

HEAR
THOMAS MANN

Germany's Foremost Writer

Winner of the Nobel Prize
in Literature

at

MEMORIAL
MEETING

for the 13,000 German People
Murdered by Hitler's Rule

Wednesday, April 21st

8 P. M.

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Cornelia Bryce Pinchot

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thoughts, escaping the prison walls and the censorship, are moving, actual, real. They are different from Rosa Luxembourg's letters, (though, in time, she too wished she were a bird), and different from Vanzetti's letters (though not because Vanzetti was less an artist).

Thus, to Stefan Zweig, Toller writes of "the inner perfection of the prisoner." To Romain Rolland: "Oh, who in this chaos will listen to my voice?", then dreaming of the men of the future to whom humanity is "a reality greater than all the realities of politics." And this revealing passage: "As a politician I act as if men as individuals, as groups performing various functions, as exponents of economics, as exponents of power, and as if certain facts, were ultimately real. As an artist I see how questionable these ultimate realities are." Imagine an Independent Socialist in a Germany where Social Democrats are strangling the revolution, an idealist in human relations facing political factionalism even inside the cell-blocks, a romantic artist who fought for his ideas with the conviction they could demand anything but the sacrifice of his conscience and intellect, a man of extreme nerves, tenderness, spirit, and courage, and a picture emerges of the political artist of our time. Toller has endured what American writers may have to endure. He has endured a Germany where "the revolution is defeated. Barbarism, moral and spiritual rotteness, lies, hypocrisy, and profiteering are triumphant." Out of those five years came four plays which had perhaps as much to do with the past decade of the German stage as any other art. And perhaps this, too, is a product of that time:

"If belief be often disappointed, as it must be, it changes into enmity and hatred of humanity. I can imagine fighters for whom it would not be a matter of crucial importance whether they had that belief or no; they fight under the power of an idea—the idea of co-operation for conscious self-development. . . . Is not the destiny of European man to be this kind of fighter, this heroic kind?"

ALFRED HAYES.

An Archaic Novel

THE BRIDAL CANOPY, by S. J. Agnon. Translated from the Hebrew by I. M. Lask. Doubleday, Doran & Co. \$3.

SUPPOSEDLY a product of a Hebrew renaissance in Palestine, Agnon's novel might in effect have been written at any time within the past hundred years, in any of the tiny centers of "enlightenment" in Lithuania or Poland, to be read by small scattered coteries of Hebrew enthusiasts. It is completely divorced from the "new life." A Hebraist of the sixties of the last century reading this book today would have no inkling of any revived activity and development in Hebrew literature. He would feel it to be contemporary, both in form and content, with the other works of his day.

The Bridal Canopy takes place in the early nineteenth century. It deals with the wander-

ings of the Chassid, Reb Hassid of Brod, who leaves his home and family to fulfill the holy commandment of bringing his daughters "under the canopy," that is, of marrying them off. Being unable to supply them with the requisite dowries, he needs must depend upon the charity of his fellow Jews to make possible the fulfillment of the commandment.

Together with Reb Nuta, his waggoner, he travels the length and breadth of Galicia accepting the alms which his fellow Jews recognize to be a sacred duty. For this was no ordinary charity. It was observance of a holy commandment which brought credit to both donor and receiver in the eyes of the Lord. It is not, however, just the wanderings and adventures of Reb Yudel and his faithful waggoner that make up the substance of the novel. It is the countless tales and legends, stories within stories, exchanged by Reb Yudel and Reb Nuta to illustrate points in their animated arguments, that constitute the major part of the book. Similarly, each village and inn they stop at affords an opportunity to hear like tales from their hosts and to swap their own in return.

These stories and legends are taken from the wealth of colorful Chassidic folk-tales and myths which the author has accumulated over years of study and research. They are woven into a delightful pattern that presents an illuminating, though one-sided, picture of the period, which can scarce be gotten from more formal studies of Chassidism.

In the end, Reb Yudel's faith is justified. He secures the bridegrooms for his daughters. Once again the Lord has provided for the faithful. And the book closes on a note of confidence and trust in the providence of the Blessed be He.

Unfortunately, in our own day, the faith of a Reb Yudel no longer sustains. The providence of the Lord is unavailing in the face of life's actualities. Chassidism itself was the revolt of the Jewish masses against the monopoly of the Talmudic and rabbinic aristocracy. The latter claimed that only through constant study of the law was loyalty and faith in God demonstrated. Only through such study was a place secured in the world to come. The Chassidim felt that joyous fulfillment of the simple daily commandments, and the interpretations of their Rebbes would find equal favor in the eyes of the Lord. For it was quite evident that humble working folk could not devote their days to holy study. That was the privilege of the wealthy and leisure classes alone. As years went by, the essence of Chassidism was corrupted by un-



Arthur Getz

scrupulous leaders who took advantage of the simple faith of their followers and feathered their own nests.

In the *Bridal Canopy*, however, we have little indication of the pressing social problems of the period. It is a romanticization of the past by one who apparently still accepts the values and concepts of the period he describes. The form of the novel is equally archaic. It is quite definitely picaresque after the fashion of *Don Quixote* or *Gil Blas*. The style and language conform to the structure of the novel. There is little of the style of modern Hebrew in it. It retains the flavor of the medieval legends and rabbinical agadas and homilies. In its nostalgia, in its idealization of Chassidism, the novel is a direct continuation of the artificially preserved Hebrew literature of the past. The English reader is yet to be convinced by his Zionist friends of the vitality of modern Hebrew literature. Agnon fails to do so.

A. ARTHUR KALLAN.

Coney Island Folk

LOW COMPANY, by Daniel Fuchs. Vanguard Press. \$2.50.

THIS novel has humor of the kind which distinguished Fuchs's earlier books—humor of an almost macabre sort—but its distinction lies in the compassion with which Fuchs writes. His characters are a low lot, and their story a rough one, but he gives them significance in spite of their vices and frustrations.

To Neptune Beach, a place in Brooklyn, come folk of lesser means, crowding from the city for a day at the shore. The story concerns the merchants along a boardwalk who are anxious to serve the pleasure seekers. Only incidentally do the vacationists figure, and then as an offstage mob parading the boardwalk or flocking into the soda parlor. Mr. Spitzbergen, owner of Ann's soda parlor, regards the rainy morning with distaste, and moans at its effect on business. Most of the action of the forty-eight hours of the story begins or ends at Ann's, and through the place troop a cheery crew: Shubunka, the operator of a string of two-dollar brothels, and an extensive renter of Mr. Spitzbergen's apartments. Moe Karty, an earnest gambler on the races and an accountant gone wrong. Moe's knock-kneed, worried wife. Herbert Lurie, who runs a dress shop, who has tried marriage and its substitutes frequently and is anxious to try again. Mme. Pavlovna, the corsetière who remembers her past in the capitals of Europe as she eats her breakfast at Ann's. And the personnel at Ann's: Dorothy, the cashier, who thinks of marrying Mr. Lurie. The new girl who is afraid of being pinched for the shortage in the cash register. Shorty, the middle-aged soda jerker who fails to understand what Mme. Pavlovna means by platonic love, and whose lesson costs him three dollars and indigestion, and costs Mme. Pavlovna one black-chiffon negligée.

But this brief account of the characters gives no idea of the rare quality Fuchs

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