

BOOKS IN BRIEF

"Dear Mr. President"

by Ben Whitehurst

THE volume of the President's mail varies from 2000 to 7000 communications daily, depending upon a number of phenomena, interesting to observe. For example, bad weather increases the number, for not only are the needs greater when the weather is uncomfortable, but confinement indoors encourages letter writing.

The mail comes from all quarters, and from every walk of life. President Roosevelt's mail is different from that of any preceding President because the public has recently become Washington-conscious, but chiefly because in his radio fireside chats Mr. Roosevelt cordially invites the people to write to him of their problems. With stark realism, they bare their innermost thoughts.

Because of their evidences of ingenuous faith in the omnipotence of the President, many letters prove to be choice bits of picturesque humor. In most cases the humor is unintentional:

"I never saw a President I would write to until you've got in your place, but I have always felt like you and your wife and your children were just as common as we are."

"I am asking you if some man would come and marry me, and I ask that you furnish the house and I wish you would ask people to buy dishes and things to keep me with. If I get a husband with some money, he must have an automobile. If Rockefeller and Carnegie would help, I would invite them all to come to dinner."

"I hear that the WPA are employing writers, and I hereby apply for a position. I have never written anything, so I ought to be chuck full of ideas."

"I am writing this letter in longhand so that your stenographer may not know its contents. It is strictly confidential. I don't even want you to tell Mrs. Roosevelt about it."

"Next month wife is getting a baby. The relief office says it is alright and is going to pay for it. Wife and I think it would be nice if we called the baby



Bill's is an interesting letter—

"I work in cast-iron, run an automatic screw machine at Delco-Remy and the fine iron dust that gets onto a fellow's face makes it almost suicide to try to shave every day with an ordinary razor. Well, I broke down and bought one of these Schick Shavers and what a life-saver it turned out to be."

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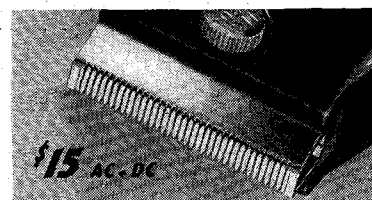
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"Just a few lines to let you hear from me. I am not so well, hope when these few lines reach you they will find you the same. I cant get a fitting place to stay. I want you to please paper me a house of my own. Write me and let me know where to come. I will close.

"Truly yours,"

"We had a letter from your place of business. Glad you got yourself elected. Glad so many demicrats in. Write often. "Your friend,"

"I want to no if — has redersted in the New Nited States he has gray eyes sandie hair waight about 140 or 50 pounds high about 5 feet 8 walks a little pigeon toed spits through teeth had big toe cut off but it was put back on. I want to no about him if you no." (Dear Mr. President, E. P. Dutton and Co., \$1.00)

Censorship in South America

by Robert W. Desmond

NOT the least of the journalist's difficulties in Latin-American countries has been censorship. Most of the countries in that part of the world had nominally free presses between the time they won their independence from Spain in 1820 until about 1930 and years following, when revolutions occurred in several of the countries. Even before that time, however, the presses of some countries were under the control of governments.

One of the more ingenious types of censorship was instituted for the first time, as far as known, in the Argentine. Although no official government censorship of the press was announced or admitted, and the domestic press was, in fact, left free of government restrictions or instructions, the foreign correspondents found themselves somewhat hampered by an indirect censorship. The cable companies are owned by foreign capital, and operate under franchise from the Argentine Government. These countries were informed that if any messages unwelcome or unfriendly to the government were transmitted over the facilities of any one of those companies, the offending company would lose its franchise. That ruling caused the cable companies to set up censorships of their own to protect their investments while the government was able to say that it never censored the news.

Much the same method was adopted by Chile and Brazil. The Government of Chile dictated a decree in 1931 forbidding any action tending to introduce "distrust or uncertainty" in national affairs.

The penalty for doing so was to be "minor exile in medium to maximum grades." The decree held that those who spread "false or harmful news or information designed to produce or introduce distrust or disturbance in the order, tranquility and security of the country, in the financial regimes or in the stability of public securities or properties," would be "guilty of a crime against the interior security of the State," and would be punished by exile.

Authorities informed foreign writers that the law would be applied to anything appearing in the form of news sent out of Chile which the government deemed "unpleasant" or "injurious," without consideration for the truth of the story. Furthermore, any news bearing a Chilean date line, appearing in the paper or papers represented by a given correspondent, would be presumed to have been written by that correspondent or, in the case of news distributed by a press association, to have been written by its correspondent in Chile.

In Brazil a somewhat similar indirect censorship was instituted following the revolution of 1931. The result of the Brazilian censorship was that news of events in that country supplied for foreign use began to come, often inaccurately, from Montevideo in Uruguay; and through amateur radio operators, travelers arriving from Brazil, and by other indirect channels.

But the news from Uruguay itself was censored in 1934 when political unrest worried the authorities. A labor situation was sufficiently serious to result in a strike preventing the publication of any Montevideo newspapers on December 2, 1933 when the Seventh Pan-American Congress was assembling in the capital. Foreign correspondents on hand to report the Conference filed cables about the strike, but the messages never were sent.

The Argentine Government made an attempt in 1935 to force foreign press associations and newspapers with representation in the Argentine to post a large cash bond for each correspondent. If the correspondent wrote a dispatch that was considered untrue by the government the bond would be forfeited; and the bond was to remain on deposit for three years after the correspondent left the country, still subject to confiscation if anything that he wrote displeased the government. Even the domestic press attacked this plan, so that it was dropped by the government almost as soon as it was declared effective, and without any bonds having been posted by any one!

Venezuela has long had a strict censorship, while Peru and Mexico have had restrictions in force from time to time. Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and some other countries of Latin America do not have constant censorships, but stand ready to impose them in a political or other crisis. (*The Press and World Affairs*, D. Appleton-Century Co., \$4.00)

MOVIES

(Important current releases)

The Toast of New York (RKO)—Its boisterous charm crackles from the first sequence when Jim Fisk is only a medicine show faker indulging his embryonic financial genius in the sale of soap. Methods are questionable and sales healthy. Neither are more than a bare hint of Erie stock speculations to come.

The film is a romanticized biography of Jim Fisk, whose actual life needs editing in the interest of the Hays office rather than of pungent movie material. Into his meteoric and ruthless career is woven a picture of American fortunes in the making, of Wall Street in the 'Sixties when it was as lusty as the gold towns and as glamorous as Vienna.

Such a panorama is good sport—and unusual. Uncle Dan'l Drew, Commodore Vanderbilt, Fisk, Gould and the rest have received scant attention from the purveyors of entertainment. Yet, in the words of Charles and Mary Beard, "To draw the American scene as it was unfolded between the Civil War and the end of the Nineteenth Century, without these dominant figures looming in the foreground, is to make a shadow picture."

Matthew Josephson's *The Robber Barons* and Bouck White's *The Book of Daniel Drew* provided the source material for the celluloid version of Dudley Nichols, John Twist and Joel Sayre. Bowdlerized though it is, *The Toast* still looks like the year's most extravagant burlesque.

Into this slapstick era of high finance Edward Arnold walks as Jim Fisk. People who found his Jim Brady too lovable will say he was specially created for this role. Fisk's generosity and popularity are as celebrated as his deft manipulation of stock. In such a role, Arnold's talents are lavish and exact. The same goes for little Donald Meek, who must have been waiting all his life to play the penny-pinching, God-fearing hypocrite, Daniel Drew, and Clarence Kolb, who shakes a turbulent Vanderbilt fist before his fine Vanderbilt profile.

When Fisk is not outwitting Uncle Dan'l's Erie control, his booming laugh rocks New York and his jewels drown his actress-mistress, Josie Mansfield, played by Frances Farmer, last seen in *Come and Get It*. She sings that new hit, *The First Time I Saw You*. The scenarists have given Fisk two fictitious partners, Cary Grant for love-interest and Jack Oakie for comedy.

The Fort Taylor Episode, Pike's Opera House, and Black Friday are historically

accurate, though no one today will believe it. When the Commodore can no longer absorb the watered stock Fisk kept grinding out (Fisk once said publicly, "If this printing press don't break down, I'll be damned if I won't give the old hog all he wants of Erie!") he has an injunction issued for the arrests of Drew and Fisk. They escape to New Jersey where they take over Taylor Hotel, changing its name to Fort Taylor, if you please, and guarding themselves and ten million in cash with militiamen from the regiment in which Fisk had bought himself a colonelship.

Hollywood never invented offices more dazzling than those Fisk subsequently sets up on the second floor of Pike's Opera House, where the irrepressible Jim abandons Erie puddles to make himself bigger than the very government. His attempt to corner the gold market culminates in the famous Black Friday of 1869.

Inaccuracies of detail must be forgiven Rowland V. Lee's charming exposé of old New York and the lawless vigor of its leading citizens. Movie-goers, except a few of Wall Street's dearest families, may even hope that this is the first in a film cycle dedicated to Jay Gould, the Commodore himself, the elder Morgan, the first Rockefeller and the rest of Mr.

Josephson's much publicized Robber Barons.

Saratoga (MGM)—Jean Harlow died before completing her work in this film. In other words, it makes little difference whether the picture is good or bad. Morbid interest in Miss Harlow's last days and curiosity as to how much her substitute looks like her will sweep a good ninety per cent of the nation's moviegoers to have a look. From a box-office standpoint *Saratoga* is sure-fire. It isn't much, though.

The story, as the title indicates, fairly reeks race track. That statement is literal, in spite of the fact that talkies are not yet equipped with odor. Frank Morgan has a role which involves sneezing every time he gets near a horse. Between katchoos he gets all tangled up in as complex and typical an equine drama as you'll find. Wall Street broker and handsome bookmaker compete for hand of beautiful girl who wants security, but was born on the best stud farm this side of Kentucky. Since Clark Gable is the bookie, no one ought to be stampeded with surprise by the outcome.

In justice to Anita Loos and Robert Hopkins, authors of this original screen play, they had a tough time getting the whole business to ring true. The end had to be rewritten after Miss Harlow's death, for Mary Dees, her near double, still can't imitate every gesture.

In further justice:—Louis B. Mayer had no intention of releasing this picture. It was amply insured—as all movies are—by Lloyds. He thought it would be bad taste to try making money on it, especially as he stood no chance of losing any. Squawks from the public finally made him relent.



Cary Grant, Frances Farmer, Edward Arnold in *The Toast of New York*—the last two as Josie Mansfield and Jim Fisk