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they once had work and hopes, they still have hopes. Their fair hair is bleached, their lips cracked; they are scarecrows, they lack teeth and they have the desert eye diseases. They suffer from hunger. They must even battle for a drop of water in a country where it is not uncommon to see five years go by without a rain cloud in the sky. They stoop to the yellow puddles where dams once were, and beg to share with the grudging housewife the thick dregs in iron tanks.

The drama is great that lies behind the great canvas of this book. These people are the victims of an antique system which took over a vast continent with the simplehearted notion of sending chain gangs there to work in peonage for a few high caste land owners. That has changed because the exploitation of the land has become more efficient.

But it is still woefully out of date. Australia is a kind of czarist Siberia in the South Pacific, its first colonists recruited in the same way, from persons exiled for life for political agitation and the crimes of want. Every improvement made in the government of the country, as well as its advanced industrial unionism, has been gained through the great sufferings and struggle of the people. And the battlers are right in feeling that they are the real Australians. They are still fighting the fight that always had to be put up by those people. They are not self-satisfied like the city slugs or the land-swollen squatters (rich planters); they are longing and battling for the good day to come, in whatever way they can, when something even more than efficient unionization will give them food, water, land, and jobs. Only a radical change will do any good to a country of this sort. It is only a great change which will free the battlers from the prison of the road.

This is the great drama of the book. What is to be done? What is to be done is not conjectured here; but Mrs. Tennant has painted the picture as clear and moving as one of Steinlen's great cartoons. It is written in a harmonious, simple style of reportage. Against a vast landscape by no means dreary or depressing, for all its horrors, move a small "mob" of good companions, among them the toothless child Dancy, the Stray, let out of a reformatory, and Snow, a morose but goodhearted bagman, a good sheep stealer. Dancy, tough but affectionate and with girlish fears, becomes fond of Snow. Snow tries to shake her, but the track unites them. The language is in the true vernacular, not the imaginative Cockney which is spooned out in Sydney to foreigners. But for this reason the publishers should have provided a small glossary. Some of the passages might be confusing; for example, to "fake" means to work, to "knock up" means to fatigue, to "cruel" is to queer, or annoy. The word "battlers" probably comes from our early German settlers and originally meant "the beggars." This splendid double-meant title is symbolic of the book.

CHRISTINA STEAD.

FARCE AND VIOLENCE

"The More the Merrier," Broadway's latest comedy, would have been better with less rough-house nonsense. . . . A new Soviet film, "General Suvorov," reconstructs the story of a people's hero.

THE business of writing farce comedy is one of the most difficult in the theater. For the farce demands—if it is to be successful—not only a sound dramatic structure, but that super-addition of comic content that makes "being funny" one of the most arduous of occupations. What seems, on the stage, spontaneous crackling humor—of situation, of character, of manners, of satire, of dialogue—is most often the result of intensive and deliberate contrivance, of ingeniously calculated timing and the clever juxtaposition of character and situation. Where comedy depends mostly on character—in its broadest definition—farce relies largely on situations that are not only ingenious and ludicrous, but ostensibly logical.

Frank Gabrielson and Irvin Pincus started off with an idea in their farce comedy *The More the Merrier*. The comedy idea was the humor to be extracted from a pompous and ambitious Colorado millionaire, who has political aspirations. (The portrait bears more than one resemblance to W. . . . m R. . . . h H. . . . t; a humorous character, you will admit.) At the rise of the curtain he is going slightly mad because his press agent, who is managing his campaign, is undergoing an emergency operation. There are many pointed cracks about the relationship of wealthy parasites to the body politic, and you get set for the authors to say something of more than comic moment.

From this point on the comedy degenerates into a farce that never comes off. If it had come off, the word *degenerates* would have been ill-advised. But it doesn't. The authors' humorous and satirical inspiration flags, and they have recourse to all the old tricks we have seen in rough-house farce since the first imaginary curtain rang up in the theater at Epidaurus. A substitute press agent arrives; he is expecting his writer-ex-wife (with whom he is still in love), and her female collaborator. The female collaborator turns out to be a male with amorous designs on the lady (which she reciprocates). All three are broke. Problem: how to get to Denver to help manage the tycoon's campaign?

Well, there are moments of genuinely insane comedy, most of them supplied by variegated minor madmen and women: a tourist who swipes souvenirs, a respectable-looking old gent who likes to draw mustaches on faces; a querulous old maid who hopes to catch a man in her room; assorted mysterious thugs; a corpse on roller skates. Like the corpse, the farce falls on its face, and only picks itself up at odd intervals.

Distinct credit must go to the man who

plays the corpse: Jack Riano, an acrobat of no mean accomplishments. He executes a magnificent and terrifying backward dead-fall from a high balcony, that will live in the annals of the New York stage. Will Geer, in a minor part in the third act, is Will Geer without benefit of a character to get his teeth into. Keenan Wynn is a genuine comedian without benefit of his father's boring mannerisms. Teddy Hart is a clownish gangster who exploits his diminutive stature to no good purpose. Millard Mitchell has a funny face and a dry humor that is contagious. Miss Grace McDonald is a charming young girl from musical comedy, who walks like the dancer that she is. Doro Merande contributes her stylized old maid; she is very funny. Frank Albertson works hard, and these accomplished people momentarily succeed in getting the farce off its last legs. But only for a moment at a time.

WHERE *Arsenic and Old Lace*, under the hand of a devilishly clever writer, achieved real farce out of the impossible situations posed by two sweet-old-lady murderesses, *Cuckoos on the Hearth*, the concoction offered by Parker Fennelly, does its best to capitalize on *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and makes a ludicrous mess of it. Most amusing aspect of the play—which is farce comedy *cum* horror—is the bland admission in the program that it is liberally swiped from *Arsenic*, *Our Town*, *The Tavern*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, not to mention

The Seven Keys to Baldpate. There is a folksy commentator a la Frank Craven; a man made up to look and act like Alexander Woollcott; a lonely farmhouse on a howling winter night; an escaped homicidal maniac; unexpected guests. All of this is tied into a hero who is working on a secret poison gas; a bird-brained cousin whose life ambition is to do the hula; a house where the Hawaiian wife of an American sea captain died under mysterious circumstances.

Some of this is funny; but not too much. After two acts the commentator announces that what has gone before only happened in the mind of Alexander Wool—I mean, the writer, who is writing a murder mystery. The third act then is supposed to show you how truth can be stranger than fiction. By this time, however, you don't much care, for you have figured out the identity of the homicidal maniac by the simple, classic method of deciding that the most innocent-appearing character is undoubtedly the culprit. He is.

Here again is an excellent cast of players set to the impossible task of resuscitating a play that is dying on its feet. They should be applauded: especially Janet Fox for her hula-ing old maid; Percy Kilbride for his convincing maniac; Howard Freeman, whose imitation of Alex Woollcott has such verisimilitude as to sicken the beholder; George Matthews for his highly credible dumb gangster. But Mr. Pemberton, who produced this thing, should have shown greater discernment; or hired the original Mr. Joseph Kesselring. (He wrote *Arsenic and Old Lace*.)

ALVAH BESSIE.

Military Epic

Mosfilm presents the life of a great Russian general.

NEARLY 150 years ago a Russian general, Alexander Vasilevich Suvorov, wrote a book of maxims whose brilliant common sense is incorporated in the military strategy and command of his country today. Suvorov titled his book *The Science of Victory*, which was no boast. For his maxims were derived from experience and he never knew defeat. Acting on them, he directed a counter-offensive against that "invincible" of the eighteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte, and drove the Conqueror of Europe out of Italy. He was the first Russian general to cross the Alps into Switzerland. Out of his career Mosfilm has made an immensely heroic and human screen epic, the timeliness of which need not be pointed out to anyone who



N. P. CHERKASOV as General Suvorov