truest words to as many millions of people as possible; to foment, stir up, to fan more and more mass-anger . . ."

Clearly—as de Kruif himself frankly recognizes—the reaction of a man who for forty years actually knew nothing about the world he lived in—and cared less. Those great titans of whose lives and discoveries he wrote so charmingly—the Pasteurs, Kochs, Warner-Juareggs, Reeds and Noguchis—could rest secure in the knowledge that posterity would presently erect to them the

one monument they could understand and value. The monument of a society in which their science—all science—would function as a dynamic, and life-giving possession of all human beings, from such fragile beings as the Dionne quintuplets (of whom de Kruif gives one of the most brilliant accounts thus far published) to the lustiest worker on duty at the largest blast furnace or rolling mill in the country.

So de Kruif, placid admirer of Saint Francis of Assisi, faintly contemptuous observer of suffering from railroad coach and motor-car, believed. Utterly devoid of clear, well-based economic knowledge, self-consciously ignorant of such plebian things as the class struggle, politically undeveloped—but with a fine capacity for using his own eyes and a sincerity capable of meeting the challenge of reality, he finally faced his world. And he found it a thing of evil, a monstrous, Janus-headed contradiction, one face that of Caliban looking backward into a night of inexpressible despair, pain and brutishness; the other that of Prospero and Ariel combined, radiant with health, overflowing with creative energy . . .

Having seen this; having dived below the iridescent scum of our Dead-Sea civilization and brought up a gruesome, misshapen horror, Paul de Kruif turns left: towards the face of Prospero. And

Now [he writes], I saw what I must do. I must learn how to tell people about the miracle that science plus love can work on children that are so sick, so hopeless, so utterly desolate. I must forget about trying to convince the haves who don't give a damn for the children of the have-nots so long as their own children are husky. I saw the chance now to begin to talk to the growing millions of the have-nots, to the mass of the hungry. They're ignorant, yes. They haven't the tear-gas bombs nor the machine-guns. These are in the hands of the army, the navy, the police, the marines, the militia, who are at the command of the Government, which is in turn in the hands of the abundance-controllers, who amid all of our now possible plenty, have got to keep one thing scarce, only one, only one thing expensive, and that one thing is where-withal. . . . No, the human mass is ignorant. It is unarmed. But it is more and more numerous, and while there may be spurts of prosperity again, yet the numbers of the enslaved, moneyless mass will some day be overwhelming. . . .

More than a generation before U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace hailed the drouth as "a blessing in disguise" (thereby exciting the bitter scorn of de Kruif, who watched how the children died of it), an obscure Russian, in a study of Agriculture, wrote, "It has not become more difficult to produce food; it has become more difficult for the workers to obtain it."

That Russian was Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin. Perhaps, after all, the "expert" who jeered at Paul de Kruif was right. Perhaps he will find the one and only answer to his question, Why Keep Them Alive?—in Moscow, in that Union of Soviet Socialist Republics where "the human mass" is no longer either ignorant or unarmed . . .

HAROLD WARD.

## John Strachey says

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## The Impartial Young Man

INHALE AND EXHALE, by William Saroyan. Random House. \$2.50.

**S**AROYAN is a poet of invalid temperament, pensive, self-communing. His life is a trance in which voiceless objects, penumbral sensations, dreams, emotions in their primitive stirring, simple affections and the caricatures of things ill-seen, come to him in equal incompleteness. He tells about them in terms which range from the gay, supple, simplicity of the folktale ("The Black Tartars"), the poetry of personal apocalypse ("Hymns and Psalms") the ingenious backing and filling of dramatic conversation ("The Barber Whose Uncle Had His Head Bitten by a Tiger"), the ludicrous philosophical pretensions of "Poem, Story, Novel," to the stilted, almost ritual, incoherence of "Resurrection of a Life."

This trance is known to all of us: it is between sleeping and waking. In it the simplest phenomena of life have exaggerated importance. Saroyan knows so little and gives himself so little to think about that his attention has become fixed on bodily functions, like a convalescent; and he is excited by inhaling and exhaling. He attempts to build up a philosophy and integrate himself on it. Language, as well as life, appears to him in its simplest elements and just as he sees life as "inhaling and exhaling," he sees the great river of English, with its complex constructions and usages as a list of opposites and categories, much like those in Roget's *Thesaurus*. He is one of the lovers of "our lady poverty" both in words and life: his is the creed of the minimum vocabulary and of holy ignorance.

Saroyan prides himself on the sanctity of the long and tragic history of his race, which seems to him to make him unique among men and on his literary gift, which seems to lift from his shoulders the need to write seriously. We are all familiar with the state of self-hypnosis when, by long contemplation, a simple word like "was" or "is" becomes perfectly incomprehensible. The mystic feeling, the wonder, is sometimes agreeable and Saroyan too often finds it so. He chooses a word to begin his story with, goes off into a long contemplation of it until he finds a whole philosophy in that verbal atom. By mentioning that he was conceived, he believes that the whole history of the animate world, as well as man's dated history, is included in that act.

Saroyan uses his few pet words constantly, often without meaning, often as if they were drugs to induce his trance. He believes his own advertising; he believes in the word. When he does not use his pet words he uses their opposites, which is another (but to him, very profound) way of using them. The following are his pets and the basis of his "philosophy" and are com-

puted from the first twelve stories in the book (although they occur excessively throughout): "Life" (and associated words used almost interchangeably—living, alive, unalive, not alive), 133 times in the first twelve stories; "death" (associates—dying, dead, not dead, deathless), 122 times; "world," 51 times; "earth," 61 times; "universe," 30 times; "everything," 57 times; "nothing," 32 times; "something," 25 times; "everybody, everyone," 28 times. Associated with the last four and used almost senselessly, simply for the sake of general diffusion, are "anything, anywhere, anybody, somewhere, somehow, somebody."

Another device is his constant and comic use of opposites. His repetition and wilful inarticulateness has a subtler purpose: it is for incantation and as a substitute for thinking. Saroyan's is a lazy mind; he slowly churns himself up to an idea. Yet, in many of the stories, after the most boring, hair-splitting and harping on some two or three of his theme-words we get a meteor of beauty—"I walked as a thing still unformed and yet aware of its ultimate form, death and dispersal, sudden pebbling of flesh on alien shores, sudden leafage of tree limbs, sudden flashing of flowers, sudden rage in the bowels of the earth. . . ." These moments of beauty concern primitive things, girls, flowering trees, early morning, his beloved brother; they show the folk-poet in Saroyan. They are the things that have doubtless appealed to his many readers, a welcome purity in love and joy in nature after all the fretful productions of metropolitan life. Thus, when Saroyan's "earth and universe" mood strikes, by chance, as it were involuntarily, a suitable theme, he sudden excels himself and all the wretched models he has been trifling with. But the same man can write, "It was his place and he was the guy and he wanted the city to be the way it was if it was that way. . . ." "The dark sea is never and forever. Sleep. It is everything and nothing and nowhere. It is the music we never hear. It is the heart. The lung. The liver. The eye. The brain."

Saroyan gets paid for this sort of thing. When he is half-asleep he can still sing, he can hum like little boys, buzz like bubbling babies, croon like Bing Crosby. It suits those who pay the piper, too, that Saroyan, man of talent, should be completely fuddled about what a story is and what art is and that he should devote his poetic gifts to piffing about little dogs and automobile fenders formed like flowers. Thus a happy, morganatic marriage is arranged. Saroyan tells a pregnant girl who is thrown out of her room, "O, do not be afraid, do not be ashamed, the Queen of England pregnant is no more than you and maybe something less, so do not be afraid." All men are brothers, but brothers, not through understanding or for any historic reason, but because they "inhale and

exhale." They should be happy in their inhaling and exhaling brotherhood; they should eat bread and be satisfied with inhaling and exhaling. But our Pied Piper reads the headlines: "My heart blackens with the cold of knowing," he cannot follow his creed of content in poverty, content in misery, content in ignorance, because he knows that men are going to fight and why? It's very simple. "The wheatfields of America and the wheatfields of Russia. War of the wheatfields so the unborn may eat bread. Diplomacy, science, agriculture, delirium: for bread, Lord." Thus the simple-hearted wiseacre reduces all problems to his common denominators. They are fools who do not stick to their tranquility. . . . "I shall have no pity for the dead. . . . Let them die. I don't care what impelled each one of them to accept the war. . . . They were alive. They are dead. Well, let me tell you something. If they are dead from a war, they were never alive. . . ."

This Pied Piper of the common denominator went abroad. He saw, of course, something and nothing. "London and nothing. Paris and nowhere. Vienna and nothing. Moscow. The same. Dialectical materialism. Class consciousness. Revolution. Comrades. Baloney. Nothing, nowhere." Although Russia is somewhere and nowhere and presumably not in that second geographical area which is not geography but "breathing," Saroyan was there and he saw there a "little dog," also "a small, greasy-looking person who began immediately to speak in American . . . a louse if ever there was one and he talked pompously. He was a true Communist. America was lousy. American workers were getting screwed left and right . . . himself as a good example of the triumph of ideology over foul matter." He also saw a motorcar in which he presumes were three Russian officials and an actress and he saw three Jewish American ladies who were in ecstasies over tractors.

But he has some rollicking stories in which

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