

The Techniques of Reconstruction

MAN AND SOCIETY IN AN AGE OF RECONSTRUCTION. By Karl Mannheim. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1940. 469 pp., and index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JOHN DEWEY

DR. MANNHEIM has had the great advantage of living in both Germany and England in the years of crisis. He has a thorough German training, but he also has a mind flexible enough to learn what new conditions have to teach. The present book represents a combination of experiences in the two countries by a man who is expert in all branches of social theory, who has an open mind, and who is capable of seeing conditions in two very different countries as parts of one and the same social world.

From what happened to the Weimar Republic and the coming of Nazism to power he learned that existing civilization "is faced not with brief unrest, but with a radical change of structure." He reached the conclusion that unless the causes of the social disintegration are understood countries which have not experienced the full impact of the crisis will not be able to "control the trend of events by democratic planning so as to avoid dictatorship, conformity, and barbarism." Living in a country in which "liberal democracy functions almost undisturbed" he was led to consider the means by which societies of the traditional liberal order can re-adapt themselves to the crisis in which the whole modern world finds itself. In Germany he reached the opinion that political democracy had run its course, in England he changed to the belief that if the dissolution of the old social order is admitted, its causes grasped, and the democratic techniques are created, reconstruction can be achieved by other than totalitarian means.

Dr. Mannheim is quite aware that persons in a country like the United States are those who are likely to believe that local causes account for the rise of dictatorships in Europe, and to suppose the idea that the whole social order is undergoing transformation is just a case of shaken nerves. That, as he sees the matter, is just their danger. It will keep persons in democratic countries repeating worn out social creeds so as to justify and support a social order that is bound, in any case, to pass.

When he says that scientific analysis, experiment, and planning are required to develop new techniques if justice and freedom are to be main-

tained, he may seem to be saying only what is urged from almost every quarter. But one who goes to the book itself will find in it, I think, the best account that exists anywhere of the causes which, in his words, have changed liberal democracy into mass democracy, and how and why it is that these causes tend to create a totalitarian order in the name of mass democracy. By planning exercised in behalf of freedom, he doesn't mean what is called a planned society nor even "planned economic order." He means rather the strategy, consisting of carefully developed techniques, by which a democratic community can maintain itself as a free community—and not just as an aggregate of self-seeking persons who are constantly subject to mass and massive forces.

Mannheim is first of all a social psy-

chologist who sees institutions, historic movements, and emotional and moral attitudes engaged in constant interplay with one another. From the standpoint of the influence the book should have, its weakness is that it tries to combine in the same work an exposition of the methods appropriate to the study of society and a brilliant and—to the present writer—convincing application of this method to the study of what has brought European civilization to its present pass. As a consequence, I fear that the persons who occupy strategic positions in politics, industry, and in what is called intellectual life will be repelled by the scholarship of the book and fail to learn the lessons which Mannheim clearly sets forth when he applies the method to interpretation of actual events. Mannheim's book is free from dogmatism, from stock phrases, and from clichés. In a word, it exemplifies its own teaching, the need of study directed by a fresh outlook.

Sheridan as a Dramatist

HERE LIES RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN. By Kenelon Foss. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1940. 392 pp., and index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JOHN ANDERSON

IN any sort of perfect state biographies would be assigned inevitably to the writer most nearly approximating the qualities of his subject. A fine stylist deserves the services of style; a brilliant wit demands the relish of witty portraiture.

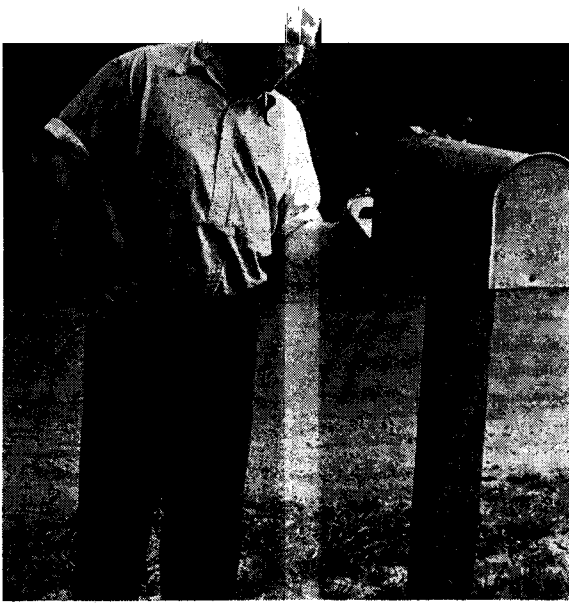
In his own lifetime Richard Brinsley Sheridan esteemed these qualities in himself so lightly that he exercised them for the briefest part of his career—the ten years in which he gave the English drama some of its most brilliant comedies. For the rest he bestowed, or wasted, his talents on public life in a career which, through its curious and exasperating lack of reality, suggests that it was the major creation of an imaginative dramatist playing out his own deliberate, but wayward tragedy.

Like the authorities in Westminster Abbey, who assigned the dramatist to the Poets' Corner, Mr. Foss knows that Sheridan's fame rests not on his public career, but on his writing. The trouble is that there is not enough in his literary life for any sort of comprehensive biography. His plays speak glitteringly for themselves, and insofar as "The School for Scandal" is partly autobiographical it sheds some extra light on the author's life in Bath.

But if the dramatist Sheridan is the one that has chief claim on our

attention the other is by no means uninteresting. Mr. Foss marshals a considerable background, including the trial of Warren Hastings and the American Revolution for his political protagonist, he deals at length with the Linleys, and with Sheridan's fabulous father and his snooty brother; he follows him meticulously through his love affairs, through his reckless and finally disastrous management of Drury Lane, in which he succeeded at one time, in owing Mrs. Siddons, some £2,000, to his Privy Councilship and his intimacy with Prinny, the Fourth George. He shows his insensate drunkenness, his maudlin remorse at his wasted talents, his decline in public position, and finally his death in a borrowed house, placarded with legal notices of his bankruptcy. He takes him reverently to the tomb after a funeral in which the corpse was knocked on the head by a bailiff and seized for a debt of £500 (quickly shaken out of some eminent and solvent mourners) and he winds up grandly with Old English type quoting "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r" . . . etc.

It is a book that, in spite of its occasionally cumbersome writing, its failure to give authorities for controversial points, and its absence of stylistic felicity, is well worth reading. A witty writer would never quote a man's witticisms without setting the stage for them and Sheridan's brilliance seems, to be sure, a little dim in Mr. Foss's careful specification of examples. The comic spirit is not so easily catalogued.

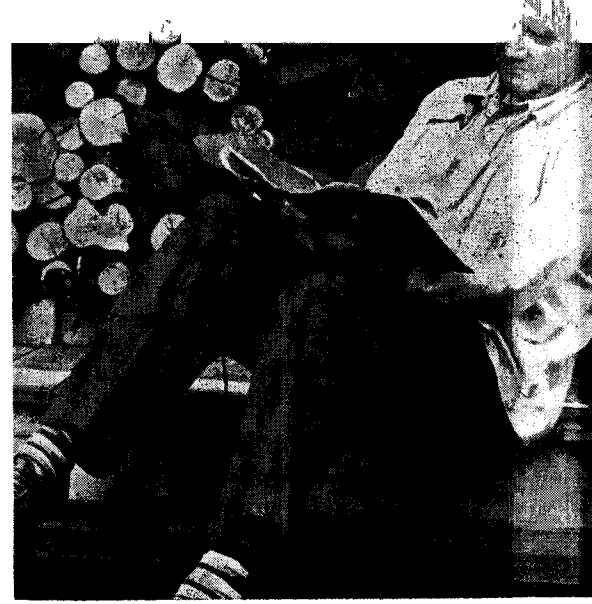


Conrad Aiken, who spends his summers on the Cape and has his "office" there, is concentrating on a group of short stories.

New England Vacation

Robert Disraeli, SRL staff photographer, passed the summer without vacation, as usual, because he was too busy taking photos of vacationing authors. Most of his time was spent in New England, the nation's magnet for play- and rest-seekers.

Disraeli's first stopping place was the McDowell Colony at Peterborough, N. H. Here even an SRL editor (W.R.B.) was on hand to give R.D. the customary editorial helping hand. From Peterborough our shooting star lit out for points North, East, and South, finally arriving at the SRL offices in New York with three dozen photographs (Part II of which will appear shortly) but without any summer discoloration of the skin to indicate he had ever set foot out of his native Greenwich Village.



Carl Carmer, at Peterborough, went in for political tomes, corduroy shirts, blazing socks, and a shady spot near the woodpile.



Chad Powers Smith, on a working vacation at Peterborough, finds it difficult to write without eleven packs of gum, three packs of cigarettes, two tins of tobacco, twenty-two packs of matches, two pipes, and three packs of pipe cleaners.



Coöperative vacation at Peterborough. Mrs. Elizabeth Black Carmer, wife of Carl Carmer, talks shop with an expert illustrator of children's books, Marjorie Flack, who is working on a children's book by our own William Rose Benét.

Joseph C. Lincoln, photographed with the Cape in the background, is collaborating on a new book with his son.

The SRL's own William Rose Benét was snapped in an apparent hurry two seconds after the dinner bell rang.

Robert Tristram Coffin spoke of his three eighteenth century houses in Maine, where he lives, works, and vacations.

Frederick F. Van de Water has been a country squire of Black Mountain in Vermont for more than six years.



The Negro Intellectual

THE BIG SEA. An Autobiography by Langston Hughes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1940. 355 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD

WHEN I was more than halfway through this book I felt a strong sense of disappointment. It seemed to me that it had not justified itself. It was vulgar in spots, trivial elsewhere; neither the contents nor the style were original, noteworthy, or compelling. But when I laid it down it was with regret. It had taken hold of me, this picture of the itinerant life of a Negro intellectual, mostly at loose ends, with nothing to tie to, and no strong parental hand to direct his life during the formative years.

Primarily it is Mr. Hughes's absolute intellectual honesty and frankness which moved me. He looks at his White and Negro world with rare objectivity and paints it exactly as he sees it. He is not a propagandist, nor a too bitter critic. When he records some of the discriminations from which he has suffered and insults to which he has been subjected he does so almost like an outsider looking in. You feel also that he is not holding something back as so many colored people do when setting forth their views where they may be seen or heard by white folks. More than that, he is as severe in his criticisms of the snobbish colored intellectuals, notably in Washington, as he is of the condescending, race-proud whites.

It will be a shock to many readers to learn that a people so discriminated against as the Negroes has an intellectual uppercrust with all the arrogance, bad manners, and snobbishness of the *nouveaux riches* of Park Avenue, but here the facts are. For example, Mr. Hughes was invited to attend a formal dinner in Washington in honor of the "New Negro" writers, to represent the younger poets. He was told that he might attend although he had no dinner clothes and that his mother was included in the invitation. The afternoon of the dinner his mother was called up by one of the "ladies" of the committee and told that it would not be wise for her to come since she did not possess an evening gown! Needless to say the younger poets were not represented at that dinner by Langston Hughes. That many of these colored intellectuals boast of their illegitimate descent from Southern white families, Mr. Hughes also stresses.

As for himself he makes no claims. He does not write as if he were a genius born and admits frankly how



Langston Hughes

slow he was in coming to his versifying under conditions which would have proved fatal to many a man. He has kept alive by struggling for existence as a sailor, scullion, bus-boy, cook, clerk, waiter, and laundryman here and in France and Italy, often hungry, sometimes sleeping for weeks in a public lodging-house or leading the life of a beach-comber in a foreign city. All this was on his road to getting a college education and becoming an outstanding poet, dramatist, and writer, and winner of many prizes. There is not a trace of self-pity, nor a whine in the whole book. There is also no yielding of his manhood or his rights as an American citizen. He is one of those uncomfortable people who wish to have ethics and Christian rules of conduct applied at all times. So when at an interracial conference at Franklin and Marshall College, which bars Negro students from attending, Mr. Hughes was wicked enough to think that this, his first interracial student-conference, ought to "get at the root of the matter *right there* on the campus where we were in session—as to why Negro citizens could not attend *that* college." He proposed a resolution on the subject. As he puts it:

But I could get no action on such a resolution at all. Everybody shied away. And the white director of our conference—an adult professional Young Men's Christian Association leader—said regarding this problem in his final talk to the assembled delegates: There are some things in this world we must leave to

Jesus, friends. Let us pray. So they prayed. And the conference ended.

It is not surprising that he has now discovered that "an awful lot of hoovey resolves around interracial conferences in this country."

One of the most tragic episodes is Mr. Hughes's description of his being taken up by a rich resident of Park Avenue in New York, who became his patroness and most generously freed him from having to toil for his living so that he might be unhampered for creative work. She wished him to be primitive and "know and feel the intuitions of the primitive." But he was

only an American Negro. . . . I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem. And I was not what she wanted me to be. So, in the end, it all came back very near to the old impasse of white and Negro again, white and Negro—as do most relationships in America.

The break—it was complete—made him physically ill.

That beautiful room, that had been so full of light and help and understanding for me, suddenly became like a trap closing in, faster and faster, the room darker and darker, until the light went out with a sudden crash in the dark. . . .

Yes, this is a moving, a well worthwhile book which should have been written; a most valuable contribution to the struggle of the Negro for life and justice and freedom and intellectual liberty in America. But I warn Mr. Hughes that when our military dictator takes the saddle "The Big Sea" will burn among the first.

Oswald Garrison Villard, one-time editor and owner of the New York Evening Post and The Nation, has been one of the leaders of this country in the fight to advance the position of the Negro race. As a grandson of William Lloyd Garrison, he comes by his crusading spirit honestly.

ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. Richard Brindsley Sheridan: "The Duenna."
2. Edward Fitzgerald: "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam."
3. Henry Aldrich: "Five Reasons."
4. Oliver Goldsmith: "She Stoops to Conquer."
5. John Dyer: "Down Among the Dead Men."
6. Thomas Peacock: "Misfortunes of Elphin."
7. John Keats: "Ode to a Nightingale."
8. Lord Byron: "Don Juan."
9. Richard Hovey: "A Stein Song."
10. George Ade: "R-E-M-O-R-S-E."