

bittered to understand why, when a people have finally conquered power as in the Soviet Union, they will never again take any risks that can lead to a restoration of capitalism, why they will break with "rotten liberalism" in their politics, and when Trotskyite traitors are found, will deal with them as they deserve. In so doing they will not be unduly perturbed at pious expressions of "liberal horror," for many Soviet citizens have studied British industrial history, they know Marx's unforgettable description of the Lancashire workers' conditions, have read Engels's *Condition of the English Working Class*. The thousands of children murdered for profit by our Liberal capitalists, the stunted physical growth of Glasgow and Lancashire workers in the heyday of Liberalism—these are burnt into our minds also, not only by books, but by bitter personal contact and experience. That is why the majority of the British workers have supported the Soviet government in everything that it has done, and our intellectuals should take such facts as these into account before they raise their voices in protest against the uprooting of those who want to overthrow the Soviet government.

Stephen Spender wrote this book many months ago. Since then, some of his writings have shown that he is rapidly growing clearer on the political issues of our time. I firmly believe that if he had to write such a book now, it would take on a different form.\*

*Forward from Liberalism*, despite the ample room for serious criticism it provides, is of definite value. I have no doubt at all that many members of the Left Book Club who are not yet finally convinced about the bankruptcy of Liberalism and Toryism will find it both useful and helpful.

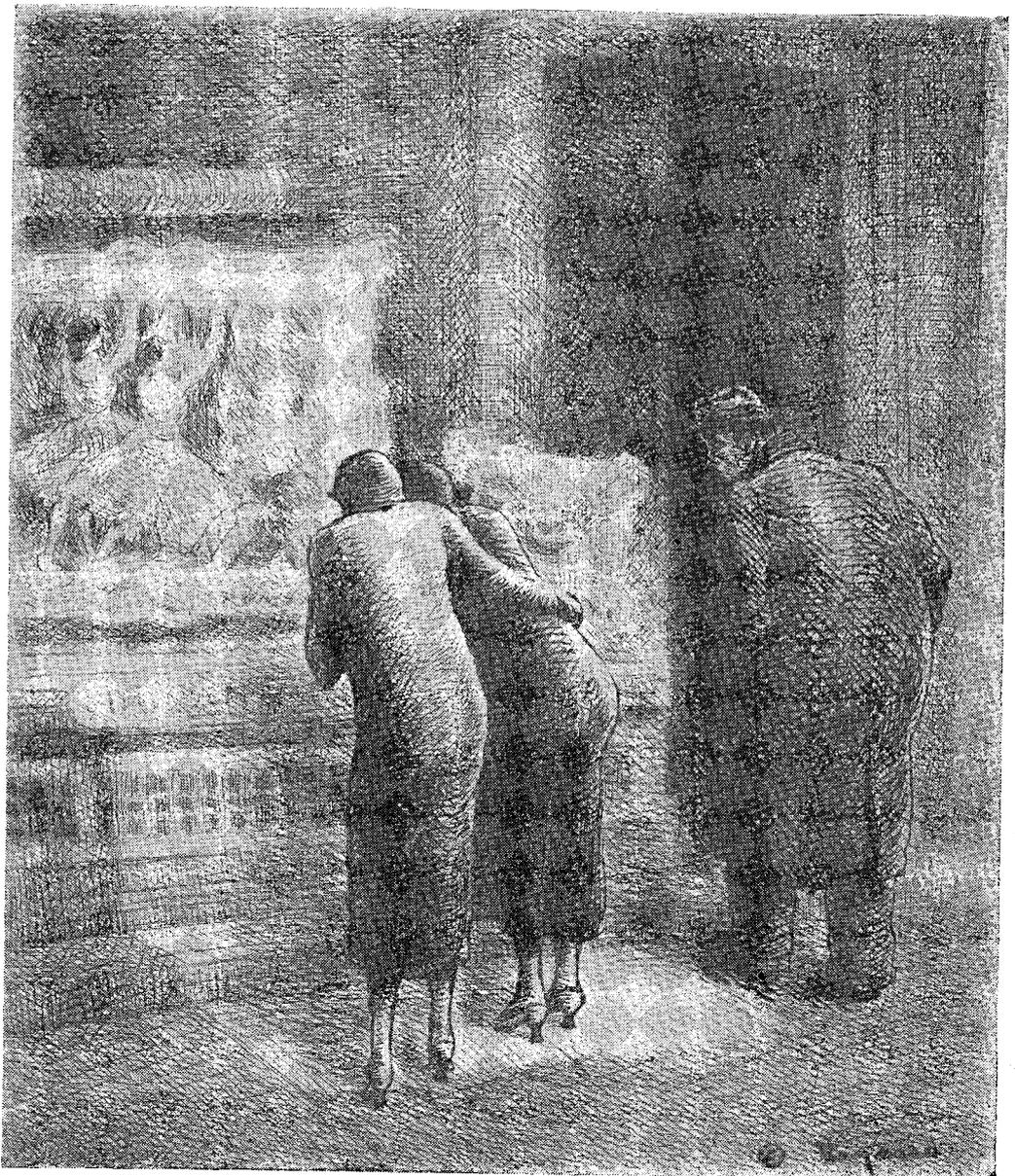
Undoubtedly, it will create strong discussion and criticism within Left Book Club circles. And why not? Socialists and Communists, members of the Club, have opportunities of explaining, expanding, and correcting those parts of the book which are undoubtedly in need of criticism. If they do this with the same intensity of purpose with which I know Stephen Spender wrote his book, they will really help to realize in practice his aim—to bring thousands away from Liberalism on the road to Communism. HARRY POLLITT.

### Herndon's Story

LET ME LIVE, by Angelo Herndon. Random House. March Book Union Selection. \$2.50.

I HAD read half of Angelo Herndon's autobiography and planned to finish it on the train to New York. You can imagine my surprise when I saw Herndon two seats in front of me. I can assure you that this promised to be, and became for this reviewer a rare experience. There I sat reading the dramatic account of this twenty-three-year-old hero. There I was, vicariously living through his terrifying tortures, looking up ever so often in pained awe to make sure that Herndon was really there.

\* Stephen Spender has joined the Communist Party since writing this book.—Ed.



Art Dealer's Window

Etching by Grant Reynard (American Artists Group)

"My head was terribly swollen [I read]. My ears were in shreds—mere lumps of raw, bleeding flesh. My eyes must have been terrible to look at. . . . I had a funny sensation that they were going to drop out of their sockets." Leaving the train, I felt that here was a book which needed new words to describe it.

In the past few months, we have witnessed an avalanche of autobiographies. To name only a few, there have been Farson's, Sheehan's, Duranty's, Reisenberg's, Gubsky's, Schneider's, Freeman's, Gallacher's, Foster's, and now Herndon's. I am sure that those of the last five are shining proofs that there are autobiographies and autobiographies. The reviewers may pass them over with a glance, but they can't down these living documents eternally. Herndon's own words stamp his book for what it really is and more: "After all, they might say, this is only the story of my life and does not call for evangelical outbursts. To this I will answer in all earnestness that the story of my life without my reactions to my own problems and to the problems of the world with the communistic viewpoint as its key and guide, without my fervors and indignations, without my hatreds and without my

loves, would remain an untrue and distorted narrative without blood and without entrails." There are few lives, young and old, which have encompassed so much and which promise so much more.

There is a remarkable quality in the telling of this life story. Nothing seems to have escaped Herndon's notice. The "veil of color" is snatched away very early. He knows the stark realities of the gravest poverty. He has had jobs which sapped his vitality and robbed his youth from the time he began to walk. Sickness and death loom macabre-like before he is ten. The inequalities of an industrial system which degrades and kills are borne in upon him before he is thirteen. He becomes conscious of the brutal terrorism which can be so heartlessly visited upon a Negro population, sometimes supine from oppression. The dirty hands of the Southern industrial bourbons show themselves in every major event in his early youth. He sees helpless men murdered, and remarks at the criminal repetition of the lynch formula. All of this tattered fabric, Herndon sews together, to make of it that Joseph's coat known as the South. This is the background for Herndon's life, his university. This is the background which made a revolutionary of

Herndon, and which will make revolutionaries of other Herndons. And if this story can be said to have a moral, that is exactly what Herndon wants it to have.

More than anyone I know, Herndon has pierced through the many-sided character of Negro life in the South. He enables us to see the false class character of Negro life itself. He shows us on whose side are the Negro lackeys and smug professionals in times of crisis. He writes in detail of how the southern ruling class astutely perpetuates these divisions among Negroes and among the whites and Negroes. But there is no ground or any room for defeatism here. He has observed too closely what has happened and what can happen when Negroes and whites come together, pool their resources, and fight.

Read this epic account of Herndon's background and development and you will see in it verification of the Marxian thesis that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that changed men react upon their environment. The world and its struggles, the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the dozens of prisons educated him, steeled him, and allowed him to carve out his own development with purpose and will. Here you will see how men become truly educated and are able to cram into a few years so much of the wisdom of the ages. His picture of a very young man becoming educated is memorable: "While the whole household was asleep, I sat before a kerosene lamp reading the works of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Lenin. I felt like Columbus. . . ."

There are very many passages, lyrical in their sweep and grandeur, which put most of our best novelists and biographers to shame. Perhaps only lives like Herndon's demand and receive this kind of telling. This is especially true of the descriptions of his early childhood, of the ineradicable things which happened to Gelo, of how he "got religion" at nine, of his father's death, of his first job as a coal loader, of the dozen arrests before he was seventeen, of the Reeltown massacre, of that memorable demonstration of the Atlanta Unemployment Council, and of those twenty-six months in Fulton Tower. No single review can begin to do justice to this remarkable document of our times. Reading it can give us some idea of how a Herndon can retort to his judge in a lynch-inspired courtroom, "You can do what you will with Angelo Herndon. . . . But there will come other thousands of Angelo Herndons. . . . You may succeed in killing one, two, even a score of working-class organizers. But you cannot kill the working class."

EUGENE C. HOLMES.

### American Panorama

THE OLD BUNCH, by Meyer Levin. Viking Press. \$3.00.

ALTHOUGH he has drawn the human material for his novel almost exclusively from the Chicago Jewish-American bourgeoisie, there is not a character or a situation in Meyer Levin's *The Old Bunch* that



J. N. Johnson

does not find its immediate counterpart in every sphere of American life, Jewish or Gentile, native-born or naturalized. Here, and in full measure, the reader will find confirmation of the truism that there is no essential difference between a rich Jew and a rich Christian; a poor Yid and a poor goy.

In the course of his long and infinitely satisfying narrative, Mr. Levin has given concrete expression to the schism we find on every hand in our day-to-day life: the emergence of the two opposing factions in a struggle that will eventually mark our period as the greatest period of world history. The point is not labored; Mr. Levin's implicit power as a novelist has not reached the full expression it will attain when he feels that he must make an explicit statement, but if the truth is revolutionary, Mr. Levin has written a truly revolutionary novel.

This schism in our life finds its expression in *The Old Bunch* in the careful and the moving externalization of the lives of some twenty major characters, all of them not only recognizable, but friends or people we have known. These lives the author follows from their graduation from high school in 1921, down through the 1929 debacle, to the closing night of *A Century of Progress*. We know them all: Mitch Wilner and Rudy Stone, the medical students; Sam Eisen and Runt Plotkin, the young solons; Sol Meisel, the boy athlete who goes into his father's cleaning business; Joe Freedman, the idealistic Jewish artist; and the others. For each of the boys, there is a girl. Some have sisters; all have girl friends who not only run true to the patterns of their class, but in every instance achieve vitality as fictional characters.

We meet them first at the time John Held was immortalizing the flapper; their preoccupations then were our preoccupations at the time—jazz and sex. The young sheiks and their hot mamas necked in parked cars, drove like mad, drank out of hipflasks, measured each other's worth by their ability to dance the latest steps. Times changed. Leopold and Loeb went to the pen; Joe Freedman and Alvin Fox went to Paris to expose themselves to art; Mitch and Rudy went into private practice; Sol Meisel abandoned the bicycle races for a job in his father's plant. Some married; some divorced. Estelle Green, the

hottest of the girls, dropped gradually into the class of non-professional whores, cut off from the life she wanted. Sam Eisen found his way into the I.L.D.; Runt Plotkin into the ranks of the ambulance chasers and the shysters. In Europe, Joe flirted with Catholicism, dadaism, Zionism, thought he had found himself in Palestine but knew he hadn't and returned. The bottom had dropped out of everything.

Insull crashed; Capone went to jail; the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped; and the Thompson administration gave place to the Cermak and the Kelly. Roosevelt came in and the New Deal was dealt. By now the old bunch was getting a bit thick in the waist. Sam Eisen had become a radical; his former wife, the babydoll Lil Klein, was evicting the poor from the tenements she owned. Values in daily life were shifting: Rudy Stone helped establish a cheap coöperative clinic, while Sol Meisel did his best to smash the labor union in the cleaning business. Harry Perlin, the amateur inventor, found himself mixed up in a relief demonstration and learned something through the instrumentality of a night-stick. With the crumbling Chicago slums for a backdrop, Chicago Big Business spent millions on the Century of "Progress," which ran its course and expired amid a concerted chanting of "I'm Headin' for the Last Roundup."

This is the chord on which Mr. Levin resolves his important presentation of American middle-class life. It is a tune we have all heard, and which more and more of us are beginning to recognize.

ALVAH C. BESSIE.

### The Good with the Bad

THE OLIVE TREE, by Aldous Huxley. Harper & Brothers. \$2.50.

A HETEROGENEOUS, ill-unified collection of Huxley's more or less recent essays, ranging from two or three (such as the pieces on B. R. Haydon and on T. H. Huxley as a man of letters) which reveal Huxley at his best, to a few which reveal him at his weakest and worst. The volume would be worth having, except for those who own the *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, if only for the essay on Lawrence, here reprinted, which Huxley contributed to that volume as a preface.

But, charming and cogent as he is on these literary and biographical subjects, Huxley begins at once to confuse and alienate the reader when he addresses himself to political or quasi-political subjects, as he does in "Writers and Readers" and "Words and Behaviour." The subject of these essays is the general subject of propaganda and partisanship, and despite the half-truths that are scattered through them, they are largely invalidated by Huxley's congenital impotence to think in genuinely political or social terms. "Politics," he says, "can become moral only on one condition: that its problems shall be spoken of and thought about exclusively in terms of concrete reality; that is to say, of persons."

If exact scientists, those heroes of Huxley's, had always forced themselves to think and