

for human slaughter, neither butchers nor cattle. They are laborers and artisans whom one recognizes in their uniforms. They are civilians uprooted, and they are ready. They await the signal for death or murder; but you may see, looking at their faces between the vertical gleams of their bayonets, that they are simply men.

"Each one knows that he is going to take his head, his chest, his belly, his whole body, and all naked, up to the rifles pointed forward, to the shells, to the bombs piled and ready, and above all to the methodical and almost infallible machine-guns—to all that is waiting for him yonder and is now so frightfully silent—before he reaches the other soldiers that he must kill. They are not careless of their lives, like brigands, nor blinded by passion like savages. In spite of the doctrines with which they have been cultivated they are not inflamed. They are above instinctive excesses. They are not drunk, either physically or morally. It is in full consciousness, as in full health and full strength, that they are massed there to hurl themselves once more into that sort of madman's part imposed on all men by the madness of the human race. One sees the thought and the fear and the farewell that there is in their silence, their stillness, in the mask of tranquillity which unnaturally grips their faces. They are not the kind of hero one thinks of, but their sacrifice has greater worth than they who have not seen them will ever be able to understand."

Only by such profound acceptance of his comrades is M. Barbusse enabled to speak as he does in the concluding chapter, and also in that moment of superb magnanimity at the end of the advance when the dignified Bertrand permits himself to say, "It was necessary," and adds that immaculate tribute, "There is one figure that has risen above the war and will blaze with the beauty and strength of his courage. . . ."

It was necessary! One does not doubt that M. Barbusse has himself said so, in the face of all it means. But in the domicile that his mind gives this war there is no mysticism, no patriotism, no acquiescence. He knows that the war is evil. He has accepted it as the lesser of two evils. His book is great because it is able to encompass everything, even the necessity of living by dying.

F. H.

Sociologic Fiction

King Coal, by Upton Sinclair. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.50.

YOU must judge the American sociological novelist by standards of sociological pertinency rather than of literary art. Whether it is Winston Churchill exposing the capitalistic taint in the church, or Ernest Poole extending the family into the Gary school, or Upton Sinclair revealing the bestialities of the stockyards, you never look for those subtleties of personal life or for those living and breathing people that make the good novelist's art. The sociological raconteur uses people, but only as bricks to build his institutional edifice. It is the family, church, industry, that the story is really about. It is the institution that is the hero or villain, and the institution either in process of reformation or in shrieking need of it. The purpose of the story is to "show conditions," and the significance is frankly the message that something ought to be done about it. Where the literary artist would let the

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institution and its "message" play insistently out of the palpitating life of the individuals, caught in the struggle with it and busy with a thousand personal desires and adjustments, the sociological novelist sharply isolates institutional consciousness and denies his people thoughts and feelings that do not contribute directly to the missionary effect he wants to produce. Zola still lives because, though the master of the sociological novelist, he laboriously painted in every segment of his canvas, documenting sensual impression and confused aspiration, as well as institutional circumstance, so as to produce, through sheer massiveness and breadth, a feeling of personal life.

The Americans are less industrious, and consequently they are under a certain responsibility of showing that their work "shows conditions" better than would a sober report or generalized narrative. The theory is, of course, that the fictional form will make them more widely read. So they throw their material into dramatic shape, arrange the incidents cumulatively, give their characters fictitious names, endow them with conversation, and presumably get a more brilliant effect. All we have a right to ask, therefore, of such a novel is that its sociology be sound and true, and its "message" urgent. Such a story should not pretend to be more than a movie transcription of life. It is sociological observation "filmed." There is no claim to artistic value, and we do not ask for any. All we say is, Does the novel make visible conditions as they are and as they ought to be speedily altered?

Judged from this standard, I should say that Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* was a most satisfactory effort at fictional sociology. Technically it reads like a stenographic

report run through the mould of a melodrama. All the same, it is far superior to a book like Ernest Poole's *His Family*, which, although constructed with more literary tact, had its sociology of both education and the family so lamentably strained and off the key. Ernest Poole erred in attempting art. You have the irritating task of disentangling the sociology from the well meant but clumsy personal characterization, and when you get it disentangled you find it is neither sound nor true. Upton Sinclair pleases because he makes it so easy to unwarmp the melodrama from this picture of the servitude of unorganized labor in a great mining camp of the American West. The soundness and truth of the sociology are fortified by "eight million words of evidence" collected in the investigations of the great Colorado coal strike of 1913-14. Upton Sinclair slaps melodrama and sociology together so honestly as to make it easy for you to believe that "practically all the characters are real persons, and every incident which has social significance is not merely a true incident but a typical one."

You discard the rich young hero who, fresh from his sociological courses at college, goes to work incognito in a coal mine to test out what he has learned, but you retain the brutal intrigue, the almost Turkish oppression, the terrorism of suspicion and fear which compose life within the armed camp of the "Pine Creek Coal Co." You discard his sensational escape into the private car of his friend, the son of the owner of the mines, and the ineptitude of the little plutocratic party, but you retain a sense of the callous indifference with which the owners hand over labor troubles to the slave driving foremen. You discard the decayed gentility of the company official to whom the hero, in disgrace, makes appeal, but you retain a vivid insight into that crew of petty helots, and provocateurs into whose hands these industrial helots, the mine workers, are delivered. You discard the amorous troubles of Red Mary and her confrontation with the dainty capitalistic sweetheart, but you do not lose the horror of the crushing out of hope in these grim and terrible camps. Throughout the book, the "social significance" of the incidents seems as impressive as the dramatic invention is unconvincing. You smile at the plot, but you say, These are conditions as they are, in all their almost incredible detail of exploitation.

Upton Sinclair does his work so well, however, as to leave you undecided whether an honest generalized summary of the labor camp life, such as that Colorado judicial decision which he prints in his postscript as proof of the accuracy of his work, would not have carried just as much dramatic conviction. Yet *King Coal* is an exceedingly vivacious narrative, boyishly sincere. If it proves to carry its "message" further than did the "eight million words," it will have to be preferred to any unfictional account. Other writers, however, might not strike so good a balance, might not make their fiction so easy to unwind. Their invention might grotesquely distort the conditions they were trying to render vivid. We are left with the question whether there is really any place for anything between the straightforward social document and the work of literary art in which the writer not only keeps the faith towards his sociological material, but creates also a drama of personal life. But if we are to have something else, *King Coal* is perhaps as good a compromise as we are likely ever to get.

The "message" needs no paraphrasing. The total impression the reader gets is one of outraged wonder that Assyrian centers of iniquity like these camps should have

grown up in a country with any intuition whatever for democracy. Where political boundaries have been made to coincide with the limits of corporation property, these camps have become actual little industrial principalities within the state, armed and barricaded against the world, and "justified" in any oppression by the plea of an "industrial necessity" which parodies the "military necessity" of the state. These camps represent the systematic squeezing of the worker almost to the last detail that human ingenuity could suggest. The system shows the will-to-exploit almost gone insane and run amuck. Scruple, legality, tradition, humaneness, have collapsed, and brutal power acts unrestrained. *King Coal* shows step by step the ingenuity of extortion, the difficulty of protest or revolt, the organized espionage which crushes any effort at organization. The direction of the industrially subjugated has become an engineering task like the mining of coal. The workers are so much wood and stone to be manipulated into the mine, and so much human slag to be destroyed with the other refuse. Only because the human instrument shows animal perversity and resistance has this technique of subjugation been turned over by corporations not to engineers but to the terrorism of criminaloid foremen. Will the war do anything to this terrible industrial slavery? *King Coal* provides a lurid but convincing background against which to understand the present industrial revolt.

R. B.

Restricting Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold. How To Know Him, by Stuart P. Sherman. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. \$1.50.

MR. SHERMAN seems to accept a little passively Matthew Arnold's saying that his public would be only "the body of quiet, reasonable people," and to write this presentation of him without having young readers much in mind. Was it, perhaps, at his moment of deepest disillusion that Matthew Arnold so turned away from restless, ignorant youth? When, at some time or other, to normal bookish inexperience, reality seems to refuse to respond to confidence, to refuse to be much more than a call to stoic endurance, his poems always remain expressive, solacing, stimulating. But Mr. Sherman's book submerges any such power in his vision of the older Arnold of the *Essays*, who was devoted to "the abiding," and "a center and refuge and stronghold for the general reader, for the man of affairs, for any man, who, conscious of the breadth and brevity of life, wishes a guide to the highlands and mountain tops of literature—wishes death, when it overtakes him, to find him in good company and noble occupation."

It was part of Matthew Arnold's cool self-control that, though he was not modest, he was never generous and loving toward his youth—and his own older vision of his poems, unfortunately, was as unfeeling as Mr. Sherman's. "They represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind in the last quarter of a century [he was writing in 1869], and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is." One would rather have it put that they express his particular melancholy at turning away from fixed and established and aristocratic order toward approaching democracy, and also the general melancholy of youth when it first feels disillusion. Love, his own powers, and his