

Who Owns Our Presidents?

William Blake reviews Matthew Josephson's book on the men who put the politicians in the White House. . . . Frank J. Wallace discusses "This War and Your Money."

THE PRESIDENT MAKERS, by Matthew Josephson. Harcourt, Brace. \$3.75.

THE name of Matthew Josephson is a warrant of intelligent, laborious, and inspired research, of felicitous style, of continuing charm in exposition, and of a cunning manufacture of the varied and uneven ingredients of history. For, after all, written history is architectionic, and Josephson excels in rounded presentations. Throughout the book there is a current of sympathy for the champions of temporarily lost causes, such as those of lower middle class, poor farmers, and workers. Nor, in personal description, does he succumb to the temptation to judge statesmen from the vantage point of their completed actions. He realizes that though this canon is valid for appraisal, it is not necessarily so for subjective description. The subjective portrait of Theodore Roosevelt is typical. There the merchant aristocrat, demagogue, alleged defender of commonalty against plutocratic plunder, servile messenger of these same plutocrats, crusader for middle class radicalism and yet skeptic of the masses, chase each other through his fluctuating psyche, grazing the borders of insincerity but rarely passing them. Wilson, too, dreamer of a formal ratification of human unity, is portrayed as schemer and a relentless dragoon of political dissenters, and yet as a pathetic victim of his own illusions, falling into paralysis by his own contradictions. Certainly the interpenetration of political government by the industrial barons and their mirror government at Washington (as under Hanna) is vividly contrasted with the glimmerings of social conscience under Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson, due to the growing resistance of a doomed middle class. Nor do these mighty pictures dwarf those of minor actors. A man of such "culture" as William Howard Taft is shown in his tory futility in the dramatic representation of Ballinger and the timber steals. One thinks of Casimir-Perier, so rich in liberal tradition, broken on the wheel of the Dreyfus case, or of Winston Churchill lending his administrative talent and the Marlborough tradition to the foul Denikin. All capitalist statesmen are prisoners of capitalist circumstance, and that truism has rarely been better demonstrated than in *The President Makers*.

What then is missing in Josephson's adroit work? I am sorry to say, everything that matters. The refined study of Theodore Roosevelt is not such as a man impregnated with proletarian resolve could possibly have written. He does not bring into proper relief the terrible implications of Teddy's lynch remarks about Haywood, surely the lowest

level attained by a President since John Adams. He does not emphasize the gory, sadistic side of the great President when he gloated in the blood of the martyrs of the Paris Commune and wished that fate for workers here. Why did Teddy so hideously libel the memory of Tom Paine? What was back of his insolent racism, his passion for the most vulgar imperialism, without even the Cæsarian glow of Cecil Rhodes or the philosophical dithyrambs of Seeley? Why did his murderous speech on Haywood precede his craven surrender to Wall Street on the Tennessee Coal and Iron acquisition, the most polluted use ever made of the White House? What a lout! This flamboyant bluffer, who never had the guts of the meanest of men against the rich he blustered about, who even lacked the grace of a tired cop toward the wretched Crainquebilles of this world, why does this low fellow deserve such delicate psychic portraiture? Because "fairness" is a bourgeois historical passion. But we have heard the Isaiah thunders of Lenin, rolling with the majesty of a rising class, as he lightened pictures of these wretches, a thousand times truer than the so-called objective science of rootless scholarship.

From the pages of Debs, from the mighty prophecy of Jack London in *The Iron Heel* one can see the President makers for what they sought, and their designees in the White House for what they were. Not the futile struggles of the Crolys and the Houses, not the fatigued splendors of a John Hay, but the twenty million sacrificed immigrants, the rise of a militant proletariat, the vivid criticism of Socialists pushed against the society in which the rich gibbered of revolution, the suspicious middle class turned to the sturdy La Follette, and where Debs strode the proletarian world like a Colossus. From the current set up by the dynamo of the proletariat, light was communicated to such fiery Single Taxers as Louis F. Post (so much more significant than that vulgarizer of radicalism, Tom L. Johnson), and power to the great Wobbly revolt of the wholly disinherited, and the cleansing broom of Lincoln Steffens. The manner in which the generous impulses so given were converted into gentility by Woodrow Wilson should have been made a demonstration that all ideologies and passions, when adapted to the interests of a capitalist class, deceive the hopes of honest men, and lead to disillusion and cynicism, and ultimately to despair, and these in turn to the open, brutal control of the state by the plutocracy.

Had the story from 1896 to 1919 been cast in that mold, had the true role

of liberal ideas (in their Protean variations at the service of a class) been shown, had the driving force of labor and the correlative fear of its impact been the source of the political descriptions, then instead of the exquisite book of a conscientious scholar we should have had the history of the President makers, as they, in their turn, were driven by their objective situation. Matthew Josephson has given us luscious fruit, but, alas without seed.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

Modern Fables

THE CAT'S CRADLE-BOOK, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Illustrated by Bertram Hartman. Viking Press. \$2.50.

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER has written a book of fables in the classic vein. Each of these charming stories contains a barb of satire, and in the exquisitely written narratives, so simple that they can be enjoyed by children, the facts of modern life are condensed. "You see, these stories are not merely works of art, they are nursery tales and education," says someone in the introduction. Through tales such as these, children of every society have absorbed prudential wisdom.

Miss Warner's wisdom is modern, and for us. Only our generation could appreciate the fable of the wealthy magpie's bequest, a fund for indigent cats. The recipients of relief mice, it is carefully stipulated, must be truly indigent—it will not do to reinforce the energies of still vigorous cats, but it is necessary to avert the dangerous desperation of the starving. The rest of the story describes perfectly the character of capitalist charity. For us, too, is the ironic "The Two Mothers," which recounts the bereavements of a wildcat and an ewe, one caused by a polecat, the other by the royal butcher. To convert the apologue, translate "polecat" as petty gangster and "butcher" as imperialist war. "The ewe drew herself up. 'Your children are killed by a common low polecat. Mine are taken by the eagle which is king of Birds or the Butcher, who is a man and Lord of Creation. Such deaths are splendid and honorable.'"

When stories such as these are written with the slyness of phrase, the felicity of descriptive double-talk which is Sylvia Townsend Warner's, the result is a little burr of a book that is not easy to brush off. Flaubert once wrote a short story in the form of a medieval saint's life, "The Legend of St. Julian the Hospitalier." With Flaubert's precision of "period" detail, the story remains cold, even a little repulsive to its simulation of the piety

of another age. But read Miss Warner's story of the fox "who had been reading the *Lives of the Saints* and was so delighted with the style of the book that he decided to become a saint himself." Or if you think that modern animal stories must be of the Kipling type, study that parable of humble labor, "The Donkey's Providence." Even an old fashioned fairy tale peers at us from these pages as a lively account of the Radical Socialist baker who overworks his daughter when he becomes the servant of the castle.

Tolstoy once wrote that "the artist of the future will understand that to compose a fairy tale, a touching little song, a lullaby, an entertaining riddle, an amusing jest, or to draw a sketch which will delight dozens of generations or millions of children and adults is incomparably more important and more fruitful than to compose a novel or a symphony or paint a picture which will divert some member of the wealthy class for a short time and then be forever forgotten." Perhaps we should not be so ponderous about this little gift book. But it is true that Miss Warner can write these stories precisely because her vision of her age is clear—as was the vision of that remote fabulist, Aesop.

MILLCENT LANG.

Whose Pocketbook?

THIS WAR AND YOUR POCKETBOOK, by L. Seth Schmitman. Vanguard Press. \$1.

THERE is some very sound advice in this book. For any family with an income upwards of \$3,000 a year, with another \$3,000 or more in savings, there are warnings and suggestions which deserve heeding. But such families represent less than 10 percent of the population. The other 90 percent cannot do much with this expert guidance.

Yet this is a valuable book from some aspects which will be, I'm afraid, rather unexpected for the author. Mr. Schmitman once occupied an important post in the Department of Commerce and is now, we are told, "consulting economist to leading corporations." It is not surprising to find him upholding the reactionary positions of the anti-relief, anti-labor coterie. And the fact is that he has very little idea why things are what they are. But there is here some plain speaking, the kind which Willkie and Roosevelt carefully avoid. Inflation is of course to be expected. The author indicates that savings in the bank will be worth less, your dollar will buy less, you will have even less to fall back on than you thought. Your life insurance has fixed benefits. Borrow to the limit on your policies and invest in second grade railroad bonds and certain common stocks. He frowns upon endowments and annuities.

Mr. Schmitman seems to have no more idea of why there is so much money unused in the banks than Stuart Chase. But he sees the low interest rates and the inflationary forces at play and draws the accurate conclusion that wise money will pull out of prime corporate bonds and long term US Treasury issues, and

invest in stocks and bonds where the rise in commodity prices will increase the chances of a profit on the principal as well as juicy yields. Especially is this course to be followed when the war spreads, and most particularly when the United States is becoming more and more embroiled in it.

As for real estate, if you own a house free and clear, raise a big mortgage on it and invest in other houses. There will be a real estate boom along right soon. But sell while they're still buying, because values are bound to collapse with the deflation that will follow, and since somebody must get stung, make sure it is not you. If you rent an apartment, sign the unsuspecting landlord up to a long term lease stipulating annual redecorating and no increase just because taxes go up—as they will. If you are a landlord, then of course you must insist on short term leases, and if your tenant must have a five-year lease see to it that he is committed to paying the increase in taxes.

To read this book is to realize how callous and unsympathetic we are to the problems of the rich. Here they are, overstuffed with money, beset with a thousand fears, advised to dump gold trimmed securities for speculative ones, urged to remember that "there comes a time when almost anything is preferable to money." Naturally in guidebooks such as this one the author is not concerned with the worker whose dollars will buy less as prices rise, nor the farmer who in this war will have to sell his products at low prices and buy everything he needs at mounting prices. But then . . . workers and farmers never did profit from war.

FRANK J. WALLACE.

Austrian Fascism

THE DEFENDERS, by Franz Hoellering. Little, Brown & Co. \$2.75.

FRANZ HOELLERING was a well known editor in pre-Hitler Germany. Coming from Vienna and having been a theater manager, he brought with him the light charm of the Viennese *feuilleton* style—the gracious talk of great and little things, the laughter about stiff seriousness and cold formality, the spirit of "fun with a bit of sentimentality," the waltz and wine mood of Grinzing. All these qualities of style are found in Hoellering's first novel, *The Defenders*. They make the book very readable but they also give it a certain superficiality, a glamour that is too glamorous to be quite true.

The action of Hoellering's novel takes place in Austria in that fateful February 1934, when the Austrian brand of fascism, the Catholic *Heimwehr* fascism of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg, destroyed the only force which was able to preserve Austrian independence against the growing danger of Hitlerism. This is the love story of Maria Steiger, daughter of a wealthy scientist and wife of a rich aristocratic ex-diplomat, and Karl Merk, a young Social Democrat, member of the "Defense Corps." Maria tries to live her life outside the "ugly political struggles" but

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