

Hagen proposes that the United Nations seek the collaboration of those elements in Germany who share their democratic outlook and have demonstrated before and during the Hitler dictatorship their steadfast opposition to Nazism. The principle he argues for is good, but his approach to methods of political propaganda during the war and to the problem of postwar Europe does not go beyond hazy generalities.

Hagen gives no picture of the struggle of the German opposition because he knows nothing about it despite boasts about connections and his trips in Germany. He ignores or falsifies the activity of the most vigorous German anti-Nazis, the Communists. He wants us to believe that the organized underground groups in Germany are composed mainly of supporters of his own Social-Democratic sect, *Neu Beginnen* (New Beginning). Unfortunately for Hagen, this group is completely unknown in Germany though it has managed to place more of its members in the US Office of War Information and the British Ministry of Information than it can muster in the Third Reich. Now Hagen is attempting to transmute the reputation he has gained in certain American drawing rooms into leadership of the German opposition. However, the responsible heads of the German Social-Democratic Party in exile in America have published a wealth of material questioning and contradicting his aspirations to "leadership." Some day the German opposition will be amazed to learn of Paul Hagen's existence.

ANDREAS NIEBUHR.

The Best?

THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES, 1942. Edited by Martha Foley. Houghton Mifflin. \$2.75.

MISS FOLEY's collection contains one good and funny Lardnerian story by James Thurber, and the rest might as well not have been collected. The extraordinary thing about them is that they seem so trivial, not only for a time of war but for a time of peace or any other time. Irwin Shaw and John Steinbeck, for instance, are represented by incredibly slight efforts. The tone of the whole collection strikes one as uniformly absent-minded—as though the writers weren't interested in their own work. Possibly this is due to preoccupation with the war. But in that case the nine stories dealing in one way or another with it ought to be very good, which they are not. The most successful of these are the sensitive studies of refugees by Nancy Hale and Marjorie Worthington; the rest are oblique, unreal, and not honestly felt.

The remainder of the stories are presumably of permanent, rather than timely, interest; but nothing new is discovered in experience or in technique, and the themes are written around and around to exhaustion. Even "Biceps" by Nelson Algren, one of the best stories in the book, seems over-written and too long. All of them are like receding echoes of the thirties.

JOAN ROCKWELL.

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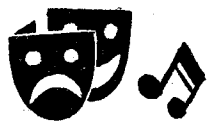
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THE WILL AND THE WAY

Some weeds in the Hollywood victory garden. Joy Davidman asks the blondes to stay out of the bombers. Nor are there barrels of fun in a heap of corpses.

BACK in the depression, Hollywood was often blamed for its willful refusal to face the economic facts of life. Hunger, to the films, was what you felt when you were trying to reduce, and unemployment was one of the words on the Hays Office taboo list, along with "lousy" and the vocabulary of sex. It is pleasant to be able to report a partial change of front.

The film community is keenly conscious of its duty in the war effort. Through individual and group activities it has done much to strengthen that effort; the industry is, at last, accepting the fact that it has a responsibility to the people. No longer do producers argue that escapist entertainment is the sole business of the film; education and morale-building are recognized as duties. Hollywood's will to aid the war effort is unquestionable. Unfortunately, the producers have not often been able to translate that will into film terms—the films remain as questionable as ever.

Through failure to readjust, much of what now appears on the screen, far from being stronger and more realistic than pre-war films, has actually disintegrated to the shocking inanity of a comic strip. This is true of one type of movie in particular. Films for the war may be divided into three groups—frankly educational documentaries, usually made under government supervision, which are serious, straightforward, and effective; fictional films based on some real aspect of the war, which are bad but getting better; and

entertainment-fictions which leave the war and other stern realities completely out of the discussion. It is these "business-as-usual" films which have gone most completely to the dogs.

FILMS dealing with war problems, while often shoddy enough, have at least made an effort at readjustment, and sometimes have succeeded brilliantly. There was *Mrs. Miniver*, there is *Wake Island*; minor pieces like *Manila Calling* and *A Yank on the Burma Road* share some of the dramatic seriousness of these. Last year's *Invaders*, in spite of romantic weaknesses, was well aware of the real issues and the real problems of the anti-Axis struggle. All these films are powerful because of their emphasis on the terrifying commonplaces of our lives instead of on sensational improbabilities. Ordinary people were their protagonists, ordinary people exposed to the enormous onslaughts and equally enormous opportunities for heroism in this war. It is probable that, as the pressure of the war intensifies, and reality seeps through the California climate, these films will set the tone for others still more honest. As yet, however, directors from Hitchcock down are still turning out tangles of silly villainy—*Sabotage*, *Desperate Journey*, even an anachronistic *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror*—as if the war were romantic, as if the Gestapo's chief occupation were twirling its collective whiskers and snarling, "Foiled again, by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer!"

Well-meaning unimaginativeness inspires this failure to visualize the people's war as anything more than a vehicle for Errol Flynn, and the headlines will educate these imaginations. The business-as-usual films present a different problem. They are important to the war effort, for they are or should be the strain-lifters, the cheerer-uppers, the movies to which soldiers on leave take their girls. Little conscious attempt has been made to adjust them to the new situation, but they have involuntarily suffered a sea-change since Pearl Harbor, for it is impossible now to duplicate the casualness and complacency of pre-war days. Would-be grace and lightness sweat with effort, nonchalance becomes imbecility, the smile becomes a painful smirk. Certain changes of subject and attitude have also made their appearance, dictated by the box office and the jitters.

IT WOULD be unfair to blame Hollywood entirely for the two most significant current trends in entertainment. They are the contemplation of sex and the contemplation of death; and never has there been a violent moment of history that didn't produce both. It would be equally unfair to call them unhealthy tendencies. As reflected on the screen, however, they become neurotically exaggerated. The tragedy and heroism of wartime love are disregarded in most Hollywood films; what we are offered instead is a completely irrelevant quantity of female flesh in an unlikely place—a blonde in a bomber, a brunette



"Two Men." Painting by Joseph Hirsch.