

Our Readers' Forum

More on Macfadden

It is time to let up a little on William R. Hearst and direct some of our fire toward another quarter. I refer to another publisher, that glorifier of the muscle-bound physique, Bernarr Macfadden, whose editorial in the May 16 issue of his *Liberty* definitely brands him as our leading saber rattler and deliberate fact distorter.

Blatant Bernarr smears two pages of his publication with the wildest, unqualified and inflammatory statements. He has been in California recently, he writes. There he learned, from an unnamed source, that there are 250,000 armed Japanese reservists in the state, waiting the word to spring upon the defenseless natives. He calls upon the government to build a vast air fleet for protecting the Pacific coastline against a Japanese invasion. A military force of 500,000 men is recommended to guard against this attack.

There is an air of finality in Macfadden's statements regarding the Yellow Peril but he neglects to offer the slightest vestige of proof. He berates the "fools" who have brought about a reduction of munitions production and screams that these same "fools" shall be forced to take their places in the front line to repel the inevitable attack. . . .

Ordinarily Blatant Bernarr's editorial ravings are either ignored or passed off with a derisive chuckle. But in this effort, it would seem, he has gone too far.

This is something which cannot be laughed off. Such a deliberate and unqualified attack upon a friendly nation from the editorial pen of an American publisher is worthy of the condemnation of every sane-minded citizen. (Incidentally, *Liberty* is carrying a serial entitled "Without Warning" in which, as the title implies, Japan is depicted as making an unheralded and unprovoked attack upon the United States.) If Mr. Macfadden is using his editorial page as a medium of publicity for this serial it would appear that he has overstepped the limits of legitimate publicity. The serial contains nothing but militaristic propaganda, unmitigated bunk.

HAL EVANS.

Topeka, Kansas.

Hearst-Macfadden Tie-up

Your article on Bernarr Macfadden interested me particularly, but I was surprised to note that it made no mention whatever of the Macfadden financial tie-up with Hearst. This is considered common knowledge in many circles. It seems to me that a long article such as Stuart's should have said something about this matter.

ROGER WILKINSON.

While I have all along suspected the tie-up that Mr. Wilkinson refers to, I was unable to find any conclusive evidence: A day or so after my article appeared in *THE NEW MASSES* I found it in Lundberg's remarkable history of Hearst. Hearst very decidedly and indisputably has a considerable financial interest in Macfadden's publications. Birds of a feather, etc.

JOHN STUART.

"The Police Attacked Us"

I am writing this letter in the hope that *THE NEW MASSES* will publicize one true fact concerning the May 11 attack on the seamen by the police of the City of New York.

As a seaman, having read the press accounts, I wish to bring this fact to light, that is, the final attack made by the police on the pickets. When the Emergency Squad arrived, they did not stop to view the situation but proceeded to discharge tear gas

and to use as violent a method as has ever been used to disperse a peaceful picket in the City of New York.

The Committee of Citizens, which was formed in the City of New York to aid the striking seamen, has done wonderful work in supplying food and clothing for the seamen. They have also planned a benefit theatrical performance to be held at the Majestic Theater, 44th Street, West of Broadway, on Sunday night, June 7, at 8:00 p.m. The proceeds of this performance will go toward aiding the striking seamen in their demands on government and shipowners alike for adequate safety measures for passengers and crew.

New York City.

JOSEPH BYRON.

U. of P. Rejects N. M.

Thank you for your recent note informing us that someone has presented a year's subscription to *THE NEW MASSES* in the name of this library. [University of Pennsylvania.]

Our building is very badly overcrowded, and the space available for current numbers of periodicals is particularly inadequate. On this account we are under the necessity of restricting very closely the number of periodicals kept on file, and the necessity of declining many gift subscriptions which are offered. For these reasons I would suggest that if it is possible for you to transfer the gift subscription to some other library it will be advantageous to all concerned.

C. SEYMOUR THOMPSON.

—But Accepts Time

Thank you for sending me a copy of the note which you received from the University of Pennsylvania librarian in answer to my gift of a *NEW MASSES* subscription. I wish you would publish the University's answer in your columns, since I think your readers would be interested in learning the status of economic freedom at Franklin's University.

I am an alumna of the University, and I know that when it was a question of getting a subscription for *Time* magazine not long ago, there was no issue about space, but only one about not being able to afford the money for the subscription. As soon as some one volunteered to put up the money for the subscription for *Time*, the University gladly accepted.

I am sending a copy of the University's letter to *The Philadelphia Record* and *The Pennsylvanian*.

I also think it is an interesting commentary on our present set-up that you are able to send *THE NEW MASSES* to a political prisoner but not to a University undergraduate.

JEAN ROISMAN.

"Blast and Farewell"

Recently *The Washington (D. C.) Post* had occasion to pat itself on the back because its editor, Felix Morley, received a Pulitzer Award. The same was true for the local Scripps-Howard paper, *The Washington News*. However, the situation behind the scenes was far from laudatory.

Karl Schriftgiesser, a staff writer and columnist of *The Washington Post*, had written a review of Lundberg's *Imperial Hearst*. Perhaps without any intention of predicting the future, Schriftgiesser entitled his review "Blast and Farewell." The best available information places Schriftgiesser on a farm in the New England hinterland, no longer a member of *The Washington Post* staff. All of the rumors agree that he was called on the mat because of his caustic review. Obviously, Schriftgiesser was told to pull his literary punches and spend his time writing about the cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin or how charming and cool the streets of the

Capital are with the new leaves out. Rather than submit to censorship of his columns and reviews . . . Schriftgiesser resigned. Washington has lost one of its most capable and valiant fighters against war and fascism. . . . The free artist and writer can only find refuge on the Left.

Washington, D. C.

A COLLEAGUE.

Wanted: A Writers' Bureau

Schneider's illuminating article, "Mass Writers Wanted," ought to serve middle-class and embryonic writers as a primer in the first prerequisite of revolutionary writing, namely, the task of becoming an integrated personality.

There is one thing, however, which he does not indicate. I refer to the interest of accepted proletarian writers which does not manifest itself in the nature of an encouraging attitude toward those who stand with definite contributions at the barred doors of the literary revolutionary movement. During the past few months, I have noticed through personal experience, how some proletarian writers, who have carved for themselves a niche in the American literary scene, react with inartistic indifference to literary aspirants who do have mass-appeal contributions to make. Some people have argued against my assertions that an honest proletarian artist is free from the residues of bourgeois attitudes.

How much of this is true or not is beside the point. What I am interested in primarily is the necessity of establishing some such thing as a guidance bureau to which writers can come for helpful advice and understanding. Revolutionary Marxism is not only a *Weltanschauung*. It is more than that. It is a practical activity which does not exclude ethical duty from the wide field of literary endeavor.

The unknown proletarian writer should not be compelled to seek the advice of or appeal to the generosity of bourgeois critics and authors. He should be given every opportunity even if he be legion, by those who constitute the front ranks of the revolutionary movement. The history of the Soviet Union's achievement has demonstrated how vitally important the pen is to the hammer and the sickle.

You speak of pamphlet publication, and a publishing house soon to be launched as every writer's opportunity. To inform a stranger that Yonkers is north of Manhattan is not enough. How to get there without wasteful rambling and blundering: that is the point.

BERTRAND E. POLLANS.

"33 Out of 67"

I have read Isidor Schneider's articles on writing and writers with great interest—splendid articles! And in the present issue of the magazine, I notice what Dee Brown has to say.

It might interest Miss Brown to know that of the sixty-seven stories published in *Manuscript* during 1935, thirty-three were by new writers who made their first appearance in our pages. She refers, of course, to the left-wing magazines—but there are all degrees of Left among magazines these days, and though our magazine is not known as "radical," yet the majority of the stories in our pages are far Left of the "middle-ground," and many of them are as radical as can be found in any other publication today.

What we mean to say is: we welcome new left-wing writers with open arms! Why not shoot a few of those stories our way?

Incidentally, *NEW MASSES* is the most "alive" magazine that comes to me.

JOHN ROOD.

REVIEW AND COMMENT

A. E. Housman: An Appreciation

A. E. HOUSMAN died May first. He was seventy-seven, a professor of Latin at Cambridge, one of the last Victorians, a fine poet.

Beyond an occasional comment in the decent tradition of liberal England—e.g., "Murder is murder no longer if perpetrated by white men on black," there is nothing in the record of his life or work to show that he was concerned with the class struggle: he made his private revolution and effected a separate peace with his own time. Moreover, there is little reason to believe that a classless society would or could have made a very different use of him. The kind of fighting there was in his own heart required his assignment, on the cultural front, to some difficult and special duty; he could assume, in the preservation of the culture of the past, obligations beyond the capacity of less qualified men. And in the creation of culture his function would have been, under any system, quietist: that beautiful poise and balance, that perfect serenity in tension, serve to fix and to suspend, rather than to urge or promulgate, things that are valuable. Housman's poetry conveys a pleasure of rest, not a pleasure of motion.

If it is possible, in reading this poetry, to perform an act of escape, to jump the life to come, and discover in *A Shropshire Lad* the existence of a post-revolutionary man who has no hunger save that of the heart, nevertheless an indifferent neglect or a sectarian dismissal of Housman is a greater peril. From his art and conduct we can derive more than inspiration for academic homage, we can take practical and profitable instruction.

To begin with, there is the less familiar aspect of Housman's existence, the way in which he made a living. He was a Latin teacher: he edited the works of Lucan, Juvenal and Manilius, and contributed frequent articles to classical periodicals. Housman devoted to an interpretation of the classics a literally terrific vitality. He scorned no detail of the exhaustive and fatiguing labors of routine, and he spared no scorn for the ineptitudes of his inferiors. Marx argued that criticism should be ruthless; and in the application of this canon to classical criticism, Housman can truly be called Marxian. "The task of editing the classics," he wrote, "is continuously attempted by scholars who have neither enough intellect nor enough literature." Likewise, "Why should a classical scholar care what he says, so long as everyone knows that his heart is in the right place? In no single line of human activity except our own—not in politics, not in religion, not in the advertisement of patent medicines—would a man venture to stand forward and utter words so evi-

dently irreconcilable with reason, with reality, and with his own behavior." Of a particular scholar, he remarked, "Mr. M's readiness to explain is considerably greater than his faculty for explaining," and of the tendencies of an entire school of criticism, he observed, "The unintelligent forfeit their claim to compassion when they begin to indulge in self-complacent airs, and to call themselves sane critics, meaning that they are mechanics." This gall and acid with which he rebuked, in the field of scholarship, the same ethical laxity and shoddiness that were pervading the areas of commerce and art, this unprofessional interference with the camaraderie of log-rolling cliques and coteries did not endear him to his contemporaries. There are signs, in the last book he edited, that their attitude was getting under his skin, and that he was beginning to feel badly treated, but on the whole he maintained himself with austere integrity. "If applause were what I wanted, applause I would have; for I know the way, and it is easy."

While we are mentioning Housman's prose, we might call attention to his homely little essay, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, interesting not so much for what it says, but for what Housman feels he might have said about a technical aspect of their craft in which revolutionary poets need to become far more competent, that is to say, the art of prosody.

The artifice of versification . . . has underlying it a set of facts which are unknown to most of those who practise it; and their success, when they succeed, is owing to instinctive tact and a natural goodness of ear. This latent base, comprising natural laws by which all versification is conditioned, and the secret springs of the pleasure which good versification can give, is little explored by critics: a few pages of Coventry Patmore and a few of Frederic Myers contain all, so far as I know, or all of value, which has been written on such matters; and to these pages I could add a few more. I mean such matters as these: the existence in some metres, not in others, of an inherent alternation of stresses, stronger and weaker; the presence in verse of silent and invisible feet, like rests in music; the reason why some lines of different length will combine harmoniously while others can only be so combined by great skill or good luck; why, while blank verse can be written in lines of ten or six syllables, a series of octosyllables ceases to be verse if they are not rhymed; . . . the necessary limit to inversion of stress, which Milton understood and Bridges overstepped; why, of two pairs of rhymes, equally correct and both consisting of the same vowels and consonants, one

is richer to the mental ear and the other poorer; the office of alliteration in verse, and how its definition must be narrowed if it is to be something which can perform that office and not fail of its effect or actually defeat its purpose.

Something of these matters can be learned from a resolute study of Housman's own verse; meanwhile we may hope that a full and explicit treatment of them will be found among his papers and given publication.

The simplicity of Housman's poetry compels more than casual admiration. This is not the artless address of an untutored mind, but highly studied and sophisticated utterance. The pure simplicity of expression derives from a subtle complexity of experience; erudition, transcending itself, is put to its noblest use. Such a poem as "March," with such lines as these

The boys are up the woods with day
To fetch the daffodils away,
And home at noonday from the hills
They bring no dearth of daffodils.

could hardly have been written by a poet who was not steeped in the atmosphere of Latin verse, keenly susceptible to its interplay of balance and antithesis, yet with what energy, what devotion, what fidelity, the pilgrim to Rome and London remembers Shropshire. There is neither the snobbishness of ostentation, nor the snobbishness of condescension.

And friends abroad must bear in mind
Friends they leave at home behind.

Well: if that can be done for the peasant and yeoman, it can be done for the worker;



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**What About
SHOSTAKOVICH?**
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