

lations on Whitman's libido. In the end, Masters concludes that the fate of Whitman's literary achievement will depend on the fate of the democracy of which he sang in his huge hymns. This conclusion gives us the heart of Masters's inadequacy. For if this were so, Whitman would today be a dead dog, which he decidedly is not. Whitman's democracy was practically dead when *Leaves of Grass* made its appearance.

The rejection of Europe as a concept in favor of America as a concept could have something of glorious validity in the brief dawn of bourgeois democracy in this land unmoored in a feudal past. It reminds me of the mystical exceptionalism of the Irish "emerald isle and pixie" cult upon which Engels turned his scorn. But Whitman lived to see the day when the federal troops, formerly at one with the "free mechanics," became an alien body of violence, shooting the strikers of 1877 and of 1886. The *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 was catching up with the *Leaves of Grass* of 1855. When will its corresponding complex sensibility make itself felt in our literature?

The truth of the matter is that Masters cannot weigh Whitman for us because he himself cannot transcend Whitman's values and inevitable historic limitations. Masters yearns with a too-bitter nostalgia for Whitman's prairie democracy to be able to view his subject with modern eyes. He is himself too ridden with the obsessions of mystical American destiny and too raw with the gaucherie of an anti-puritanism whose very hatred of its enemy bears the tragic marks of its enemy's influence. I cannot but respect the desperation of search which I feel in Masters's prowlings about the serene figure of Whitman. But I cannot at the same time help feeling the doom which pervades Masters's preoccupations simply because he is attempting to operate with a critical apparatus rooted in an American petty-bourgeois outlook darkened with shadows of horror at the remorseless advance of twentieth-century monopolism. For this reason, Masters makes of Whitman something perilously close to a lost cause, a vanishing dream. Because he expects too much of Whitman, expects that he will in fact be the prophet of a divine America, he ends by placing him in a false position where we must either reject or accept him completely. The genius of Whitman for us does not at all lie in such a quandary. He is with us. But we go beyond him.

Whitman wrote in his exaltation: "I reject nothing—I accept the master as well as the slave." The slave cannot be grateful to him for it. But neither can the master breathe easily in the storms of his social and natural pantheism. He wrote: "My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion." But he also wrote:

I hear it was charged against me that I sought to
destroy institutions,
But really I am neither for nor against institutions,
(What have I in common with them? Or what with
the destruction of them?)

Has anyone ever explored the organic lack of discipline and responsibility which is coiled secretly within Whitman's all-encompassing embrace of nature and society? Is it this, as well as his problem of rendering vastness, which conditioned the form of his verse? Is that why, with all his tireless apostrophe to masses, he was unable to give living form to dramatic or even lyrical conflict of individuals? And the problem of Whitman's sexuality, its quality and its sources, still needs, after Masters's book, modern critical examination. Greatness of spirit was needed to affirm it in a country dominated by New England. Does it need the foil of puritanism for its effectiveness? Generally, his sexuality remains at the level of discovery (there are, of course, some remarkable exceptions, as in the beautiful image which closes the fifth section of the *Children of Adam* poems). But what have we to learn from a comparison of Whitman's sexuality with the subtleties of daring eroticism which irradiate the texture of Elizabethan intellectuality in Shakespeare's day?

The problem of Whitman's genius as a critic needs (Masters does express his opinion on this

point) more study. Whitman, like T. S. Eliot, who has never thought fit to expose Whitman to his researches, preferred the leanness of Dante to the torrential abundance of Shakespeare. There were in him, the man who "sent his barbaric yawp across the rooftops of the world," many elements of modern critical awareness. Like Milton, Blake, Shelley, and others, Whitman was trying to affirm some aspect of the spiritual realities which accompanied the anti-feudal revolution. For the modern poet who has gone beyond that restricted affirmation, Whitman, like the others, is a proper subject for "critical assimilation." But Masters's book is evidence that the job remains to be done.

MILTON HOWARD.

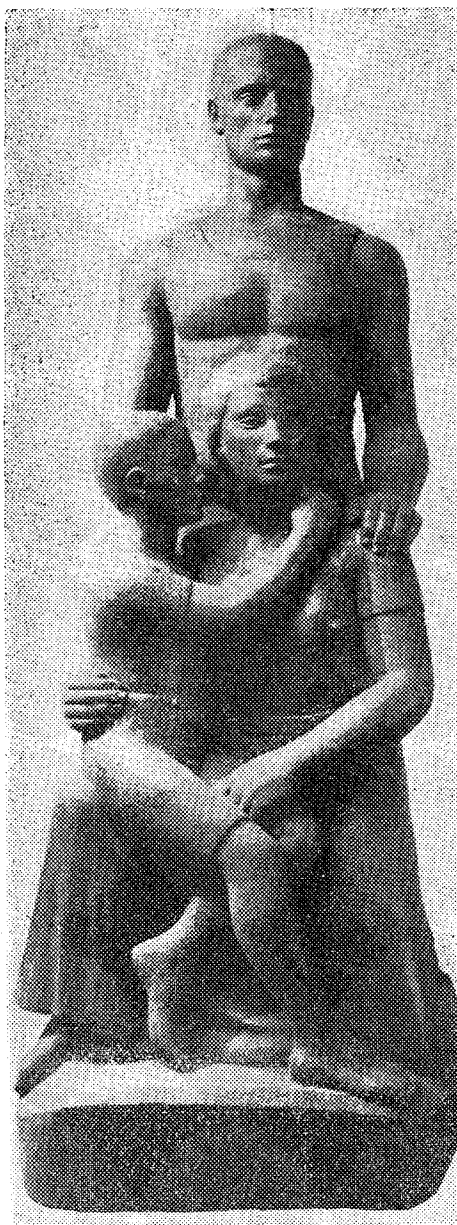
Magnissima Charta

THE NEW SOVIET CONSTITUTION, by Anna Louise Strong. Henry Holt & Co. \$1.50

IN this compact little volume, Anna Louise Strong continues her brilliant and invaluable role of interpreting Soviet Russia to the outside world. Starting with an analysis of the present sad state of democracy in capitalist countries, she goes on to give the background of the new Soviet constitution in the evolution of the U.S.S.R. This approach shows clearly that the new constitution is not something strange and unexpected, but a natural outgrowth of those democratic principles and processes which were inherent in the first workers' republic from the day of its establishment. The very manner in which the new constitution was adopted demonstrates this point. Surely no other document of its kind in history was ever discussed before enactment so thoroughly, so democratically, and by so large a proportion of a nation's population.

Miss Strong proceeds to explain the political provisions of the constitution. The creation of a second chamber, the Soviet of Nationalities, in addition to the Soviet of the Union, is due, she points out, to the fact that "the U.S.S.R. is a multi-national state" in which it is only just that the particular interests of the minority national and racial groups should be protected. If the British empire, the author intriguingly suggests, had a similar constitution, it would mean that "all imperial laws had to be passed both by a majority of the total population—with India outvoting the rest of the empire combined—and also by a majority of the constituent nations, in a second chamber which would restore to England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales a certain equality of rights!"

Quite fittingly Miss Strong concludes her book with a chapter on the "New Rights of Man" embodied in the Soviet constitution. Outstanding among these provisions are those guaranteeing the right to work, the right to rest, the right to material security in old age and in case of sickness or other incapacity, the right to education, the right of women to full equality with men, and the right of freedom from all racial discrimination. These constitutional guarantees are so extraordinary and



Maurice Glickman (American Artists' Congress)
Asturian Miner and Family

epoch-making that in themselves they entail an affirmative answer to the query of Sidney and Beatrice Webb as to whether there exists a new civilization in the Soviet Union. The articles in question take up only five pages in the author's carefully annotated translation of the new constitution, and I declare without qualification that no one henceforth can be considered educated who does not read, remember, and reflect upon these five pages.

Of course it is easy to say that this is only a "paper" constitution. But it is obvious in the nature of the case that *all* written constitutions are paper constitutions. In other words, the extent to which constitutional provisions become actualized is dependent on the good faith of the government and people involved. Now I do not contend that the new Soviet constitution will always be lived up to 100 percent, especially during these first years; but I venture to predict that its basic principles will become in reality the law of the land far sooner than in the case of most other constitutions. The United States Constitution has been in effect for one hundred and fifty years, but we all know how frequently it is violated even today, particularly its guaranties regarding civil liberties.

Furthermore, the Soviet constitution shows a rate of growth towards democracy in the U.S.S.R. unprecedented elsewhere in political experience. The British parliamentary system has been in process of evolution for more than six hundred years, but till 1884 approximately 50 percent of the population did not have the ballot; and only in 1918 was universal suffrage for men and women over twenty established. In the United States it took nearly a century after the Declaration of Independence for Negroes to win equal political rights; even then it was mainly on paper and remains so to this day. Women's suffrage came in America only in 1920. In the Soviet Union, nineteen years after the revolution, there is suffrage for everyone of both sexes over the age of eighteen. These are a few of the more obvious comparisons that can be made, but they may be sufficient to indicate the swift pace at which Soviet democracy marches on.

CORLISS LAMONT.

Napoleon the Class Warrior

BONAPARTE, by Eugene Tarlé. Knight Publications. \$4.50.

THE relation between certain stages of Napoleon's life and their social and economic background has been demonstrated, in fragmentary analyses, by many writers, among them Marx and Engels. In this excellent biography by a leading Soviet historian, these analyses are now expanded and integrated, and Napoleon's personal role is shown in relation to the development of the bourgeois revolution in France.

As Tarlé demonstrates, the revolutionary and, later, imperial armies derived their strength from the newly liberated energies of the French middle classes. They conquered the feudal countries that opposed



Martin

them, but were unable to hold their conquests; at the beginning of the nineteenth century no more than now could there be a really unified Europe within capitalism. The greatest military genius of all times, with all his miraculous organizing powers, was helpless when faced with an economic crisis and the anarchy of the market. But as Tarlé shows, the rhythm of the social and economic forces explains not only the objective facts of Napoleon's rise and fall; it also explains to some extent his subjective decisions. Napoleon was aware of the forces he represented. He was a loyal instrument of his class, and naturally could not transcend its historic perspectives. In Russia he discarded the idea of liberating the czar's serfs, and even after Waterloo he refused to lead the "proletarian rabble" against the restoration of the Bourbons. In Tarlé's materialistic treatment, despite its necessary accent on impersonal forces, the tragedy of Napoleon as an individual is not blurred; on the contrary it stands out with greater clarity, because instead of a blind victim tossed about by chance, he is seen here as the focal point of a class consciousness. In addition to its scientific merits, *Bonaparte* has that of being as smoothly readable as any "novelized" biography.

NORMAN GOODRICH.

A Socialist Reads Lenin

ON JOURNEY, by Vida Dutton Scudder. E. P. Dutton & Co. \$4.

VIDA SCUDDER, professor emeritus of English literature at Wellesley College and for forty years a Christian Socialist, at the age of seventy-six has begun the study of Lenin's writings. Her article, "A Little Tour in the Mind of Lenin" in a current issue of the *Christian Century*, is refreshing after the mysticism of the closing chapters of her autobiography, *On Journey*.

In the earlier pages of her life story, she ranges pleasantly over the wide meadows of English letters, from Beowulf and Chaucer, through Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, down to Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis

—whom she does not so much like. She reads Dante and the records of early Franciscans in the original Italian, quotes them, and does not imagine that her readers may need a translation. She is conscious of writing more for the élite than for the masses.

From a family representing New England's cultured minority—an uncle was editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and another uncle was head of Dutton's publishing house—Vida Scudder found herself readily in the field of literature. On her many trips abroad, she has been as much at home in Oxford or Assisi as in Wellesley, Massachusetts. The mediaeval, whether in art, religion, philosophy, or letters, has always called forth her special enthusiasm. It provided the theme for several of her earlier books, solid contributions to scholarship, on the Arthurian legends, the Franciscans, and Catherine of Siena. In religion she is more than a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church; she is an American Anglo-Catholic, that is, a catholic who has not "submitted to the Roman obedience."

It was through hearing Ruskin's lecture courses at Oxford in the 1880's, reading his "Unto This Last" and the works of Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley, that the young graduate of Smith College became a Christian Socialist. Later she took out her red card as a member of the Socialist Party, but was never very active in the party's political life. Through the work of Denison House in Boston, one of the early college settlements, she maintained contact for a good many years with the trade-union movement in New England and with working-class neighbors who came to the settlement for classes, discussions and forums.

But for any consistent, logical economic thinking, the autobiography is disappointing. Miss Scudder admits that she is confused, that she is famous among her friends for her "disconcerting habit of switching from side to side in an argument." She has, however, a definite program of three "essential" points: "Faith in the movement toward political socialism, in the pressure exerted by organized labor, and in the growing development of Consumers' Coöperation." She claims that in the class struggle she is one with the workers in spirit. But she can speak of "laughing and weeping over the constant failure of communism"—and she can keep her name on the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky.

It must have been after finishing the autobiography that she began to study Lenin's life and work, of which she now writes in such invigorating fashion. Urging her middle-class readers to travel "for a time" (why only for a time?) "along the new trails broken by communists," she describes Lenin as statesman and thinker and one whose intellect was at once powerful, flexible, and creative.

Will the time ever come, she asks, when Lenin's *Selected Essays* will be assigned in America as college preparatory reading? And she concludes that Marxists, "however one judges their ultimate theories"—which she rejects—have unprecedented understanding of