
BETWEEN COVERS—III

BY LOWELL BRENTANO

THERE IS a perennial excitement about a publisher's search for new books and fresh authors. Unlike other businesses, in which the markets are more stabilized and standardized, experience is not necessarily of great value. A publisher seeking to build his list has only one certainty — he never knows what to expect, be it pain or pleasure, disappointment or success. In dealing with artistic temperaments, he quickly learns that he cannot work on any psychological generalizations; each individual has his own foibles and eccentricities. Only too often an unguarded enthusiasm, a momentary ignorance of some intimate detail of an author's private life may betray him.

I recall, for example, an embarrassing and yet amusing experience some years ago, with the first Mrs. Arnold Bennett. I met Mrs. Bennett as a fellow passenger on a trip to England. She was a tall, distinguished-looking, animated Frenchwoman, a *diseuse* and a poetess, who was returning, I believe, from a lecture tour in America. Naturally our conversations turned to her husband, and I expressed a hope that I might some day have the privilege of meeting him. She was kind enough to say she thought he would enjoy meeting me and urged me to write him immediately I arrived in London. She herself, as she explained, was going first to Paris, but I should say in the letter that I had met her and was writing him at her suggestion. Naturally I followed her instructions, only to be somewhat startled by the consequences. Promptly enough I heard from Mr. Bennett, who had left London and gone to Southampton where his yacht was anchored. Unfortunately I have mislaid his letter but I quote from memory. He very cordially invited me to join him on his boat for luncheon and a chat, but there was a bombshell in the postscript of his note. It said: "It will, perhaps, interest you to know Mrs. Bennett and I are separated."

I could not avail myself of this opportunity, and it was not until years later that I finally met Mr. Bennett. You may be sure I did not refer to our earlier correspondence. I found him, however, a fascinating individual. Dressed like a fashion plate, he combined the tense, nervous drive of an overworked American executive with an Old World courtesy. But I never felt I had known Mr. Bennett at his best; he was undoubtedly a sick man physically when I met him in 1928. He had a very sallow complexion, his face muscles twitched constantly, and he had some vocal impediment, seemingly caused by paralyzed muscles, which rendered it difficult for him to articulate distinctly. I tried to persuade him to write his autobiography, and he told me laughingly that I was about the twentieth American publisher who had come to him with this request.

MYSTERY MAKER

ANOTHER VERY fleeting contact I had with a high-pressure Englishman was with Edgar Wallace. I called on him not so much in the guise of a publisher but rather as a mystery fan and as a playwright who had done some work in his field. I chanced to be coauthor of *The Spider* and had collaborated on other mystery plays and novels and so I talked with Wallace more about writing than about publishing. In line with newspaper reports, I found him engaged in quantity production. The walls of his large study were lined with bookcases, but the shelves were filled with more dictograph records than books. A typewriter on the table before him, a dictograph at his elbow, and a pile of multitudinous notes all testified to his industry. And yet he had that genius, possessed by most successful and speedy workers, for shifting his attention instantly from one subject to another without loss of concentration. And while I was there

I should have supposed he was possessed of ample leisure; there was no sense of hurry either in his movements or his mood.

He discussed with me his anxiety about the rapidity with which his books were being published in America — at the rate of five to six titles a year. He wondered whether his sales per copy would not increase greatly if he lengthened the period between publication and whether, in fact, he could not thereby increase his total sales and lessen his own work. Although it is a much-debated question among publishers how frequently a writer can issue a book without flooding his market, I was inclined to agree with him.

He had a new play, *The Case of the Frightened Lady*, which had just opened in London, and he asked me to see it immediately. I went that night and was rather disconcerted at the slow tempo with which English mystery drama is performed. To my surprise, Wallace telephoned me a few days later and asked me my impressions of the play. I tried to be both tactful and truthful but I am afraid I was not as enthusiastic as I should have been. He was expecting to sail for America in a few months, and we made tentative plans to lunch together when he reached New York. Little did I dream I should never hear his voice again and that his return to England from his Hollywood pilgrimage would be in a coffin.

CHILE MAPOCHA ACUNA

WHENEVER ONE thinks of Edgar Wallace, one instinctively thinks of the underworld. There are authors in the underworld — both good and bad — with whom I have brushed elbows. My descriptive adjectives, by the way, refer to the writing ability and not the morals of the authors concerned. Probably the most widely publicized of these figures was Chile Mapocha Acuna, who sprang into prominence in New York City as the star witness in the series of investigations of the local vice squad and its alleged “framing” methods. Acuna, in his testimony, revealed himself as one of the decoys in the system. His story created great excitement and resentment in many quarters, and eventually he was given a police bodyguard against the possibility of his being “bumped off.”

He called at my office one day accompanied

by his guard, two ferocious, husky-looking gentlemen, either of whom should have been able to put Acuna in his pocket. Acuna himself was a small, fragile, delicate-appearing man, with soft brown eyes and a shy manner. Leaving his escorts in the reception hall, I took him into my office and closed the door. It was beginning to rain, so I went to the window and closed it with a bang. Instantly my office door was thrown open, and his escorts literally spilt themselves into the room. They looked sheepish. One of them said, “Sorry, but we’ve gotta watch this fella. We don’t want any trouble while we’re on the job.” This was the first time, so far as I know, that a publisher has been suspected of luring an author into his office for the purpose of shooting him.

Acuna told me a pathetic story of his life and how, in order to protect and shelter his family, he had entered upon his revolting work. Curiously enough, at the risk of seeming overcredulous, I confess I was inclined to believe the essential parts of his story, at least to the extent of considering him more sinned against than sinning. He had written (I think with the help of a friend or a newspaper man) a book about his experiences, which he said quite frankly he wished to publish as a justification of his course and in the hope of vindicating his name. He was, not very strangely, eager to make any money possible but he wanted “his name right.” I did not feel such a book fitted in with our editorial policy and, besides this, I had my honest doubts as to its salability. Tactfully I explained the situation to him. To my surprise, he told me he was so eager to have it published he would pay me three hundred dollars to offset some of the risk involved. I was still reluctant to undertake the publication, and he left me in a most disappointed mood. I believe he subsequently made a similar arrangement with another publisher, and his book saw the light of day.

SHAW AND HIS BOOKS

I HAVE OFTEN been asked what was the largest and most difficult publishing contract I ever negotiated. Certainly both in the time and money involved and in the complexity of the contract itself no other publishing arrangement I have concluded equaled the importance of the contracts covering the collected edition of

George Bernard Shaw. And, speaking of contracts, it is a source of great pride to me to recall that (with the exception of this collected-edition contract) my family published Mr. Shaw's books for over a quarter of a century not on a scrap of paper but on a gentlemen's agreement and a handshake. Here was one of the world's most sought-after authors, besieged by rival publishers at every step, who stood by us and with us on a basis of mutual confidence and esteem.

For ten years, off and on, Mr. Shaw and I had casually discussed a definitive de luxe edition of his works. I say "casually," because Mr. Shaw, notwithstanding his desire for and his interest in such an edition, was always engrossed with a new play or book and was not anxious to forgo his original writing in order to collate and revise his old books. He always referred to our proposed Shaw Set as something to look forward to in the vague future. I, on my part, did not press the matter. To begin with, the investment involved in a collected edition of one thousand to fifteen hundred sets is very substantial. Secondly, and more important, I was uncertain, even if and after the entire edition was sold, whether he would be satisfied with the remuneration. And, above everything else, I wanted Mr. Shaw to be a satisfied author. I would far rather have never persuaded him to enter an arrangement than to carry it through to his dissatisfaction.

And so the matter lagged, till I had an idea that subsequently proved feasible. I knew that as a general publisher I was equipped to dispose of a limited de luxe edition, but I had no facilities for the larger market enjoyed by so called subscription publishers. These firms, usually specializing in sets, not only sell by mail but also employ representatives to visit people in their homes. If, I reasoned, I could make an arrangement with such a firm, over the course of years, various editions could be published and marketed on a broad scale. This, I felt, would give Mr. Shaw distribution by a method to his liking. So one summer I broached the idea to him, and, subject to many restrictions, he gave it his verbal approval. We discussed for hours his wishes and preferences and the types of financial arrangements to be made. I knew that many months would be needed to make the necessary arrangements in America,

and, of course, these could not be concluded without referring them back to Shaw again. Accordingly we agreed I was to conduct various negotiations in New York and, once I had the American end clarified, was to return to London.

On my arrival in America, therefore, I began conversations with William H. Wise, whose firm for many years has specialized in the subscription and mail-order field. Mr. Wise, a man of great charm, wit, and brilliancy, saw the possibilities of the arrangement and sat down with me for long and weary months of detailed planning. I sailed for London the following summer carrying with me voluminous contracts embodying the three-cornered deal between Shaw, Wise, and Brentano's. In general, they carried out Mr. Shaw's wishes and commands, although many questions had come up which I had not previously anticipated; and here all I could do was to carry out what I felt to be the spirit, rather than the letter, of my instructions.

When I reached London, the storm broke. Mr. Shaw professed himself surprised and to some extent displeased that I had returned to him with complete contracts drawn up by lawyers. This was unnecessary, according to him. For, despite the warm personal regard and high esteem in which he holds his American legal representative, Mr. Benjamin Stern, Mr. Shaw distrusts lawyers as a tribe, even English and Irish solicitors. He prefers to draw up his own contracts. Accordingly, day by day and clause by clause, we battled over and revised the contracts until they were more satisfactory to him. And, daily, as soon as I left Mr. Shaw's house, I would rush to a cable office and radio Mr. Wise a complete text of the day's changes, in order to secure his comments and approval. Usually his reply would arrive early the following morning, and I would convey his sentiments and reactions to Mr. Shaw. My position was not an enviable one, for I had to satisfy both Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wise, let alone myself. Eventually, at the end of two years of planning and discussion, innumerable letters, cables, and arguments pro and con, the contracts were finally signed and witnessed one hot, September afternoon. The occasion was celebrated (and should I say solemnized?) at an English high tea attended by Mrs. Shaw, the American

Consul (in his official capacity to notarize the documents), Mrs. Brentano, and myself.

THE SHAVIAN CHARACTER

AND YET, in the midst of the turmoil, there were charming moments, rare episodes, which illustrated the uniqueness of Mr. Shaw's character. For example, in our preliminary discussions about finances, he and I had agreed on a certain division of profits. Subsequently, when I negotiated with Mr. Wise in America, the way in which the contracts shaped up made it legally and mathematically impossible to follow our prearranged plans. I worked out what I felt to be the equivalent of the former arrangement, but it was much more favorable to Mr. Shaw and left Brentano's with a smaller share. When, the following summer, he came to the paragraphs dealing with this point, Mr. Shaw angrily waved his long arms, his face red with anger. "This is not what I agreed to," he shouted. "But, Mr. Shaw," I interposed pleadingly (hoping to explain the reason for the changes), "you don't understand — you —" "I understand well enough," he answered belligerently, "that you've given me more than was agreed upon — here, where's my pencil?" Before I could say another word, he lined out various clauses and wrote in a new arrangement not only restoring the old balance of division but even tipping the scales in my favor. What can you do with a man like that?

On another occasion I had a protracted argument over a clause to protect Mr. Wise in the event of the sudden disability or death of Mr. Shaw. As Mr. Wise had explained to me, once the arrangements were concluded, they would require a heavy investment on the part of his firm, and he demanded protection against any physical or legal accidents which might delay his definitely planned program. To cover this point, we had a clause which provided for the continuance of the project without interruption and delay, in the event of Mr. Shaw's disability or death before all the material was in Wise's hands. This clause, for some reason that even today I do not know, enraged Mr. Shaw. He demanded that it be struck out of the contract. Mr. Wise insisted that it remain. I continued to argue. Mr. Shaw scattered the papers with a wave of his hand, rose from his desk, and walked out of the room in

dignified anger. I waited a few minutes and then left the house silently. For several hours, heartsick, I roamed the streets of London, cursing myself for upsetting two years' work in one morning's insistence. Finally, footsore and soul-weary, I reached my hotel. The desk clerk called to me. "A message for you, Mr. Brentano." I recognized Mr. Shaw's handwriting and eagerly tore it open. Here was the message:

4 Whitehall Court,
London, S.W. 1,
21st, Sept., 1929.

Dear Lowell Brentano,

I think the enclosed will cover the risk of my dying or going noticeably more dotty than I already am.

Faithfully

G. Bernard Shaw.

One of the high spots of the summer was a last-minute invitation to attend the opening performance of *The Apple Cart*. A London opening, especially a Shaw opening, is an occasion. Unlike first performances in America, where one can sometimes obtain seats in advance at the box office, always from an agency, a London opening is a social event, by invitation. The dress is extremely formal, with women wearing their choicest evening gowns and men their tailcoats and high hats. Naturally I had a Tuxedo with me but I had a sense of diffidence as I visualized the stares of the English four hundred at the vulgar American. I mentioned the matter to Mr. Shaw, who scoffed at my scruples. "Be like me," he boasted. "Whatever I do is right. If I wear a sack suit and all the others are in full dress, I make them feel they're wrong. Remember, my boy, whenever you feel out of step, always act as if the other fellow wasn't in step with you."

I am afraid that I never paid the proper attention to the performance. My wife and I were hardly seated when Ambassador Dawes and Ramsay MacDonald were ushered into the seats directly behind us. Cautiously I turned myself sideways, so that the rest of the evening I could listen to the play with one ear and to their comments with the other.

Either Mr. MacDonald had suffered a hard day which he could not shake off or the performance annoyed him. At any rate, he sat there, stiff and dour, and listened unsmilingly to the jibes about the English Parliament and

Ministry. Dawes, on the other hand, kept up a continuous series of chuckles and at sallies he particularly appreciated would jab MacDonald vigorously in the ribs. Finally, as the action of the play progressed, the King and Queen were holding a garden party, and a loud announcement was made: "The American Ambassador to the Court of St. James." For the first time Mr. MacDonald seemed to come to life; he slapped Dawes on the leg and laughed heartily at the characterization. I heard him whisper, almost in a tone of revenge, "Now it's your turn!"

TACKLING ROYALTY

SPEAKING OF KINGS and queens recalls to my mind the time and money I spent in a vain attempt to be the publisher to a king, or, to be more accurate, the world's most important ex-king. When the revolution in Spain occurred and King Alphonso abdicated and left his native land, I realized that His Majesty's autobiography would be a trump card for any publisher. My associates thought my idea preposterous, so I resolved to seek further advice. It so happened that I was acquainted socially with a very beautiful and talented Spanish girl, the daughter of the Marquesa B. She and her mother, who had intimate contacts at the Spanish court, had spent several years in America partly on a confidential mission for their government. While I was deliberating whether or not to talk with Miss B. about the matter, she telephoned me, in great excitement, and voiced what was already in my mind. Accordingly, we met immediately and discussed at length the feasibility and possibility of sending her, accompanied by her mother, to Fontainebleau as my emissary to secure a contract with the King.

Lest at this late day I seem moon-struck to have ventured on such an enterprise, I can only say that every important newspaper, magazine, and syndicate rushed representatives abroad by fast steamer with the same end in view. Within two days I concluded arrangements with the editor of one of America's most famous magazines, by which we jointly shared the expenses of Miss B.'s trip and he, in return for a mouth-filling sum, was to have the magazine rights of the book, when and if secured. Then ensued another breathless

day when, with Miss B. at my elbow to guide me in court etiquette, I wrote and destroyed letter after letter to His Majesty outlining our financial proposals.

We put the ladies on a fast steamer, sailing within four days after our original consideration of the project. They were equipped with enough warnings, directions, and equipment for any polar expedition, not forgetting a complete and private code for use in confidential messages. But, alas, all our efforts were in vain. The ladies arrived in due course at their destination and found many of my competitors and colleagues already besieging the premises. We did have the satisfaction of knowing that Miss B. was one of the few people ever to secure an interview with various members of the royal family, but there was never an occasion to present our offers. She was told that a certain English syndicate had far outbid us, if the matter were to be decided on purely financial grounds. But the King's attitude at that time was that, irrespective of finances, he would write nothing for anybody. He felt that the political situation in Spain should not be further complicated by any public statements by him and that both his dignity and the welfare of his country would best be served by reticence! Subsequently, many articles and a few books telling about his experiences and purporting to reveal his sentiments have been published. But only within the past few months, so far as I know, has Alphonso written a personal record of the kind we sought.

I was in Paris the summer of 1931 and, in an effort to follow up the most recent developments in the matter, had the privilege of meeting the King's private secretary, the Marques de Torres de Mendoza. The Marques, a slender, vibrant little gentleman, looking not unlike Adolphe Menjou, is a gallant who speaks flawless English. On his first visit, he kissed my wife's hand with a flourish, greatly to her embarrassment. She resolved to be prepared for him on another occasion and, after a manicure, sprayed the back of her hand with perfume. But this time, evidently with a realization that his first advance had taken her aback, he shook hands in a businesslike, American manner and disconcerted her afresh.

The project of the book was still incubating. His Majesty did not feel that as yet the time

had come to break his self-imposed silence. I tried to explain, tactfully, that news, like food, is a perishable commodity and that, the longer His Majesty delayed, the less valuable his book became. No matter, Marques Mendoza said; His Majesty realized that, but nothing could be done at present.

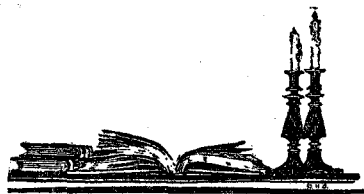
Through the Marques' kindness, I expected an appointment with the King the following week; and for the next few days I studied court etiquette. But three or four days later the Grand Duke Alexander died, and the King came to Paris to assume charge of the funeral arrangements. He went into royal mourning and canceled all tentative appointments that had been made for him.

This and the other experiences I have been recounting are but a few of the many contacts I have enjoyed; in fact, it is this aspect of publishing I now miss most. There is a sense of loneliness in being cut off, even temporarily, from the mental stimulation of working for and with authors. For to me publishing is far more than a business; it is an art, inasmuch as it deals with a spiritual product, intangible values; it is a career of cultural and intellectual richness, which in the space of a lifetime barely affords a mastery of its techniques; it is a game in every sense of the word; it offers companionship, competition, zest and variety, continuous excitement, unexpected battle, according to the turn of the wheel. It is a racket only to those who abandon their inner integrity and sublimate every fine and honorable aspect of literature for experience and an immediate

profit. It is a profession, not, to be sure, as exactly defined as law, medicine, and engineering, but nevertheless preimposing standards of taste, based on knowledge of books that have passed and prescience about books to come.

For, in the end, the publisher, as I see it, is a divided soul. He wars against himself, as the pendulum swings from the artist in him to the businessman and back to the artist. If he inclines solely to either extreme, he is lost. A publisher who is merely a businessman is not, to my mind, a true publisher. "Man does not live by bread alone." An artist who is merely an artist, who despises commerce and balance sheets, will soon sit in an ivory tower, weaving dreams to and for himself. Only by maintaining the ideal balance between literature and life can a publisher exist and continue year after year to serve his public and his own self.

And so, to a true publisher, it is the future which beckons imperiously. He is like some fabled monster with an unending appetite; he needs books, more books, still more books. And books spring from human personalities. But what books? And what human personalities? Who can presage the turns in public taste, and what type of fiction will entertain the crowd next year? Who can foresee coming movements and events that will alter human life as we know it to-day? Who will be the personalities of to-morrow? Who will guide the destinies of our children's children? The publisher who can gaze into the crystal ball and answer questions like these will reap his reward not in heaven but on earth!



This concludes Mr. Brentano's reminiscences
of his career as a publisher

SWEATSHOPS, MODEL 1935

BY ROSE C. FELD

FIFTY YEARS ago American public opinion was aroused by investigations which disclosed the dangerous conditions under which certain consumer goods, among them cigars and men's and women's clothing, were manufactured, in whole or part, in tenement sweatshops. The sweeping elimination of this industrial evil makes one of the proudest pages in the history of labor reform in this country. We are not modest about that history and refer proudly to a nebulous conception called "the American standard of living." We profess to be horrified at reports of daily wages of twenty to fifty cents in Japan. We were indignant when Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt returned from a tour of Porto Rico and declared that women employed in highly skilled needle trades there were paid as little as two cents an hour. Such conditions, we stated firmly, would never be tolerated in the United States.

Unless these professions are meaningless, we will do well to regard with concern certain developments in the industrial life of our country today. For the sweatshop, relic of a primitive industrial past, has left us a heritage, a lusty offspring whose thriving growth is a dangerous threat to those high social and economic standards we so ingenuously proclaim. This heritage is the homework method in industry.

Homework flourishes in many fields but particularly in the fabrication of knitted and hand-embroidered goods and of popular novelties such as artificial flowers, lamp shades, veils, gloves, powder puffs, artificial eyelashes, jigsaw puzzles, and so on. Where the sweatshop involved hundreds of workers, and those concentrated in industrial centers, the homework industries involve thousands, and these scattered from Maine to California, with a vast number in outlying rural districts. Its very decentralization multiplies the difficulties of

controlling it, indeed, of even arriving at a close estimate of its full proportions.

Ten cents an hour is considered a high wage in the up-to-date homework industry. Three cents an hour is not an uncommon rate. No complete survey of the firms using this method, including definite figures of the number employed, is available, but here are some examples.

There is the Knitted Outerwear Industry. In one branch alone, that of knitted headgear, this industry employs 20,000 homeworkers in New York and 75,000 throughout the country. Wages range down to three cents an hour. One firm in another branch of the same industry, that of children's knitted garments, has 10,000 homeworkers "on call," employs 3,000 regularly, pays from four to six cents an hour (which is considered high), and has an annual pay roll of \$125,000.

The Pleating, Stitching, Bonnaz and Hand Embroidery Industry has 45,000 homeworkers scattered from New York to the Pacific coast. The glove industry is reported to be about half a homeworking industry. About 4,000 men and women in the South cane chairs at home for as little as six cents an hour. Two dollars a week is the code wage for homework in Porto Rico, and 70,000 homeworkers there do needlework for American firms.

II

FOR BRINGING this subject of homework out into the open, the writing of the NRA codes has been responsible. Over 600 of them have been drawn since July, 1933. Roughly speaking, twenty per cent are concerned with the homework problem. Over eighty codes definitely prohibit the practice. The rest of the twenty per cent have provisions or regulations to abolish it within a stated length of time or to keep it within agreed bounds.