

The Chronicler

I shall note first
the ones I loved
They were you
They were all
except a few outside
The four hundreds and their coteries
The hatchet men with manicures
The icy ghosts, the unreal people
nourished by decay.

Then let me note
The ones who loved me,
The great-hearted strangers
who fought in my causes
Who knew my miseries
but never asked my name.

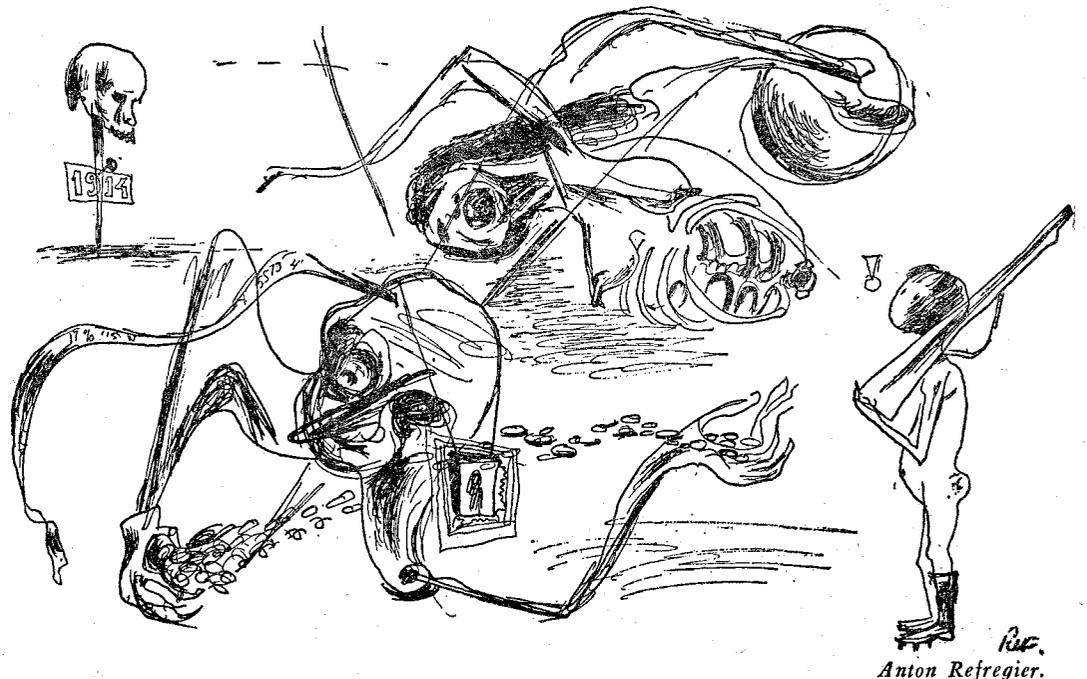
And after these my parents' names
My father and my mother
The poor little laundryman
who could have been a shoemaker
or a fish peddler
Who could have been any man
weeping in the world that night
And my tired mother beside him
as always, weeping too.

And next to these I name
The conscious ones
who knew before the bullet hit the mark
whereof they died;
men without distinguishable names
except at home
around their own small dinner tables.
These have a special place.

And for the rest
Go look upon great rolls of honor
cut in bronze, in stone
In chronicles of little towns,
Glance quickly at the cemeteries
The long daily lists in every land
of those who merely died.
I mention these because they lived
before tomorrow's dawn
And they too must wish
to be remembered then.

None whom hunger marked, or want
None who shared defeat or victory
In the long red dawn of human history
Will be forgotten in the final count
When all the chronicles of suffering are done
And new lists for new honors have begun.

ALEXANDER F. BERGMAN.



Ref.
Anton Refregier.

shut the stable door. Now is the time because it is pretty late."

In the rutabaga country a woman farmer left her rutabagas in the ground, risking frost, to drive many miles from farm to farm to speak of security, jobs, peace. She was running on the Communist ticket for Secretary of State. Her rutabagas got out of the ground. Farmers came out and voted for her although in many cases the votes were not counted! Now is the time to make democracy work.

There is a meeting in a small midwestern farm house. The light shines out on the snow from the little windows, and the snow stretches far to the dark horizon which swings in a circle around the Great Bear. They are meeting to talk of butterfat and peace. They go together. To a woman they go closely together. You now feel it in the midriff—butter or bullets. They know war prosperity to be a bloody prosperity and likely to be their own blood.

Another thing about butterfat: like peace it connects you with the whole world. Maybe that's what the Professor doesn't know. Hunger and butter as well as bullets make a universal language. You don't need Esperanto now. Women who have never read a book understand it. It is written in the book of the flesh. You understand women you have never seen—in China, Cuba, the West End of London—in the Midwest they talk about those women you see in the rotogravure sitting on the steps of some ruin in the West End with their children dreaming of butterfat—yes—when you meet in a little house on the prairie in the dead of winter you are not alone. You are never alone.

Democracy has a history, too. The people live with the history of democracy. There are the muskets on the wall and pewter on the shelves and the surveying instruments your grandfather used when he got free land in Illinois, and there is the quilt pattern on the bed brought from the Valley Forge country in a covered wagon. The people have longer memories than the Professors, fortunately.

The hard Yankee speech rises in the night, the hard, bolt-nut speech of putting things together, hard and fast—the speech of where do we go from here, and we come a long way, pardner, down raft, ahorseback, wagon, mule back, afoot, hitched and hiked, and what now? Speech sharp as a scythe, with the dry rustle of cornhusking, flat as the horn rim of the prairie. The humor rising like smoke from the house on the prairie—this is a free country, everybody says so. We're being bombed, too, as well as the people of England, bombed of our rights. We're the same as we always were, they say, it ain't us that changed. A woman says, keeping on knitting—It's a mighty funny thing you don't see in the casualty lists from England any of the high names, the great names. It's OUR people. . . .

What's eatin' ya, ma—a big Swede spits into the fire, they're in New Yawk safe as hogs on ice. Laughter and the foot on the snow of another coming to meeting.

We are a patient people. But look out.

Yes, sir, a woman says, it's like my grandpaw in the Civil War. He never saw a big piece of water and he was put on patrol in the Gulf of Mexico, south of New Orleans. When they come to relieve my grandpaw he wasn't there. They hallooed and an answer came out from the water and they yells at Grandpaw—what in tarnation air ya doin' out there in the middle of the water? And Grandpaw yells back—I ain't moved. I been walkin' up and down in the same place but the derned crick's rose!

Men jack-knife over their long legs and laughter snuffs the long snoots and backfires down the long-barreled chest and the women cover their mouths but their eyes search each other solemnly. Yes, it ain't us that's changed. The people are hearing about each other, all over the whole enduring world. The dern cricks rose!

Yes, look out for the people.

The bell ram won't always lead them to slaughter.

MERIDEL LESUEUR.

White-Collar Dilemma

The middle classes more and more cast off their upper-class illusions. Isidor Schneider finds that large sections have become conscious allies of the workers.

SIGNIFICANT of the unstable and confused status of the "middle classes" is the difficulty of defining them. Should the term include white collar workers, proletarians in fact though largely petty bourgeois in thinking? Such an all inclusive sweep brings together small businessmen, farmers, craftsmen, storekeepers, social workers, sales people, civil service employees, even trade union officials, and every type of professional and artist. Obviously a farmer and a storekeeper lead different lives; obviously neither has much in common with a journalist, surgeon, clergyman, or policeman, nor the latter with each other.

Even within the separate groups there are big social, economic, and psychological distances between top and bottom layers. For example, there is a broad gap between the mortgaged small farmer whose land ownership every crisis proves to be a legal fiction and the large scale farmer who plows with tractors and reaps with harvester combines. There are varying distances between shipping clerk and department head; dental mechanic and dentist, peddler and specialty shop owner. In the last case the customers and neighbors of each provide landmarks of the social distance between them.

There are other special differences to muddle the classifier. In the garment industry, for example, the designer desires consideration as an artist. The advertising copywriter's social affiliations are with the literary milieu; while the living clothes dummy who peacocks through the aisles, displaying expensive wraps, often considers herself a step away from other worlds—the stage or a Park Avenue apartment. (The recently organized model's union is displacing them with healthy realities.)

Still another world apart are the artists who live by their work and those who starve for it.

A chaos, and yet this at one time was a source of middle class pride and strength. It seemed to symbolize middle class individuality. Proletarians, all at the universal, prone level of their sea of squalor, were not individuals; while in the revered aristocracy rank counted rather than capacity. On their solid acres before they were foreclosed; in their well established businesses before they were merged; in their business corner stores before they became chain stores; and with their high priced professional skills, before gears and electric eyes displaced them, the middle classes considered themselves the "core," the "foundation," the "bulwark" of society. If we examine any of the groups, which either by their relationship to production or by psychological affiliation is middle class, we see how each is being stripped of independence and security.

Under a socialist system, tractors and har-

vester combines and the latest findings of agricultural science would serve all the farmers on their pooled acres. But under capitalism the machinery goes to the large farmer, increasing his competitive advantages over his poorer neighbor. While prices to consumers are such as to put the working masses on rations without the excuse of a foreign war, through capitalist control of the produce markets, prices to the poor farmer are below production costs, forcing him deeper into debt, foreclosure and tenancy, or wage labor on the rich farmer's fields.

The smaller merchant is as far on his way out. The department store undersells him; the chain store absorbs him. In ten years, 1919-29, the number of independents dropped fifty percent. Of the survivors many hang on at the cost of frightful self-exploitation. Like the sharecropper's family, all in the field, the storekeeper's family in candy stores, groceries, road stands and other petty "businesses" take turns behind the counter in a grueling dawn-to-midnight day for an income in half the cases of under twenty dollars a week.

Machinery has displaced numbers of white-collar skills, though the new machine tenders may have the consolation that they can still work in white collars.

One of the worst falls of all is that of the salesman. Well-tailored, cigar smoking, irresistible to farmers' daughters, he was once the American symbol of high living. What a different image the word calls up today—the desperate book agent with the doorstep toe, the drilled Fuller Brush man. In many instances salesmen are still used because, as a new and comparatively genteel form of beggary, their efforts produce some sales. National advertising, the long distance telephone, mail order, and other new selling techniques have reduced the salesman's role in distribution.

Among the highly trained professions, medicine, law, architecture, dentistry, engineering, etc., a trend from independent practice to salaried status has been set by the pressure of competition, which compels high rental locations, showy fixtures, and elaborate apparatus, much of it for display rather than use. Incidentally this which makes it more difficult for poor families to subsidize children through the costly first years of establishing a practice is combining with high tuition costs, as educational requirements are raised, to restrict the professions to higher income groups.

As for salaried employees, the rationalization that squeezed so many of their unacknowledged proletarian brothers off the payroll squeezed them off simultaneously. Between 1929-33 office help employed in manufacturing dropped from 1,203,760 to 802,484.

Even the lower ranges of coupon clippers

have suffered. In the alternating process of the watering and dehydration of securities the small investor has been both washed out and wrung out.

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The declassing process with its humiliations, insecurity, and economic deterioration was felt even before the crisis years, but people tended to lay their troubles vaguely to cut-throat competition and the vileness of man. Nationally, people deplored the declining birthrate as "race suicide" (the term coined by Theodore Roosevelt who wanted a speedup production of human beings for the army). Individually they deplored the human superfluity, especially when standing behind it on a long job line.

There was a general search for escape. People who could, retired. It is extraordinary how tamely proud and powerful businessmen gave up their business independence in mergers; how many scores of thousands of small factory owners and storekeepers surrendered, sold out, became branch managers or retired, often in their prime.

The post-war disillusion was a double one, a loss of faith in the economic as well as the moral pretensions of capitalism. Our literature reflected it. The ideal of business success became a subject for satire.

In the professions, many of the most scrupulous speculated on the stock market. I knew doctors and dentists who, uneasy over their ambiguous relations to their patients and their profession under capitalist drives, gambled for sudden fortunes that would enable them to devote themselves to research.

The retreat from reality was perhaps most conspicuous in the arts, which had been suffering from the tensions of its double life, the unnatural division into popular arts and fine arts. The commercialized, popular arts followed the line of least sales resistance—shameless exploitation of human weaknesses, greed, fear, and sex fantasy. Except for book publication, a special section of the theater and of the concert stage which returned a good living in relative artistic independence for a few, in the fine arts there was a general dependence on a largely indirect and parsimonious patronage—the angels of *little* magazines, *little* theaters, *little* galleries—all *little* to emphasize intimacy and exclusiveness.

Whereas in the popular arts escape was as conspicuous as vanilla icing on store cake, in the fine arts it was detoured into formal experiment and explorations of the subconscious. The extremes in this process led to the ivory tower, to mysticism, to Catholicism, to T. S. Eliot's monarchism, to Mussolini's Haw-Haw, Ezra Pound.