

# READERS' FORUM

*A letter on Spain from the author of "Stay Out of My Life"—And a message to our readers*

● For a good many years I have gone each year to Spain and spent there the greater part of my too-short holiday. Usually I go in the early fall, when the vintage is on, and the great wheat threshings of Old Castile are almost over, and everywhere in the South bare trees and sides of houses are hung with thick fringes of long yellow ears of corn. Last year I did not make my usual visit because of the revolution, but last year and every year before that I have subscribed to a Spanish magazine to bring me a regular reminder of the country I hold in dear affection. . . .

The *Mundo Grafico* is edited and published in Madrid, it is a much-illustrated news-sheet printed in brown and green rotogravure with large illustrations, mostly from photographs, and it looks rather like one of our Sunday picture supplements with smaller page and more text. It reports sensational crimes, preferring those of a sentimental slant; it has a page or two of bull-fighting, pages of other sports, football, cycling, tennis, swimming, boxing; there is a page of women's fashions; the arts, the theater, the films, society are all represented.

When the revolution began last July, there was a sudden delay in the arrival of my *Mundo Grafico*. But presently it began again, with pictures of young men drilling and pretty girls with collection boxes and Red Cross caps, and volunteers with raised hands of loyalty to the government, and speakers rousing the crowds—all that feverish, uncoordinated enthusiasm which I could recall so well in America in 1917. The fiction dropped out. The advertising lessened. The sports pages grew more and more scant, the theater and the films and women's fashions went too, except when now and then something of the sort was put in palpably to fill a desperate last-minute gap. But the *Mundo Grafico* carried on.

After October there was another long lapse, and when at last the magazine came through again, it was lean indeed. Practically no advertising. Pictures of men on duty, of the child victims of air raids, of weary files of refugees, of death and wanton destruction filled it now, and the printing was often very, very bad. I waited for it each week with fear that I would never see it again. It had become for me a symbol of Spanish courage and proud indifference to death. . . .

All during the siege of Madrid the *Mundo Grafico* has arrived, still edited and printed and mailed from Madrid! It is very lean now, but its spirit is unimpaired. A few weeks ago it carried a symposium on the future of Spain after the war, street interviews with men and women passing the office by chance. Only one old woman was pessimistic; she said, "I have seen civil war before; Spain will be sad and poor for a long time." But the young Spaniards, optimists still, all said: "Spain will be better, there will be more understanding, more kindness, more justice!"

In another, very recent *Mundo Grafico* there is an account of the little street businesses of Madrid, for many shops have closed and peddling has therefore increased. One of the most flourishing businesses is the selling of *bocadillas*, generally speaking, a sandwich, a snack. It seems that the pre-war *bocadillas* made with eggs or anchovies or ham have vanished, but the *Mundo Grafico* gayly reports that the smart, resourceful Madrileños have found a way to make egg sandwiches without eggs, and ham sandwiches without ham, but it cautions that you must not ask what is in your *bocadilla*. As a final gourmet touch it affirms that the *bocadilla* of horse meat is undoubtedly the best!

There is something about these thin little not-to-be-downed *Mundo Graficos* which brings me new hope. It cannot be much fun to get out a magazine in a

city which is daily bombarded by artillery and airplanes, a city with scant light and power, a city rationed on horse meat, an anxious, nervous, battered, depleted city. But the *Mundo Grafico* comes along every week, and so long as it reaches me I know that Franco, the would-be dictator, Franco the butcher,

as his own men call him, has not achieved his bloody and oppressive ends. More, it gives me confidence that he can never achieve them. Viva, Viva, el *Mundo Grafico* de Madrid! More power to your pen and your presses!

SOPHIE KERR.

## An Open Letter to Our Readers

YOU will feel at once that this direct address to you in the columns of the NEW MASSES is a rather unusual procedure. You will be right about that; it is. And the reason we do it is that we have embarked upon a venture which is itself unusual for the NEW MASSES.

Perhaps you have sensed something in the air recently which will be a clue to what it's all about. Changes are taking place. Heywood Broun's column in last week's *Nation* gave food for thought on the question of progressive political journalism. The appearance of Harold J. Laski in our pages for the first time two weeks ago was another straw in the wind. The article by Peter Freuchen, internationally known explorer, which we published last week, was another. The very fact that events forced us to publish an enlarged forty-page issue last week was yet another. Next week we will publish another forty-page issue in order to do justice to the thunderous march of history. In that issue we will publish for the first time an article by Heinrich Mann, internationally known novelist, brother of Thomas Mann. Heinrich Mann, along with Willi Munzenberg, will write on the people's front in Germany (as part of our international symposium on the people's front), and will tell the story behind the recent news of the growing anti-Hitler movement inside and outside of Naziland. We have received from correspondent James Hawthorne an article about the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in Spain which we will publish next week. There will be several other articles on various historical and legal aspects of the sit-down strikes in America—and so another forty-page issue is called for if you are to be kept properly abreast of the times. But eight extra pages costs \$300 more per issue.

And so we of the NEW MASSES have decided to launch a public drive for a fund of \$15,000, which will enable us to finance the publication of a bigger, improved NEW MASSES until the improvement in the magazine raises circulation totals (which is bound to happen) to the point where the extra expense is met by increased circulation and advertising. You have a share in the responsibility for making this venture a success, just as you have a share in the fruits of that success. When the NEW MASSES started as a weekly three years ago, support poured in because it seemed a heroic effort at that time for the revolutionary movement to put a weekly magazine into the field. It was a heroic effort—we have never had big-money "angels" to foot our bills (and, incidentally, to bring pressure to soften our editorial policy). Now that the NEW MASSES has appeared as a weekly for three years, many readers take us for granted. But it has been a heroic task all along. Many are the weeks in which the staff has got only half pay, and sometimes none at all; too many are the times when paper and printing bills seemed to threaten the continuance of publication. Those weeks the staff went hungry. It is still a heroic task to issue this magazine, and with forty pages! . . .

We are not here appealing to you for funds (although we won't refuse any cheques the postman brings); we are asking you to participate in the drive by arranging parties, lectures, etc., for the benefit of the NEW MASSES. We are asking you to publicize among organizations and individuals the fact that we are selling life-time subscriptions for \$100; ten-year subscriptions for \$25. Members of the editorial staff will be glad to appear at parties and meetings to explain the plans for bettering the magazine. Our business department will be glad to help you make arrangements for such affairs. Branch 615 of the International Workers' Order, at Brighton Beach, New York, has already started the ball rolling by having one of the editors speak at a meeting which brought us thirty-two subscriptions and half the box-office receipts. Several individuals have planned parties at their homes in line with the drive. Who's next? Write or phone our business department about it. And watch Between Ourselves each week hereafter for news of the drive. Remember: whatever other magazines may do, the NEW MASSES must grow in size and influence! And you must help!

JOSEPH FREEMAN, Editor.

GEORGE WILLNER, Business Manager.

# REVIEW AND COMMENT

*Revaluing Ford Madox Ford—Poems and war preparations—Virginia Woolf, Diego Rivera, and Valentine Kataev*

**N**EARLY ten years ago, I read Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, and was so impressed with its virtuosity that I went through a good many of the sixty-odd books he had published up to that time, and a little later wrote an article called "Ford Madox Ford—A Neglected Contemporary." It did seem to me extraordinary that so little attention had been paid to the author of *The Good Soldier* and the Christopher Tietjens tetralogy, who had also been Joseph Conrad's collaborator and the editor of the impressive *English Review*.

Rereading my article, I am relieved to find that I did not commit myself to anything silly. Indeed, most of what I said in 1930 I could endorse today. But if I were writing the article now, which would scarcely seem worth doing, I confess, my emphasis would be a little different. I do think that Ford began his career with unusual talents, and I would argue that he might have become a first-rate novelist. But I doubt, however, if he has been underestimated. Whatever his potentialities, he has written an unforgivable number of trivial books. The war tetralogy, though it has some memorable scenes—the Duchemin breakfast still sticks in my mind—is, from volume to volume, increasingly diffuse. And as for *The Good Soldier*, it is, as I wrote in 1930, "remarkable for its sustained inventiveness and its sound, unfaltering progress," but I fear I must recant my assertion that it is "not merely a *tour de force*."

The explanation of my recalling an article published some years ago in an obscure periodical—*The Bookman*, to be exact—is, I suppose, the natural desire of a writer to keep his record as orderly and coherent as possible. But there is some justification for my making this review a kind of appendix to that article. The three books by Mr. Ford that recent months have brought us—*Collected Poems* was published in the fall—are all reworkings of material that has previously been used in one or another of his publications, now perhaps eighty in number. One is, of course, frankly a collection. The second combines in a familiar pattern some new experiences with many old ideas. The third, as we shall see, contains scarcely anything that has not appeared in earlier books. This habit of repetition, which Mr. Ford developed early, forces the reviewer to refer his latest books\* to their predecessors, and thus invites speculation upon his entire career.

*Great Trade Route* is a travel book, and is preceded not only by several books on England and France, but also by at least two on the United States. It differs from these prede-

cessors by being even more loosely organized and by being more political in its emphasis. Mr. Ford pretends that civilization has always followed the fortieth parallel, and he describes a trip to New York and thence into the South. The method is associative, and the author rambles widely in space and time, slipping from anecdote to anecdote and from impression to impression. Therefore, although it is based upon a trip to the United States that has taken place since he wrote *New York Is Not America*, the volume introduces some of the material of that book and of other books as well. The method of presentation, incidentally, makes it difficult to read, and classes it with the not inconsiderable number of dull books that Mr. Ford has written.

If *Great Trade Route* is worth reading at all, it is because of the political views it expresses. These, too, have been previously stated, or at least adumbrated; but Mr. Ford, like everyone else, has grown more politically conscious in the past six or seven years, and he feels it incumbent upon him to take a position. He is against imperialism, war, and economic injustice. These evils he proposes to abolish by encouraging small producers and doing away with mass production. This somehow is to be brought about by a general change of heart, which, in turn, is largely to be accomplished by the arts. He calls himself a Quietist Anarchist, and expresses sympathy with the aims of the Confederate agrarians.

Surely it would be pointless to underline the futility of his program, but I might allow myself the luxury of touching on one issue that is very close to Mr. Ford's heart, the issue of food. He rails against canned vegetables and refrigerated meat, and praises the diet of the small producer who grows his own food. I live in a community of small producers, and I know how many months of the year they subsist on pork and potatoes. It is true that my home is north of the fortieth parallel, and

therefore in a region that Mr. Ford would apparently like to see abandoned to lower forms of life, but the fact is that millions of people do live in this region, and I am not sure that dwellers on the great trade route—to use his fanciful name—are much better off. Modern methods of refrigeration and transportation have made possible for almost the entire country a more varied and better balanced diet than home production could ever achieve. What comfortably well-off persons in New York City now have, everyone could have—but not by going back to the soil.

We pass from Mr. Ford as gourmet, traveler, and political philosopher to Mr. Ford as literary critic and friend of the great. *Portraits from Life* contains essays on James, Conrad, Hardy, Wells, Crane, Lawrence, Galsworthy, Turgenev, Hudson, Dreiser, and Swinburne. Mr. Ford has written small books on James and Conrad and a study of the novel, and at least three volumes of reminiscences, and from this it can be imagined how little in *Portraits from Life* is new. Even *Great Trade Route* contains some of the anecdotes that are used in the other book, and I wager that not even Mr. Ford knows how many times they have served his purposes. Apparently he was urged by Mr. Palmer of the *Mercury*, to whom the book is dedicated, to do the series, and he obligingly raked over the ashes, hoping to find embers enough to make the pot boil once more.

There are some good stories in *Portraits from Life*, if you happen not to have met them on one of their earlier appearances, and there are a few critical comments of real shrewdness, but what chiefly impresses the reader is that Ford knew all these great men more or less intimately, and was accepted by them more or less as an equal. They, too, must for a time have regarded him as, at least potentially, a major writer.

What happened to Ford Madox Ford, born Hueffer? A precocious youth, growing up in a literary household, he appeared in print long before he had anything to say. He was facile and something of a rebel, and, in the æsthetic nineties, he justified both his facility and his nonconformity by the familiar device of the art-for-art's-sake dogma. Later he defended this dogma by maintaining that art for art's sake was also art for society's sake. ("This civilization of ours . . . can only be saved by a change of heart . . . a change that can only be brought about . . . by the artist.") Meanwhile, egotism and a kind of effervescent energy kept him producing book after book, books shaped by personal whims and literary fashions. His emotions were fundamentally decent, I think, but, as you can readily see if you compare him with the men he writes about, he had no intellectual center. Their philosophies were often inarticulate—more so than



Martin

\* GREAT TRADE ROUTE, by Ford Madox Ford, Oxford University Press. \$3.

PORTRAITS FROM LIFE, by Ford Madox Ford, Houghton Mifflin Co. \$3.