

rather confused text could be found in the country. The Falashas had been a freedom-loving, warlike people, who for many centuries had to undergo terrible trials in their fight for independence against the kings of Ethiopia; as a result, they were reduced to a comparatively small, economically weak, and spiritually not very much developed community (although Dr. Leslau praises their zeal for the education of their children). Nevertheless, despite its rather confused arrangement, the Book of the Sabbath displays a genuine and most original religious attitude.

The other books presented in translation in this anthology are mostly adaptations from the so-called apocryphal literature created towards the end of the Second Commonwealth, with its revelations about life after death, about the Heavens, and about Hell and Paradise, as well as recasts from Christian Ethiopic or Arabic sources, which in their turn were strongly influenced by later Jewish lore and fiction. Some of these pieces, for example the book of "The Death of Moses," are not without a particular charm and even humor. All the translated selections are preceded by useful short introductions and synopses.

It is instructive to compare the Falashas with another Jewish group, the Yemenites, who lived on the hills overlooking the opposite, eastern, shore of the Red Sea, which divides Africa from Arabia. The Yemenites have participated in each and every phase of the development of Judaism; they are Jews in the fullest sense, although they show some strange traits owing to their long geographical segregation from the rest of the Jewish people. They represent the case of a portion of the Jewish people separated from the rest only by outward conditions and therefore able to "come back" and to amalgamate with the main body without serious difficulties.

The Falashas offer the contrary example of a foreign population converted to Judaism by the missionary efforts of an ancient Jewish sect and developing completely on its own line. From the religious point of view the Falashas display many original and most significant aspects. In particular in these days, when the discovery and the decipherment of the Dead Sea scrolls is bringing us so much fresh material about the life of the ancient Jewish sects, the study of the Falashas should be given new momentum. It is to be hoped that Dr. Leslau

will be enabled to make a third expedition to Ethiopia, in order to carry out, *inter alia*, a final examination of that most interesting community.

### The Working Day

7½ CENTS. By RICHARD BISSELL. Little, Brown. 245 pp. \$3.50.

*Reviewed by* NATHAN GLICK

THE 30's had their "proletarian" novels, but these were concerned with class-consciousness and revolt, and not with how a worker passed eight, ten, or twelve hours at a machine or desk. The 40's brought forth novels about life in the office of *Time* or the *Times*, of an advertising agency or a private eye or a diabolical magnate. But their interest in the daily life of the office was usually either grudging or exotic, a matter of local color or of providing a prosaic background for the "real thing" which lay always beyond and outside the office. Then there appeared, in passing, novels which treated modern industry as a phase of the purgatory through which the artist-writer must pass to discover his true self, novels in the main of anguish and rejection.

In contrast to this, Mr. Bissell looks amiably upon the third floor office of the Sleep Tite plant in Junction City, Iowa (*Sleep Tite, the Pajama for Men of Bedroom Discrimination*), finding it interesting for its own sake. Not that he has any notion of celebrating modern industry or boosting the morale of its wage slaves, or any visible ambition in the direction of sociological reportage. If he is celebrating anything, it is the survival of the Horatio Alger taint in the person of a moderately sophisticated small-fry plant superintendent named Sid Sorokin. Sid is a novelty of normality in recent fiction. He is everywhere, and everywhere indispensable to the modern industrial machine, but no one to my knowledge has before this deigned to make him a fictional hero. This particular Sid Sorokin is twenty-eight, educated in the public schools of Gary, Indiana, the night schools and correspondence courses of Chicago, and a whole gamut of jobs in the garment trade. He has wit and industry. He is easily bored and upset, but, unlike the artist type, he is eminently practical, with a strong and active instinct for self-preservation. Again unlike the artist type, he retains his capacity for prosaic pleasures. So in the middle of a

standard gripe about the constant tension of the factory and the pot shots sent his way by labor on one side and top management on the other, Sid feels impelled to confess that "nobody has to be a superintendent of a garment plant unless he wants to. So far I can't say I had been having a very bad time. Having a pretty good time as a matter of fact."

IF SID is having a pretty good time, some of the credit is owing to Babe Williams, a freckled and forthright beauty "who operated a Union Special 51400 and could set more sleeves in an eight-hour day than any operator between Council Bluffs and Columbus." She is one type of "queen" of which every garment factory contains several. Another is the quiet brunette with olive skin and enormous dark eyes "who put button holes in the flies of men's pajamas with a genteel air as though she were pouring tea at the Junior League." Babe is Sid's principal and intimate source of pleasure at Sleep Tite, but she is also, as ringleader of the union slowdown, his tormenter. Manning the barricades on the opposite side is Sid's cadaverous, penny-pinching boss, Myron Hasler, a man of stern principles derived from Fulton Lewis, Jr. And with Sid in the middle of the battle sits Mabel, repository of gossip and bulwark of strength, Sleep Tite's particular variation of the universal female office wheelhorse: "Mabel was about forty-three or forty-eight or fifty-one, hard to

tell—one of those big energetic girls with a big bust, a lot of hair, and good-looking legs (but also solid), and she alternated between fancy printed dresses with everything on them that a sewing machine would hold together and tailored suits, which she wore partly because they made her look like a career woman such as Colbert or Roz Russell and partly to annoy her husband."

IN WORKING out the ramifications of this particular segment of the class struggle, Mr. Bissell has made a modest but significant contribution toward the folklore of American capitalism. He has documented for the first time to my knowledge, in the popular medium of the novel, the precise Lardnerian language of a business house bulletin for salesmen, along with supremely meaningful and hilarious verbatim extracts from the morning mail of a plant superintendent. His chapter epigraphs, culled from the weirdest sources (ranging from S. J. Perelman to a brochure entitled *The Progressive Sewing Room*), constitute a mocking commentary on our industrial rituals. Most of all, he has conveyed something of the incalculable variety and monotony of the eight-hour day, filled with small talk, irritations, gripes, wisecracks, high spirits, work, goofings-off, machine breakdowns, sex, and the casual fire-works of a union drive for a 7½-cents-an-hour raise.

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