

tural productivity and facilities of transport would make possible the supply of a grain tribute so predominantly superior to that of other areas that any group which controlled this area had the key to the conquest and unity of all China," Dr. Chi goes on to show how the shifting of the key economic area was brought about. Students will be grateful for his study, which in true Marxist fashion provides a way of understanding what must otherwise be an endless tangled account of the alternate occurrence of unity and division in Chinese history. The frequent use of engrossing, often beautiful, quotations from old Chinese records makes Dr. Chi's account as charming as it is informative. The book contains an extremely useful annotated bibliography.

LEO HUBERMAN.

Painters Against the World

DEAR THEO, *The Autobiography of Vincent Van Gogh*, edited by Irving Stone. Houghton Mifflin Co. \$3.75.

MY FATHER, PAUL GAUGUIN, by Pola Gauguin. Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.75.

BY 1880, impressionism, which in the sixties had been greeted by so much horrified comment and ridicule, was the accepted art of a bourgeois culture. But the critics and the public were not ready, as usual, to go a step further and accept the ideas of Van Gogh and Gauguin. These two men were no longer interested in bourgeois values and the conventions of a now almost academic impressionistic school. In their lives we read of their struggles within a hostile society and of the contrasting avenues which each took to escape from a society he was unable to change or propitiate. Each found his solution in contact with the common working people and with nature. Van Gogh, in particular, tells us again and again, "I feel that my work lies in the heart of the people," "This humanity is the salt of life; without it I do not care to live," and, speaking of his work, "No result could please me better than that the ordinary working people should hang such prints in their room or workshop;" and again, "I call myself a peasant-painter . . . I feel at home in the country, and it has not been in vain that I spent so many evenings with the miners and peat-diggers and weavers and peasants. . . . By witnessing peasant life continually at all hours of the day, I have become so absorbed in it that I hardly ever think of anything else. In fact, I have no other wish than to live deep, deep in the heart of the country, and to paint rural life."

To Van Gogh this life among the people was a satisfactory solution. But the problem of earning money in a hostile world, of existing, even on a miserably low scale, continually tortured him. In reply to an uncle who rebuked him for his lack of financial stability, he cries out: "Earn bread, or deserve bread—not to deserve one's bread, that is to say, to be unworthy of it, that certainly is a crime, for every honest man is worthy of his bread, but unluckily not being able to earn it, though

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deserving it, that is a misfortune." It was a misfortune so deep and vital to Vincent that it was undoubtedly an important contributing factor in producing insanity in a mind already tortured and electric with creative ideas—insanity which shortly led to suicide.

Vincent's brother was the link between two worlds which made life possible for the artist. In his nightly letters to Theo he could talk to the one human being who understood and cared for both his mental and physical needs. He could pour forth the warmth of his feeling for humanity, a humanity not ready to accept and understand him, and could forget the inhospitality of his own class.

These beautifully written letters tell, in an intimate personal manner, the struggle of a simple, humble, humane person to exist, to feel and to create. The editing is unfortunate in that it has almost entirely eliminated dates, thus giving a jerky, unbalanced sense of time. But Mr. Stone has done the reading public a great service in cutting these letters down to an inexpensive one-volume edition.

In contrast to *Dear Theo, My Father Paul Gauguin* is a sadly academic, uninspired job, and largely a rehash of well-known material. Pola was seven when he saw his father for the last time, so his personal family reminiscences are limited almost entirely to letters between Paul and Mette Gad, his Danish wife. And these are exactly the type of letter one would expect of a man who has left his wife for his art, and of a wife who could not understand why a prosperous bank clerk should want to become an artist. Furthermore, there is no attempt to analyze the character of the artist by this son who was continually being told, "Why, you're just like your father."

Unlike Van Gogh, Gauguin had no confidant. He had chosen his wife not as an understanding companion, but as a mother for his children and as a healthy, buxom figure who appealed to his eye. He was unlike Van Gogh also in that he was unable to cut himself so completely away from the existing society. He had spent a good thirty years in respectability and, even after his escape to Tahiti, he continually longed for his friends at home, his family, and the approval of the contemporary world. The primitive Maori people did satisfy his love of the unconventional simple life, his need for affection and understanding, and his search for new plastic forms and colors. But Gauguin was more intellectually inquiring than Van Gogh and yet less able to supply his own mental needs. Gauguin says, "I consider that every man has a right to live and to live well in the community in proportion to his output of work. The artist cannot live.



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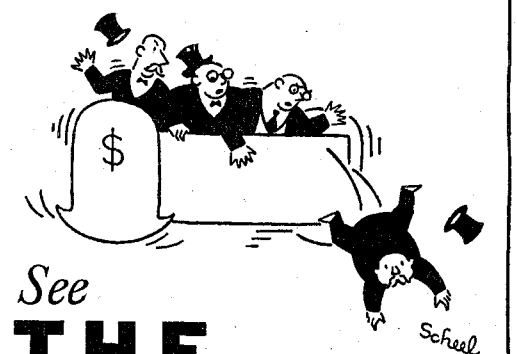
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Therefore society is criminal and badly organized." He clearly realized his dilemma but, unlike Van Gogh, was unable to attain even a temporary solution. His escape to the primitive was a defeat, and one feels in his later painting that he had come to the end of a blind way. Van Gogh's latest works were the beginning of a new and ever-developing creative force, which only society and his own heredity could defeat.

NANCY MACDONALD.

Brief Reviews

MOSCOW IN THE MAKING, by Sir A. D. Simon, Lady Simon, W. A. Robson, and J. Jewkes. Longmans, Green and Co., \$2.50.

The four authors of this book spent only four weeks in Moscow, do not know the Russian language, and apologize in the preface for their inconsistencies and inaccuracies, which are numerous. They did, however, manage to amass a great amount of information which will be of value to the discriminating reader. The first chapter, by Robson, giving a general view of the Moscow city government, is the most rewarding. Mr. Robson has a real grasp of the essential democracy of the Soviet system, and of the enormous advantages of the absence of conflicting class interests in administering a city's affairs and planning its future. While he deplors what seem to him certain repressive aspects, he considers them incidental and temporary. The chapter on industry and finance by Jewkes is confused and misleading. Mr. Jewkes does not understand the functioning or know the facts about the system he attempts to describe. Lady Simon cites some interesting data on the quantitative aspects of Soviet education, but completely fails to grasp its more fundamental attributes. Sir E. D. Simon, too, is rather mixed. While constantly under compulsion to admit advantages in the Soviet system, he keeps on making rather unconvincing statements to the effect that after all we do it better in good old England. He is disturbed about the housing situation, but acknowledges that in the Soviet Union everything points toward the fulfillment of plans for improvement while in England everything is blocked by the existence of private property, conflicting class interests, and overlapping authority. He quotes some silly, unsupported gossip about repressive measures, and concludes with the following statement:

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I SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN RUSSIA, by Sir Walter Citrine. E. P. Dutton Co., \$3.

The leader of the British Trades Union Congress writes of his brief tour of the Soviet Union in the fall of 1935 as of a slumming expedition. The book abounds in such expressions as "rather cheap and nasty," "shockingly dressed," "horrid odor." Whatever does not conform to the good old British standards of housing, dress, behavior, or whatnot is chalked up as a failure of the Soviet regime. Sir Walter spends pages and pages on meaningless computations about the real value of the ruble and of wages. These figures convey little and are all out of date anyway. He takes careful note of peeling plaster, shoddy woodwork, rough edges. Is it by

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