

politicians fear elections; the average man fears illness, because then doctors will take everything he owns; the merchant fears that racketeers will come and riddle his store counters with a machine-gun fusillade.

What they could not foresee was the transition of great masses of the population from a fear psychology to a fighting mood, as the C.I.O. rose and flourished, as the movement for a national farmer-labor party takes shape; nor could they foresee the new spirit that has come into American life in the last eighteen months.

HERMAN MICHELSON.

Jewish Immigrants

THE MOTHER, by Sholem Asch. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$2.50.

STORIES about immigrant families almost invariably have a certain folk charm. Hardships in retrospect, in the telling of them, often achieve a humorous, even magical quality which this translation from the Yiddish skillfully conveys. Asch's family of Polish Jews meets the bitter implications of its poverty with shrewdness, tenderness, irony, prayer, and a sense of the comic in misfortune.

These qualities, as well as the ever present feeling for the lifebearing power of human labor, are crystallized in a speech by Ansel, the father, to his family on their first Passover in America:

How is it that I, a Jew, a Scripture reader in the old home, and so, of course, in spite of everything a scholar, how is it that I should be sitting in a room with Gentile wenches and doing a woman's work, sewing shirts? When I think this over thoroughly—and while one is busy sewing is a splendid time to think things over—it seems to me that I have developed into an entirely different Ansel, a better, more admirable, more honest Ansel, who serves God more honestly than formerly in the old home. . . . I am not eating bread which I have not earned. Then I praise God and give thanks that he made a workingman of me. Oh it isn't so simple a matter, this sewing shirts, it's a great thing; all one needs to do is just to give the idea thoughtful consideration.

This occurs almost in the middle of the book, and save for the inclusion of one or two later episodes, it would have been better had the story ended here, in all its pleasant simplicity.

The second half is chiefly devoted to the affair of the daughter, Deborah, with a young sculptor, Buchholz, whom she leaves in the end, for his own good, so to speak, so that he can go off to Paris with his scholarship and a lady with Oriental eyes and good connections. Asch implies a parallel between the sacrifices of Deborah for Buchholz and those of her mother, the heroic Sarah, for her husband and children. In this parallel, the idea of the *Mother*, symbolized in Buchholz's statue of Deborah, is lent a mystical significance. But in this new motherhood, art has taken the place of life.

This substitution is brought out very clearly by an overdrawn incident. Deborah, in order to continue working and posing for Buchholz, has an abortion without his knowledge. While

she is still weak from the operation, Buchholz is inspired by her to do his best work. The unborn child becomes a real as well as symbolic sacrifice to the statue.

The falsity, the lack of necessity of such a sacrifice is apparent from the artificially romantic treatment of the whole relationship. The idea of motherhood has also degenerated considerably. Whereas Sarah's relation to her family was that of a real individual, a tower of bodily and spiritual strength, Deborah merely "mothers" her sculptor, lets him creep back to the womb where, in forgetfulness of reality, he is supposed to produce masterpieces. This return to the mother is not new in modern literature, just as it is routine in modern psychology. Because he is not able to treat this theme of frustration objectively, to give it a material basis, Asch has fallen for the bourgeois separation of art and life, exalting all sacrifices of art to life as events in an eternal tragedy.

Early in the book, Ansel shouts to his wife who is crying over a letter from her eldest son in America, "Let me read, for heaven's sake, you can cry later on." This moment of dramatic insight on Asch's part is impossible without a clear sense of values and understanding of Ansel's weakness and desire to escape. But Buchholz never achieves the reality of one such shout. He is art wandering through the park with leaves in his hair while other people worry about the rent. He is out of date.

CLARENCE WEINSTOCK.

Dementia Praecox

MANIA, by Lawrence M. Jayson. Funk & Wagnalls Co. \$2.

THIS is an autobiography which, in somewhat fictionized form, tells the surface story of a man's mental illness and struggle back to health. The success of Mr. Jayson's admittedly unusual recovery from dementia praecox comes from the strong life-drive within him rather than from any very definite help that he received. "We did not cure you at all," a doctor tells him when he is recov-

ered. "You cured yourself. Our function was simply to provide the ideal conditions so that your mind could wrestle with the problems and solve them accurately." With all sympathy for the human fact of Mr. Jayson's illness, the reader will feel that the real forces for sickness and health—both within and outside the mind—are hardly touched on in Mr. Jayson's book.

A recent NEW MASSES article gave a cruel insight into the social reality within which the problem of insanity must be set—inadequate state appropriations, underpaid help in state hospitals, lack of proper supervision outside of hospitals. When I visited a state hospital during the low point of the depression, I asked a nurse—among other things—how many patients there were on the average to a single nurse. She said that an average of ten was considered right both for proper treatment and for the safety of the nursing staff, but that because of low appropriations there were actually a hundred to a single nurse. Whether or not this may have been an exaggeration, it certainly explains a statement in Mr. Jayson's book, that in a certain institution those "in the 'violent' ward" were "the dregs of humanity and treated as such—hollow, rotting hulks sent to finish lives which could not be ended legally any other way."

That Mr. Jayson was not in such an institution was fortunate for him. He also was fortunate in having a sympathetic and fairly well-to-do family to which to return after his recovery. Yet easy as Mr. Jayson's story is, the reader will feel understandingly the psychological reluctance felt by the author and by some of the friends he made within the hospital to return to the world "outside." "The nearest thing to heaven," his friend Joe says, "is a place like this." And as things go in the world now, it is only too true that for many people only a fierce life-drive and some ultimate hope makes it possible to go on living. One person out of twenty does—for a short period or permanently—retreat from a difficult world into the easier adjustment of psychosis. Yet to Mr. Jayson there does not seem to occur the answer our friend Mike Gold gives every day—"change the world."

MILLEN BRAND.

Dutch Uncle of the Arts

THE ARTS, by Willem Hendrik van Loon. Illustrated by the author. Simon & Schuster. \$3.95.

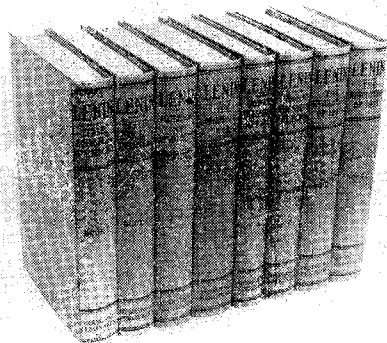
SPOTTING a ten-year-old boy and girl holding a drawing portfolio and a violin case as his train stops at a particularly ugly bit of American landscape, Mr. van Loon decides he will write a book on the arts for them. Then, almost as though he had invited the kids to pull up chairs beside his table in the dining-car, where in this emergency he must illustrate his examples on the tablecloth with his butter knife, he proceeds to talk to them about the beauty of art and its history like a Dutch uncle.

Mr. van Loon genuinely enjoys art and



Marcella Broudo

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wants to share his enjoyment. His discourse is primarily a sales talk to win the uninitiated over to an understanding and appreciation of art in general and actual participation in some specific category—even as a hobby. His single idea is that art enriches a person's life. While he necessarily recognizes economic and political forces that have affected art, he hasn't a great deal of interest in art as it has affected economics and politics. Art is to him "essentially a one-man experience," and "man is not a rational animal and hates logic as a cat hates water."

Every illustration is a van Loon drawing, and, unlike the elaborate diagrams in his *Geography*, the majority of them are useless as documentation. Cave drawings, Greek sculptures, mosaics, even impressionist paintings are all redone in the author's (after all) definitely limited technique.

Like the drawings, the text is informal, entertaining, superficial, often inaccurate, and so hurriedly written that in spite of the book's impressive size and the vastness of its subject matter, there crops up throughout the feeling that Uncle Willem is glancing at his watch and that we must soon leave his table and let his train take him off to do another book on another important subject.

CROCKETT JOHNSON.

Behind W.P.A. Footlights

BREAD AND CIRCUSES, by Willson Whitman.
Oxford University Press. \$1.75.

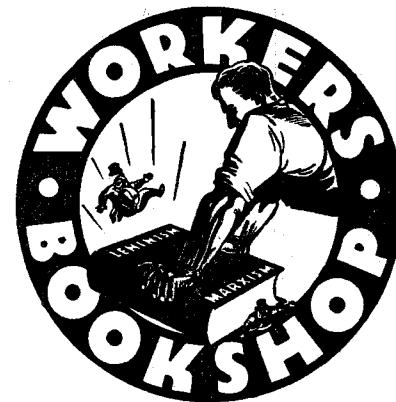
THE federal government went into the show business not only to keep people fed, but to keep them employed at tasks which made use of their particular skills. Out of this twofold purpose of the Federal Theater Project, other consequences arose. An entire class, which had been cut off from the theater by high prices and the restriction of the theater to small sections of the country, once again saw "real live plays." The dramatic level of these plays rose gradually from *Lightnin'* and *Broken Dishes* to social criticism, the classics, and finally to new theatrical forms.

In her exciting story of this project, Miss Whitman sees the government once again subsidizing the "pioneer":

As long as the land held out, the subsidy took the form of free land grants, to individuals as well as railroads. Now that all the continent is claimed and cleared and Hollywood staked out by big business, the new pioneers, if they have the spirit to seek adventure, must find it not in physical movement but in exploring new regions of the mind; and here again the government offers a grub-stake.

The project thus becomes, not a receptacle for the unemployable, cast-off talent of the commercial theater, but a cultural vanguard, fighting on a front where the intellectual and financial domination of Hollywood may be challenged, and new goals evolved which the commercial theater is either too shortsighted to envision or too unstable to attain.

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