

## "THE LOWER DEPTHS"

THE more one sees of pre-revolutionary Russian plays the more one realises how necessary was the revolution.

In the plays of middle class and "intellectual" life one sees hopeless types which would be better out of the way in any system, and in the plays which depict the life of the masses—or certain sections of them—as Maxim Gorky's "Lower Depths," one realises what the common people of Russia endured, and why they decided at last to overthrow a system which inflicted so much misery upon them.

The "Lower Depths," which is running at the Gate Theatre, Floral Street, Covent Garden, is one of Gorky's most depressing works, and clearly shows the effects of privation on a sensitive mind. Gorky had been in the lower depths himself, and what he felt and saw there lived with him always.

True his experiences made him a rebel, but it infused a pessimism into his work which is common among Russian writers.

The "Lower Depths" is to that extent reactionary. Although it presents an awful picture of misery and degradation under the tsarist regime it offers no way out—or at least not the way of the Workers' revolution.

The characters are submerged—they have lost hope and faith in themselves—there is nothing for them to do but die.

This, of course, was the attitude of the "intelligentsia" in Russia before the Revolution. They saw no way of escape, and committed suicide wholesale instead.

What Gorky does not show is that besides the miserable lost creatures of the lowest depths was a proletariat coming to a knowledge of its strength and urged by historical forces towards the overthrow of the system which produced misery and those who had batted on it.

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## Mr. Clissold Blows the Gaff on Mr. Wells

The World of William Clissold. By H. G. Wells. (Ernest Benn, Ltd.) 7s. 6d. 246 pp.

MR. H. G. WELLS has blown the gaff on that muddled little bourgeois gentleman, Mr. William Clissold—or perhaps, we should say, that Mr. Clissold has blown the gaff on Mr. Wells.

What is the world actually of Mr. Clissold? What does the future hold for him, and what does he see in the forces at work to-day, and which are plain to every class-conscious Worker, and which, indeed, are perceived by every proletarian who comes up against reality—as only the proletariat does?

A fair sample of Mr. Clissold's philosophy may be found in the following speculation on "life":—

Is there a plot to the show: is it a drama moving through a vast complexity to a definite end, or at any rate moving in a definite direction? To the question

(Continued from previous column)

Nevertheless the play gives a wonderful picture of the lowest types of doss-house dweller—such types as can be seen in London slums any day. His dialogue—given to us in English through the translation of Michael Krivoy—is wonderful in the simple manner in which it lays bare each character.

The Gate company's acting and atmosphere were of their usual level—which is about the best tribute I can pay them.

All were made to feel the tragedy, the drabness, and the sordidness of these poor crushed lives. It is difficult to single any one out for special mention, but tribute should be paid to Caroline Keith, Peter Godfrey, Molly Veness, and Geoffrey Wilkinson.

D. BRIDGER.

the various religions have given their various answers . . . there is some invincible fact or group of facts outside of, or positively inconsistent with, all their explanations. . . . Either the whole is too complex for me to perceive a plot or recognise the one the teachers would have me see, or there is no plot.

Mr. Clissold has written three volumes, of which this book is the first, to elaborate this statement. The plain fact is that Mr. Clissold doesn't know where the world is going, he has no clear philosophy—but a rough "cast-up" of the three volumes shows that he takes about 200,000 words to make this plain.

Mr. Clissold's bankruptcy is clearly shown in his handling of Russia.

Mr. Clissold tells us that he went to Russia, and what is more he didn't like the country nor the people in charge of affairs there.

There may be a reason for this. Perhaps Mr. Clissold is thinking of a well-known author who went to Russia and did not receive from the Bolsheviks that measure of homage which eminent authors are wont to receive.

This well-known author discovered to his indignation that Lenin in the greatest period of the world's history had other things to think about than an eminent author who did not even understand what the Bolsheviks were driving at.

The eminent author must have felt hurt, too, when Trotsky let it be known that the eminent author's "history" was something in the nature of a joke.

Obviously there is more than a single reason why Mr. Clissold does not like the Bolsheviks—the Bolsheviks have such penetration and such a sense of perspective!

Mr. Clissold's "demolition" of Marx is perhaps the lightest section in a rather drab book. Marx has so often been "refuted" by people who know something, at least, about Marxist economics that it is refreshing to have the views of someone who quite obviously doesn't!

And just as Marx has withstood the assaults of whole armies of professors of economics so he will withstand the puny slings and arrows of Mr. Clissold.

Mr. Clissold's main objection to Marxism—like that of the eminent author before mentioned—is the length of Karl Marx's beard. Mr. Clissold refers to the fact that Marx used the Hegelian dialectic, which, is carefully explained, "tells us that the thing—that is, is always shattered at last to make way for the higher synthesis by the thing—that-it-isn't."

Obviously this cannot be true, says Mr. Clissold, forgetting—or being unable to see—that capitalism, the thing—that-is, is giving birth to the thing—that-it-isn't—Socialism.

In fact Mr. Clissold is very apprehensive about the future of Socialism. What is wrong is that Socialists

## CASTAWAYS

THIRTY of us crowded round the factory gate, everyone with "unemployed" stamped on his face. Half-past seven tolled and the works policeman hung out a sign—"No hands wanted," then waved us off with his stick.

"It's a rotten shame," said my neighbour as we turned away. "It's too old at forty wherever I go. I'm about all in, I can tell you."

I listened in silence while he told me his story.

"I'm a Smith and better'n many a young 'un. I know the boss here—worked for him ten years in Sheffield. He'd promised me a start this morning, but soon as I took my cap off it was all over. 'Sorry, Brown,' he says, 'you're greying, you're past forty, and I daren't do it.'"

"Last month I got a start over at Doncaster. I lied about my age. Mind you, had to lie to get a job at fifty bob a week. Called myself thirty-eight. Well, I got past the doctor, and he was keener than him I passed ten years ago for the army."

"I thought I'd won at last till three days later the boss called me in and bade me take my cap off and sit down. He looked me over, played with his pen, and then, casual like, asked me, 'In what year were you born, Brown?'"

"In surprise I blurted out '80, sir.' 'Thanks,' said he. 'I suspected it. Your money'll be in to-night.'"

"He admitted that I'd given satisfaction and he'd no complaint, but says he, 'You're forty-six. Good morning.'"

"It's a rotten shame. What's to become of us. Eh?"

I couldn't answer. I am thirty-nine. EDWIN LEWIS.

## "MANON LESCAUT"

they can be properly visualised. The charming scenes of gay luxury, the gloom and terrifying brutality of the prison-looms, and the deportation of women offenders, are presented with equal vividness. Another triumph of this picture is that long after one has seen it small touches linger in the memory. The ghostly row of trees glimpsed through the darkness as Manon and her lover drive away at midnight in the old marquis's carriage;

the expressive downward glance of Manon's step-brother, plainly indicating that he is pocketing money from the marquis, although the actual transaction is not seen; the canary in his fantastic crystal-hung cage . . . and so on.

Lya de Putti plays Manon exquisitely—she is Manon, in fact, with all her charm, passion, and lovable shortcomings. Vladimir Gardarov as Des Grieux was also very good. One may further mention Siegfried Arno's pleasing rendering of the saturnine step-brother, while the many minor parts were all well played. V. A.

## PLAYWRIGHTS NEEDED

The Workers' Theatre Movement wants plays. At the moment there scarcely exists a play suitable for its purposes in English.

That is why the SUNDAY WORKER is starting a new competition. No prizes will be offered—but the best play (or plays) submitted will be printed, and the author will get 100 copies of it free. Plays should not be longer, if possible, than 6,000 words, and can be as short as 600.

What sort of play is wanted? First of all, the main characters ought to be Workers. The "kind lady" has been slumming and written a little play about the awful effects of drink on dock labourers—sort of thing is, however, not likely to be received gratefully. And the authors of the future will find that it is not often possible to get away with a chunk of raw "Workers' life"—just description of conditions, injustices, &c.—unless some sort of a story is worked into it.

Next, the plays ought to be flexible. That means that it must be possible for those acting them to change the phrases a bit to suit their own local way of talking, and change the scenes and characters to fit in with incidents that their audiences will remember as having happened in their locality.

Much the best plays will be those that groups of Workers build up for themselves this way, but such groups need an outline in front of them—at present, at any rate—and it is no good giving them middle-class plays as outlines to work on. The class bias won't wash off.

Plays should be sent to the SUNDAY WORKER marked in all cases on the envelope in large letters PLAYS.

A committee of judges is being formed, and will be announced next week, when a closing date for the competition will also be given.

J. M. FLANAGAN.

## A Working-Class Revue

ON my way to Russia, where I have just arrived for the purpose of a further study of the Workers' Theatre, I could not avoid comparison.

I had just left London, where the principal successful productions in the theatrical market were plays by pre-war Russian playwrights, Chekov and Tolstoy. Each of the four wears an identity label in the form of the title of a gloomy work—Chekov, "The Cherry Orchard"; Andriev, "The Seven Who Were Hanged"; Dostoiévsky, "The Idiot"; Tolstoy, "Resurrection" or the Atonement. Each carries gloomy properties belonging to their plays. Chekov a pistol and hatchet; Dostoiévsky guns, a bottle of prussic acid, and another labelled dreams and death; Andriev, a gibbet and ropes; Tolstoy has a carving knife, and wears a map of Siberia, and so on. They march solemnly round the room and deposit the properties in various places.

The complete contrast to this world of unutterable misery was the new world of hope, confidence, and enthusiasm represented by the fine ship "Soviet," on which I was travelling. Here, indeed, was a splendid introduction to the Soviet Union which has arisen out of the ashes of the old imperialistic limbo. I could write pages about this significant and instructive introduction to the conception, organisation, and work of the new life in Russia, found in the duties, recreations, position, and treatment of the officers and crew of the "Soviet." Everything revealed the recognition of the principle of co-operation as the basis of the Soviet conception of life on board ship, as it is in the vast Soviet Union territory itself.

But I shall not stop to explain this system. My present object is to suggest how a satirical revue could be made out of this contrasting material. Let me say here that I have noticed that contrast is the great thing in the Russian Workers' theatre and kino as it is on the picture page of the SUNDAY WORKER. In the kino the rule seems to be an American bourgeois film, followed by a strong revolutionary film. The effect is to make life expressed by the American film too contemptible for words.

SCENE. A dismal room in a gloomy farmhouse somewhere in a bleak part of Russia. Outside a variety of noises, suggesting an earthquake, hurricane, blizzard, a snow, hail, and rain storm, &c., all happening at once. Odd rattle of chains to suggest gibbet, and, if possible, throw in a howling dog or two. The room is in semi-darkness, which is increased by the dim light of an oil lamp. Several people sit

shivering at a bare table. The door opens with a crash. Enter a small procession of characters representing the Playwrights of Gloom of the pre-war period in Russia. They include Chekov, Andriev, Dostoiévsky, and Tolstoy. Each of the four wears an identity label in the form of the title of a gloomy work—Chekov, "The Cherry Orchard"; Andriev, "The Seven Who Were Hanged"; Dostoiévsky, "The Idiot"; Tolstoy, "Resurrection" or the Atonement. Each carries gloomy properties belonging to their plays. Chekov a pistol and hatchet; Dostoiévsky guns, a bottle of prussic acid, and another labelled dreams and death; Andriev, a gibbet and ropes; Tolstoy has a carving knife, and wears a map of Siberia, and so on. They march solemnly round the room and deposit the properties in various places.

All (solemnly and slowly): "We are the playwrights of gloom!" (Moving towards the door.) "Of gloom! Of gloom! Of GLOOM! Our Grand Guignol plays reflect the soul of Russia as it was in the days of the Tsars." (They strike attitudes of intense melancholy.) (Pointing to the other characters.) "Here are samples of our work." (They exit listlessly. Terrific sounds off.)

1st character at table (drearily): "I'm tired of waiting for breakfast. (Takes pistol and shoots himself.)"

Servant (enters hurriedly): The canary has committed suicide in the soup. (Takes poison and dies.)

2nd character at the table (mournfully): The soup is spoilt. (Stabs himself with the carving-knife.)

3rd character: Dead, and he owes me money, I will hang myself. (Takes rope.)

4th character: Not here. In the shed. (3rd character exits.)

5th character: Where's Peter?

4th character: In the river.

5th character: He must be lonely. I'll join him. (Exits.)

3rd character (re-entering, carrying rope): The shed's full. (Throws rope down.)

4th character: Try the well.

3rd character: The well's full. It's drier here. (Puts his head in the gas stove.)

This could be worked out to any length. One takes poison, another places himself under a falling tree, another throws himself out of a window, and so on, all for the most trivial reasons.

SCENE 2. The deck of a Soviet steamer. A rope ladder, a covered hatchway, a circular piece of metal, suggesting a funnel, and a square box with a hole in it to suggest stairs to lower deck. Men seated on hatch playing chess. Another group with musical instruments. A third group surrounds the box on which is seated a commissar, who leads a discussion, in which the men join eagerly, on the class struggle and how it is entering into every form of social life. The discussion over, there is music, song, and dancing. The scene ends with an assertion of vigorous life in complete contrast to the death-like atmosphere of the first scene.

HUNTLY CARTER.

## The Landworkers' Story of Revolt

The English Agricultural Labourer, 1300—1925. By Montague Fordham & T. R. Fordham. (Labour Publishing Co., 2s. 6d.)

THE history of the English farm labourer is an absorbing subject which, unfortunately, receives far too little attention from students.

Most active Workers have a knowledge of industrial history, but little of agricultural, and this is natural enough when we consider that the British movement at present finds its main strength in the ranks of the industrial Workers. This is, of course, due to the rise of British industry during the past 150 years, and the attraction of the agricultural Workers to the towns.

But although the capitalist class has allowed agricultural England to fall into decay, the urgent necessity of a countryside which will provide the Workers, at least in part, with food cannot be over-emphasised.

In the period of transition to Socialism we shall be beset on all hands by enemies who will rely on the weapon of starvation to crush the British Workers' State.

This is a fact which cannot in any way be evaded by thinking Socialists.

The agricultural Workers are our natural allies, and the town Workers must see to it that these allies, who have for so many years been left to their own resources, now receive every ounce of aid it is possible to give.

The English agricultural labourer has an inspiring revolutionary tradition. The reader will find that for the last six hundred years the history of these men is one of bitter struggle, breaking, as conditions became intolerable, into periodical revolts.

From about the period 1300—1350 there were no landless labourers. At that time England was essentially an agricultural country, with a population of about two millions. Most men held farm-land, under the lords, and according to their rank as serf, cottar, or freeman. All peasants were, however, virtual slaves to their lords, and were forced to pay tribute.

But this system was infinitely better than that which developed some five hundred years after.

The class struggle was intensified by the Black Death which swept England and killed half the population. The landholding serf was called upon by his lord to perform impossible services, and therefore gave up his land to become a free labourer. The growing class of labourers fought a bitter struggle against the lords for better wages.

The struggle came to a head in 1381, when the king imposed a tax of 1s. per head on all persons over fifteen years of age.

The men of the eastern counties marched under their famous leader, Wat Tyler, on London. Tyler was killed and his followers pacified with promises and then crushed.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century the lords of the manor had

become absolute owners of the land. They stole huge tracts from the small farmers, and put this land out to sheep, turning off the land thousands who had formerly worked to provide food for the countryside.

The dispossessed peasants roamed about getting what work they could, and again revolted. In addition to smaller risings, 15,000 Norfolk men, led by Ket, captured Norwich. Again they were crushed in a welter of blood.

This mass of despairing humanity existed in some manner, forming a huge reserve of cheap wage-labour, which gradually lost every privilege which the peasantry under the old manor system possessed.

The labourer had sunk to terrible depths. He was unable to provide his family with even the bare necessities, and was forbidden to leave his parish to seek work. At last their suffering could no longer be borne in silence, and around 1830 there were many sporadic outbreaks, culminating in a widespread revolt in the South of England. Hangings and mass transportation were the methods adopted to break this rising.

For many years after this "the labouring poor," as they were called, were quiet. England was now becoming a manufacturing country, and men began to find work in the sweat-shops of the towns. Here they formed unions, and used the strike weapon to secure improved conditions.

But the large reserve still left in the villages were used by the factory owners to replace strikers, and new thousands were drawn from the land.

There was a revival of trade unionism in 1906, and a succession of strikes improved conditions somewhat. But less land than ever was cultivated; wages verged on the starvation level; hundreds of thousands of farm workers were unorganised.

The Agricultural Workers' Union is now doing yeoman work. But conditions, as will be easily appreciated by readers of this book, have created a mentality which will require the weight of the Labour Movement to alter.

We know there is revolutionary material in the countryside. Then let us develop it.

H. A. FLOWER.

This German screen-version of a famous French story and opera has already had a fortnight's run at the New Gallery. I hope that it will be more widely shown, so that the Worker will have a better chance of enjoying a really good film.

The fine acting of a tragic story, the satisfying accuracy of costume and scenic detail, the original and impressive settings—one hardly knows what to admire most in this film. The photography is remarkably clear. The eyes are never strained and teased, as is so often the case, by spectacles or incidents being whisked away before