

## Books in Brief:

### The World at Large

I THINK ALOUD IN AMERICA. *By Odette Keun. New York: Longmans Green & Company. 1939. 337 pages. \$3.00.*

Madame Keun has been visiting us, and here she tells how she feels about us — our cities, manners, art, politics, and economics. She likes almost nothing in the United States. America, she says, is a vulgar land, interested only in making money — except the South, where one finds dignity and decency. For New York she has particular loathing. The city's "long, low, narrow" busses "are driven by surly wattmen from whom you can't extract one civil word of direction. . . . Nobody helps you. Nobody even advises you." The same apparently is true of the street cars, elevateds, and subways. Altogether she thinks that we smell like "a relatively small troop of skunks." Madame Keun probably believes she is a very acute observer. She will still be welcome here when she learns that a lady of the world should be as careful with her pen as with her tongue. Americans are so vulgar that they will not go to the trouble of pointing out her errors to her.

NORTH OF THE DANUBE. *By Erskine Caldwell. 64 photographs by Margaret Bourke-White. New York: The Viking Press. 1939. 136 pages. \$3.00.*

The fact that this book is comment on a no longer existing state does not in the least diminish its value, either in the literary or historical sense. Mr. Caldwell's text is all that it should be, and while subdued, always colorful. It is never melodramatic as it relates his encounters which vary from the most unpleasant to the most charming. The pathetic peasants, impoverished and disheartened, come vividly to life. Miss Bourke-White's excellent photographs add greatly to the effectiveness of Mr. Caldwell's text.

AFRICAN NOTEBOOK. *By Albert Schweitzer. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1939. 144 pages. \$2.00.*

The distinguished physician, philosopher, musician, and writer here relates some of his experiences in French Equatorial Africa,

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## *Quarterly Comment*

A GREAT DEAL of highly emotional twaddle has been and is being written about the plight of the artist in the current world war of political ideologies. In what are now loosely termed the "democratic" countries, increasing pressure is being brought on the artist to descend from his Ivory Tower and mingle with the masses. Certain of the politically-minded artists and writers of the more liberal countries complain, and rightly so, that art cannot thrive in dictator-ridden countries, where it is strictly regimented to follow the whims of a Mussolini or a Hitler.

That is all very well, but one ironic fact seems to be widely overlooked. The grouping of artists in revolt against dictatorship and art-regimentation inevitably, in this instance, has led to another type of unofficial regimentation. For it is being increasingly brought home to the writer and artist that he should concern himself not only with politics, but with a certain type of politics.

The current wave of proletarian art in this country is a case in point. There is a widespread tendency to criticize and evaluate the work of the proletarian artist from its political aspect, rather than its artistic merits.

It is true that in times such as these the artist should not remain aloof from the immediate problems of civilization. But it is equally true that few artists are equipped, in background and knowledge, to depict competently