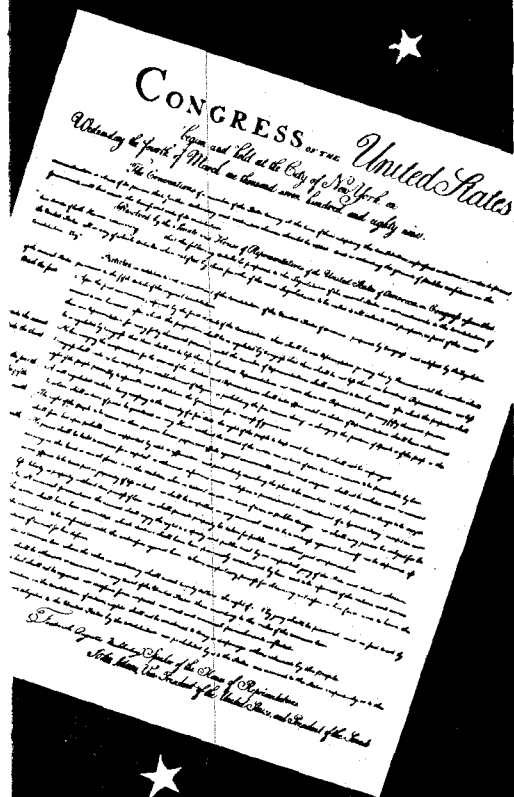


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At these stunts dozens of *New Yorker* poets and Broadway skit writers can outwrite him and make him look silly.

The other quality that flaws his work has been too much commented upon to call for much comment here. It is obscurity. It clouds much of his work and is the result, so far as I have been able to analyze it, of three circumstances that in no case justify it. One is the falling into the personal association which may be titillating to the author, or a small circle of intimates but which in any case remains a solitary diversion; another is the use of accidental association, that is, of things that happen to occur together in the mind in association as mechanical and arbitrary as the alliterations in a dictionary, and which there is as little reason for using; the third is imprecision and vagueness which irritate the careful reader who, looking for deeper beauties under fine filaments of sound, does not find them.

Both flaws are present even in some of his best poems. They appear even in a poem of such large sonorities and ideas as "Spain."

The underlying tone of the poems is a sadness that comes close at times to resignation, at times to cynicism. If Auden goes any closer he will shut off his potentialities for becoming a major poet of and for our time. At present he stops himself short by his reverence for human achievement, as in his memorial poems to William Butler Yeats, Ernst Toller, and Sigmund Freud; and in the poem "Spain." So long as greatness in the lives of great men, and greatness in the actions of groups of men, continue to attract him, large poems will be possible to him. Otherwise he will find that the refuges of defeat are, on the poetic plane, as mean, inhospitable, and cramped as on the geographical plane. A few poems in *Another Time* bear this out.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Hunters and Pioneers

THE TREES, by Conrad Richter. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

CONRAD RICHTER's new novel, *The Trees*, reconstructs a phase of pioneer life of the period not long after the Revolution, when there were only fifteen stars in the American flag. It is the story of the hunter Worth Luckett and his family, their life in the dense wilderness of what is now the state of Ohio.

A family that "followed the woods as some families follow the sea," the Lucketts set out from Pennsylvania when the game left the country, and tramped through the woods to make their home on a spot north of the Ohio River. We are given a series of episodes which recreate their struggle to wrest a living from the forest. Their woodlore, folklore, religious and social patterns, life, love, and death are all revealed as Richter unfolds the world of these American primitives in a prose expressing the idiom of the period. The writer seems to have set himself the task of presenting the world of the

Lucketts as it appeared to them: what they felt and thought about it, and how they expressed it. He succeeds in making the reader "see" the family disintegrate under the solitude and hardship of the forest, finally to abandon the life of hunters and turn to farming and the civilization of the pioneer settlement.

An oration by one of the characters entitled "Hail to Civil Law, and Death and Damnation to Military Domination" reveals the trend toward civilization that was rising as a reaction against the long period of military domination necessary during a revolutionary period. To those who wished to take Canada by arms, the people were beginning to say, "... God forbid! If our American eagle wants to scream, let it scream over the fields, forests, and workshops of its own white and red peoples for civil equality and justice!" Words which might well be said now to those who would place our frontiers across the Atlantic. Yet this is not a "historical" novel, but a lyrical epic of early American life. Technically, some of the episodes are too brief, and we cannot accept Richter's idea that the trees had some mystically oppressive effect upon the folk of that period. On the whole, however, the book makes pleasant reading.

RALPH ELLISON.

Labor and Machines

ORGANIZED LABOR AND PRODUCTION, by Morris L. Cooke and Philip Murray. Harper & Bros. \$2.50.

CONSULTING engineer Morris L. Cooke is one of America's foremost authorities on Scientific Management (capitals indicate its importance in the industrial world). Chairman Philip Murray of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee is vice president of the United Mine Workers of America and also vice president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. These two men together have written a significant book on "labor's part in cooperating for greater efficiency in industry."

As a strong, convincing argument for collective bargaining and what it can achieve for organized workers, this study marshals important facts on trade unionism today, working conditions, and labor's rights under the National Labor Relations Act. It includes an analysis of what is really happening in technological developments and the use of electricity in industry. Chapters on each of these topics make good reading.

Recognizing that unemployment, especially technological unemployment, is the outstanding contradiction of the present business system, Cooke and Murray agree that "a final solution of the unemployment problem must be left to the future." But forces already set in motion by the government, by industry, and by organized labor may, if properly directed, as the authors indicate, stave off the hardships resulting from further displacement of men and women by labor-saving machinery.

When these two authorities attempt to

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discuss the abolition of unemployment under socialism in the Soviet Union, they desert their scientific approach and indulge in statements which have no basis in fact. Confusing the socialist state with fascism in Nazi Germany, they assert, falsely, that unemployment has also been abolished under Hitler. A good factual study of the Soviet Union, such as Pat Sloan's *Russia Without Illusions* (Modern Age, 1939) is a necessary antidote to the anti-Soviet bias the authors display.

In a closing dialogue, Cooke and Murray agree to disagree on certain points of program. They agree that their principal purpose in writing this book was to demonstrate to the open-minded that collective bargaining works. But the engineer sees "management engineering," or Scientific Management, and the Taylor system as most important and leading toward a free society and a better life. Murray, the labor leader, declares that "our principal dependence for the extension of collective bargaining must be placed on labor's own activities, on its insistence on collective bargaining and its efforts to make its practice serve broad social purposes." The CIO's record already proves that it can serve such broad purposes.

GRACE HUTCHINS.

Political Correspondent

CHIP OFF MY SHOULDER, by Thomas L. Stokes. Princeton University Press. \$3.

THIS is a political correspondent's autobiography considerably superior to the worst ones (Mark Sullivan) and not nearly on the high perceptive level of the best ones (Lincoln Steffens). I should say that Mr. Stokes has one really good eye. With it he has been able to see the matchless arrogance of the South's bourbons. (When he first began his newspaper work Mr. Stokes witnessed a lynching that inflamed his conscience.) In Washington, the good eye pierced the darkness shrouding the governments of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover—that upstanding triumvirate of monopoly dictatorship. He admired the congressional gadflies who buzzed around in the wilderness occasionally stinging some sensitive spot. Particularly did he respect the leadership of the order of "sons of the wild jackass"—Norris, La Follette, Walsh—who battled the plunderbund ensconced in the Treasury, Interior, and law departments. That good eye makes for indignation, for passionate charges against cheap politicians, against the cliques who tie up useful legislation by meddling with the rules. The other eye, the bad one, suffers from typical liberal myopia. What torments American life is a lame distributive system, the monstrous machine, the political hack, the irresponsible employer—everything but the real thing. The bad eye also saw evil in the political activities of WPA workers. For his investigation into the Kentucky WPA Mr. Stokes got the Pulitzer Prize and the country the notorious Hatch law.

JOHN STUART.

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