

# What's in a Book Title?

BY IRVIN HEYNE

SINCE 1900 there has been evident a growing tendency toward the use of quoted or symbolic book titles. It is not possible, at this time to enter upon a discussion of the causes underlying this tendency or of the direction it might take. But it may be interesting to get some idea of its scope. Shakespeare and the Bible, of course, are primary sources. Among the recent or forthcoming books whose titles are derived from the former are:

MORE THAN KIND, by C. Seaforth, and LESS THAN KIN, by C. C. Dobie (A little more than kin and less than kind. *Hamlet*). COME, MY COACH, by Marjorie Worthington (Come, my coach! Good night, sweet ladies; good night. *Hamlet*). HOW LIKE AN ANGEL, by A. G. Macdonell (What a piece of work is man! . . . in action how like an angel! *Hamlet*). SO WISE SO YOUNG, by A. B. Hale (So wise so young, they say, / do never live long. *Richard III*). MY SHADOW AS I PASS, by Sybil Bolitho (Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass, / That I may see my shadow as I pass. *Richard III*). LORD, WHAT FOOLS, by F. Boon (Lord, what fools these mortals be! *Midsummer Night's Dream*). CALL BACK YESTERDAY, by G. Goodwin (Call back yesterday; bid time return. *Richard II*). RIPENESS IS ALL, by Eric Linklater (*Lear*). THE UNCERTAIN GLORY, by B. Marshall—the fourth novel, by the way, with that title—(Oh, how this spring of love resembleth / The uncertain glory of an April day. *Two Gentlemen of Verona*). MIDSUMMER MADNESS, by E. Tripp (This is very midsummer madness. *Twelfth Night*). ILLYRIA, LADY, by C. Butler (*Twelfth Night*). THIS PETTY PACE, by C. C. Furnas (Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, / Creeps on this petty pace from day to day. *Macbeth*). LITTLE CANDLE'S BEAMS, by Isa Glenn (How far that little candle throws his beams! / So shines a good deed in a naughty world. *Merchant of Venice*). SUMMER'S LEASE, by Winifred Howe (Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May; / And summer's lease hath all too short a date. *Sonnets*). IF THIS BE ERROR, by Martin Hare (Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks. . . . If this be error, and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved. *Sonnets*). FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES, by George Cronyn (When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes / I all alone bewep my outcast state. *Sonnets*).

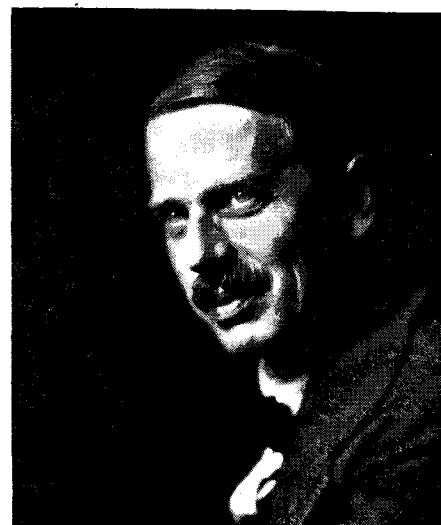
From the Bible come the following: IF NOT JERUSALEM, by O. Harland (Let my right hand forget her cunning . . . let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. *Psalms*). CONCERNING THIS WOMAN, by W. Le Queux (Am I a dog's head . . . that thou charest me today with a fault concerning this woman? *II Samuel*). SKIN FOR SKIN, by Winifred Duke (Skin for skin,

yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. *Job*). SOLOMON, MY SON!, by John Erskine (*II Chronicles*). AS THE FOOL, by F. Plunkett (How dieth the wise man? As the fool. *Ecclesiastes*). HE SENT FORTH A RAVEN, by E. M. Roberts (*Genesis*). NOT BUILT WITH HANDS, by Helen C. White (We have a building of God, an house not made with hands. *II Corinthians*). ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE, by Lewis Browne (With God all things are possible. *Matthew*). THE POWERS THAT BE, by A. Cannon (The powers that be are ordained of God. *Romans*). BEAUTY FOR ASHES, by G. L. Hill (To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. *Isaiah*). DWELL IN THE WILDERNESS, by Alvah C. Bessie (Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman. *Proverbs*). THE ELEVENTH HOUR, by Eden Phillpotts—also the title of a detective story by J. S. Fletcher—(The parable of the laborers in the vineyard. *Matthew*). IN HIS OWN COUNTRY, by J. Gill (A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country. *Matthew*). THE MARK OF CAIN, by H. T. Comstock (*Genesis*). WHAT MANNER OF LOVE, by Rita Weisman (*I John*). WEEP NOT FOR THE DEAD, by M. Matveev (Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. *Jeremiah*).

Titles of course come from other sources than the Bible and Shakespeare. Some examples are: BRAVE MUSIC, by E. Wells (Ah, take the cash in hand and waive the rest; / Oh, the brave music of a distant drum! *Rubaiyat*, 1st ed.). GARMENT OF REPENTANCE, by C. Wright (Come, fill the cup, and in the fire of spring / Your winter-garment of repentance fling. *Rubaiyat*). DEAD YESTERDAY, by G. Grant (Unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday. *Rubaiyat*). THERE WAS A DOOR, by Talbot Mundy (There was the door to which I found no key; / There was the veil through which I might not see. *Rubaiyat*). APRIL'S SOWING, by Rosamund Rees (You'll love me yet—and I can tarry / Your love's protracted growing: / June reared that bunch of flowers you carry / From seeds of April's sowing. Browning, *Pippa Passes*). YOUTH ON THE PROW, by C. Whitehead (Youth on the prow, and pleasure at the helm. Gray, *The Bard*). THE FARMER IN THE DELL, by Phil Stong (Mother Goose). ON WHAT STRANGE STUFF, by E. Bialk (On what strange stuff Ambition feeds. Eliza Cook, *On Thomas Hood*,—not, as some might think from: Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed, / That he is grown so great? *Julius Caesar*).

(To be continued)

Queries concerning titles of books will be gladly answered if accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.



EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

## Taking Stories Apart

THE SHORT STORY CASE BOOK. By Edward J. O'Brien. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by TESS SLESINGER

MR. O'BRIEN has for years presented us with anthologies of short stories without ever completely exposing his own critical values and bases of selection. His "Case Book," in which each story is treated to a detailed paragraph-by-paragraph commentary on the right-hand pages, reveals him as a painstaking analyst, an astute observer, and—in the light of many of the stories he has included in his anthologies—a surprisingly just and balanced judge. One wonders if all his selections in the past can possibly have lived up to the high, frequently classical, and even perfectionist standards which are expounded in the "Case Book"; or if perhaps Mr. O'Brien is better equipped as a detailed analyst or teacher than as a critic.

The "Case Book" is designed for short story writers and short story teachers. It might very conceivably be useful also to fellow-critics who have difficulty in deciphering just *how* a writer has or has not achieved his effects. Mr. O'Brien states his aims clearly in the introduction:

If you are convinced that the writing of short stories has been successfully reduced to a matter of observing so many rules and formulæ, and believe that nothing more is needed in creative writing, you had much better avoid this book. But if you are keenly and sensitively alert to life, if your imagination plays freely and honestly over all that happens to you and over all that you observe in the life of your neighbors, I may be able to offer you something that will be useful to you.

In other words, if you have what it takes in the first place, Mr. O'Brien presents you with an invaluable aid to thinking.

The introduction—which should be read, not only as a key to the rest of the

book, but as a helpful survey of the component parts of the short story—contains a general discussion of aims and techniques, with emphasis on Plot, Action, Character, and Setting. It is interesting to note—again, in the light of past anthologies—“Plot is merely a means to an end. It is never an end in itself.” There is a valid warning in the passage under Setting: “Local color for its own sake has been one of the chief vices of the American short story for two generations.” (One is tempted, ungratefully, to suggest that Mr. O’Brien read his own book.) But it is the field of Character in which Mr. O’Brien seems most interested and in which he is certainly most illuminating. Although it is surprising that nothing of Conrad Aiken’s, that brilliant and strangely neglected exponent of the Joycean school, has been selected to illustrate the stream-of-consciousness, still that method, as exemplified here in moderated form by William March and Whit Burnett, is effectively contrasted with the characterization through unassisted dialogue used by Hemingway, and again with the economical development by fact so thoroughly mastered by Maupassant.

The first two stories are treated to an almost infinitesimal analysis, step by step, sometimes sentence by sentence. The immediate effect may seem mere paraphrasing—something like reading from a pony on the right page. But somehow the accumulated probing succeeds in building up in the reader an unusual degree of concentration which serves him in the subsequent stories—which are less minutely handled—to make his own comments, and, most important of all, to ask his own questions. The commentary upon the third story—Maupassant’s—is not made paragraph by paragraph, but in a generalized discussion of Maupassant’s methods based on his own statement in the preface to “Pierre and Jean,” a discussion so meaty that it becomes a gauge for all the rest.

Apparently Mr. O’Brien is almost unconcerned with the relative importance of a writer’s choice of subject matter. By implication his chief point seems to be that any story, well-told, is a good story; it is interesting to conjecture what would have happened to Marquand’s commonplace story had he been capable of following Maupassant’s advice. The question is still a moot one. Perhaps one must evaluate a writer a little in terms of his own time—so that a present-day Jane Austen would deal with the foibles of the bourgeoisie “in trade,” a modern Swift would satirize the twentieth century. In the end the best writers seem for the most part to have chosen subjects which reflected importantly the important aspects of their day; after that they told their stories well.

*Tess Slesinger is an exponent of some of the best work in short story writing that is being done today. Her most recent book, “Time—the Present,” a collection of stories, was reviewed in the Saturday Review of May 25, 1935.*

## Idealism and the Corn Belt

*FORTUNE AND MEN’S EYES. By George Cronyn. New York: Covici Friede. 1935. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THOUGH the very first episode of the first section of this distinctly United States novel—which is in five sections—describes quite objectively the Reverend Charles Worden Peirce’s extra-marital exploit in the village of Santa Ana near Manila, in the Philippine Islands, one soon enough finds out that the book is based upon an inquiry conducted by a certain Doctor Bedell, who has given over his practice as a consulting psychologist to devote himself to a research project. He is investigating one thousand cases of variations from normalcy in the average man. Not the Reverend Charles, but his son Max (or, as he now calls himself, M. Worden Peirce), a well-known banker, “was to have furnished the final case history of the series.” Unfortunately he leaps to his death from the fifteenth floor of a New York hotel. One of his two brothers, Byron Peirce, becomes that thousandth man instead.

Through the doctor’s examination of the willing Byron and the information about his family that he furnishes, is unfolded a thoroughly American story of various frustration; a story the last third of which deals with the present day, with the sons of an idealistic but unfortunate father who started as a Presbyterian minister in the Corn Belt in the Middle West. The story is not at all told through the comments of the doctor or of Byron, nor is a strict chronology preserved. It is so varied in the method of presentation as to keep it continuously interesting, as it moves steadily forward.

The father returns from the Philippines to his wife in the Middle West, and his three young sons, at the beginning of this century. The end of his sons’ several stories is late in 1934. The idealistic career of the father, suddenly almost destroyed by a sexual “slip”—or a mortal sin (as his relatives severally argue it)—is temporarily turned down the road of poverty and exile. His three boys struggle to manhood; Max always the conservative and some-

what the snob, with an eye to the main chance; Byron, the dreamer, draughtsman, and budding architect; Clyde, the wild one, who finally runs away to Calgary and British Columbia, after a somewhat athletic career at school. The mother dies during their poverty, drowning herself. The father comes into a residuary legacy from his grandmother, joins the International Society of Christian Rationalists, and becomes the editor of the *Rational Advocate*. The large remainder of the novel is chiefly concerned with the careers of the three sons.

“*Fortune and Men’s Eyes*” is unusually rich in detail. It is the story not only of these principal characters, but of many other members of the family connection, and of a few friends. It bears its own ironic implications. It is written with facility and a thorough knowledge of terrain and people. It gives one the same feeling of solidity and significance as did the earlier novels of Robert Herrick. It seems to me, in character, to stand between these and those of Sinclair Lewis. The financial assistance to the two surviving brothers, at the end, though it comes in the natural course of events, appears as a slight sop to Cerberus; but the money in the family does not then

so much matter. It is the vividness and strength of many of the episodes that matter; the strong, weak, and corrupt characters that one encounters. Most aspects of human nature are illustrated. And behind the book is the history of this country in the last thirty-five years; of the average American, born of strong stock near to the soil, moving from the outlands into the city struggle.

Not a book particularly unusual for its style, “*Fortune and Men’s Eyes*” is still a book worth writing and reading. It covers a lot of territory. It is unpropagandist in its realism. Mr. Cronyn earlier wrote well of the troubadour, Peire Vidal, in “*The Fool of Venus*.” Now he has strongly delineated an energetic American family, the more independent and idealistic members of which get their noses pretty thoroughly rubbed in the dirt. Yet gusto for living is in the book; and, granted a slight tendency toward caricature, its values are eternally right.



GEORGE CRONYN