

First Aid to Authors

THIS TRADE OF WRITING. By Edward Weeks. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. (Atlantic Monthly Press). 1935. \$1.75.

Reviewed by STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

I DON'T know whether there are sillier books on writers and writing than there are on painters and painting, carpenters and carpentry, trout-breeders and trout-breeding. But I've seen more of them.

Here, however, is something different—an intelligent, candid, and illuminating book on the writer's trade. Its manner is pleasantly casual rather than didactic, and there are few thunders from Sinai. But it contains, to my mind, a great deal of What The Young Writer Ought To Know—about himself, about his work, about his publisher, about his possible public. Let me qualify that, hastily—chiefly for the author's sake. Mr. Weeks already reads a million words a year and I don't wish to swell his pile of unsolicited manuscripts. "This Trade of Writing" displays no royal road—no magic secret. It will not teach you how to become Marcel Proust in six easy lessons. But it does contain a great deal of salutary, sensible, and witty advice, information, and comment about the trade of writing by an editor who knows his business and has been able to preserve his enthusiasms and his sense of humor, in spite of the vast spate of material, good, bad, and indifferent, that passes over any editorial desk in the course of a year.

It is professional advice—and I use the word professional in its best sense. Few beginning short-story-writers could fail to profit by the brief but cogent section called "Women and Short Stories"—and a good many poets with nothing in them but a goat-cry or a formless desire to write verse of the "I asked the moon for a silver penny" school would profit by reading "The Unsuspected Poet." Not that Mr. Weeks is either harsh or unappreciative. He is sensible—and how rare a quality! It is the sort of talk that the novice ought to be able to get from a good agent or a good publisher—and very often can't because agent and publisher, by the mere press of work, are too busy. And if the person-who-wants-to-write doesn't come out at the end of this book with a much sounder idea both of the problems that face every writer and the problems connected with the merchandising of writing, he must be remarkably insusceptible to the impact of words.

I am also glad to see Mr. Weeks's extremely sane discussion of censorship and his excellent and clear exposition of the problem of the lending libraries—a problem which grows in importance and which few enough authors and very few laymen realize. Nor can I omit mention of his final chapter, "The Three Crises." For

what he says there is true—though, on one point, I am more of a fatalist than Mr. Weeks and believe that, in general, an author produces what he has it in him to produce and can claim very little excuse, except death, for not producing it. But it is an essay which both authors and readers should read over. And it ought to give the average reader a better and clearer understanding of the way in which writing is done, and the way in which reputations grow and fade, than a great many more portentous and pretentious volumes.

I think, as I have said, that this book is a very valuable one for anybody who wants to write. It seems to me a very valuable one, as well, for anyone who

wants to know the truth, not the fiction, about writing and publishing in this Year of Our Lord. Prize-contests, agents, best-sellers, worst-sellers, methods of work from Balzac's Dominican robe to Edgar Wallace's staff of stenographers—they are all here. Mr. Weeks knows a lot about writing. And what he knows, he has put down with concision, wit, and sense. The whole book is as compact as a first-aid kit—and quite as indispensable. And there is one thing about it which Mr. Weeks may not have realized. A lot of writers who are asked for advice about the *modus operandi* of the trade are going to steal from this volume from now on. I know of one, already.

As a poet, a novelist, and a short-story writer for the large circulation magazines, Stephen Vincent Benét has had wide experience of the problems of authors.

Symptoms of Something Serious

MRS. ASTOR'S HORSE. By Stanley Walker. New York: Frederick A. Stokes. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by OGDEN NASH

HOORAY, hooray, for Stanley Walker! He came all the way to New York all the way from Texas, But he doesn't write with a drawl even though he may have a drawl as a talker, Oh, no, on the contrary, his pen simultaneously strikes the funny bone and the solar plexus.

Mr. Walker gained fame as the wizard of the N. Y. *Tribune*, with which is combined the *Herald*,

Because he was an anomaly, because he was not only brilliant, but also methodical, And his reputation as a giant among newspapermen will by his new book be enhanced rather than imperaled,
Because it certainly is the all-wool 14-Karat sterling genuine odical.

Mr. Walker proves himself a veritable Abou Ben Adhem
Because he loves his fellow men and loves them most when they are at their most delirious,
Despite which his approach is as tough and nubbly as macadam,
Because he realizes that the fellow men he is writing about are symptoms of something that may turn out to be serious.

Here are the practically unexpurgated stories of Daddy Browning and Earl Carroll and Aimée Semple MacPherson,
Here are estimates from contented undertakers of how much it costs to give a prominent gangster a befitting funeral,
Here is a warning of if you need to wash your hands in a Hollywood chateau what crimes may be committed against your dignity and person,
Here is the lowdown on testimonials and whether they are or are not remuneral.

Here is Mae West, and the Entrepreneur of Demi-Monde Attractions who attempted to make the country cockroach conscious, and tea room salads,
Here is Walter Winchell and his influence on society, and the *Morro Castle* souvenir hunters, and Bernarr Macfadden,
Here is the reason you may no longer hear the merits of laxatives wafted over the air in hill billy ballads,
Here is the story of an America some of whose citizens had a tendency to swing a little off center, and it would have been a duller if wiser America if they hadden.
Here in one volume is a helpful guide to our national strength and weakness, Our weakness being that like every other country we at times are pretty comical. And our strength being that we are always populated with somebody like Mr. Stanley Walker to point out our lapses, so I think Mr. Walker is a prominent part of American uniqueness,
So I hope that he will never suffer any difficulties, either financial or anatomical.

Little America Is Up to Date

DISCOVERY—THE STORY OF THE SECOND BYRD ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION. By Admiral Richard E. Byrd. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1935. \$3.75.

Reviewed by GRIFFITH TAYLOR

RARELY has the reviewer read a book which weaves the strands of adventure, personality, and research into so attractive a design as Admiral Byrd has managed to do in his latest volume.

Vast changes in the technique of exploration have marked the last quarter of a century. It would have been thought impossible to take a flimsy steel ship to the Barrier in 1910; yet Byrd placed his chief reliance on an "oil-burning out-cast" from the Shipping Board. This was necessary to transport his huge Condor airplane to the South, and in this iron coffin he successfully navigated the "Devil's Graveyard."

In 1910 no one relied on flying in the Antarctic. Byrd, in 1933, took down four planes, and picked up another, still usable, at his old base. Modern expeditions run to such large totals in material and personnel that two ships are necessary nowadays. The old wooden whaler, *Bear of Oakland*, was born as far back as 1874, but was staunch enough to penetrate into the unknown Pack near King Edward VII Land far beyond any previous voyages. Our expedition in 1910-13 first tried tractors—with little success; but Byrd made full use of three Citroëns, two Ford tractors, and a huge Cletrac from Cleveland. However the Eskimo husky is still the most reliable "engine" in polar travel, and Admiral Byrd took no less than 150 dogs to the Antarctic.

One of the most thrilling chapters deals with the preliminary voyage of the steel-ship *Ruppert* south of the Circle from 150° to 118° West longitude. For five days they were befogged amid enormous icebergs—risking the disaster of the *Titanic* for hours on end. Even a gale did not clear away the fog—and to cap the climax the oil-feed choked and for a time they drifted powerless amid the bergs of the Devil's Graveyard. Three flights were made from the *Ruppert*; which in effect added an area of 120,000 square miles to the known map, and dispelled the belief held by many geographers that an Antarctic Archipelago anchored the pack ice in this region. On January 17th, 1934, they reached Little America.

Probably the hundred men concerned will remember the ordeal of unloading the ships when they have forgotten most of their Antarctic experiences. Seven miles of awful ice, known as "Misery Trail," separated the ships from Headquarters; and for some weeks it seemed likely that Little America itself would break away. Dr. Poulter found that the site was tilting as the result of swells from the north, and 2,000 feet of water lay below their icy foundations. Luckily the emergency cache laid at Retreat Camp was not needed; for the cold weather anchored Little America securely a few weeks later.

In March an inland station was set up 123 miles south of Headquarters. There is no doubt of the great value of the meteorological records here collected by Byrd during seven months of winter. Hitherto all continuous records have been made on the coast close to the relatively warm Ross Sea, with its more or less "marine" climate. At the Southern Camp much



Joseph A. Pelter

THE SCIENTIFIC STAFF MEETS

more typical "Antarctic" conditions obtained, though the data are not yet available to the public. Byrd elected to carry out these duties alone, partly because it was not easy to supply the Camp with food for more men, primarily, as he admits, because he wanted the experience.

The Underground City at Little America with its personnel of fifty-six men was the scene of many incidents grave and gay through the winter. Incidentally, one misses a map of the Headquarters and of the Bay of Whales, though it is referred to on page 185. Among the attractions of the book are the frequent fragments of conversation which are sprinkled like plums in the pudding. In one of the chapters contributed by C. J. V. Murphy he dwells a little on national idiosyncrasies. For instance, he writes of the . . . "British note of tragedy and spiritual enrichment; . . . the easy-going what-the-hell-of-it attitude which is peculiarly American."

During the winter, in addition to the usual meteorological and magnetic logs, several new forms of research were undertaken. Dr. Poulter took advantage of the unusually clear skies to institute a meteor watch. No less than 1,300 were seen in one period of fifteen hours—which is probably the record in this research. At the foot of Mt. Erebus (below the Great Plateau) no such clear skies were our lot in the winters of 1911 and 1912, nor could we describe winter as a place where "blizzards were rare!"

The knowledge of cosmic rays was greatly extended by the work of Bramhall and Zuhn so near the Polar axis. One of the most interesting jobs was that carried out by Morgan, who explored the depth of the ice or water by exploding T.N.T. and listening to the echoes sent back by the rock below. These data will be referred to later.

As spring arrived the sledging parties made ready for their arduous journeys. Little America has clearly proved its



HAULING THE WINGS OF THE FLOYD BENNETT TO THE SHIP

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