

possible. For the book as it stands deals very largely with monopoly from the angle of imperialist policy. To be sure there are sections in the book that hint, and often more than hint, at the ravages of corporate rule. But they are transient references just as the references to the development of anti-monopoly politics are not full blown even within the textual goals Allen set for himself. The chapters on the Soviet Union naturally are the keys to understanding the source of freedom from the tyranny of monopoly. The sections on new economic developments in Eastern Europe are also indicative. But more could have been done to integrate these major currents with the colonial independence movements and with international labor struggles and organization. Perhaps this suggestion can serve as the subject of another book by Allen—a natural sequel to this one.

In dealing with the devil's own science, economics, simplicity and clarity are indeed virtues. And while Allen is always simple and clear his paragraphs lack a sense of drama. The Marxist classics are models of vigorous style enriched with folk and literary allusions and a passionate conviction that bind the reader close to the writer. Allen undeniably has the talent for such writing because I remember a beautifully moving column he wrote as a farewell to his *Daily Worker* readers when he was inducted into the Army. It had a calmness that is the special quality of his writing but it also had glow and zest. A book that pounds the mind but only flicks the heart often loses much of the very large audience it deserves.

The book would have benefitted, too, if it had rejected certain assumptions. The mass of readers who should have this work because it reaches into their lives may not, and probably do not, know what a cartel is, or a monopoly, or the exact meaning of imperialism. In the public mind these words have an evil connotation yet unless they are defined precisely, condemnation of them remains more on an ethical basis rather than on a political and economic. And it would have been to advantage also to explain how they affect the wage worker's pocketbook in addition to the damage they do to peace and democracy. But let no one for a moment think that these points detract measurably from the profundity of his basic thesis or the brilliant achievement which the book is.

Adrift

ISLAND IN THE ATLANTIC, by Waldo Frank. Duell, Sloan & Pearce. \$3.

WALDO FRANK's island turns out to be a floating one, torn loose from its moorings to solid earth. When first we discover it in mid-nineteenth century, harbored at the edge of America from the wide Atlantic's swells, it seems to be *terra firma*, a piece of the green raw world named Manhattan, where goats are still pastured in grassy gulches. But as we trace the transformation of this island through the decades, it turns from a piece of yet unexploited real estate into a man-made thing, a ship cast adrift. And in the end this ship—now become the *Cosmopolis*, the world's newest wonder—plunges with all its human freight to the bottom of the Atlantic.

Island in the Atlantic is Waldo Frank's major undertaking, a vast 500-page panorama of New York in the fifty years between the Civil War and World War I, between the Draft Riots of 1863 and the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. Against this evolving scene Frank has placed his characters, whose lives he clearly intends as illustrations of their epoch's inevitable progress toward catastrophe. These fifty years are the span from boyhood to old age in the lives of his hero, Jonathan Hartt, son of a middle-class Jewish family whose career carries him to eminence as a lawyer, and his hero's best friend, Evan Cleeve, scion of a moneyed dynasty, who like Jonathan becomes a lawyer, but unlike him cannot put his faith in civic reform as a panacea for the evils of the age.

Seen in broad perspective, Frank's *magnum opus* (which has been six years in progress) may seem to belong in an old and honored tradition, that of the naturalistic "family chronicle" novel. Out of it one might easily piece together an outline history of New York's political, technological and cultural evolution from 1863 to 1912. What remains, however—and this is the largest part of the novel—makes it clear that Frank's approach is by no means that of the enlightened nineteenth-century liberal whose trust in scientific progress saved him from the horrors of chaos. This essential variance in viewpoint is characteristically betrayed by the unrestrained breast-beating of Frank's frequent purple passages. But the author's intentions

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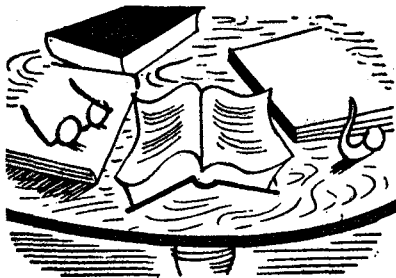
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become fully clear only with the appearance on the scene (page 398) of Dr. Freud—in the same year as Halley's comet.

It can be no accident that the good doctor—or rather, his spokesman, one Dr. Anton Freienleben — appears at something called the Radical Club in Greenwich Village, simultaneously with a representative (or mis-representative) of Dr. Marx. Dr. Freienleben tells his audience that he feels “as a man in 1500 must have felt, telling Europeans that America is discovered. In this case the America is the *unconscious* . . .” And this, we learn, lies in each of us: a “vast dark hunger that has no name, no predetermined goal, not even individual life, for it can seek its own death.” Our understanding of Frank's intentions is further clarified by the pronouncements of the “revolutionary,” Marius Schmitt (as grotesque a revolutionary as one is apt to find in all fiction). Schmitt's championship of Marx is far from orthodox. As he himself explains: “Marx . . . had something, when he was young and hadn't got himself organized.” Nevertheless he is the only champion to step forth. It turns out, however, that despite his contempt for Dr. Freud's “old-world standards,” he finds the doctor's ideas quite useable. From Schmitt we learn that “the proletarians” (those shadowy and fearful figures whom we first met, back on page 1, indulging themselves in the orgiastic violence of the Draft Riots) are no less than “society's *unconscious*. They're dark desire . . . One day they burst out. A cyclone. That's the general strike . . . The capitalist class lies on the ground, dead chickens.”

It is this Freudian “vast dark hunger”—a hunger of estranged and lonely people in a hostile world for a lost sense of relationship, manifested both in individual lives and in the life of society—which is Frank's theme. But just as Frank's individuals find no solution except death (they all die, and in fact welcome death with eagerness), so his society can find no solution except—and here any reader must ask the question on which all Frank's 500 pages ultimately focus: Except what?

The answer remains uncertain.

It seems to involve violence. “No wonder men love violence,” comments Frank's hero, having lost his nine-

teenth-century liberal's last forlorn hope of reforming social evils. “It pays. Why won't they admit it?” Before his final descent (which becomes somehow Jonathan Hartt's greatest triumph) to the bottom of the Atlantic, the possibility of salvation is hinted—but, oh, very faintly—by Father Peters, the priest who answers when asked if he is a Socialist: “I try to be one. On the true foundations of love and guilt which alone can save the sorely needed economic revolution.”

It seems to me that *Island in the Atlantic*, for all its depth of insight into the realities of our world, fails in the end to meet that last test of the validity of a work of art: that it should deepen our understanding of those realities. Perhaps Frank's characters are too much the personifications of ideas. I can always feel their creator's presence, guiding them to their predetermined destinies. In the last analysis, I am uncomfortably aware that Frank is attempting, as a social theorist, to win me over to views which, as an artist, he has failed to embody convincingly in a work of art. Since I cannot accept all these views, I am not won over.

WALTER McELROY.

Two Poets

THE GLASS MOUNTAIN AND OTHER POEMS,
by Aaron Kramer; CIVILIAN POEMS, by Don
Gordon. Beechhurst Press. \$2.

IN THIS volume two poets build upon the same theme. The subject is that of war, the poet's reaction toward the emotional and physical upheaval of war. Mr. Kramer's poems sometimes diverge from this subject: some are expressions about love (“To Kitty”), about social or labor conditions (“After the Ballet,” “Unemployed Song,” “Spring Song”). All the poems deal, however, with the immediate circle of reality and concern themselves directly with social conditions.

This vast subject of war is well taken by Mr. Gordon, and his voice rings with strength and much beauty. Almost without fail he has the reader step into the scene he creates, either in his somewhat general description of the war (“Communique,” “The Islands,” “The Beachhead,” etc.), or in his reevaluation of incidents, often very ably analyzed and pictured in detail.

With the exception perhaps of “Bomber's Moon” and “Hospital