



▷▷ "Happy" New Year, etc., etc.

IF YOU think that Santa Claus has turned out to be a bill collector and that the New Year is merely somebody's idea of a bad joke, you should read some of the financial statements from the former land of private swimming pools and solid gold villas. While a few movie stars are still basking in the glow of rich contracts, the revenues from the theatres have been dropping steadily and something is due to crack up in a short while. Already a receiver has been asked for the RKO company and within the coming year it is quite likely that some of the largest producers will be talking of mergers and bankruptcies.

As has been repeatedly pointed out, Hollywood's present situation is not entirely due to the depression. The motion picture has never really found itself. It has kept itself alive by improving its technique, by imitating the Germans (1921-4), by building fancy theatres and by adding sound. Now, for the first time, the American film industry is standing alone and shivering in that same cold white dawn about which it once had so many subtitles. It has superlative technical equipment, a fine distribution system and about 15,000 more or less luxurious playhouses. In spite of present conditions it has a potential audience of a good many millions of cash customers each week. All it needs is the wit, talent, ingenuity, skill, dramatic sense and enthusiasm necessary to make an adequate supply of pictures. It looks very much as though Hollywood was on the carpet. Its theories about making muck for the "masses" are not holding up. Some of the very oldest tricks are producing mediocre results. *Over the Hill*, which brought in millions ten years ago, remained only a week at the Roxy in New York in its new sound edition. Hollywood is worried and bewildered.

At this point it might be interesting to consider two books on the movies which have just been published, one in this country, and the other in England.

*A History of the Movies**, the Ameri-

* *A History of the Movies* by Benjamin B. Hampton; Covici-Friede; \$5.00.

can volume, is a bulky and detailed account of the growth of the various film companies and the personalities who brought them into power. It was done by Benjamin B. Hampton, himself a part of the industry. While I am quite ready to trust his facts implicitly, I cannot always agree with his conclusions. It seems to me an elaborate defense of mediocrity, a



Worth Seeing

AROUND THE WORLD WITH DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS: Travelogue through the Orient conducted by your old friend Doug.

ARROWSMITH: An honest and intelligent filming of Sinclair Lewis' novel about a young scientist.

THE CHAMP: Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper as a played-out old fighter and his small son.

FIVE STAR FINAL: An expose of the damage done by tabloid newspapers. Exciting and bitter.

THE GUARDSMAN: Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne of the Theatre Guild in something pretty light and amusing.

MONKEY BUSINESS: The four Marx brothers in their latest delirium. The best farce of the year.

PRIVATE LIVES: Noel Coward's dialogue with Norma Shearer and Robert Montgomery.

SOOKY: A successor to *Shippy* which it very much resembles. Jackie Cooper and Bobby Coogan are still grand.

In German

ELISABETH VON OSTERREICH: Gossip, scandal and intrigue featuring Elisabeth of Austria, Franz Joseph and mad Ludwig of Bavaria. Well done and quite interesting.



puff sheet for all the stupidities and frailties of which Hollywood has been guilty. Mr. Hampton is not interested in art, and is rather proud of the fact. Again and again he sniffs at critics and other awful "sophisticates" who ridicule the simple amusement of the "masses." In 456 pages of text and 191 illustrations he has no mention whatever of *Caligari*, unquestionably one of the most interesting films ever made. On one page he says American films have succeeded because they did not try to "educate" their public but a few pages later admits that a few good pictures have now educated audiences out of the movie habit. The book is, in fact, a defense of Hollywood and of the industry as a whole. So completely does Mr. Hampton overlook all the elements which the rest of the world has regarded as essential to any sort of literary or dramatic achievement that the book is a sort of case history of mediocrity, a defense of second-rateness. It is the

voice of Hollywood, and as such makes curious and fantastic reading.

*Celluloid, the Film Today*** comes from an English critic, and very good it is, too. Paul Rotha is little known in this country, but his essays and reviews show not only that he knows his movies, but that he is thinking seriously about the technique of the motion picture. At the same time he is keenly alive to the commercial and mechanical difficulties which stand in the way of the man who tries to make an exceptional film. If you are discouraged about the movies, read this. It will revive your faith.

▷▷ Cash in Censorship

During the past ten years the New York State motion picture censorship board has achieved a *net profit* of \$1,200,000. Not only is the peek-and-be-shocked industry fundamentally sound, it is on the increase, reports Dr. James Wingate, head of the board. In the year ending June 30 last some 3,031 scenes and titles were "eliminated" as opposed to a mere 2,116 the year before. Although the censor board's cash revenue depends upon the number of reels inspected and not the number of cuts it makes, this increase in "eliminations" is the sort of thing censors like. It proves to the taxpayers that their censor board is hot on the job and really "necessary." While the rest of the country has been suffering from stagnation, Dr. Wingate and his aids have been shocked almost fifty per cent more often than in the previous year. Apparently they enjoy their work. Last year the New York Board (four individuals on a salary from the State Education Department) rejected fourteen films, three of which were later approved after drastic butchery. The past year's "eliminations" were for the following reasons; indecent—468; inhuman—243; tending to incite to crime—1,129; immoral or tending to corrupt morals—1,165; sacrilegious—26.

▷▷ "Tonight or Never"

Gloria Swanson's teeth, slicky clothes and pulp-paper magazine romances are now so familiar that to a good many people they *are* the movies. Some think her films are the only ones made. *Tonight or Never* is a faithful copy of a Belasco comedy about an opera singer who has been told that her voice will never have warmth and passion until she has a lover. As usual this sort of thing

(Continued on Page 570)

** *Celluloid, the Film Today*, by Paul Rotha; Longmans Green; \$3.00.

»» The New Books ««



The Week's Reading

Bret Harte: Argonaut and Exile
By George R. Stewart, Jr.
Houghton Mifflin, \$5.00.

The author has made assiduous inquiry into Bret Harte's early life—family, childhood and struggles to make a precarious living in California. It is true, as Mr. Stewart points out, that in former biographies there is little material on this part of Harte's life; while after he became a success the material is almost superabundant. Yet it cannot be said that all this new matter throws strong light on Harte's literary development, nor is it even highly interesting in itself. He worked on newspapers, held at one time a minor Federal clerkship, visited the mines (but not nearly so much as his tales would suggest) and wrote a few stories of mining life which have a fetching combination of rough fun and sentimentalism. Then he jumped suddenly into universal attention through his "Heathen Chinée" poem, the catchy lines of which were quoted by everyone, everywhere. When he came East he was besieged with offers for stories, poems, plays and lectures. He was not lazy, as some believe. He has at least forty book titles, but of all these volumes only a half dozen short stories, a mediocre novel, *Gabriel Conroy*, and two or three narrative poems, are read today. The fact is that Harte's vein of literary gold petered out. The author aptly compares Harte with a business man who fails in middle life and finds his well-conceived efforts rendered futile by a lack of physical and mental force.

Personally Bret Harte was a queer stick. He was not a snob or a dude but he sometimes acted like both. When he received the eminent honor of being the Phi Beta Kappa poet at Harvard, he appeared in a sporty suit with green kid gloves, and read a poor poem he had written nine years before! Mark Twain's remark about him is quoted often: Harte was, said Mark, "one of the pleasantest men I have ever known; he was also one of the unpleasantest men I have ever known."

One heroic action is to be credited to Bret Harte. When he was less than twenty-five years old he was left in charge of a newspaper in Uniontown. While the editor was away a hideous massacre took place of innocent Indians by settlers roused to rage because of acts committed by other Indians in another place! About sixty Indians—men, women and children, were brutally slaughtered with axes and knives. Harte wrote and published a scathing denunciation of "the shocking and revolting spectacle," ending, "We can conceive of no wrong that a babe's blood can atone for." Harte narrowly escaped lynching, but escaped, through "departure by request."

Beyond doubt Mr. Stewart has written the fullest and most satisfactory life of this man of odd personality and of unquestionable genius, running however in a rather narrow groove.

R. D. TOWNSEND.

In getting together the collection of essays in *American Writers on American Literature* (Liveright, \$5) John Macy has presented a lively and—if compared with the textbooks—unconventional picture. He has endeavored to "collect a diversified group of collaborators who should be united only by their common interest in the art of writing, who should regard criticism as an act of creation," and whose approach is neither academic nor historical. A very valuable book, it seems to us—much more valuable than the handbooks and histories which are all too apt to sort and arrange and classify cut and dried material from which all the life has been beaten by too much handling. And stimulating—if there can be no stimulation without irritation. For it will irritate you, we hope, as it did us. Stephen Crane, for instance, gets one line in 500 pages. Henry James, now out of fashion, gets 20 pages of shrugs from Robert Herrick. Llewellyn Jones' paper on Contemporary Fiction is good, but so loosely woven that a number of important authors have slipped out between the meshes. But there are excellent essays on Emerson by Henry Haz-

litt, Hawthorne by Louis Bromfield, Thoreau by Gilbert Seldes, Melville by Raymond Weaver, Henry Adams by William MacDonald, Prescott, Motley and Parkman by Allan Nevins, Pacific Coast Literature by Charles Caldwell Dobie, Negro Literature by Walter White, Modern American Philosophers by T. V. Smith, and American Drama by Percy H. Boynton. One of the best things about the book is that you will find what every volume on American literature should—and almost never does—contain—conflicting opinions.

Illustrated Magic If you yearn to shine at evening parties by snatching lighted cigarettes from the air, making a chosen card flutter up out of the pack, or escaping from knotted ropes, this book, with its 230-odd illustrations should be a great help, for it explains everything from sleight of hand to mind reading and the most elaborate tricks of stage magicians. The most minute and careful instructions are given for manipulating cards and small objects, and apparatus is both pictured and described. Fulton Oursler has written a preface containing short sketches of the most famous magicians. And did you know that there was an International Brotherhood of Magicians?

Eyes on Russia
By Margaret Bourke-White
Simon & Schuster, \$5.00

Miss Bourke-White went to Russia to photograph machines. This book records what her own eyes took in as well as what the camera recorded, and both views—one as practical, personal and non-theoretical as the other—combine to give you a better idea of "what is going on over there" than many heavier tomes. The photographs,



What to Read

FICTION

Maid in Waiting, by John Galsworthy: Scribners. A quiet drama of English life. Readers of Mr. Galsworthy's Forsyte chronicles will find a few old friends.

The Almond Tree, by Grace Zaring Stone: Bobbs, Merrill. The story of three sisters.

Westward Passage, by Margaret Ayer Barnes: Houghton Mifflin. On a transatlantic steamer a happily married woman falls in love again with her divorced husband.

Malaisie, by Henri Fauconnier: Macmillan. Life in the Malay jungles.

Two Against Scotland Yard, by David Frome: Farrar & Rinehart. A readable murder mystery.

NON-FICTION

The Care and Feeding of Adults, by Logan Clendenning: Knopf. A book against cranks and in behalf of those who fall for the crank's schemes.

Theodore Roosevelt, A Biography, by Henry F. Pringle: Harcourt, Brace. The first full and impartial biography of T. R.

The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind, by H. G. Wells: Doubleday, Doran. The third part of Mr. Wells's massive trilogy.

Bernard Shaw, by Frank Harris. Simon & Schuster. An unconventional "unauthorized" biography.

Free Wheeling, by Ogden Nash: Simon & Schuster. Amusing light verse.