

As One Editor Sees the Press

The Young Man and Journalism, by Chester A. Lord. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$2.00.

THE undergraduate knows vaguely what he wants to do when he leaves college, but needs an older brother. Hence the Macmillan Company's plan of twelve books dealing with popular professions, prepared "by men of ability and experience . . . competent to explain the nature and divisions of the particular vocations they represent, the personal and educational qualifications necessary for a successful pursuit of the same, the advantages and disadvantages, the difficulties and temptations, the opportunities and ideals." This volume, number five, is the work of Chester A. Lord, for thirty-three years managing editor of the New York Sun—and patron, in that capacity, of more than his share of cub reporters.

What Mr. Lord has written is a pocket Baedeker for the undergraduate. At the same time his book will interest the alumni. For Mr. Lord is one of the first contemporary editors to write about the modern metropolitan daily and its enormous influence; and occasionally he takes his readers behind the scenes. He describes, for instance, a certain practice of doctoring the foreign cables. He sees no harm in that—provided the cables are concerned with relatively unimportant matters, and provided also that certain necessary precautions are observed. The method he describes is new to me, in my own limited experience as a reporter; but Mr. Lord has thirty-three years as Managing Editor to his credit. And this is the way the trick is turned:

A new king is to be crowned in Spain. By mail, the London correspondent sends his paper in America a program of the event, with names of people who are to participate. When the event actually occurs he cables: "Madrid Alfonso crowned unchange." "Unchange" means that nothing unexpected happened. So the cable editor in New York, three thousand miles away, but a good eye witness, writes a report of the coronation—"embellishing it," suggests Mr. Lord, "perhaps with a few lines here and there about the cheering multitudes, the elaborate decorations, and the other things that obviously add splendor to every coronation of a king." Why waste cable tolls when "Alfonso crowned unchange" will suffice for an embellished story? "The cable editor knows right well," says Mr. Lord, "that if the crowds were sullen or the decorations were lacking or the soldiers did not strut and shout, the correspondent surely would say so." News, in short, by non-contradiction. "It is an entirely legitimate practice since it involves no mis-statement of fact."

Mr. Lord speaks also of the practice of deliberate overstatement of the news, to arouse the reader's interest. "The editor is tempted to exaggeration because a little exaggeration makes it a little more interesting. He sees that the exaggerated novel sells where the novel true to life is unnoticed; that the actor who gesticulates and shouts has the loudest applause." Whether success in the theatre is really so much a matter of noise is of course a side-issue; but as far as the press is concerned, Mr. Lord sees no harm in dressing up the news a bit. "A little discreet exuberance of expression may be tolerated." The editor, of course, must not pervert the truth. "Gross exaggeration"—as distinguished from a little discreet exuberance—"becomes downright lying."

It is excursions of this sort into newspaper ethics that the ordinary reader will find most interesting in Mr. Lord's story of the press. As for the undergraduate who wants to know what journalism has to offer, and how he'd better start, Mr. Lord's message may have a familiar campus ring about it. "Seek to rise above the commonplace." Give the best that's in you. Don't make a mistake, at the very start, of keeping your hat on when you ask some editor for employment. A man who does not "know enough to remove his hat even in an office" does not have manners enough to represent a paper. Treat your job faithfully. It will keep you busy. "The hours are irregular and unlimited." But use your spare time to study politics or art or finance. Write snappily. "If we are to keep pace with these snappy times we must hunt for strong masculine nouns, and rapid-fire verbs, and staccato adverbs, and sudden adjectives." Cultivate some specialty—it is the best way to get on. In the end, your "pecuniary reward has no comparison with those of many other professions or businesses"; but there are incidental profits well worth reaping. The reporter's work brings him "in daily contact with men of affairs." He is "alive to everything that is going on." His mental vision may survey "the entire field of human thought."

That is perhaps a little rosy. There is more than one wornout reporter to testify that "contact with men of affairs" turns out ordinarily to be the contact of a bill-collector with a fugitive; that "alive to everything that is going on" means, among things more worth doing, prying into homes that have been disgraced, to find out whether a humbled woman has cringed before her husband's escapade. As for "the entire field of human thought," that may mean nothing less than being freed from routine news, occasionally, to write a feature story about the princess traveling with forty-seven trunks, or the thrifty housewife who discovered that potato peels make excellent shoe-blackening.

There are reporters who break through to special writing. There are reporters who become vice-presidents of banks. There are still other reporters who stay at routine assignments—tired men who die in harness. But over all of them, whether they are the star reporters who have first call in earthquakes, or the humble drudges who sit through countless public dinners, there hangs the aura of an initiated craft. Men who have been meeting incoming ocean liners for thirty years, and will meet another one tomorrow, still talk of the "lure" of journalism as professional travelers talk about the "lure" of the Orient.

More than that, there is even a certain identification between being first to describe something and actually having had some part in its achievement. "Within the span of my own newspaper experience," writes Mr. Lord, "reporters have given first information to the world of the discovery and development of electric lighting, heating, cooking and propulsion; of Roentgen rays; of the telephone . . . of steel construction in big buildings . . . of bacillus treatment in medicine and the wonders of abdominal surgery."

Ability somehow to identify one's own half-column with ten or twenty years of desperate scientific labor on someone else's part—that is a psychological compensation for more than one of our modern metropolitan journalists whose career might otherwise startle him with its likeness to a squirrel galloping around a cage.

CHARLES MERZ.

A Premature Study

Waldo Frank: A Study, by Gorham B. Munson. New York, Boni & Liveright. \$1.50.

MR. WALDO FRANK is thirty-four years old; and already he is a man to reckon with. His point of view, his philosophy, and his tortured, exacting prose—in short, his world—afford a much richer theme for discussion than those of almost any other contemporary novelist in America; and under the tattoo of a critical hammer, one fancies that the sparks might fly, and that Mr. Frank's work would, through impact and resistance, take on a firmer shape. Mr. Gorham Munson's study of Waldo Frank is not, alas! the sort of tribute the author of *Rahab* deserves; for its thin, eulogistic exposition leaves Mr. Frank on the brink of maturity with most of his barbarisms and solecisms intact.

It is true that Mr. Frank set the example for this kind of study a few years ago when he wrote *Our America* in the mood of an "idealtor" from Zenith; but I am sorry to see him weakened by a dose of his own medicine. Mr. Frank would profit at the present moment in the hands of a generous antagonist, who would wrestle with him and make him sweat; unfortunately, in Mr. Munson's friendly hands he gets nothing more than a cool massage; and if this sort of treatment is pleasurable, it is also debilitating.

For Mr. Frank's sake, I am tempted to quarrel a little with the purpose and animus that lie behind this book; with the hasty effort to slash open the womb and to expose an artistic organism that is still embryonic and that still needs darkness and nourishment, rather than caresses, if it is to keep on with its growth. What our young writers want, it seems to me, is an opportunity to live quietly and find their depths; and a perpetual blaring of their genius and uniqueness is a more formidable system of discouragement than Gifford ever practised. It is hard enough to distinguish between achieved individuality and mere crotchiness; and if our criticism gives a man nothing to tussle with, he is greatly in danger of becoming a law unto himself; which is a pretty sure way of keeping him from being a law unto anybody else. One should not perhaps blame the publishers for cackling over all their ducklings as if they were swans; still, it is well to remember that in Andersen's parable the swan grew to maturity without any one taking it for more than an ugly duckling. While Mr. Frank's hardy genius will probably survive even Mr. Munson's study, it should never have been put to the test.

Almost as irritating, perhaps, as Mr. Munson's treatment of Waldo Frank is his way of dealing with Mr. Frank's critics; and here my grievance is personal, and I have an axe to grind. Almost a quarter of this study is devoted to excerpts from criticisms, which unite into a veritable din of praise by the simple expedient of omitting all the qualifying clauses, sentences and paragraphs in which the praise is embedded. These excisions are unfair to Mr. Frank, unfair to his critics and unfair to the unsuspecting reader; and the least Mr. Munson might have done in his "Selected Critical Opinion Appendix" was to explain in a footnote the basis upon which these little testimonials had been selected. It needs the spleen of the Edinburgh reviewers to reproach this sort of thing with sufficiently mortal venom. "*This will never do.*"

LEWIS MUMFORD.

"Nicanor Lay Dead in His Harness"

David Lubin: A Study in Practical Idealism, by Olivia Rossetti Agresti. Boston: Little Brown & Company. \$3.50.

THE founder of the International Institute of Agriculture and the delegate of the United States to the Institute, David Lubin, lay dead at Rome. On the day of his burial, Woodrow Wilson in his rôle of apostle for the League of Nations entered the Eternal City, and in the excitement the United States Embassy forgot to send a representative to the funeral. The incident is significant. *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona!*

The Institute was David Lubin's triumphant achievement. Signora Agresti calls it the "first league of nations"; this may be an appraisal too high or too low—depending upon one's viewpoint. The Institute is a functional piece of international machinery which works. It was the only international organization which continued its operations during the late war. Its basis was international need plus specific international activity. It was and is more than a generalization, or a series of deductive ideals. We may live to learn that effective international cooperation can only be achieved according to this process.

Incidentally, another of David Lubin's neglected suggestions might be revived with profit. His international reserve board if established shortly after the war might have pointed a path toward the solution of the problem of national indebtedness.

But, David Lubin accomplished so much that his biography needs no reflected glory from unfulfilled ideas. He was born of Jewish parents in Russian Poland. The nineteenth century was half-spent, and the latter part of the century was to witness that most remarkable of human migrations from Europe to America. In this stream came David Lubin to be cast up on New York's East Side. Signora Agresti's story from this point onward is not entirely convincing. The dramatic events are there, but one has the feeling that the biographer has absorbed too much of her subject's philosophy to make a realistic portrayal possible. David Lubin believed that "right thinking in the abstract leads to right action in the concrete," and all his life was patterned after this dictum. It is also the guide to his biography. In consequence, many of his activities are accounted for by rationalizations which modern psychology teaches us to distrust.

E. C. L.

For Eager Lovers

For Eager Lovers, by Genevieve Taggard. New York: Thomas Seltzer. \$1.25.

THERE is a somewhat regrettable modern tendency to rank all artists arithmetically—one, two, three and the ruck following. The attention of the public has been called to the three foremost Shakespearean actors, to the three contemporary masters of scenic design, to a triumvirate of preeminent American novelists. Yet in some fashion a review must suggest a ranking for its subject