

of the constables has hit Johnny: "Dazed with the blow as Johnny was, he saw the lovely sight of Mick sending a short jab to the constable's jaw that tilted up his head with a jerk, and, when the poor man's head was well up, a straight-left beauty to the poor man's chin that sent him in a curled-up heap to the floor . . . while the barman hurried and scurried and worried to fetch a glass of brandy for the fallen bowsy, a red dribble dodging down his own nose. . . . Johnny in the midst of them, with a red ear and it tingling, praying the hand that struck him might be paralyzed, that the eyes would have the power to see nothing but the paralyzed hand, the ears hear nothing but the people talking about the paralyzed hand, and the tongue have but the power to point it out to others."

Despite a few excessive Joycean borrowings, the style of this autobiography is authentic and individual. Yet in affirming the poetry of life, O'Casey speaks not alone for himself but for the creative millions who "will vivify the sad music of humanity into a surging song of never-ending activity and glorious work."

SAMUEL SILLEN.

Plant in the Sun

NOW AND ON EARTH, by Jim Thompson. Modern Age. \$2.50.

HERE is a novel that really ought to be read, because it extends our knowledge of what goes on in America. Richard Wright says it's as true as "a birth or death certificate"—it is, and it has most of the truth in between those two documents. I don't know any book that has been written with quite such a desperate need to unpack wounds, to relieve unbearable pressures. At the end you feel the pressures have been relieved and a man is ready to act.

The book is about a writer, Jim Dillon, who like most writers is badly in need of money and doesn't live by writing: he's coming home from a new job in an airplane plant and is greeted (as the hero in the role of wage-earner) by his daughter, Jo. If you read just this opening two-page chapter, you'll know what the book is about.

It starts the family going and they're really candescent, so much so that the book could fall into the category of "color" books if the movement of life were not propelled with unfaked agony. There is sickness, there is pain and brutality. But there are other things. There is a wife who is able to delve under the surface abrasions to a love that doesn't change, and knows she gets what she gives. The children are something—not many children, I'd say fortunately, have quite the Dillon guts but what they have is what life at its source breeds up against oppression. If you can't lick children, you can't lick the final reserves of the free spirit. The family part of *Now and on Earth* has plenty of *tour-de-force*, explosive illuminations of the

life of the living—it has a frankness seldom achieved and in fact seldom attempted.

The airplane plant part of the book is even more important—in a time when the public wants to know about war production, this is it. Here is the chance to see the shift from small to large production; the way money, human beings, and haste are scrambled together in a number one chaos that finally adds up to keeping 'em flying. The resolving chaos of the plant is neatly mixed with the family: there is even a sense of how values come out of personal turmoil, out of the mystery of involvement, fury, and pain, the same way they come out of the clamoring factory. The people come through. They have values—they get them worked out no matter what the pressure. And there is an episode at the end of the book, in the story of plant production, that, if representative, is as heartening as any that has come along. The old process of Red-baiting is worked into in a particularly easy frame: Dillon, a former Communist, is up for investigation as a possible saboteur. The investigators have sense and establish finally that Dillon is working in the mesh of chaos as well and efficiently as anybody else. The charges are dropped. The implication is that there is the will to use the resources of the country without labels, scares, or hysterical persecutions, which is the way to win a democratic war.

Now and On Earth is a strong plea for the people to be allowed to live this side of heaven, now, when it counts. Give them the chance for it, and they'll fight.

MILLEN BRAND.

Migratory Workers

ILL FARES THE LAND, by Carey McWilliams. Little, Brown & Co. \$3.

CAREY MCWILLIAMS has done a truly magnificent job in combining his intimate firsthand knowledge of conditions among migratory farm workers with wide and careful study of documentary material. His book is so readable, with its restrained and convincing fervor, that it should reach a very wide public.

And it is needed by a very wide public, since Mr. McWilliams makes it forever impossible for us in the East and the Middle West to cast self-righteous aspersions at Oklahoma and California.

"Okies" from Kentucky are laboring in the muck of Ohio onion fields. Mexicans from Texas are herded in unspeakable covered wagons—crouched and smothered under tarpaulins in trucks that speed northward across state lines. Evading attempts to check the interstate traffic in laborers, the trucks are loaded with "produce." Truck farms around New York and Philadelphia, potato fields of Maine and Long Island, fruit farms of Florida and Georgia, beet sugar in Colorado, apples in Washington—wherever crops require intensive cultivation and much seasonal labor, large-scale farm

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employers and destitute migrants are reenacting with minor variations *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Ill Fares the Land does more than paint an authentic and unforgettable human picture. It includes a comprehensive and constructive analysis of the ways in which migrant workers are excluded from rights of citizenship. By moving about they forfeit their claim to the most elementary forms of public relief. Neither migrants nor "resident" farm wage workers are covered by the social legislation which has been developed under pressure from organized workers. Themselves almost wholly unorganized, they have the lowest wages, the worst living conditions, and the most meager social rights. Excluded even from workmen's compensation laws (except in four states), farm laborers are entirely outside the scope of the social security and fair labor standards acts passed by Congress in recent years.

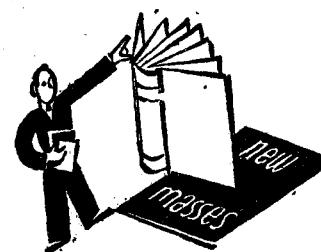
Mr. McWilliams seems well aware that such problems can be really solved only by the organized action of the victims themselves. But he shows the peculiar difficulties of organization among farm laborers and makes a stirring plea for action on their behalf by non-farm labor and the well-intentioned "public." He also shows how the extreme exploitation of agricultural labor on large-scale farms makes even more difficult the already precarious position of the non-employed working farmer.

Right here, however, there is one flaw that mars the excellence of Mr. McWilliams' book. He includes a special chapter on the "agricultural revolution" in which he pictures the growth of large-scale farming—quite correctly—as definite and relentless. He shows that great capitalist farms at one extreme and destitute farms at the other are two aspects of a single economic process. But in his clear picture of trends within agriculture, he lets the reader lose sight of the extent to which medium-sized farms are still in operation.

Actually the process of ruin is much slower in dairy, livestock, and grain farming than in fruits, vegetables, sugar beets, and other intensive crops. Farms of all types with medium income (\$1,000 to \$4,000 product) still numbered close to 1,800,000 in the census of 1940 and produced considerably more than two-fifths of the total farm output. Many of these are small part-time employers, many of them have tractor equipment, but they are in no sense "large-scale farms" or "factories in the field." Their economic existence is threatened, but they are still a force to reckon with and their efforts to organize and survive are extremely important to the nation.

Mr. McWilliams, I am sure, had no intention of blurring the significance of this middle group, but his strong emphasis on the two extremes might lead the reader to assume that it had already been wiped out by the trends which threaten these survivors of an earlier day.

ANNA ROCHESTER.



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