

distrustful, form but a minor thread in the story, of which his subjection to woman is the chief. And this introduces to us the dominant figure of Evanthia Solaris, whose purposes he serves for a season. Spokesly is l'homme moyen sensuel whose aspirations to command are pathetic and laughable. Evanthia Solaris is a born queen—a Eustacia Vye of the Levant, and like her prototype of Egdon Heath, her kingdom is the hearts of men.

She was aware that this man, come up out of the sea like some fabled monster of old, to do her bidding, was the victim of her extraordinary personality; yet she never forgot that his admiration, his love, his devotion, his skill, his endurance, were no more than her rightful claim. Incomparably equipped for a war with fate, she regarded men always as the legionaries of her enemy.

She rules by the passion which she feels and inspires and despises. Her war cry is *Je deteste les hommes*.

She stood there, a man's arm flung tensely about her, another man cautiously working the boat in beneath where she stood, the blood and tissues of her body nourished by the exertions of other men, meditating intently upon the swinish proclivities of men. She even trembled slightly at the thought of those proclivities, and the man beside her held her more closely and soothed her with a gentle caress because he imagined she was the victim of a woman's timidity.

Evanthia commands Spokesly because she is nearer to the elemental forces than the pupil of the London School of Mnemonics; but stronger even than Evanthia is the irresistible push of things. The war is the background of the story, the war in its most desultory phase in the eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean. Against that background of crass casualty there is little difference between the futility of Spokesly and the official competence of his commanders. There were in fact no commanders. Of the English command at Saloniki, Mr. McFee records the failure to secure a complete view of the world on the war. "If they could collar stores from some other front or from their allies, it was all one to them." "They never spoke of private affairs except to some man of their own class who had been to one of the great public schools. For them the war was a war to perpetuate this social hierarchy, to place it once more upon an impregnable base." And their failure and the end of the war and the end of the world through the lapse of command is predicted by the German, Liethenthal:

"Europe is dying. The war, the war is only a superficial disturbance. The trouble is deeper than the mud of Flanders, my friend. Europe is dying because her inspiration, her ideals, are gone. . . . The old fidelities are departing. And when they are all dead, and Europe is a vast cesspool of republicans engaged in mutual extermination, what will happen then do you think?"

It would be a sad error to imply that *Command* is a thesis novel. On the contrary the story unrolls itself as a simple narrative of events with an artless dependence on each other, interrupted by disaster, which is thoroughly disarming. The author's detachment is complete. He does not construct his story; it merely happens. He does not create his characters; they are there awaiting his comment. In this Mr. McFee follows Conrad, but without the latter's elaborate and self-conscious alibi. Mr. McFee has achieved an indifference, a nonchalance, an aplomb which are quite the perfect manner of the novelist. But it would

be naïve not to suspect behind this ingenuousness a theme of which the story of ships and commanders is a simple statement; and to which the background of a world heaving and yawing like a gigantic derelict, is a choric response.

ROBERT MORSS LOVETT.

Speaking of By-Products

Rootabaga Stories, by Carl Sandburg. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. \$2.00.

THIS book for kids looks like it was a by-product of what the highbrows call Sandburg's Muse. Like most by-products it is put up flossy and advertised special. The publisher's ad man has a line about "folk stories" and "the soil of American life" and "the beginning of an imaginative American literature"—whatever that means—but the author omits the college stuff and just runs on about the Ax family (Gimme the Ax, Please Gimme, Ax Me No Questions and Gimme the Ax Again), about such nuts as Any Ice Today and Jason Squiff, the cistern cleaner, and about Poker Face the baboon and Hot Dog the tiger—and he's no blind tiger neither.

There's a lot more characters—some funny, some fancy and some mixed—and all their names are printed separate in front of their stories, like in a movie. At first they don't do nothing much but go to old-fashioned places like the Village of Cream Puffs and stick round Main Street in a tank town called Liver-and-Onions. They travel in trains, all right, with long tickets and everything, but their stuff is old—pigs with bibs on, and such—so it's quite a while before you know where you're at. Then just about when any regular kid would decide he wasn't no place at all and begin thinking about his radio on the sly, he hears a chummy "attaboy, li'l bunny" and learns that mascots never stay long and meets a circus man with lots of spot cash money. After that—well, you can take it from me nothing but dope could put him by-by till he found out what happened when two sky-scrappers got the bug of having a baby and how the Committee of Sixty-Six got the animals' tails back onto them by junketing from the union depot in Philadelphia to the weather headquarters in Medicine Hat.

I guess this guy Sandburg must of got up against it one night for bedtime stories and started in making them up on lines the mothers favored when he was a kid—ladies that knew their place, and it was in the home. I guess he figured he could put across any cute little idea that popped into his head by just slicking it up with some of the stuff going to waste in his poetry factory, and then repeating it over and over so's the kiddies could get it. Right there's where he missed his step. Of course, he may of got interested in his by-product and improved it on his own hook. More'n likely, though, the audience didn't—maybe they went to sleep on him! Anyways, he commenced getting busy with the world the young ones really live in, and that's not many million light-years off from the one us old ones live in.

Take the case of Bimbo the Snip. He forgot and thumbed his nose at the iceman just as the wind changed. So his thumb stuck there. And his father, Bevo the Hike, just naturally had to chase all over town after the ward alderman, the barn boss of the street cleaning department, the head vaccinator of the health department and the big main

fixer of the weather bureau before he got wise that a traffic cop was all the doctor Kid Bimbo needed. Of course the cop had to leave an understudy at the crossing; so Bevo went to the zoo and got him a monkey. Even then the game would of been crabbed if the widow of a ditch-digger who'd croaked in a sewer explosion wouldn't of took pity on him and told him where he could borrow a ladder and whistle to make the monk into a sure-enough cop.

After Sandburg put in a lot a hard work of this kind he got up a book that's funny without always breaking its back to get the laugh and poetical (not that it's printed that way) without depending on grand-stand plays and grand-opera parleyvoo. But he never would of pulled it off by just going through the motions of fairy-telling like he was at first. Kids know what's what quicker than they get credit for, and grown-ups that don't know what's what in Fairyland had ought to keep off the grass—trying to put over what ain't by talking high, wide and handsome only leaves the kids, as it were, silenced but not convinced. Fairyland's got its own constitution and by-laws and ground rules, and you have to know something about them if you want to be a star reporter there.

At that, it's a question nowadays whether any Fairyland correspondent has a cinch on the first page of the Kids' Daily Interest. There's so much competition between science, sport and travel—history too, since Doc Van Loon tumbled that we're all kids when it comes to history—that the wise ones will look for the news from Fairyland on the magazine page of the home edition, along with all the other mental relaxations of the Tired Business Child. But if Sandburg really done his stuff as a by-product, he should worry about that. And if by and by his publishers wire him that the Daily Interest wants some copy to feature on the first page under a two-column banner, he hadn't ought to credit the order to Fairyland but to the wise cracks he made at the cuckoo world we all got to live in, kids the same as grown-ups. Then maybe, if he brackets his shots close enough, he'll get to make the first page every trip—something his poems never done. 'Twouldn't be the first time a by-product opened up a bigger market than the original article: it ain't on record that the so-called learned books of the guys that wrote Alice in Wonderland and The Story of Mankind ever made the best-seller list. So being a by-product ain't nothing against Rootabaga Stories. Chances are the Child's Garden of Verses and the Just So Stories started in life that way.

As for the ad man's hot air—well, if S' Matter Pop and Krazy Kat and the lingo of the bus and phone talkers is "folk" stuff, then these here are American "folk stories," though they got more Peer Gynt in them than Uncle Remus or Buffalo Bill. Dollar watches and cigar-store Indians and zig-zag fences and Golden Spike Limited trains may be the "soil of American life;" but you know a soil by what you can grow in it, and some of Sandburg's plants are pretty foreign-looking for all their having backyard names. About that "beginning of an imaginative American literature" it is to laugh. Hundred percent or not, Rootabaga Stories, just like Carl's poetry, is imaginative literature—part of the time. The rest of the time he hands you the makings and you got to roll your own.

It's funny, but when a blurb makes a noise like the "beginning" of anything it sounds just like that old blaa about the "great American novel." *Beginning*—after Rip Van Winkle and Br'er Rabbit and Huckleberry Finn and Dr. Dolittle and . . . ! But, say, you tell them, kids—you've been kidded before.

CLARENCE BRITTEN.

Joining in Public Discussion

Joining in Public Discussion, Volume I, The Workers' Bookshelf, by Alfred Dwight Sheffield. Published for the Workers' Education Bureau of America. New York: The George H. Doran Company. \$1.25 in cloth; \$.50 in paper.

THE editors of the Workers' Bookshelf have set the pace for educational book-writers. Three centuries have passed since Francis Bacon issued his famous dictum: "Books must follow sciences and not sciences books," but the wisdom of this suggestion has been neglected by authors and publishers alike. Now that the workers have rediscovered this simple truth and have embodied it as a guiding principle, we may look forward hopefully to a new and more vital educational literature.

Joining in Public Discussion is a striking achievement in more ways than one. In the first place, it fulfills its promises; it actually does what its introduction says it aims to do. It assumes a thoroughgoing scientific attitude toward facts and problems. It uses simple language. It bases its material upon genuine human experience. And it is scholarly. I have attempted to compare this work with other textbooks familiar to me, and I can think of only two which deserve to be classified in the same category. Writers, publishers and teachers will do well to study the technique and the style of this new venture in educational literature.

My enthusiasm for this book is so intense that I must leave to others the task of discovering and pointing out its shortcomings. My estimate of the book increased after I had tested it in the class-room with two types of students. It reads well, but what is far more important, it actually performs; it is usable and fruitful in the hands of students.

How shall the thought of the worker become incorporated in the complex movements and expressions of democracy in modern, industrialized society? This is a question of paramount importance. Professor Sheffield proposes an answer in terms of modern social psychology. His answer is in reality a condensed expression of the purposes and objectives which lie back of the entire workers' education movement. He might have chosen to respond to this query in the usual, academic and theoretical fashion, but happily he had taught in a workers' school, and this salutary experience is graphically revealed in his book.

Joining in Public Discussion means the abandonment of the methods of the crowd. It means an actual joining and not a mere overcoming of one group by the other in terms of brute force. It means contributing to the social process through the medium of sound ideas effectively expressed. Observers with historical perspective now know that ideas ultimately rule the world, but how shall one know how to recognize and discover right ideas? Only by bringing them in contact with other ideas, plus the experimental testing in the real situations of life. The processes according to which ideas are developed, tested and utilized are excellently described in this book.

A mere statement of the titles of the various chapters indicates the practical viewpoint from which the problem is approached: Gaining Control Over Voice and Bearing, How to Decide What to Say, What Makes a Speech Successful, Sticking to the Point, How Fact and Opinion Count, Causes and Consequences, How to Avert the Misleadings of Words, How to Express Oneself Tellingly,