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achieves in this novel. His dialogue is excellent. His account of a day at the track with Moe Karty and Arthur is one of the best racing reports in contemporary fiction.

JERRE MANGIONE.

Brief Review

FORAYS AND REBUTTALS, by Bernard De Voto. Little, Brown, and Company. \$3.

Bernard De Voto, editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and occupant of *Harper's Easy Chair*, is a tough-minded critic: lashing out furiously at Big Business, at reformers, at sentimentalists, social and literary theorists, politicians, revolutionists, Babbitts, and the young intellectuals, he manages to refute almost every interpreter of American life and literature. Since so many of these interpretations have been merely pedantic researches, or sheer apologetics, or personal fulfillments, we should be grateful to De Voto for trying to salvage the face of America from beauticians like George Seldes and dyspeptic moralists like Paul Elmer More. As against such crusaders as Harold Stearns who have taken to the covered wagon in search of the *real* America west of the Alleghenies, one wonders whether De Voto's cry that there is no *real* America, there is only a series of events and a mass of individuals, as not almost preferable.

Answering Edmund Wilson, who complained that De Voto had no system, no program, he boasted of his lack of programs and defined himself as an empiricist. But in his straining toward "pure" empiricism, De Voto has converted what is at best a method of testing ideas into a world-philosophy. As an advocate of progress toward a better world—"slow" progress, because any quickening of the tempo would interfere with natural processes—he rests his faith in the ultimate triumph of man's inner nobility. Similarly, in opposing any critical theory of the frontier or of Mark Twain as a speculative luxury, De Voto is committed to a view of the world as a vast carnival of facts and events which can be indexed or dramatized but never completely or satisfactorily explained. This is not to deny his critical intelligence in specific essays; many of his attacks on the extremes of the literary Left as well as the Right are in the interests of consistency and sanity; but De Voto is essentially a debunker. And professional debunking is a self-consuming activity which leads to a cynical denial of all values and all hope of knowing the truth. Will the sun rise tomorrow?—surely Mr. De Voto knows that it is impossible to prove absolutely that it will. W. P.



Recently Recommended Books

Spain in Arms, 1937, by Anna Louise Strong. \$1; paper 25c.

Bread and Wine, by Ignazio Silone. Harper. \$2.50.

Away From It All, by Cedric Belfrage. Simon & Schuster. \$3.

The Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Center: A Verbatim Report, published by the People's Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R. Bookniga. \$1.

Tsushima, by A. Novikoff Priboy. Knopf. \$3.50.

Pie in the Sky, by Arthur Calder-Marshall. Scribner's. \$2.50.

Angels in Undress, by Mark Benney. Random House. \$2.50.

From Bryan to Stalin, by William Z. Foster. International. \$2.50.

Zero Hour, by Richard Freund. Oxford. \$1.25.

You Must Break Out Sometimes and Other Stories, by T. O. Beachcroft. Harper. \$2.

Forward from Liberalism, by Stephen Spender. Random House. \$2.

Let Me Live, by Angelo Herndon. Random House. March Book Union Selection. \$2.50.

The Old Bunch, by Meyer Levin. Viking. \$2.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

A revolutionary comedy on Broadway—What's wrong with phonograph records—Two art shows

SPRING came up like thunder along Broadway this week with the appearance of Victor Wolfson's grand comedy *Excursion*. And, despite the fact that it was loudly echoed by the reviewers of the capitalist press, the thunder was definitely on the left. This play is a joyous, tingling, revolutionary escapade. If you're within traveling distance of Times Square, get your tickets now, for it looks like a smash hit.

The story, briefly, is of the scheduled last voyage of a Coney Island excursion steamer due for the scrap heap because she no longer earns her keep. Captain Obediah Rich, who has sailed her to and fro through the Narrows for thirty years, is doubly woebegone because he realizes that he has been cheating his passengers for more than a generation—ferrying them away mornings to the land of heart's desire, and then returning them evenings to the squalor and cruelty of their workaday lives. He confides his woe to his brother Jonathan, a rash old salt who has come along for the farewell voyage, and the latter proposes the hair-raising expedient of sailing away with the boat-load to a Carib isle where life is fine and free and hard by the seacoast of Utopia. Captain Obediah hesitates, then takes the bait. The passengers, after some discussion backward and forward, by backward and forward elements, ratify the decision, and the S.S. *Happiness* noses happily out past the Hook. Huh, you say; pretty escapist stuff. Or is it just symbolic? Well, it isn't exactly either; the story doesn't end quite there. Playwright Wolfson lets capitalist nature take her course, and she takes it just as she would if such a hare-brained effort were actually attempted. I'm not going to tell you how, but you should be able to guess if you're properly grounded in the Marxist conception of the relation of the state to property. And this is what drives home the political lesson of the play.

Most of the action takes place among the passengers on deck, and they are such an assortment as you'd expect to find on a Coney Island boat, full of the still-born dreams, win-someness, and resolutely held aspirations of the plain folk of our time. There is a whole deck-load of them, yet most of them stand out as fully developed and memorable characters. There are so many excellent performances by the acting company that mention of a few would be strictly invidious. Director Worthington Miner's handling of pace and ensemble seems to outshine the best of his recent work, and designer G. E. Calthrop has done tricks with the settings which brought spontaneous applause for their heightening of realistic effect. The producer is John C. Wilson, who was associated with Noel Coward in the production of *Tonight at 8:30*, and his presentation of this play adds an eagle's feather to a cap previously fledged with peacock.

Ward Morehouse, who for years has been theatrical reporter for the New York *Sun*, has turned his hand to the writing of a play of his own, *Miss Quis*, with by no means negligible results. It is the story of the efforts of a housemaid (Peggy Wood) in a small southern community, who is left a fortune by an employer, to wipe out the welter of corruption and stupidity into which the town of Fancy Gap has fallen. Having been housemaid-about-town, she knows the unsavory doings of practically everybody, as well as the chinks in their armor, and she starts out bravely, with the aid of the local gambler (James Rennie), to put things to rights. Into this *Main Streetish* milieu a murder trial enters to carry on somehow ineptly the tradition of theatrics, and in broad outline the play continues to the traditional happy ending with the gambler and Miss Liz Quis slated to live happily ever after. But apart from this theatric banality, Mr. Morehouse has probed sharply into small-town social and economic relations, and there is much in the play that has the savor both of authentic Americana and sound characterization. The material is basically worth while, and you get the feeling that around this general plot the author could build a solid novel. As it is, the relative overplaying of plot tricks and underplaying of character development and social scene lend a regrettably artificial tone to material that is essentially authentic. Miss Wood and Mr. Rennie, however, bring enough vitality to the goings-on to make it worth your while.

Hitch Your Wagon, which is about a famous actor and his engagement to the daughter of a designing mama, succeeds in being funny for most of its length, and in its incidental material, in being real and human as well. But it rather loses headway as it proceeds, which is not exactly what the doctor ordered. At the same time, playwright Bernard Schoenfeld has obviously been around,

and has a sharp eye for the foibles of great actors and of bourgeois domestic relations, and a keen ear for the flow of human speech, whether it be of professional masters of ceremonies or of West End Avenue furriers. The results are frequently delightful, especially when entrusted to such competent performers as George Curzon, Dennie Moore, and Joseph Greenwald.

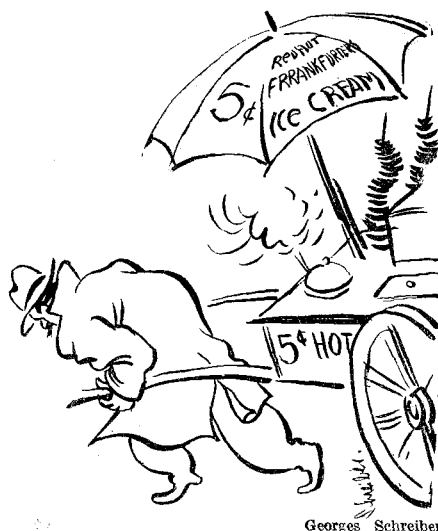
Good news comes from the direction of *Marching Song*, which is going ahead with a new lease on life as a result of having been taken over on a coöperative basis by the acting company. Actors' Equity Association granted the request of the company and the Theatre Union for this special dispensation, being convinced that this was a genuine coöperative effort, and not some producer's dodge to avoid Equity pay scales. The company has vigorously attacked the problem of keeping the show going, and, since this is the first large-scale coöperative enterprise of its kind, it is expected that extra support will be forthcoming from those organizations that would like to see a coöperative enterprise succeed. This reappearance of *Marching Song* as theatrical news provides an opening for one comment that the play deserved and which was more or less lost in the original discussions that surrounded it because it was about a sit-down strike in auto. This concerns the humor in the play. It's there and it crackles, and when it isn't crackling, it's ranging generously in such matters as the lines of Woodrow Wilson Rosenbloom, perhaps the most effective character in the play.

ALEXANDER TAYLOR.

PHONOGRAPH MUSIC

THE surest sign that an unhealthy boom is budding is the sprouting of a sizable group of new recording concerns. In the popular fields, the labels Master and Variety were introduced on April 1 by Irving Mills, the Broadway song publisher and manager whose activities have occasionally been commented upon in this column. In serious music one may find the Decca Odeon and Parlophone series, Musicraft, Friends of Recorded Music, and several semi-private ventures, as well as the return of the Brunswick gold label repressings of German and French Polydor.

There have been many requests for information about the working conditions in record factories in this country. It would not be within the province of this column to comment upon them were it not for the fact that the conditions are directly reflected in the quality of the finished record. So many criticisms have been made by record reviewers about the surfaces of certain records, the residue that is allowed to remain in the grooves of lami-



Georges Schreiber