

NEW MASSES STUDIO PARTY

Saturday, Feb. 6, 8:30 p.m.

Steinway Hall... 113 West 57th St.
Studio 503

Refreshments Dancing Entertainment

(One of those intimate parties
where everyone has a good time)

Admission: FIFTY CENTS

SPAIN NEEDS AMERICAN WORKERS...

Hard pressed by fascist invaders, the Spanish people call on American workers to take an industrial or productive job in Spain. Each such worker would free a Spanish worker to join the military forces of his own country. Backed by German and Italian troops, Franco threatens liberty. The Spanish people need every fighting man on the front line to save Spain—and you—from the fascist menace.

HELP SEND THEM ACROSS

Many electricians, steel workers, telephone and telegraph repair men, automobile workers, truck drivers, miners, bakers, others are ready to respond to the call to serve in freedom's cause, though behind the firing line. They'd serve to keep up the essential productive system needed alike for the Spanish army and civilian population. Lack of money for transportation delays their sailing for a job at union wages and to fight for democracy. We need money to pay for their transportation. We ask you to help with contributions to send them over.

Your Contribution Helps Save Spain from Fascism

The American Society for Technical Aid to Spanish Democracy (Officers: Waldo Frank, chairman; Paul Crosbie, vice-chairman; John Howard Lawson, secretary; William E. Browder, treasurer) asks your help in sending American workers to work in Spain. The following are members of the Board of Directors, exclusive of the officers, of this Society: Michael Blankfort, Van Wyck Brooks, Malcolm Cowley, Kyle Crichton, Joseph Freeman, Ben Gold, Henry Hart, Lester Cohen, Lewis Mumford, George Sklar, Alexander Trachtenberg.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL AID TO SPANISH DEMOCRACY
31 East 27th Street, New York, N. Y.

Enclosed is \$..... as my contribution to send American workers to Spain to help the Spanish people in their fight against fascist invaders.

Name

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tributors are Kay Boyle, Stefan Zweig, Isaac Babel, Mary Heaton Vorse, Liam O'Flaherty, Dorothy Thompson, and Panteleimon Romanov.

In the appended essay on "Writing the Short Story," Lillian Barnard Gilkes makes skillful use of the stories to illuminate technical questions. The unspectacular good sense of her generalizations can be summed up in her final quotation from Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*: "The best form is that which makes the most of the subject—there is no other meaning of form in fiction."

Dr. Brewster's volume should prove widely useful outside as well as inside the classroom.

PHILIP STEVENSON.

With Benefit of Marxism

HISTORY OF FLORENCE FROM THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY THROUGH THE RENAISSANCE, by Ferdinand Schevill. Illustrated. Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$5.

IN his preface, Dr. Schevill denies a truly scientific character to history, declaring it to be more an art than a science—that is, too dependent upon the individuality of the historian for its data to resist manipulation as, let us say, the data of chemistry do. In his epilogue, accounting for the decline of the great city-state, he mentions the new orientation of world trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and the development of competing industrialisms in the former markets of Florence; yet he prefers as an explanation the more mystical theory of spiritual energy running out. To him, Florence is an example of communal human genius subject to indefinable laws of growth and decay; and the fact that the term of its activity falls within a period when Italy enjoyed a favorable economic position, due to determinable geographical and historical causes, is mentioned as a concomitant but not decisively significant factor.

Such an attitude is unMarxian; yet in spite of it, Dr. Schevill's history shows the traces and the benefits of the growing Marxian influence upon historical writing. In spite of his announced plan to deal with his subject primarily as a political entity, and to deal with its economy as with its arts and learning, in separate chapters, the explanation of political action must again and again be made in terms of conditioning economic fact. Had he placed his economic chapter (XVII) at the beginning, it would have made the preceding sixteen chapters clearer.

The history of Florence is the history of a triumphant bourgeoisie. World trends after the eleventh century made possible a revival of trade and industry in Italy which became the chief bank, depot, and workshop of Europe for several centuries. Economic power enabled the bourgeoisie to overthrow the feudal aristocracy. The overthrow was so complete that enrollment into the unprivileged class of the nobility became a punishment, while transfer from the ranks of the nobility into the citizen body was an elevation.

Having defeated the aristocracy, the bour-

goisie had all the democracy it wanted. It systematically frustrated every effort of the masses to raise themselves to the guild status, to organize, to exercise the franchise, or to participate in any other way than as "hands" in the life of the city. Exploitation of the masses was indirect as well as direct. Taxation was chiefly in the form of indirect levies imposed with that "equality" beloved by the rich, upon all classes in the same amount. The bourgeois democracy was in practice an oligarchy of the leading bankers and industrialists; and the oligarchy became a tyranny under the Medici when the political situation in Italy demanded unified control.

First under communal, then under the princely patronage that continued it, learning and art flourished. But Florence made magnificent contributions to the world in coinage, business, and industrial technique as well as in learning and the arts. A distinct development toward capitalist industry as we understand it, was proceeding when the balance shifted and economic power inclined to western and northern Europe. The step into capitalism was to be taken by the northern inheritors.

Dr. Schevill writes with a real love of his subject. His style is graceful and fluent. He shows admirable selectivity in dealing with the overwhelming data that face the historian of Florence, one of the most articulate communities in history. His use of the Marxian key, though unacknowledged by him, provides a chain of causality that gives the work unusual clarity. Altogether, it is one of the distinguished pieces of historical writing of recent years.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Illegal "Justice"

VILLAINS AND VIGILANTES, by Stanton A. Coblentz. Wilson-Erickson. \$3.

IT is hardly necessary for this reviewer to remark upon the tremendous social significance and disastrous consequences of the growth of vigilanteism in California, for readers of a magazine which has ably reported its most recent incidences—El Centro, Salinas, Santa Rosa—and shown its complete incompatibility with what passes for Americanism. There is hardly a commentator on the scene in that state who does not see in its spread the ominous development of an indigenous fascism.

Oddly enough, despite the non-intellectual character of the movement, in its present setting it has been aided and abetted and made to seem "indigenous" by the historians of the early Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856. These historians include Hubert Howe Bancroft, whose books on California history form the nucleus of all public school courses in the subject, Josiah Royce, Theodore H. Hittell, and Mary Floyd Williams.

Today, whenever the tarring and feathering of labor supporters in a middle-class community occurs, or the disruption of a student peace demonstration, or the threat of a lynching, newspapers and the vigilante leaders lend encouragement to the deed by speaking of the

spirit of '56 pervading the community. There is thus a constant and remarkable interlacing of written history and contemporary action expressed in the vigilante movement.

Histories of the vigilantes possess more than academic or antiquarian interest. They have a considerable import in and to the present. For that reason, it is all the more necessary to reexamine that history. Mr. Coblentz is obviously aware of this need, for he says in the concluding pages of his book, bluntly and determinedly, what no other historian has said:

Today, the term Vigilante is used to denote almost everything that the original Vigilantes were not. Whenever bands of hired thugs and bullies are employed to put down strikes at a mine, we hear them referred to as Vigilantes; whenever a gang of desperadoes set out to inflict punishment on alleged Reds or Communists, again the term Vigilante is used; whenever a mob of race-inflamed southerners undertake to hang a Negro without the semblance of a trial, once more we hear mention of a Vigilance organization. And the perpetrators of a thousand and one diverse atrocities, while knowing nothing of the original Vigilance movement, use the name of Vigilance to justify them in their villainies.

Nevertheless, he has been content to accept the historical hypotheses of Bancroft & Co., to portray once again the old vigilantes as noble, honest, sincere men.

What were the concepts of "justice" which the vigilantes held? To cite a case from Mr. Coblentz's book: why were the laboring groups termed "mobs" when they attempted to apply justice to sea-captains accused of bestial treatment of seamen, while the application of penalties by the Vigilance Committee to Australian convicts (60 percent of whom had committed no worse offense than having fallen into debt) brought acclaim? To what extent did the formation of the vigilance committees coincide with increasing labor organization, as Ira B. Cross reveals in his excellent *History of the California Labor Movement*? Can we attach no significance to the fact that the leaders of the committees were ship-owners, merchants, financiers, and landlords at a period when labor shortage, high prices, financial manipulation, and crashes, and exorbitant rents prevailed? That, as Royce remarked, the extremes of concentrated wealth and dismal poverty had already appeared in the city—a circumstance later to bring forth the Single Tax theory?

Again, did the committees fulfill their own concept of honor? We know that they expended an average of five thousand dollars a month and that the manufacturers of uniforms and ammunition were extremely active among them. Even Bancroft admits that the financier to whom was entrusted the benefit funds collected for the widow of James King (crusading editor assassinated in the fifties) lost the major portion of them in security speculation. There are similar accusations made by O'Meara, an anti-Vigilante pamphleteer of the times; yet historians deny him even the courtesy of a *précis*.

Above all, there is the larger question of the probability of a reform movement initiated by the business men effecting a reform. If the city was purified in '56, whence came its cur-

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