

speaking exclusively in terms of individual spirochetes, of individual drops of carbonic acid, of individual alpha rays, the present state of the natural sciences can only too easily be imagined. That the social sciences have anything to learn in this respect from biology or physics seems never to have occurred to the grandson of the man who wrote *Lay Sermons*; and it is a measure of his incapacity in these matters.

NEWTON ARVIN.

Æsthetic Assault

THE BOYS IN THE BACK ROOM, by Jules Romains. Translated from the French by Jacques Le Clercq. Robert M. McBride & Co. \$2.

IT was in the last years before the World War that Romains first published *Les Copains*, now translated into smooth American prose under the magnificent title *The Boys in the Back Room*. He wanted, he explains in a preface, to exalt the spirit of comradeship of which he was dreaming, comradeship which he "raised almost to the height of a world concept." So he wrote this jubilant story of a group of drinking pals who set out to perform an act of comic destruction against the sacred cows of the bourgeoisie: the Army, the Church, and the Public Monument.

The campaign, which begins and ends in the clouds of Olympian drinking parties, is a joyous celebration of the goodness and opulence of material existence. It affirms, in no uncertain terms, that reality, and reality alone, is adequate for all man's needs and desires. The "boys," all "stiff drinkers, brave fellows, and good players at nine-pins" (Rabelais), seem sufficiently well-fixed to move about like free men, though they haven't risen above a healthy interest in the prices of food, drink, and lodging. They are an active, intelligent, and thoroughly normal crew. Like M. Romains himself, they are far from all hysterias and blind yearnings. And the individuality of each is heightened and completed by his participation in the group. . . . The supreme virtue of Romains's outlook is that it finds this purely human and natural world as inspiring and profound as any gilded with ideals and other-worldly promises.

The boys of the back room, with their fooling, their meaningful pranks, and their cultured kidding, form a little social eddy of peace and good humor within the clashing currents of modern society. Like a bowling club of well-paid mechanics, or a clique of bachelor school-teachers or civil-service employees, they reflect that level of society which still escapes the degeneracy and power-lust of the ruling class, on the one hand, and the crushing slavery of the proletariat, on the other. But their materialistic clarity rescues them also from the smugness and spiritual confusion of the petty bourgeoisie. Their "back room" society, with its realistic and magnanimous impulses, seems to be the foreshadowing of a similar society that will cover the whole earth with a fraternity of productive men of good will.

"I therefore salute you, O one and only god," one of the boys hails the group, "by your seven names: Omer, Lamendin, Broudier, Bénin, Martin, Huchon, and Lesueur."

"And I raise aloft my cup."

What more natural, then, for the boys than to invade the backward provincial towns of Issoire and Ambert, two French Main Streets, wreak havoc in the army garrison, preach the divinity of the flesh from the church pulpit, and upset the ceremonies at the unveiling of an equestrian statue of the warrior Vercingetorix? Their love of their own society takes the form of a mischievous hostility against the bourgeois social order.

Marx once remarked that the last phase of a historic form is its comedy. History prepares matters thus, he asserts, in order that humanity may separate itself *joyfully* (his italics) from its past. It is the materialistic joviality of Romains's book, with its nay-saying to all mystical pessimism and all dogmatists of human misery, that prevails against any political "danger-signals" in Romains's outlook; that justifies, in the name of comedy, this merely "aesthetic" assault upon the middle class, characteristic of romantic literature.

HAROLD ROSENBERG.

Kipling's Last Book

SOMETHING OF MYSELF, by Rudyard Kipling. Doubleday, Doran, & Co. \$2.50.

THIS is in a way a good book, a better book than might have been expected. It is unpretentious and fragmentary, and because of that fact the author keeps within limits that include his virtues and exclude

many of his faults. It shows Kipling's personal modesty, his sense of humor, and his devotion to his craft. Its power of evoking a scene equals that of his best work, and the style has the originality and precision of phrase that once won him the praise of so exacting a critic as Henry James.

It is well that Kipling's last book should exhibit his talents, for it is easy to forget that fifty years ago his first books were being acclaimed, not merely by James, but by almost every English man of letters. The young man who was born in India, suffered in a British boarding-house, passed triumphantly through the ordeal of the United Services College, and for seven years performed heroic tasks on Indian newspapers, seemed, in the late eighties, a genius of the first order. We who think of Kipling chiefly as the high priest of imperialism, and are inclined to regard a taste for his work as something to be outgrown with maturity, find it difficult to understand the impression that his earliest work made. That work has its virtues, certainly, but the trouble is that, whereas his contemporaries were startled, quite naturally, by the possibilities of the man who could do such work at twenty-four or twenty-five, we know all too well what it led to.

There was, it seems, a point in Kipling's career when he might have developed in either of two directions. He might have continued as the shrewd observer he had shown himself to be in his short stories of India, or he might have become, as he actually did, the spokesman of a cause—the cause of the Empire, as opposed both to "little Englandism" and to other empires. Why he chose the latter course



Fishermen Mending Nets

Woodcut by Helen Ludwir

Read Them Both!

They are the principal novels, to date, of

JAMES T. FARRELL



the brilliant young author of whom everyone is talking

A WORLD I NEVER MADE

Attacked by John S. Sumner—
VINDICATED IN COURT!

516 pages \$2.50

STUDS LONIGAN

The trilogy which won for Mr. Farrell a Book-of-the-Month Club Fellowship

1104 pages \$3.00

Both these novels may be obtained at all booksellers

VANGUARD

424 Madison Ave., New York, N. Y.

✓ Read **LOW COMPANY**
(Novel) By Daniel Fuchs \$2.50

SEE SOVIET RUSSIA

with

**JULIEN BRYAN
WALT CARMON
JULIA DOAN
WILL GEER**

NORRIS HOUGHTON



JOHN A. KINGSBURY

JOSHUA KUNITZ

ANNA LOUISE STRONG

Trips which show you more than tourist sights at least cost of time and money. Circular on request.

Independent arrangements for those who prefer to travel on their own.

THE OPEN ROAD

Russian Travel Department

8 West 40th Street New York, N. Y.
Cooperating with Intourist

\$394

round-trip New York with a month in Soviet Russia. Other tours up to \$895.

Multigraphing

Letters reproduced exactly like typewriting; any quantity. Also mimeographing, printing and mailing. Quality work at low prices.

MAILERS ADVERTISING SERVICE

121 West 42nd Street, N. Y. C. BRyant 9-5053.

this book does not greatly help us to understand. (He does point out, in precisely this connection, that both his grandfathers were Wesleyan ministers.) But we can vaguely discern the process. His early work did, without his having particularly aimed at that result, perform a useful function in the new phase of imperialism that brought England out of the depression of the eighties: it helped to make the underprivileged members of English society feel that they had a share in the empire. He assumed the role of high priest largely by accident, and then, of course, his prejudices and upbringing led him to continue in it.

It may seem, to some superficial critics, a paradox for a Marxist to reproach Kipling for being, as these critics would say, a propagandist rather than an artist. No career, as a matter of fact, could illustrate better than his what Marxists really believe about the literary processes. The Marxist never wants an author to impose a set of ideas upon his observations. The Marxist, on the contrary, believes that honest observation must lead an author to recognition of some part at least of the truth—the revolutionary truth—about our civilization. What he objects to is any shrinking away from the truth, any willingness to compromise with bourgeois prejudices. Kipling, in becoming the bard of imperialism, was delivering himself over to his prejudices, and his powers as an artist were consequently stultified.

It is the elimination of much of the familiar preaching that makes *Something of Myself* less irritating and more readable than most of Kipling's later work. But there are glimpses enough of the imperial evangelist—in his account of his friendship with Rhodes, in his hatred of Irish, Jews, and Americans, even in his strictures on dressing for dinner. And time and again one catches hints of the process by which the imperialist stifled the genius in Kipling. One comes to understand, too, the loving, patient craftsmanship with which, rather pathetically, he tried to compensate for the narrowness of his sympathies and the distortion of his vision. One comes to feel that it was only as a craftsman that he really grew up, that his values were always those of an adolescent. That is, of course, why his following is chiefly among adolescents. It was, this book reminds us, a heavy price to pay.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Brief Reviews

THIS, MY BROTHER, by John Rood, with an introduction by Meridel Le Sueur. Published by Midwest Federation of Arts and Professions, Chicago. \$1.

This story, the first publication of the Midwest Federation, is about a strike of the men who work in mines; this is a theme—with strikes today being as common and as well understood by the masses as is the purpose of the touring Germans at the gates of Madrid—sufficiently apropos and typical to be popular. Unfortunately, Rood's language, a blend of Anderson, the Bible, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Lawrence Vail, and Gertrude Stein, tends to look cockeyed at the theme. To what develops to be to the

mutual embarrassment of both language and theme, here's how they start:

This,

My brother, and brother yet to all and to everybody brother. We then being each the others' brother.

This man a brother being yet to me and to you and to all others brother.

This man begot of old McGregor, Jesse McGregor; from the silence and the deeper dark of old McGregor. And of not only Jesse but too his mother silent. And all a silent race from whence begotten.

Robert McGregor; heavy footed silent man, so deep alive inside.

The story tells how Jesse, the protagonist's father, believes in unions and in social change, but Robert is caught in a woman's body and doesn't know what he believes.

Now, deeper, Robert, deeper into the folds of her soft flesh. All the unspent agony of your body—into the rich body of this woman. This sterile seeding. This sterile seeding that cannot you appease, except for the moment, an hour. Not for the months or the years to come nor the eternal satisfaction of your mind and body. But for the moment, yes.

Robert not only lives in a woman's body, he thinks in it. The author, of course, tries for intensity and passion, but his prose gets in the way. And it is too bad that such a lush style should have been used, for the story contains elements of real originality and (rather unconsciously) humor. Somebody once ascribed a certain author's failure to the style he used, proving scientifically that the left of thought carried depends on the holding power of the supporting word structure. John Rood's heart and mind yearning towards the right place, he should put new tires on the old gray mare so he can get there.

J. S. B.

A CATALOGUE OF THE MUSEUM OF LIVING ART: *New York University*. \$1.

With one exception, the contributors to this volume (Messrs. Jean Helion, A. E. Gallatin, J. J. Sweeney, and G. L. K. Morris) ignore the important question of the relation of abstract art to revolutionary culture. Instead, they speculate on the abstraction solely in its own terms and exclusively on aesthetic grounds. G. L. K. Morris, the one exception, makes an interesting but not entirely successful attempt to see the abstraction in its historical perspective. The reproductions of works by Picasso, Miro, Arp, etc., are good; and the Museum remains probably the most carefully chosen collection of its kind in the country. A number of American painters are represented in the collection, but their works are not reproduced in the catalogue.

F. W. D.

★

Recently Recommended Books

Changing Man: The Education System of the U.S.S.R., by Beatrice King. Viking. \$2.75.

Between the Hammer and the Anvil, by Edwin Seaver. Messner. \$2.50.

I Will Not Rest, by Romain Rolland. Translated from the French by K. S. Shelvankar. Live-right. \$2.25.

April, by Vardis Fisher. Doubleday, Doran, and Caxton. \$2.

Catherine de' Medici and the Lost Revolution, by Ralph Roeder. Viking. \$3.75.

An Actor Prepares, by Constantin Stanislavski. Theatre Arts. \$2.50.

Dialectics: The Logic of Marxism, and its Critics—An Essay in Exploration, by T. A. Jackson. International. \$2.50.

Report, Brussels Peace Congress. Secretariat, International Peace Campaign.

The Croquet Player, by H. G. Wells. Viking. \$1.25.