

# Science and Society

A MARXIAN QUARTERLY

SPRING 1937

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navaca murals done for Ambassador Morrow and in the decoration of the great stairway of the National Palace. The tender and elegiac melody is lost. There remain discord and confusion. One wonders if this compositional confusion can have any relation to Rivera's abandonment of the revolutionary movement. During his American visits, he began the production of marketable commodities and murals of compromise, such as those in Detroit.

Today Rivera has even given up the revolutionary theme. He paints water colors of exotic Mexican scenes alternating with easel paintings in which lurk dim ghosts of the past—Japanese print-makers, neo-classic Chirico, Picasso, the impressionists. His last murals done for the new Hotel Reforma, removed after the usual scandal by their owner Pani, reveal a stylistic anarchy which can add nothing to his reputation.

CHARMION VON WIEGAND.

### Soviet Best Seller

PEACE IS WHERE THE TEMPESTS BLOW, by Valentine Kataev. Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. \$2.50.

IN 1905, Valentine Kataev was just the same age as are his characters, Petya and Gavrik, in his latest novel. Like them, presumably, and like many other Russian children, he first became a revolutionary in that year. How and why children of eight and nine became advocates of the Bolshevik cause is the main theme of *Peace Is Where the Tempests Blow*.

It is not hard to understand why Gavrik, the street gamin, was forced to take sides. His brother had already become a revolutionary; he himself had had plentiful experience with the hardships of life in pre-Soviet Odessa. The gobies that he and his grandfather caught in a hard day's fishing brought only thirty kopeks a hundred; frequently both he and the old man had to depend upon resurrected bread crusts for food. When he and his grandfather rescued a sailor who had been a member of the crew of the revolting *Potemkin*, he came into direct conflict with the authorities; his class feeling and his intelligence grew as he strove to elude the police, as he watched his grandfather grow deathly ill as the result of beatings in jail, as he carried ammunition to besieged Bolsheviks when street fighting broke out, as he helped the sailor to escape again when the revolution failed.

Petya presents a more difficult problem. When we first meet him, he is finishing a pleasant, bare-footed summer vacation on a farm at Akkermann; his father is well-to-do and middle-class. But he is innately sensitive and just. Gavrik is his friend; Gavrik's grandfather, a nice old man, is unjustly jailed; the *Potemkin* sailor is obviously more likable than the detective who follows him; carrying ammunition to the Communists in his school satchel and helping the sailor escape offer a fine combination of excitement and good deeds. By the time the novel closes, he is as

ardent, if not as clever a revolutionary as Gavrik.

Although the novel has neither the social importance or the power of such Soviet novels as *Seeds of Tomorrow*, *Skutarevsky*, or Kataev's own *Time Forward*, it is a very good book. Stylistically (Charles Malamuth's translation, one judges, reproduces the style of the original admirably) it is an exceptionally fine book, displaying a deftness comparable to that of Dos Passos in fitting diction and sentence structure to character and mood. Critics who are worried about the cultural state of Soviet Russia should read this book, remembering that *Peace Is Where the Tempests Blow* was the outstanding success of 1936 in the U.S.S.R.

JOHN THAYER.

### Brief Reviews

THE COAST: A Magazine of Western Writing. Vol. I. No. 1. 50c.

Described as "an unofficial, coöperative publication of writers on the San Francisco Writers' Project," this new venture is designed as a model for a regional creative W.P.A. magazine. Some of the ablest of West Coast writers have contributed to it: Lawrence Estavan, Kenneth Rexroth, Miriam Allen de Ford, among others. Without a doubt, the magazine contains quite enough first-class writing to justify a regular government-supported publication. There is no reason why W.P.A. writers, who drudge usually at encyclopædias and guidebooks, should not have the opportunity for creative expression which the Federal Theater and Art Projects offer.

PHOTO-HISTORY MAGAZINE: A quarterly, edited by Richard S. Childs, Ernest Galarza, Sidney Polatsek. April, Vol. I, No. 1. 35c.

The meaning of the war in Spain is graphically brought out by logical and artistic juxtaposition of two hundred and fifty photographs, reproduced headlines from the New York Times, and original and quoted texts, in this first issue of Photo-History. Superior photography and a partiality to the truth prevent this from being just another picture magazine.

★

### Recently Recommended Books

- Rainbow Fish*, by Ralph Bates. Dutton. \$2.
- Look Through the Bars*, by Ernst Toller. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.75.
- Low Company*, by Daniel Fuchs. Vanguard. \$2.50.
- Spain in Arms, 1937*, by Anna Louise Strong. Holt. \$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.
- Let Me Live*, by Angelo Herndon. Random House. March Book Union Selection. \$2.50.
- The Old Bunch*, by Meyer Levin. Viking. \$2.

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# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

*New operas and symphonies—A magnificent new film—Some remarks on the ballet—Youth movement on Broadway*

THE urge that drove me to an unaccustomed number of concert halls in the last fortnight was, I think, the need for some musical equivalent of the old-fashioned sulphur and molasses cure for spring fever. I succeeded only in aggravating my malady except for one highly diverting hour or so of as satisfying entertainment as I've had all year. And from an opera at that.

As a composer, young Mr. Gian Carlo Menotti hasn't much beyond fluency and an excellent schooling in Rossiniana (which, come to think of it, is pretty good equipment in itself), but as a theatrical *ingénieur* he comes as close to genius as anyone I've come across since Kurt Weill. Add a liberal dash of very sound humor, garnish tastefully, and you have a recipe for a stage success that doesn't depend on hokum (at least hardly ever and then on a very high grade of hokum). The Curtis Institute of Music presented *Amelia Goes to the Ball* in one-night stands at Philadelphia and New York (New Amsterdam Theatre, April 11), but it'll be around again, for it's a box-office natural. A field day for Margaret Daum in the title rôle, she was able to combine a virtuoso and really captivating bit of acting without flawing a deft vocal performance. In fact, the whole performance and staging sharpened the stylized attractiveness of the work and perfect timing drove home every point with light and sure accuracy. It was all as synthetic as cellophane, but equally as ingenious a creation, and while it is no *Prodana Nevesta* (i. e., the invariably mistranslated *Bartered Bride*) or *H.M.S. Pinafore*, it is a first-rate show and that—in contemporary opera—is a rare bird.

Milhaud's music for *Le Pauvre Matelot* on the same bill was vastly more original and striking, and the ironic little tragedy was produced with nearly equal skill, but it just didn't add up to entertainment. You can't (at least Milhaud and a good many others can't) fit the square peg of realism into so well-rounded a hole of artificiality as the operatic form. However, his was an honorable enough failure compared with the WPA productions of *La Serva Padrona* and *Romance of a Robot* (Federal Music Project Theatre of Music, April 12). I should have known better, but Amelia's bewitching glances had left me pleasantly dazed and I took an ill-advised chance. The Pergolesi started off fairly well with some good staging ideas, but it proceeded to go *Commedia dell' Arte* in a big way (and the Brothers Minsky aren't as 100-percent made-in-America as they think they are, although I must admit that they've added some necessary improvements in the imported product) and everybody concerned—with the possible exception of the little orchestra—fell so hard for their own buffoonery that they entirely overlooked the existence of the occasional bits

of real music with which Pergolesi had spiked the interminable monkeyshines. The acting was insulting enough to the audience, but equally bad singing would have been less an insult to Pergolesi's memory than the total lack of any attempt at singing.

The fun had only started. The F.M.P. really went to town with Hart's "satirical musical romance." I was to learn later that the production was an "experiment in using plastic motion and choreography as an integral part of opera, rather than an interpolated interlude," but while I lasted I couldn't find even a ghost of music haunting a jittery mob scene of moronically costumed gals, couldn't even determine which aspect of the affair was the most juvenile (I should have stayed: it all turned out to be a valentine in the end). The huff I left in ripened into a very sour stomach on next morning's reviews. If tripe must be exhibited in public (and it's hard to believe that this could be a production of the same organization to which we are indebted for Lehman Engel's choral programs), it must either be ignored or held up to scorn in all its pulpy tripiness. Bad as it is, it's infinitely less harmful and less dishonest than the gentlemen (save the mark) of the press who are either stupid enough to accept it or dishonorable enough to encourage its being foisted on the public.

With that off my chest, I can't get worked up over several other concerts, but the terrific build-up given the current white-haired boy of "American" music emphatically calls for some deflation. Samuel Barber is obviously young and rather too obviously "promising"; to hail his symphony (N. Y. Philharmonic-Symphony, April 4) as a work of any remarkable talent or even as indicating significant potentialities in its composer is doing him ill service. The man has no more than a superficial working knowledge of his tools, but I can forgive his blundering scoring more readily than his blundering tonal thinking, his obsession with an originality that he hopes to retch up from badly digested symphonic classics, Sibelius in

particular. Dressing up a few shoddy tunes and ideas in a grotesque harlequinade of specious modernity (which, it goes without saying, is about as "modern" as Richard Strauss) won't stand close inspection, and if the composer accepts the general ignorance of his fundamental weaknesses, he has got a flying start on the road to artistic ruin already well strewn with the decaying cadavers of his contemporaries.

Barber was not helped by Rodzinski's programming Ernest Bloch's *Voice in the Wilderness* at the same concert, although the conductor displayed unmistakable favoritism even to the point of relaxing his customary care in the latter work. It wasn't a slipshod performance, but it fell off sharply from the standards Rodzinski and the Philharmonic have set themselves. The work is hardly a masterpiece, and calls imperatively for pruning and trimming, but after Barber's sophomoric, it was rich joy to hear a master craftsman, working effortlessly, surely, making every point tell. Bloch has long ago learned that originality comes from within, that symphonic tricks are a stale joke at best. His soliloquies for solo 'cello (Joseph Schuster) and orchestra are the utterance of a man with something to say, speaking out with conviction and eloquence. Even the minor words of such a man put to shame the empty rhetoric and furious ranting of an audience spellbinder. The Philharmonic-Symphony's audience was properly spellbound by Barber and seemed to find Bloch dull: the too familiar but happily impermanent triumph of the yowling orator over the calm voice of reason—a voice in the wilderness indeed.

R. D. DARRELL.

## THE SCREEN

*THE WAVE* (Garrison Films) finally had its premier at New York's Filmarte. This premier is as significant and important as was that of *Potemkin* many years ago. It is the first feature film to be produced on the American continent on a working-class theme for workers. And what is even more important, this working-class film is at the same time a thing of great beauty—one of the most beautiful films ever to grace the screen. While the film was produced in Mexico—not by one of the commercial firms, but by the Secretariat of Education—*The Wave* has a universality of theme and feeling for its people that does not confine it to any esoteric categories or national boundaries. Thus it takes its place with the major Soviet films (especially those of Dovjenko) and with the great working-class films of other countries: *Kamaradschaft*, in pre-Hitler Germany and *The Loves of Toni*, in France.

Like *Toni*, the plot is simple, elementary. Unlike the films of Robert Flaherty, *The*

