

READERS' FORUM

For a "Chamber of Horrors"

TO THE NEW MASSES:

IT IS a curious thing and a dangerous one, too, that American citizens, desiring to rent space in an American Fair to advance the American principles of peace and democracy as opposed to foreign theories of war and fascism, are denied what our Constitution states is an elementary right.

Strange rules are these by which the World's Fair Committee permits foreign countries to erect exhibitions propagandizing themselves while denying this to native organizations like the Joint Boycott Council of the American Jewish Congress. It is only a makeshift excuse to state as Mr. Whalen did that, "There has been no indication of any thought on the part of any one of them of introducing exhibits that would in any degree serve the purposes of political propaganda." It seems that the rules also would prevent this.

If this argument is well meant, it is incredibly naïve. It is childlike to assume that the exhibit of any nation will not be a reflection of its culture, traditions and politics. It is obvious that the exhibits of each nation are designed to attract the tourist trade and to popularize their native industries and, as a matter of course, the government.

What could there be in a Nazi exhibit but regimented art, regimented industry and regimented lies? The shadow of Hitler's "Mein Kampf" must inevitably drape the exhibit. It is inconceivable to think of the exhibition as anything but an exhibition of fascism.

We hope that Mr. Whalen does not desire this. But that is what he is going to have as surely as Hitler and Mussolini are carrying on a war of aggression in Spain today. Like the recent Olympics, the German buildings in New York's World Fair will be one great fascist advertising blurb.

Our organization is in emphatic agreement with the Joint Boycott Council's desire to expose Nazidom's lies by an exhibition very appropriately called a "Chamber of Horrors." At this point we express our earnest desire to cooperate with the Joint Boycott Council and assert that Young Communist League members will be ready to join the Council's picket line in the event that one is established in front of the Nazi buildings.

JOHN LITTLE, *Executive Sec'y,*
Young Communist League of
New York State

A Genteel Gathering

TO THE NEW MASSES:

REALIZING that you-all are always interested in the welfare and fulminations of that irresponsible Irish wit and genealogist, James T. Farrell, it gives me exceptional pleasure to report that my Winchellian snoop-hounds have unearthed and brought home a choice bit from the sassy columns of ye old Virginia daily, ye *Alexandria Gazette*.

"SPOTLIGHT: on Saturday evening a select little party of friends at the Eddie Gilmores to meet author James T. Farrell, who wrote the successful book—*World I Never Made*. . . Mr. Farrell has been in Washington gathering material for a new work, and has now returned to New York City . . . guests for the evening included Mrs. Royal S. Copeland, the James B. Powells, the Jack W. Joshins, the Roger Hawthornes, the Maurice Reises, the Rodney Southwicks, Miss Aurie Schwarz and Mr. John Maloney . . . a little dark gen'lman of the south did a bit of 'big apple-ing' and uke-strumming for

the entertainment of all, and there was food and drink to top off the evening!"

A word of explanation is necessary in order to appreciate the cultural and social aspects of genteel Virginia society accepting James T. Farrell to its sterile bosom. The particular society entertaining Mr. Farrell does not represent the F.F.V.'s (who seldom read anything deeper than *Gone with the Wind* or *Little Women*), but a new intellectual group that beat a leisurely exodus from Washington to the historic town across the river. Why? First, because nobody knew they were in Washington—they merely plopped and glittered like a raindrop on the ocean. Second, because some slick real-estate salesmen forced a lot of poor families out of poorer dwellings into worse slums and put a coat of paint, green shutters, and brass door-knockers on the former slum dwellings and sold them to gullible newspaper folks and New Dealers as authentic Colonial houses with a history. Well, in a way the houses do have a history. During prohibition they were inhabited by booze peddlers, pimps, poor folks, and prostitutes; in earlier days (not Colonial!) these houses were grog shops and whorehouses patronized by sailors when Alexandria was on the map as a port instead of a period.

However, the odors of Stark Young, James Branch Cabell, Richard Halliburton, and Robert E. Lee still linger in the old timbers—a faint nostalgia for the old days sneaks up and swats all the well-fed and well-paid newspaper folk in the seat of their pants, and they try to bring back that good old era of mint-juleps and cavaliers, when conditions were so good the slaves revolted with courageous regularity against their kind masters, and Nat Turner was given to the world. Perhaps it was not significant that James T. Farrell and Richard Halliburton attacked Alexandria at the same time, but when the Third Estate opens its heart and portals to entertain distinguished guests with food and drink and a dancing "little dark gen'lman of the South," we can see the old days coming back across the cobble-stone streets covered with asphalt, and we only hope these cultured folk on the banks of the Potomac take up the old habit of snuff-dipping and sneeze their heads off.

Alexandria, Va. "RECONSTRUCTED REBEL."

Writers' and Readers' Writers

TO THE NEW MASSES:

I AGREE quite fully with the letter on poetry by Lee Hays in the issue of January 11. In the same issue (Literary Section) there appeared a brilliant essay entitled "When Poets Stood Alone" by Dorothy Van Ghent. The letter was easy, toothsome reading—it was doubtless dashed off in an inspired mood, and like things done in this way, it breathes inspiration to the reader. The essay, on the other hand, is difficult to read and obviously belabored. The author must have spent months polishing this brilliant diamond and, like a diamond, it nourishes neither the stomach nor the mind.

Lee Hays is exactly right, too, in calling on Mike Gold to do battle with the "demons" that prevent the readers of NEW MASSES from getting good poetry to read, for Mike is about the only one who has the proper contempt for "cerebration"—the word is Mike's—although I think that is insulting the cerebrums that try to cerebration into a comprehension of most of this poetry and some prose like Dorothy Van Ghent's.

The NEW MASSES has come to be a splendid magazine, although I am sure its present splendor will pale before its future glory—thanks, I think, to its ability to get such straight-from-the-shoulder reactions as that of Lee Hays. Letters like that—from mere readers, not writers—are the true touchstone of a magazine's health.

And in making that distinction between readers and writers, I believe I have touched on the heart of the subject. A magazine like the NEW MASSES, I am sure, is intended to be a readers', not a writers', magazine. There are readers' writers and writers'

writers. Mike Gold is at all times a readers' writer—and great literature is all of this kind, readers' writing.

Why should poetry be wrapped in cacophony and incomprehensibility? If Wordsworth could write—I quote the substance of what the late English critic, George Saintsbury, said about the poet's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality"—the greatest poem in the English language although it doesn't make sense, why cannot we have better poems in the NEW MASSES when the poets have at their disposal material that makes the best sense in the world! For my part I miss the poetry of Hayes that used to adorn the pages of NEW MASSES. Writing in the conventional forms with "straight" English, it is my belief that Hayes has done the most memorable work in the poetic field that has yet appeared in the NEW MASSES.

That word "memorable" is another key-word for me. What is it that makes for distinction in literature, in music, in all art if it is not this feeling of memorableness of the thing seen, heard, or read? The first time one ever heard the *Blue Danube*, for example—and, yes, the strains of the *Internationale*, too—it seemed that one had *always* heard them. The same is true of Lincoln's Gettysburg speech, of the celebrated passages of Shakespeare, of the formulations of Marx and Engels, the incisive summations of Lenin and Stalin.

Poetry, along with music, is peculiarly the art that springs from the bosom of the people. And what the people love in art and life is that which possesses this "memorable" quality—as of something that has always been and will always be.

Chicago, Illinois.

IRA BENSON.

The Sixty Families

TO THE NEW MASSES:

PROFESSOR R. K. LAMB's analysis of Lundberg's book on the Sixty Families is the kind of discriminating review for which we look to the NEW MASSES. No better review of this book is likely to appear in any paper.

Shortcomings of the Lundberg book, as pointed out by Dr. Lamb, suggest a comparison with the Marxist book, *Rulers of America: A Study of Finance Capital*, by Anna Rochester of Labor Research Association. (International Publishers, 1936.) I read the Rochester book with deepest interest and did not find in it any of the shortcomings that are apparent in *America's Sixty Families*.

Where, as Lamb explained, "Lundberg's treatment of the leading families is inadequate to the complexities of the set-up," Rochester's analysis does give the reader "comprehension of the relationship between families and corporations by way of banks and other control institutions."

I commend *Rulers of America* to those who have read *America's Sixty Families* and to all those who want to understand more fully how and why a plutocracy controls the United States.

LAWRENCE MAYER.

Croton-on-Hudson, N. Y.

Hague and Hague

TO THE NEW MASSES:

IS this man Hague that the New York *World-Telegram* is writing about any relation to the Hague that has been the subject of a series in the New York *Post*? I note the address given in each newspaper is the same, but on comparing these two dossiers offered concurrently to the reading public, I confess to a slight feeling of dizziness. There must be some mistake, and I am anxiously waiting to see what the *World-Telegram's* Hague is going to do about it. He certainly owes it to Mr. Roy Howard, as well as to himself, to make the public understand that the *World-Telegram's* upright and successful Mr. Hague belongs in an entirely different world from the *Post's* disreputable character.

New York.

MARGARET WRIGHT MATHER.

BOOK REVIEWS

In Quest of Freedom

THE WILD GOOSE CHASE, by Rex Warner. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.75.
POEMS, by Rex Warner. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.

THE simultaneous publication of a novel and a volume of verse by Rex Warner introduces to American readers another writer who is associated with the Auden-Spender-Lewis group. That the remarkable work of the *New Country* and *New Signatures* contributors was not a flash in the pan, as some observers persistently rumor, is indicated not only by the superb quality of Auden's recent work (*Spain, Letters from Iceland*), but by the unusual ability of such less familiar figures as Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNiece, John Lehmann, and other writers whose work appears in the semi-annual collection, *New Writing*. These two books by Warner—and especially the novel—further illustrate the imaginative energy and versatility of the younger left-wing writers in England.

The Wild Goose Chase places once more in the foreground of discussion that strikingly unfortunate term, the "fable." Much of the talk which has revolved around the literary phenomenon which that term is intended to name has suffered from absence of extended definition, and it is devoutly to be hoped that the literary issues implicit in the brief comments which have already appeared in the *NEW MASSES* will soon receive fuller treatment. Meanwhile, it is appropriate to inform the reader that Warner is quoted by his publishers to have said that "The only modern novelist I like is Kafka. . . ."

This statement, I feel, is symptomatic of that exaggerated impression of Kafka's importance for contemporary fiction which Spender spread in England a few years ago and which has made the discussion of Kafka's genuine and original talent so awkward in this country. At the same time, this type of exaggeration calls attention to the important fact that not a few writers of undoubted talent regard the naturalistic method in fiction as oppressive (within the memory of this generation it was hailed as "emancipatory"). I suspect that some of these writers are confusing naturalism with its less gifted practitioners. There is, at any rate, a movement away from the restrictions of "photographic literalisms" of which Thomas Wolfe's announcement about the nature of his new novel (sections have appeared in the *NEW MASSES* literary section of January 11) is only the most recent instance. And this movement, which has complex sources in contemporary society as well as in literary tradition, requires evaluation. The increasing preoccu-

pation with the "myth" and the "legend," it is perhaps safe to predict, will lead in two general and opposite directions. For some writers anti-literalism will be the high road to a new literary mysticism; for others, one hopes, it will be an approach to an enriched realism. There will be a gathering compulsion in criticism to distinguish between the poetic penetration into reality which Mann is attempting in the Joseph cycle, for example, and the sickening retreat from reality exemplified by Cabell's dreary legend of Poictesme. Moreover, a disciplined exercise of critical language becomes imperative when Sinclair Lewis's "realism" degenerates into what is certainly a fable in the vulgar sense, and when Rex Warner's "allegory" turns into a searching commentary on capitalist society.

The Wild Goose Chase is obviously indebted to *The Castle* and *The Trial*. But what makes it so noteworthy is not its mechanical adaptation of Kafka's tortured inconclusiveness—indeed the novel suffers in those passages where such adaptation leads to a literalism of its own—but its assimilation of Kafka's fluid apperceptions to the native tradition of satirical political allegory in *Gulliver's Travels* and *Erewhon*. Warner escapes from the shut rooms and endless corridors to

the sunlight and the fields. He combines with Kafka's elaborate analysis of terror and frustration, Swift's animated narrative of adventure and wonder. Kafka could find for his Mr. K. no other escape from the weighty burden of his mysterious superiors than the oblivion of death. The climax of Warner's novel is the invigorating seizure of power from their oppressors by the workers and peasants. Swift, in *A Tale of a Tub*, objectified through allegory the historical force of the church's doctrinal deviations; Butler investigated the Victorian compromise in his land of Nowhere, in which the "colleges of Unreason" taught the "hypothetical language"; and Warner, in *The Wild Goose Chase*, gives in imaginatively symbolic terms the diagnosis and prescription for the pathology of fascism.

The precise meaning of the Wild Goose is never explicitly formulated in the novel, but it is apparent from the context that it symbolizes such virtues as freedom and courage and strength. It is certainly one of the failings of the novel that this symbol embodies a concept of individual emancipation which, as in Kafka, reduces itself to a mystical transaction between the individual and the universe. With its "mysterious barbaric love" the Wild Goose represents the never-quenched spirit of individual yearning for the ideal, which in Warner's poems, as in Lawrence's, is too frequently befuddled with the image of "the blood." This is not, however, the crucial point of the novel. It is the immediate road on which men must travel before they can even begin to feel as individuals that Warner has portrayed. And this is the road of social revolution.

The three brothers who set out on bicycles to discover the Wild Goose represent three generalized personalities. Rudolph is a sportsman and adventurer of the Kipling type, indifferent to ideas, spurred by love of action and fame. David, the bookish favorite of the local clergyman, is an aesthete, a scholar of ambiguous sex who despises the vulgarity of real existence. And George is a plain, honest, common-sense fellow; he is impatient with the social injustices which Rudolph covers up with self-confident bluff and David with metaphysical fumbling; his favorite authors, as he later tells his shocked inquisitioners, are Shakespeare, Karl Marx, Fielding in *Tom Jones*, and Isaiah.

On their journey to the "frontier" the brothers separate. George encounters a fantastic pedant who lives the life of a recluse tending two flowerbeds, of which one contains all the flowers mentioned in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* of Virgil, and the other all the posies that "in happier times" were culled by Elizabethan lovers. The intellectual debasement of the academic isolationist (Warner himself is a teacher of Latin and

Recently Recommended Books

- Red Star over China*, by Edgar Snow. Random. \$3. (Book Union Selection for January.)
America's Sixty Families, by Ferdinand Lundberg. Vanguard. \$3.75.
Two Wars and More to Come, by Herbert L. Matthews. Carrick & Evans. \$2.50.
Contemporary Mexican Artists, by Augustin Velasquez Chavez. Covici-Friede. \$2.75.
Marc Anthony, by Jack Lindsay. Dutton. \$3.75.
Letters from Iceland, by W. H. Auden and Louis MacNiece. Random. \$3.
Old Hell, by Emmett Gowen. Modern Age. Cloth, 85c. Paper, 25c.
Madame Curie, by Eve Curie. Translated by Vincent Sheean. Doubleday, Doran. \$3.50.
Six Centuries of Fine Prints, by Carl Zigrosser. Covici-Friede. \$5.
Young Henry of Navarre, by Heinrich Mann. Knopf. \$3.
The Pretender, by Lion Feuchtwanger. Viking. \$2.50.
The Flivver King, by Upton Sinclair. United Automobile Workers of America. Also by the author, Pasadena, Cal. 25c.
Ralph Fox: A Writer in Arms, edited by John Lehmann, T. A. Jackson, and C. Day Lewis. International. \$1.75.
Labor Agitator: The Story of Albert Parsons, by Alan Calmer. International. 35c.
The Civil War in the United States, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. International. \$2.50.
Engels on Capital, translated and edited by Leonard E. Mins. International. \$1.25.