

Five Minutes, Oleo

By H. H. Lewis

Ole Olson, .

"Prominent farmer of this community,"

Paused at the bottom rung of the ladder leading from the hallway of his barn, up through the loft, up toward a rafter. Many a time he had mounted that total height to throw hay down from a crammed harvest.

But now—

His purpose very different.

Forty rungs in that ladder,

Worn glossy by the callouses of as many years:

To climb now,

Pausefully,

Reluctantly,

Was to epitomize it all . . .

Never had he been called lazy.

In Minnesota, across the flat visibility of the Swedish township, his woman's kitchen-light had always been the first to appear at morning, his lantern the first to go swinging barnward;

Five miles away some Erik prompting, "Greta, Greta, time to get up, that Olson's at his cows";

All the local Knutes pillowed conveniently beside windows that faced the center:

Ole the free alarm clock,

Ole the pace-setter,

"Pushing on the reins."

Never had he been called extravagant.

"Oleo" becoming "Alarm Clock's" other nickname after a gossip neighbor discovered him selling all his butter and eating oleomargarine.

Never had he been called a poor manager—

"Keeping books" for the Extension Service of the State College of Agriculture, filling the blank spaces in big annuals, achieving more than a mere-factive ledger, a heartfelt diary of his heydays

From the World War to the World Depression,

Till loss became too remindful.

Now once more upon the ladder,

Up to the crossbeam holding the framed parchment MASTER FARMERS OF AMERICA, his own name gorgeously calligraphed hereunder as one of the 48 so honored for 1927—

He extended a gnarled finger,

Fondlingly,

Tremblingly,

Rubbing away some fly-specks . . .

Up to the roof at last,

He opened his eyes again, facing the cowed hay-entrance, and peered out upon the familiar landscape shimmering in earthlight real;

And he gripped the rung tighter,

Holding on,

Holding on,

And he rested chin upon it, looking . . .

Could Heaven itself be dearer?

But could Hell be worse than banishment alive from *this*?

Ole Olson,

Not praying to God and Frazier-Lemke any longer,

Removed a coil of rope from his shoulder, tying one end to a rafter and the other around his neck.

II

Scratching like a mole,

Dusty old soul,

Oleo, Oleo-Ole."

*"Ole, Ole, Oleo-Ole,**

Longest-houred clodsman in the country whole,

Worst to hirling roustabouts from Pole to Pole;

Had he jumped,

Was he dead?

Satan taunting him with that old ditty?

No,

Worse yet,

Sounds like Nels Nelson!

Mortification at death's door—

His former hired man, the belly-aching Bolshevik, the organizer in the Farmers' Holiday Association,

That fellow at just this time

Popping into the hallway below!

III

Two hundred pitchfork-men waiting yonder,

Tines sharp as the logic of Lenin,

Courthouse-bound to prevent a number of foreclosures by threat of low bidding:

Nelson announces,

Palming his timepiece with a flourish toward the one who has stopped trying to de-noose himself quickly enough.

"All right now,

If you can decide to be saved by 'damn Reds,'

Five minutes, Oleo" . . .

* Concocted years ago by a Yankee harvest-follower, this being doubly vicious because Ole does not rhyme with whole, the mispronunciation still parroted by certain local Swedes for pure damned meanness.

READERS' FORUM

For Subsidized Art

TO THE NEW MASSES:

I HAVE just read the article entitled "The Federal Arts Bill" by Elizabeth Noble in your issue of February 8. I wish to compliment the writer upon the comprehensive scope of her treatment of the measure, and also upon her sympathetic understanding of the potentialities for enlargement of the culture of the masses of American people within the bill. Its passage will require the united and vigorous effort of all lovers of the arts in America, of all liberals and intellectuals who patriotically desire to see the cultural taste of our fellow citizens elevated.

For generations, the American people have been denied access to the masterpieces of art of the present and of the past. The theater has been an avocation of the rich, and participation in its cultural delights has been denied the very people who needed it the most. We have suffered from an intellectual snobbery in America. Though we have spent more money on public education in recent years than have any three comparable nations elsewhere in the world combined, we cannot arrogate to ourselves credit for having accomplished true education and artistic appreciation for the majority of our population. There is no more laudable objective, it seems to me, than that of fostering movements and helping in the passage of laws the inevitable result of which will be the proper appreciation of culture, of beauty, of artistic achievement in our daily life. In Europe we are known as a money-grubbing nation. We have apotheosized Mammon. We have subordinated most everything to our national cupidity. We have affected metaphorically at the altar of gold. We are relegated to the background that which all educated Europeans consider paramount: a cultural life and appreciation for arts and beauties of the 'd.

My bill, H.R. 9102, and its parallel measure in Senate, provides, as was well set forth by Elizabeth Noble in your February 8 issue, for a permanent Bureau of Fine Arts, setting up six departments dealing with the main categories of the art, encouraging the creation of artistic output providing for the autonomous control thereof by artists themselves in their organized unions. America has subsidized everything under the sun of art and culture, in the sense of encouraging the work and file to develop their knowledge and inheritance for its joys and its beauties. We have wastefully spent government funds to preserve the forests, the insects in the ground, animals in the sea, birds in the air. We nonchalantly appropriate seventy million for each new dreadnaught, less sums for air "defenses"—but until now we neglected to perform a national duty, to create a permanent Bureau of Fine Arts, to bring home to the humblest citizen in our land the culture which flows from artistic appreciation and attainment out of which no nation can be truly great, and out of which no nation in the final analysis can create itself as genuinely civilized.

hington, D. C.

JOHN M. COFFEE.

The Easy Way

NEW MASSES:

viewing *The Tyranny of Words* in the New Masses of February 1, I quoted from it two statements about Hegel, supposing, not unnaturally, that I was inated with Stuart Chase, that they were

what he had to say about Hegel. I find that they were what Lancelot Hogben had to say about Hegel. It is not plagiarism, of course; Chase refers to Hogben, and changes a word here and there. But considering the acclaim *The Tyranny of Words* is receiving, it may be illuminating to quote the two passages—they are not unrepresentative of the method of the book—to show how little mental fatigue the process of popularization need entail.

Chase writes (*The Tyranny of Words*, p. 265): "Hegel we remember as the metaphysician who upbraided the astronomers for trying to find more planets when philosophy had established the number at 7 for eternity. 'Of all the philosophers since Plato,' observes Hogben, 'none has adopted a world view more diametrically opposed to the scientific outlook.'"

"Perhaps Hegel's chief accomplishment was the reestablishment of the occult properties of the number 3. The secret of the universe, he said, lies in finding out how reason works. Reason equals unity. Waste no time on experiment or observation. Every argument which arises in the quest of the absolute consists of three parts (the magic three):

"The first step—which Hegel seldom succeeded in taking—is a plain statement, and is called 'thesis.'"

"The second step is the negation or contradiction of that statement, and is called 'anti-thesis.'"

Hogben wrote (*Retreat from Reason*, Northampton edition, pp. 22-23. Dots indicate my omissions.): "Hegel wrote upstanding scientists . . . citing the time which astronomers wasted in looking for a new planet. Philosophy clearly showed that there could only be seven. . . Of all the philosophers since Plato none has adopted a world view more diametrically opposed to the scientific outlook. Hegel's chief accomplishment was to reinstate the occult properties of the number three. . . Reason or unity was the source of all. So the secret of the universe lies in finding how the reason works. Hegel did not waste time like astronomers who make thousands of observations. . .

"Every argument which arises in the successive series which lead to the Absolute consists of three parts. The first step, which Hegel never succeeded in taking, is a plain statement. It is called the thesis. The second step is usually translated in English as the 'negation' or 'contradiction.'"

Compare these sentence by sentence. If he is going to make so much of the meaning of words, why does Chase begin, "Hegel we remember," when he obviously means, "How well I remember Hogben"? What are the "referents"? Or for the changes in Hogben's terms, "reestablishment" for "reinstate," "never" for "seldom"?

Boston, Mass.

OBED BROOKS.

Southbury's Strategy

TO THE NEW MASSES:

ALSON J. SMITH's letter in your issue of January 25 shows considerable understanding and appreciation of the action taken by the town of Southbury. However, what he does not know is that the townspeople, without indulging in a lot of idle talk, were following the advice of several lawyers scattered all the way from Hartford to New York. For instance, he refers to the "indignation meeting," but fails to note that it was held immediately after an adjourned special town meeting had appointed a zoning commission to draw up zoning regulations.

The blue-law business was a legal device to prevent the German-American Bund from doing any work on their acreage while the zoning commission was drafting the regulations and getting them approved by a subsequent town meeting. The people of Southbury hate blue laws as much as Mr. Smith does. He undoubtedly will have noticed that the case was continued until after the final town meeting had ratified the regulations. The Bund in the meantime was prevented from starting any work which would have subjected the regulations to attack on the ground that the town was attempting to

make them retroactive. The objective gained, the blue-law complaints were dropped like hot potatoes, bail refunded, and the two Nazis sent on their way. Waterbury, Conn.

R. J. HALL.

Hope for a Free Cuba

TO THE NEW MASSES:

I HAVE just finished reading the very interesting article "Cuba: A Fascist Link Weakens" by Cristobal Davis, in your issue of December 14 last. I was in Cuba recently for almost four weeks and could not read this issue or comment upon the article in question until just now.

In the main the article is correct; there are, however, one or two points which are of enough importance to require comment. Mr. Davis states "true, the *Armas* is still in Havana harbor, and its crew of one hundred and ten finally left for Spain recently." This is definitely incorrect, as there are eighty men still aboard, and they are being starved as regularly as formerly. I know that as late as January 20 they were still in Havana. I used to meet some of the boys from the ship every night at a certain cafe. The newspapers were full of the story about there being no food aboard the ship twice in one week, right after Christmas. They are a fine bunch of fellows, and very anxious to get back to Spain. I understand that the Spanish government is paying their salaries to their families in Spain.

Mr. Davis also has a letter in the issue of January 25 concerning the Marinello meeting held in Havana on the eighth of January. I had the great pleasure of being present at this meeting, and in fact sat right close to Marinello on the platform. There were thirty thousand people present, and very attentive, too. Absolute decorum prevailed during the hour and a half of Marinello's speech, but the tribute paid him both before and after his speech leaves no doubt about how he stands in the affections of the Cuban working classes. The stadium where this meeting was held is way out in the suburbs, probably eight miles or so from the center of the city, yet thousands walked to hear him. The most significant thing about this meeting, however, is the fact that Dr. Alexander Vergara, president of the National Agricultural Party, was seated close to Marinello on the platform.

The parties of the Left are all working in close harmony and there is no question but that when a legal election is held Marinello will become the next president of Cuba. I believe the people's front will be strong enough to prevent any such action as Vargas took in Brazil.

This letter would not be complete without reference to the great work being done by Adolfo Garcia Fernandez, a Spaniard by birth, a Cuban citizen by choice. He has been on the air for four years, broadcasting nightly over the same station which carried Marinello's speech, CMBX on the long wave, COBX on the short wave. His program is known as the "Spanish Diary of the Air"—"the voice of Spanish democracy in Cuba." Every night from seven to eight. This is one of the strongest anti-fascist programs in Cuba, and it has caused Garcia to get into many jams with the government. In addition to this radio program he edits and publishes *Facetas de Actualidad Española*, one of the great anti-fascist publications of the world, which is making rapid strides in circulation in the United States. I have seen letters, in stacks, from all over the world, commenting upon his radio work. His magazine subscription list contains the names of many illustrious Americans. Garcia is an "honorary" member of the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and publicizes many news items pertaining to their work.

With the thought that the Cuban workers are thinking correctly, and the fact that their leaders at present are of the best, there is great hope for a free Cuba.

Baltimore, Md.

COLEMAN BLUM.