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government might be set up in their absence.

Maritain's admiration for the French workers and farmers is summed up in his remark that "It is the privilege of the humble folk alone to be great in the midst of total disaster." He describes their effort to rebuild as best they can under the fist of the enemy and the senile rancor of their appointed guardian, but hints that a day must come when rebuilding is not enough, when they must rise against their native and foreign oppressors.

It is unfortunate that Maritain should be misled by the same demagoguery which was used by German agents like Bonnet and Doriot to disrupt the unity of the French people against fascism. He states, with no factual evidence whatsoever, that the workers were demoralized by Communism, and attacks the Popular Front. As for the campaign in France, even the *New York Times* was obliged to record the bravery of Communists at the front. And every week brings new stories of anti-Nazi underground work conducted by the Communist Party.

Mr. Maritain is much fairer to his foes. In a burst of unpolitical generosity he imagines that pity for the suffering people entered into the traitors' scheme to capitulate. Sooner say that the jackals show pity for the deer when they let the lion eat first.

CHARLES HUMBOLDT.

Brief Review

MEN OF WEALTH, by John T. Flynn. Simon & Schuster. \$3.75.

In a subtitle John T. Flynn describes his *Men of Wealth* as "The story of twelve significant fortunes from the Renaissance to the present day." In a preface more than usually expansive (if not in words, certainly in promises), Mr. Flynn says he will paint "a picture of the economic system" of the time in which lived each of his twelve figures ranging from Fugger through Vanderbilt, Mitsui, Zaharoff, Rockefeller, and Morgan. But somehow Mr. Flynn fails to live up to his promises. He is content for the large part to describe his villains as men with one characteristic in common—a lust for accumulation, for money for the sake of money. All of them succeed because they are above ethical considerations, because, to put it as bluntly as does Mr. Flynn, they are dishonest in the grand manner. But nowhere do the times and social backgrounds emerge. Mr. Flynn's economics remain oversimple, devoted to the proposition that the New Deal was just as bad as Alf Landon said it was, and that the ills of evil capitalism can be cured by some sort of reformed capitalism never described. The only figure for whom Mr. Flynn has any praise is Robert Owen, eighteenth century reformer. The rest are worthless buccaneers, distinguished only for their greed. It is worth mentioning that when Mr. Flynn discusses the Rothschild family, he indulges in more than a suggestion of anti-Semitism. *Men of Wealth* makes pretty tiresome reading that never gets any place.

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LOUIS ARMSTRONG, SWEET AND HOT

The master as trumpeter and composer. His early recordings, now reissued, are monuments to the "golden age" of jazz. . . . Alvah Bessie passes judgment on the reluctant Mr. Disney's dragon.

NO BOOK on modern music, so far as I know, lists Louis Armstrong, the great Negro trumpeter, as a composer. Yet some day the records he made ten and fifteen years ago will be placed among the highly important contributions to American music. Not available for many years, these records are now being reissued, and I envy those who will hear them for the first time. The album of records by Armstrong and his Hot Five, recently pressed by Columbia in its series of "Jazz Classics" reissues, contains typical examples of the early blues jazz.

The blues are an American folk music whose importance is only now being fully understood. When they first became popular, in the twenties, the blues were regarded as erotically suggestive in both words and music. Yet blues songs did not go beyond the frankness which can be found in any folk art. Their content resulted in part from the demoralizing effect of poverty and exploitation upon Negro family life, and also from the fact that most Southern Negro singers and musicians of that time could not get jobs except in "less respectable" places of entertainment—a phase of Southern city life supported by white politicians. Besides, owners of the recording companies and cabarets were exploiting the market for eroticism. The businessman who hired blues singers and musicians to perform "what would sell," at the same time censored the bitter social content of the music.

Nevertheless, the blues had a simplicity of structure and sincerity of emotion which lifted them far above most of the sentimental ballads of the twenties. Most important, they were perfect for instrumental jazz improvisation since their short, poignant phrases could be woven into innumerable complex, exciting patterns.

Many jazz musicians then, both white and Negro, improvised imaginatively and feelingly upon the blues. In Armstrong, however, ideas flowed so freely, with each "chorus" a development of the one before, that the music attained a tighter unity, a greater resemblance to a complex, thought-out, "written" composition. The music was still partly a collective creation. Yet there is no contradiction between such collective work and artistic unity (as can be seen by studying the folk art of the Middle Ages, for example). The musicians Armstrong worked with, such as Johnny Dodds, Jay Higginbotham, "Kid" Ory, all "spoke the blues" as a natural language, giving Armstrong ideas and backing up his most imaginative flights with perfect taste. The record of "S. O. L. Blues" listed below, in

which Armstrong provides a searing climax to Dodds' blues solo on clarinet, is a perfect example of such fine collective composition.

The trumpet style created by Armstrong, while new to jazz, was basically only an adaptation of structural forms implicit in instrumental blues jazz. One of these forms was the interweaving of two melodic lines, the small band "counterpoint" so natural to the blues. Armstrong's trumpet style suggested a two-voice counterpoint, playing a "lead" melody and accompanying arpeggios and decorative figures at the same time (in the manner, for instance, in which Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi wrote for violin). Fine examples are the succession of trumpet choruses in "Knockin' a Jug," "Twelfth St. Rag," and "Tight Like This," and the affectionate adornments of the melody in "Squeeze Me" and "Basin St. Blues." (The last-named is one of the finest blues-inspired tunes of the twenties.) Another basic device was the "riff," the constant repetition of a short blues phrase to tie a performance together. This is the structure of "St. Louis Blues" and "Mahogany Hall Stomp," in which the melody gradually resolves itself into the pounding, climactic insistence upon a single figure.

Armstrong's decline as a composer came when the conditions for jazz performance banished the style and content of the small band blues. Today he is as great a master of the trumpet as ever, but the sentimental tunes and large-band harmonies are a barrier to free creation, just as the blues and small band improvisation were an inspiration. The records listed below are only a sampling of his finest work, much of which is still not available. They are not only a monument to the "golden age" of jazz, but splendid music in their own right, revealing the possibilities of jazz in a future when musical creation is less dominated by the market and the businessmen who run it.

Columbia's album of records by Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five contains typical examples of the early blues jazz. The recording itself is acoustically poor, dating from 1925, and I have heard finer blues tunes than some of these. But everyone interested in jazz

should own at least the discs containing "Skid-Dat-De-Dat," "Muskrat Ramble," and "Cornet Chop Suey," and play them through a dozen times.

"Skid-Dat-De-Dat" is a summation of the instrumental blues. The opening choruses, with trumpet, clarinet, and trombone weaving together and apart, are a perfect example of the "ensemble" texture, partly harmonic, partly contrapuntal, which makes this blues jazz at once restrained and moving. Equally fine are Johnny Dodds' clarinet answers to Armstrong's comic vocal, and Louis' simple, touching cornet phrases at the close. This kind of music takes careful listening, but will reward anybody who gives it proper attention. "Muskrat Ramble" is a fine, jolly, exuberant "rag" featuring Kid Ory's driving, rough "folk style" trombone. "Cornet Chop Suey" is a perfect example of a performance built out of "stop-time" and "breaks," the shattering, powerful arpeggios which were an integral part of the developing blues style for trumpet.

Other Armstrong records in the Columbia series of Hot Jazz Reissues are: "Knockin' a Jug," "Twelfth St. Rag," "S. O. L. Blues," "Squeeze Me," "Mahogany Hall Stomp," and "Beau Koo Jack." You might also throw in Bessie Smith's "Cold in Hand Blues," with Louis on cornet. The following may be found on either Vocalion or the new Okeh label: "St. Louis Blues," "Basin St. Blues," "Tight Like This." (The Columbia records are fifty cents, the Okeh thirty-five.)

MARTIN MACK.

Disney Disappoints

The Grahame fable is twisted into a blurb for the Disney Studio.

NOW that the reluctant Disney has consented to bargain collectively with his employees of the Screen Cartoonists Guild, the public may conscientiously see his latest picture, *The Reluctant Dragon*. What they will get is a glorious disappointment on almost any score. For the new feature-length production is a glorified trailer celebrating the life and works of Walt Disney, with the Kenneth Grahame fable running about twenty minutes at the end of the celebration.

The whole thing comes at a moment of supreme irony, for the subject matter of the film is intended to demonstrate to the audience what a fine, successful man is Mr. Disney, what a magnificent plant he possesses for the production of his animated cartoons (it sure is), and what a great and happy little family collaborates with him in these productions.

