

would find pride in his accomplishments.

Mr. Anderson cites a WPA project in a Southern town where the workers put in overtime to complete the paving of their Main Street, "lifting it out of the mud and dust." When the paving was completed the people celebrated with dancing in the street.

The WPA needs more projects that will fill the workers with the desire to dance when the work is done.

WILLIAM SPENCER.

## Odyssey of the Jews

THE FISHMANS, by H. W. Katz. Translated by Maurice Samuel. Viking Press. \$2.50.

OF THE fiction published in America by German exiles, it is significant to note that a large proportion have been cast in the form of topical novels—a form, that is to say, which is primarily concerned with the fictional reinterpretation of current events. The enormous psychological pressure of these events in post-war and Nazi Germany, must have served to stamp them irrevocably in the consciousness of the creative artist; and the novels of Renn, Liepmann, Schoenstadt, and Bruno Frank have all rehearsed the drama of cultural barbarism as it appeared on the political stage. In this prize novel by a young German-Jewish exile, however, the emphasis is turned away from the political event towards a recapitulation of the author's past, which is at the same time the eternally tragic past of his people. Mr. Katz dissociates himself from all trace of the merely illustrative or informative, escaping the facile contemporaneity of reportage which is all too often the limiting sphere of the topical novel. Instead, he attempts to discover a focus for his values in the experiential texture of individual lives; and in order to do so he relegates the historical implications of his theme to the background,

from where they are drawn up only as they enter the total qualitative experience of his characters.

As a consequence of this shift in accentuation, the great problem facing Mr. Katz was the problem of style. Since the action centering around the Fishmans is always reduced to their commonplace perspective, it does not, of course, generate its own meaning in terms of some historical or social context. Whatever values Mr. Katz intended to express could only be conveyed by his treatment; and since the narrative structure of *The Fishmans* is simple first-person autobiography, treatment in this instance can only mean style. Hence the notable success which Mr. Katz achieves in his first section can be traced to the half-humorous, half-pathetic tone with which he evokes the lives of his protagonists, Yossel and Leah Fishman, and their little village of Strody on the Stryj located in pre-war Galicia. This stylistic quality reflects the naive simplicity and the guileless humanity which are the Fishmans' outstanding traits; and by viewing the brutalities of anti-Semitism through the framework of the Fishmans as a family group, Mr. Katz is able to present a devastating criticism which arises naturally from his whole conception of character.

In so far as Mr. Katz is able to maintain the exquisite tenderness of his tone, *The Fishmans* remains a unique and sensitive novel. But unfortunately this is only possible in the first part, where the scene is static, and where Mr. Katz has the leisure to develop his overtones by a judicious use of detail. When he writes about Yossel Fishman's journey to America, however, or Leah Fishman's wanderings on a refugee train during the war, the demands of exposition preclude those nuances which are the essence of his method; and instead of the emotive juxtaposition which invests the Fishmans with their poignancy, one receives a straightforward account which rarely attains the ironic incongruity of the previous section. Mr. Katz apparently sensed this discrepancy, for he studs his concluding pages with incidents designed to capture this effect—and in one sense that is the measure of his failure, for the quality of *The Fishmans* does not depend upon incident but upon a sensibility diffused into the very texture of the prose.

JOSEPH FRANK.

## Analysis of Race Prejudices

WE AMERICANS: A STUDY OF CLEAVAGE IN AN AMERICAN CITY, by Elin L. Anderson. Harvard University Press. \$3.

THAT the ingredients of America's melting pot have remained to a large extent unmixed is no longer news. But Miss Anderson in her study of Burlington, Vt., brings uncommon sense and sensitivity to her treatment of the barrier which ethnic factors impose



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upon human relations. As a believer in the democracy of the American dream, she is clearly disturbed by the prejudices and consequent discriminations which she finds in this conservative, individualistic community. Foreigners have insensibly penetrated the town and its occupations until now 66 percent of the population are other than Old Americans, but the latter retain control of the banks, most of the city's manufacturing, and the university. The challenge of the New Americans, the Irish, Jews, French-Canadians, to the dominance of Old Americans generates frictions which pervade every phase of social and economic life.

The author is aware that "particularly since the economic and political uncertainty of recent years, consciousness of class is coming to be more important than consciousness of 'race' as such." She cites the pertinent comment of one Irishman who said that "there's damn little fat in thinking you're better than an Eyetalian if neither of you can pay the rent." But she finds that this realization has not produced an alignment of workers comparable to that brought about among the business men by the Chamber of Commerce. At the time her facts were collected, there was an absence of union leadership and organization to give class cohesion to workers that would transcend the chasms of ethnic divisions deepened by the practices of dignitaries of the churches.

One cannot fail to become conscious, as one reads this book, of the latent soil of fascist

ideology that exists in the United States, particularly in the prevailing attitudes toward Jews that Miss Anderson describes. The author realizes that the task of effacing these prejudices is essential to the development, functioning, and preservation of democracy.

BERNHARD J. STERN.

★

## MAGAZINE

STATE OF AFFAIRS, July-August, 1938. 10 cents.

New York State voters will find this publication extremely useful in the coming elections. Issued by the Legislative and Research Bureau of the Communist Party of that state, the present issue provides a comprehensive analysis of Tammany and reaction, as well as a tabulation of the voting strength of parties in each assembly district. Another article gives an illuminating historical account of "Tammany's Betrayal of the Irish" from the time when Aaron Burr used the organization in an attempt to place himself in the White House as an opposition candidate to Thomas Jefferson in 1800. The vote records of various congressmen are analyzed in the light of the major issues which face the country and the specific local interests of the people whom they represent. John J. O'Connor and Bruce Barton are taken for a well deserved sleigh ride.

The issue is informative and suggestive. It serves as a model for legislative research and interpretation. One would like to see a publication of this type issued in every state in the union, since intelligent voting based on facts and figures is the basis for a victory over reaction in the crucial fall elections.

★ ★ ★

## MEDITATION ON ANCESTRY

What disparate pasts we had, what separate sleeping,  
when schools of us, like swimmers under ice,  
found no clear air-hole,  
were bound for drowning.

We traveled sinuous dream among blue mermen,  
grace of the fox-tail fern, face of the moonfish,  
our only stars  
of protoplasm.

Now from the pool we emerge, glistening, gasping,  
amazed by our vertebrate stance, and, chilled  
by the air's knowledge,  
advance, whispering.

This erect motion, the wind, the arched tree strumming  
the cliff, inform us fiercely, till we speak  
the lung's important will,  
the cry of union.

The riverine dream flows, but emigration  
carries up canyons head-wild scalars of  
the mountain life  
of revolution.

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