CARL SANDBURG

By Sherwood Anderson

HE comes into a room where there is company heavily and slowly, staring about. His eyes are small and blue-faded. Everyone knows a personage has arrived but there is no swagger to him.

He is not a physically strong man although he looks like the stuff out of which champion middleweights are made—a fighter who has given up fighting, gone out upon another road, out of condition for fighting. His eyes are not strong and he reads little. He is an eternal sitter-up o' nights drinking quantities of black coffee.

In conversation concerning the two subjects that absorb him—labor and poetry—he is unsure of himself, makes startling statements hesitatingly and covers his uncertainty with a blustering manner. There is no intellectual smartness and oddly enough no intolerance.

A distinguished Frenchman came to my house and wanted much to meet Sandburg so I had him up for an evening. They sat and stared at each other—both helpless. Sandburg took from his pocket a paper covered with figures and began to tell the Frenchman of the number of tons of coal mined in the state of Illinois each year, the number of miles from Chicago to Dallas, Texas, how many railroads come into Chicago, what Mr. Gary said at the time of the steel strike.

Silence settled down upon the two men. One might have cut the silence into little squares and rolled it into balls.

I led Sandburg to the piano and he began to sing, thumping steadily on two or three chords.

His voice is mellow and rich and he has the gift of song. He sang nigger songs, a song of the boll-weevil, one about Jesse James, another about a tough girl of the city streets whose lover had proved unfaithful.

Sandburg singing, naively, beautifully, was something the Frenchman understood and loved. Later he told me that the evening was one of his really fine experiences in America. On that evening we were all so absorbed that while Sandburg sang a robber crawled in at a window and going into his sleeping room robbed the Frenchman of his clothes, his money, and his luggage—thus giving him, in addition to his evening with Sandburg, a strikingly true picture of what life in Chicago is like. I've a notion that he went home to France inclined toward the suspicion that Sandburg and I were in league with the robber.

There is a growing tendency, as his fame goes up in the world, to speak of Carl Sandburg as a He man, an eater of raw meat, a hairy one. In Chicago newspaper local rooms he is spoken of as John Guts. I do not think of him so although I've a suspicion that he

sometimes writes under the influence of this particular dramatization of his personality.

Buried deep within the He man, the hairy, meat eating Sandburg there is another Sandburg, a sensitive, naive, hesitating Carl Sandburg, a Sandburg that hears the voice of the wind over the roofs of houses at night, a Sandburg that wanders often alone through grim city streets on winter nights, a Sandburg that knows and understands the voiceless cry in the heart of the farm girl of the plains when she comes to the kitchen door and sees for the first time the beauty of our prairie country.

The poetry of John Guts doesn't excite me much. Hairy, raw meat eating He men are not exceptional in Chicago and the middle west.

As for the other Sandburg, the naive, hesitant, sensitive Sandburg—among all the poets of America he is my poet.