

the professional, and a chance for conversation and phobias for the lay reader.

The founding and development of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, "The Burlington," are pictured and related in *Granger Country*, Edited by Lloyd Lewis and Stanley Pargellis (Little, Brown, \$5.00). Illustrations of the pioneer years show the obstacles of wilderness, Indians, and outlaws, and the pictures of the early years of this century in some ways seem almost as funny and indicative of periods as those of the nineteenth century.

*The Aspirin Age, 1919-1941*, Edited by Isabel Leighton, (Simon & Schuster, \$3.95), is a collection of chapters on the sometimes comic and sometimes tragic highlights of yesteryear. All of the chapters are by well known writers, from Harry Hansen to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. There is a little nostalgia in reading about Izzy and Moe of prohibition days, Huey Long, Aimee Semple McPherson, and others.

That veteran exponent of correct usage of English, John Baker Opdycke, now admonishes us to *Mark My Words* (Harper, \$5.00), in a volume intended to be a guide to modern usage and expression. By looking up the word you are using in a 3-column, 47 page index, you can quickly find the differences between *antipasto*, *hors d'oeuvre*, and *smorgasbord*, with explanations of the varying meanings. That is but an appetizing example. Our old friend J. B. O. just helped get the right word elsewhere in this column, and the book should be a boon to writers.

### Fiction

The historical setting of *Prepare Them for Caesar*, by Mary Louise Mabie (Little, Brown, \$3.50), serves only as an indicator of time, while the political ambitions of the consul are shown through his love affairs, and marriages. It might be called Caesar in modern style and dress; it does away with heroics and shows the man. A little brusqueness of style and short sentences prevent smooth reading.

A novel for Freudian disciples, *Inner Harbor*, by Frederick Wight (Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$3.00), is a love story involving the psychoanalyst with his own patient, and in a

sense showing his reactions to emotions as well as hers. In fact, it's a case book of sensitive and sensual souls, largely members of one family. Good characterizations of figures whose actions provide "situations" hold the reader's interest.

*The Journey of Simon McKeever*, by Albert Maltz (Little, Brown, \$2.75), might be made required reading for psychiatrists and some of their patients. The whole story is the recital of McKeever's journey across California, seeking an elusive cure for his arthritis. An old man of 74, his reminiscences interspersed among the pages describing his ride-thumbng, make for a study out of life, with philosophy, human nature, and humor throughout. It's an odd story, exceptionally well told and developed.

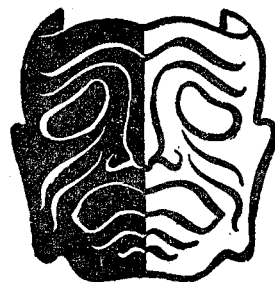
Outstanding should be the designation of *Elephant Walk*, by Robert Standish, (Macmillan, \$3.00). Like his earlier novels, the scene is in the Orient, this time Ceylon. Behind a story of love, good and bad, is the life of an Englishman's family and its coffee (later tea) plantation, and native superstitions. The elephant's long memory is a small but tragic part. Here is a tale of people who have real passions and foibles, with an exotic atmosphere to bring excitement to the reader.

The idea of existentialism with all its melancholy, pessimistic trappings is displayed in *Nausea*, by Jean-Paul Sartre (New Directions, \$2.50). Translated from the French by Lloyd Alexander, it is my idea of the autobiography of an atrabilious (credit J. B. Opdycke's new book mentioned earlier) individual. Made up of a series of sketches of Parisians, mostly middle class, it reveals their petty tragedies and hopelessness, exemplifying Sartre's: "I am, I exist, I think, therefore I am; I am because I think, why do I think? . . ."

*A Diplomatic Incident*, by Judith Kelly (Houghton, Mifflin, \$2.75), is concerned with the conflict of ideologies of the United States and Russia, expressed through secret agents and undercover investigators in Washington. It's quite in keeping with the year 1949, but a bit too argumentative to make interesting reading except for fellow travelers or extreme chauvinists.



# The THEATER ARTS



by John Gassner

After 75 years the Western theatre has explored many styles and techniques only to witness the exhaustion of each of them. Some of these exhausted themselves quickly and quite thoroughly so that they have proved fruitful only on very rare occasions and then only when diluted.

Symbolism, which once seemed to open up so many possibilities when Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* and the plays of Verhaerren and Andreyev ruled the theatrical roost, soon came to be regarded as laughably naive. When Philip Barry nobly attempted symbolism in *Here Come the Clowns* and suffused it with exceptional thoughtfulness and feeling, it was found much too obscure although the parallel it drew in 1938 between an illusionist's tricks and fascism was close enough to public concern. When Barry attempted allegory several years later in *Liberty Jones* his effort was found too transparent and we told ourselves that the allegorical method may have been good enough for the Middle Ages but was rather childish in our own time. Expressionism flared up briefly in Central Europe and collapsed after the dervish dance of its devotees, leaving behind only a few plays like *R. U. R.* and *The Insect Comedy* that the theatre has cared to revive now and then. In France and England expressionism took no root at all, and in America, where it provided a stimulus to the young O'Neill, it proved to be a passing fancy. It was yoked to musical comedy on the one occasion when it enjoyed any success at all after 1930—in Moss Hart's *Lady in the Dark*. When at the present time post-war Germany brings forth an expressionist piece like *Outside the Door*, it proves to be inept in spite of flashes of inspired writing.

"Theatricalism," the style that was supposed to simply evoke the pure joy of play-acting and theatricality, did not produce a single dramatic composition of any importance either in Europe or America, except perhaps the lonely "jazz-symphony" *Processional* by John Howard Lawson. Nor did the "formalism" so highly prized in the productions of Jacques Copeau at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier give us any dramatic literature. "Constructivism" and mechanistic theories of acting, which aroused the interest of the world during Meyerhold's brief rule in the Russian theatre, vanished completely—also without leaving a single living play behind. It might be argued that since these were essentially theatrical rather than dramatic modes, they should not be judged by whether or not they gave us good plays. Yet we cannot overlook the fact that every vital style of dramatic production in the past yielded a harvest of plays and was justified by this ability to inspire a literature. Without a literature of its own, even the most attractive type of theatre dies of inanition and proves to be only a flash in the dark. The fate of experimental styles in our theatre has been, on the contrary, a quick demise with no progeny to cheat time.

But what about the realism and the naturalism that brought modernity into the Western theatre? Naturalism, in the narrow sense of the term, actually enjoyed no more than a decade of fruitfulness, giving rise to some theatrical reforms in Paris and Berlin and to some plays of more or less lasting value: *The Father*, *Countess Julie*, *The Vultures*, and *The Weavers*. It was essentially a reaction to naturalism that instigated a return to romanticism in such plays as *Cyrano de*