

The Critical Circus

by GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

THEY say that Americans as a race have no sense of humor. I think this is profoundly true. . . . In all our literary history we have produced only a few scattered works of humor: Clemens, Harte, Riley, perhaps Holmes. . . . To-day we have less than a half dozen writers whose work could be called humor: Don Marquis, of course, and Chris Morley on occasions, and the immortal Herriman of Krazy Kat; DuBose Heyward with his novels of life among the Carolina Negroes; and Percy Crosby, whose novel *Skippy* has, in my opinion, given America her most important contribution to humor of the century.

— COREY FORD in *Vanity Fair*

Unadulterated whangdoodle! "In all our literary history we have produced only a few scattered works of humor: Clemens, Harte, Riley, perhaps Holmes." What of Howells, Ambrose Bierce, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Eugene Field, Frank R. Stockton — to say nothing of Joel Harris, George Ade, Judge Shute, Harry Leon Wilson, and Finley Peter Dunne? "To-day we have less than a half dozen writers whose work could be called humor: Don Marquis . . . Chris Morley . . . Herriman . . . DuBose Heyward . . . and Percy Crosby." Maybe Mr. Ford hasn't yet heard of Ring Lardner, Anita Loos, and certain other such comiques in his wild excitement over the great geniuses of Krazy Kat and Skippy.

It takes extreme violence to make us sit up. No play, no book, no sporting spectacle is going to thrill us unless it can compete with the front page of the newspaper. . . . We demand knockouts; we get knockouts; and our emotions are roused by nothing less.

— KATHARINE FULLERTON GEROULD
in *Harper's Magazine*

Here is a common platitude, completely hollow. Among the most popular plays of this last year are *Berkeley Square*, *The Green Pastures*, *It's a Wise Child*, *June Moon*, *Bird in Hand*, *Death Takes a Holiday*, *The First Mrs. Fraser*, *Michael and Mary*, *Rebound*, and *Strictly Dishonorable* — not one of which has so much as a trace of violence. Books like *Dodsworth*, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the Warwick Deeping series of sentimental tales, *The Forsyte Saga*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *John*

Brown's Body, and dozens upon dozens of other relatively placid works have thrilled the country from one end to the other. Madison Square Garden is packed by thousands who apparently enjoy hugely such mild sporting spectacles as six-day bicycle races, hockey games, dancing marathons, and the like. Baseball, the national pastime, surely does not make us sit up because of its extreme violence. Mrs. Gerould should get around more.

I THINK it (Hollywood) is doing the best possible work under the given conditions, and I think if God woke up some morning and decided to establish a motion-picture industry and had to run it with this sadly inadequate human race, after looking over all the available material He would plant His studios in Hollywood and He would appoint Lasky and Fox and Schenck to the Board of Directors, and He would put Ben Schulberg and Winnie Sheehan and Irving Thalberg in charge of the studios.

— GEORGE ABBOTT
in *Hollywood — A Minority Opinion*

Mr. Abbott apparently has a very low estimate of God's critical abilities. Being a somewhat more devout believer, I prefer to think that God, if He were conceivably to bother Himself about the movies at all, would prefer at the head of things such fellows as the Russians who manufactured *Potemkin* and the Germans who manufactured *The Last Laugh* and *Caligari*, even if the industry didn't make quite so much money and the directors and studio heads had to ride around in Fords instead of Hispano-Suizas.

I READ to-day a remarkable book. It was written by a woman . . . but, of course, I must carefully avoid mentioning this fact because you would immediately say: "Pooh, pooh! It can't be so good as all that!"

— ANDRÉ D'ESTRÉES

Paris critic for the New York *Sun*

Who would say pooh, pooh? Cher André, come on over and meet Willa Cather, Ellen Glasgow, Ruth Suckow, Edith Wharton, Anne Parrish, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Evelyn Scott, Susan Glaspell, Dorothy Canfield, Julia Peterkin, and our other girls.

THERE is nothing so drearily alike as your modern pornographic novels, principally written by maiden ladies.
— HILAIRE BELLOC
in the Preface to *The Church and Current Literature*

Whence comes the nonsensical idea, shared by Mr. Belloc, that our pornographic novels are written principally by old maids? For every dirty novel written by a maiden lady there are a dozen written by men, married or divorced women, and flappers. Look over the records in England and America and see for yourself. Mr. Belloc has evidently gained his information from the comic papers.

MR. CABELL does not actually believe that lifelong devotion to what one knows is false (however attractive) will serve as compensation for reality, any more than an agnostic can be convinced of the truth of religion by the incontrovertible argument that it does a lot of people a lot of good. The visionary must believe in his vision; Mr. Cabell does not. . . . The fact that Mr. Cabell must, in his more thoughtful moments, know his implied philosophy for the unsatisfying thing it is, makes it a greater pity that he has, in what he announces is his last work, allowed his mind to be so exclusively dominated by an emotional mood.

— GEOFFREY T. HELLMAN
in *The Miscellany*

How does Mr. Hellman know that Mr. Cabell doesn't actually believe it? As a matter of fact, Mr. Cabell does, I happen to know, and profoundly. If Mr. Hellman is doubtful, he might ask Mr. Cabell.

IN a world which is becoming steadily more realistic about the reasons for war and the costs of war, there has been no comparable increase of interest in pacifism as a philosophy of life or way of conduct.

— NORMAN THOMAS
in the *New York Herald-Tribune*

The Peace Conference, the League of Nations, the purpose behind the Naval Limitations Conference, and other such matters doubtless escaped Mr. Thomas during his late oratorical war to make New York safe for Socialism.

AMERICAN magazines of large circulation have no use for creativeness. They go on with their set program and are perfectly certain that creativeness is a regrettable function.

— EDWARD J. O'BRIEN
in *The Modern Quarterly*

This is one of the cardinal pieces of buncombe in the American critical credo. There are, true enough, certain American magazines of large circulation that adhere to the rubber stamp, but there are others that do not deserve the charge thus commonly registered

against them. It is in the magazines of largest circulation that you will find much of the creative work of Galsworthy, Wells, Bennett, Rebecca West, Lardner, Dreiser, Cather, Hergesheimer, and other such craftsmen; it is merely the circumstance that you find Fannie Hurst, Edgar Wallace, Peter B. Kyne, Robert W. Chambers, Sax Rohmer, and such like in the same magazines that obscures in a measure the sense that real creativeness is also present in the pages. Some of the best modern writers' best work has appeared in our popular magazines. The *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Cosmopolitan*, and other such million or more circulation periodicals have published more creative work than most of the so-called little arty magazines bunched together.

MOST people are happier than the reformers who are trying to lead them out of their "misery."

— WILLIAM FEATHER
in the *William Feather Magazine*

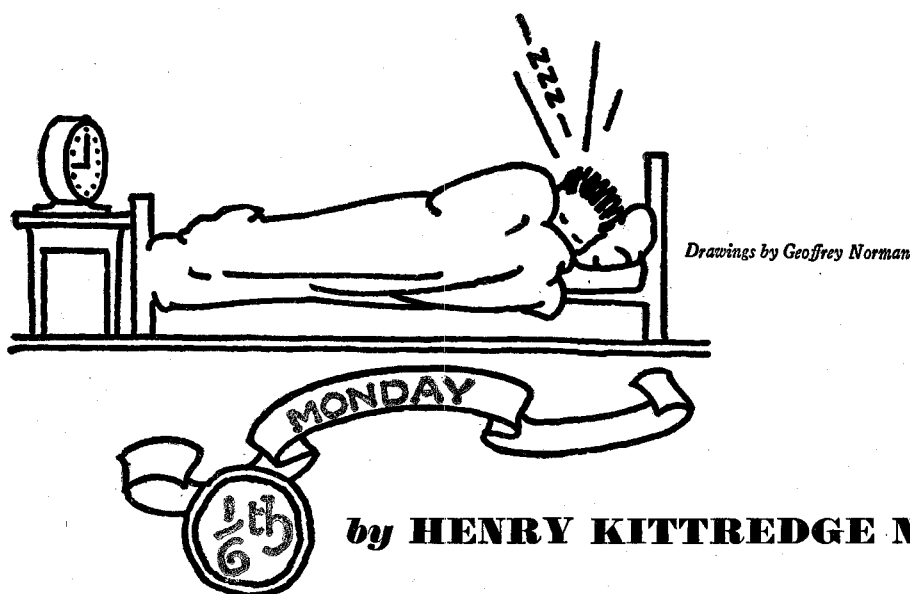
Although a lot of us, like Mr. Feather, profess to believe it, I doubt that it is true. A reformer is generally a completely happy man, at least according to his own lights of happiness. When he succeeds in his enterprises, he enjoys all the delights of a task accomplished in the face of heavy opposition. When he fails, he enjoys all the vicarious delights of defeat in what he believes to be a righteous and holy cause. To himself, he is superior to other men.

MR. SQUIRE is old-fashioned, so am I. . . . Mr. Squire voices what many of us feel about the new style of the latest school of writers. The predilections of these writers, quite properly, give them their style. *All Quiet* is symptomatic. Its continuous emphasis on matters which once got no more than a passing and discreet reference . . . is only an outstanding example, known to everybody, of a peculiarity that has been noticeable for some years in our new books.

— H. M. TOMLINSON in *Books*

Mr. Squire and Mr. Tomlinson are perhaps not so old-fashioned as they think. If they were, they would not feel as they do about "the new style of the latest school of writers," nor would they describe its emphasis precisely as being "on matters which once got no more than a passing and discreet reference." Any really old-fashioned person — that is, any person of another and bygone age — would realize that the emphasis of the latest school of writers is almost effeminately weak when compared with that of Fielding, Smollett, Zola, and Gautier.

STAGGERED Holidays



by **HENRY KITTREDGE NORTON**

Now that the American people have at last reached the milk-and-honey land of prosperity, many of them have found that the milk has soured and the honey become bitter. Workers are beginning to discover that there is little point in straining all their energy to accumulate enough wealth to enjoy their leisure hours if those hours are to be few and far between. The five-day week — the first step toward a reorganization of our recreation periods — is therefore being discussed and in certain industries practiced. And while employers are coming to realize that the benefits of this plan are mutual — that in the five-day-week employees will produce as much as, and consume more than, during the five-and-a-half or six-day week — it may be that there is still another improvement possible.

Before going on to that, however, let us examine the advantages of the five-day schedule, for its establishment must precede that other innovation of which we shall speak later. The argument for the five-day week is that the additional holiday will cause workers to become so enthusiastic that they will speed up production until they equal their present output — an assumption which, according to a

Many of our great business executives are beginning to follow the lead of Henry Ford in endorsing the five-day working week. The ordinary man will not be slow to give the plan his approval when he sees the prospect of gaining two full days off in every seven without a reduction in his wages. But what will he do with his extra holiday? Motoring has become our national pastime; but even under the present system the roads are already so jammed with traffic on Sundays that motoring is no longer an unmixed pleasure. If the five-day week is adopted universally, won't it merely increase the congestion? Not necessarily, says Mr. Norton; and he outlines a novel plan of staggered holidays which will doubtless recommend itself to most of us — workers and executives alike.

report issued by the National Industrial Conference Board, is correct. Then, with the extra day for recreation, the industrial population will turn to consumption and by their increased expenditures create in every line a new demand which will send all business forward with greater velocity. Data concerning the validity of this latter supposition are not as yet available, but one has only to consider the increased

consumption on our present Saturday half-holiday to conclude that there is no apparent reason why this successful experiment could not be repeated to the advantage of all concerned. Lengthening our holiday periods is merely one, and the most obvious, method of distributing among the community at large the profits, material and otherwise, resulting from the swelling produc-

tive power of modern industrial processes.

Now that the leaders of great industries have begun to urge the desirability of a five-day week, we may fairly assume that before long it will become a reality. But the project carries with it a danger — the same danger which threatens to make our present Saturday afternoon and Sunday more wearing than the previous five and a half days of labor.