

## A Producer Backstage

THE CURTAIN FALLS. By Joseph Verner Reed. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1935. \$2.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IF "show business" were run by "safe and sane" business men, probably no plays would be produced; though the more one gets to know about business, the fewer business men who are either safe or sane there seem to be. The business men of Broadway can so easily be proven quite the opposite of sane that there would be no fun in supplying the evidence. What one needs to be a producer are money and enthusiasm, and then you are quite as



KATHARINE HEPBURN'S DEBUT  
IN "ART AND MRS. BOTTLE"  
From "The Curtain Falls."

likely to succeed as the next fellow. Joseph Verner Reed, author of the book I am reviewing, didn't succeed, but he had the fun of doing some plays he believed in and meeting such temperamental phenomena, and good actresses, as Jane Cowl and Mary Ellis. That's about all he could expect, the way things are. He might easily have had better "breaks" than those he had. The firm of MacGowan and Reed had plenty of brains in it, plenty of vitality, and fortunately at one time plenty of money. But I do not wish to imply that Mr. Reed's account of his experiences as a producer is in any sense a "belly-aching" document. On the contrary, it is bursting with enthusiasm and the joy of effort. It is swift and vivid, so swiftly written that it frequently stumbles over the English language, but takes all that in its stride.

Yes, it is an exhilarating book to read. If the theatrical world did not have in it the particular mad exhilaration that Mr. Reed well conveys in his reminiscences, no one would stay in it for five minutes. The tragic exasperations are too many, the desperate chances too great, the grim losses too heavy. When one stops to realize all the effort, all the human factors, all the money that go into a single production likely to close, after a bad start, within a few days; one sometimes wonders why any mortals from any point of view have the courage to connect themselves with such an enterprise.

But, on the bright side, the greatest virtue of the theatre is courage—courage of the actors and actresses, primarily—and, yes, in spite of all that can be said against them, courage of entrepreneurs and managers who put on the plays.

Mr. Reed, at the age of twenty-six, was, as he frankly admits, theatre-crazy. He would rather have seen a bad show than no show at all. But he didn't want to stay in an orchestra seat. He had money, and he wanted to manage and produce. In Kenneth MacGowan he found, after considerable search, a kindred spirit and a man of great talent and energy. Winthrop Ames, that most urbane and delightful of men, gave him sage advice. In he plunged. He ended by dropping a thumping sum of money—but according to this vivid book he had certainly had a high old time.

To me the bright spot in his book for interest and amusement is that part concerned with Jane Cowl. Mr. Reed has no little anecdotal facility. His study of a temperament, in her case, is imbued with affection. It is also laughable and immense

and almost incredible. And he sweeps his plumes to the floor before her talents as an actress, as he well may.

Mr. Reed, apparently, thought too little of "box-office" rather than too much. His enthusiasms swept him on. His taste in choosing plays was spontaneous and erratic. He finally had to learn, as he says, that he belonged out front, not behind the scenes. If you, too, are the kind of human who feel a thrill along your spine every time you sit in the orchestra, or the balcony, or the second balcony, and watch the curtain rise—as I am—you will enjoy this volume; and you will learn a little about those strange and blundering, and admirable and "cuckoo" people who make your enjoyment of the theatre possible.

## Two Ways of Thought

FOLLOW THE FURIES. By Eleanor Carroll Chilton. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1935. \$2.50

Reviewed by CURRIE CABOT

SINCE the tone in which words are uttered is often more revealing than the words themselves, much of a story's meaning can be conveyed by the tone in which it is told. Now although printed words assure our reason that "Follow the Furies" is a tragedy, we are unconvinced, for Miss Chilton's cool, urbane voice makes us feel that nothing really serious can possibly happen. The book lingers in the mind as a pleasant, faintly satiric comedy of manners. The grim facts remain somehow incidental, so alien are they to the quiet and gently humorous flow of the story.

One cannot help wishing that comedy had prevailed over the thesis that Miss Chilton set herself to expound, or else that she had given the darker side of her novel the full weight of austerity and seriousness it demands. Actually, the book impresses one as a compromise. There is the underlying problem the author has chosen



ELEANOR CARROLL CHILTON

to work out for herself, and then there is the veneer which gives the book its superficial aspect of light, agreeable fiction.

Miss Chilton, with the instinct of a true novelist, has sought out a theme that will bring into conflict problems larger than the merely personal ones of individuals. She has found it in the opposition of two ways of thought; she has set the values of the freethinker against those of the Catholic. Indubitably, she has touched upon an extremely important question, the place of religion in modern life, but the special case with which she has chosen to illustrate her point of view is so very special and so very extreme that it has the unconvincing ring of propaganda. There cannot be many families brought up to the conscientious atheism of Hugh Linton's, or many misplaced fanatics of the type of Barbara Linton.

"Follow the Furies" is one of those books too merely intellectually conceived to touch one deeply. It is the product of an alert intelligence, of an accomplished novelist's deft, subtle handling. But it never achieves the life-and-death significance it is supposed to bear, and one puts it down wishing that the author had confined it to the quietly satirical mood which so dryly exposes the contradiction between Hugh Linton, the bold-thinking novelist, and Hugh Linton the cautiously conventional man.

## Something Ought to Be Done About It

THE TIME IS RIPE. By Walter Greenwood. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

MR. GREENWOOD, the English workingman whose "Love on the Dole" was one of the best of last year's novels, has produced another excellent study of slum life in Manchester-Salford. Possibly that was only incidental to his intention; the English title was "His Worship the Mayor," and the story, in so far as there is any, deals with the rise of Edgar Hargraves, lower middle-class clothing merchant, from the ragged edge of bankruptcy to wealth, the Lord Mayoralty, and the prospect of a knighthood. How did he rise? Why, his miserly old aunt died intestate; this and this alone lifted Hargraves to the heights—but that is hardly enough to make the book the "scorching satire" which the never-failing English critics have discerned.

Mr. Greenwood is himself a City Councillor of Salford and presumably knows his municipal politics; when he shows us policemen taking protection money from bookmakers, and closing hours enforced on public houses and disregarded by rich men's clubs, it is to be supposed that he is telling the truth. But Hargraves, though doubtless truly enough observed, is a figure of no consequence. Rich or poor, he is a cowardly snob, selfish and merciless. There are such shopkeepers and there are such millionaires; and it is no longer news that chance can lift such a man from obscurity to eminence.

What is important in this book, as in its predecessor, is the first-hand account of the lives of the poor—the people who are on the dole, or barely off of it, or (worst fate of all) are disqualified by the Means Test as applied by men whose chief concern is to keep down the taxes. We have heard a good deal in the last two or three years about English recovery; but the class of which Mr. Greenwood writes, the class from which he sprang, has not shared in that recovery and has apparently begun to doubt if it ever will. The gentlemen who are so zealous for proletarian literature would doubtless think poorly of Mr. Greenwood; he never mentions the class struggle, and he does not froth at the mouth. He does not need to; mere objectivity carries a conviction, in cases like this, that could not be increased by any amount of underscoring. Accordingly the American publishers, appreciating better than the English publishers and perhaps better than the author himself the real point of the book, have taken a title from Lowell's "The time is ripe, and rotten ripe, for change; then let it come."

Let it come, Mr. Greenwood would doubtless say—but he does not paint all his proletarians spotless white, or all his bourgeois dead black. There are decent and kindly men even among his City Councillors; and the very worst exploiter in the book is one of the poor, Mrs. Sarah Ann Nattle. She is also the best character in the book; readers of "Love on the Dole"

may remember her, though she played a smaller part there. Mrs. Nattle, bootlegger of eightpenny gin to widows on pension, go-between for pawnbrokers and abortionists, general chiseler and percentage-grabber—to this reader at any rate Mrs. Nattle appears as that incarnate evil which Faulkner was apparently aiming at in his Popeye. But far more convincing than Popeye, because she is human.

That is Mr. Greenwood's second merit as a propagandist—all his people are human, even though some of his City Councillors may have been observed only from the outside. The real protagonist of the story is Joe Shuttleworth, the unemployed miner, who kept believing that the mine where he had worked for forty years would reopen, and who felt as if the end of the world had come when he saw that mine being dismantled. Joe Shuttleworth who went mad trying to realize what had happened; his wife who served three months in jail for stealing a shawl from Hargraves's shop; his children, with nothing to look forward to but more of the same—this is their story, not the ennobled haberdasher's. Read it, and you will feel that the time is ripe indeed. There remains the question whether England, as a collective entity, can ever again be operated at a profit; but you cannot blame people like the Shuttleworths for feeling that something ought to be done about it when they see what profits there are going to people like Hargraves.

## John Peale Bishop's Novel of the South

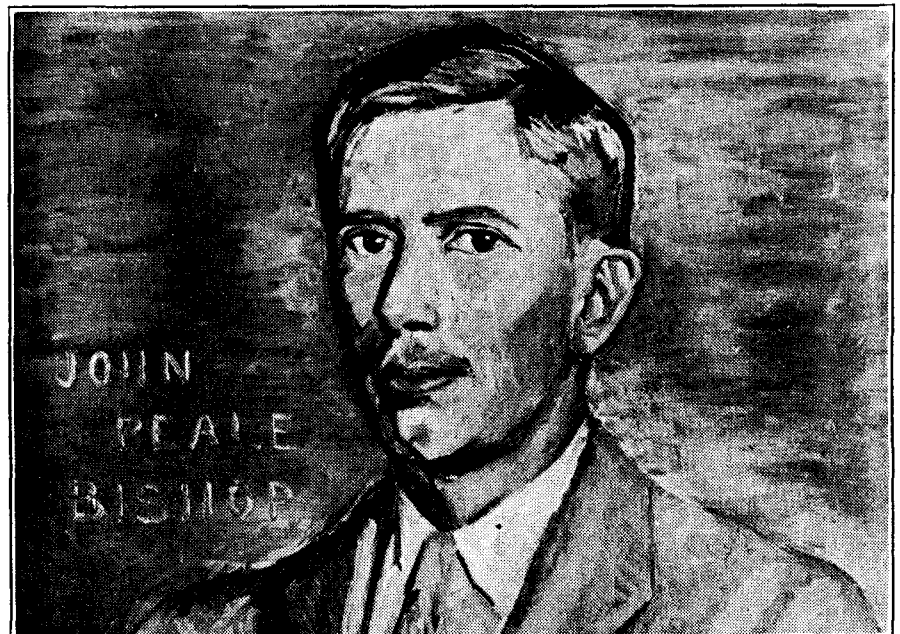
ACT OF DARKNESS. By John Peale Bishop. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1935. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BERRY FLEMING

THERE isn't much difficulty in putting your finger on some of the qualities that make this a good book. It is primarily concerned with the life of a boy during his adolescence and through him you see his beloved West Virginia, his home town, his numerous family, his family's friends. All of this is described with extraordinary feeling and with the articulate sympathy of a poet. The writing is vivid and living, with an occasional awkward inversion of phrase that gives it the sort of life you feel in a painter's line that doesn't run absolutely true. It seems to me a deliberate awkwardness, different from the occasional stammering of an overpowering emotion, and in that sense to be artifice, but it is artifice of the best kind and effective.

There is more difficulty in saying why the book isn't even better than it is. Perhaps the reason is its lack of an overpowering emotion. For the boy John, who is the principal character and in whom the reader is most interested, doesn't go through any emotional crisis. The emotion is transferred to the secondary, or at least indirect, story of Charlie; this emotion is inherently deep enough and real enough, but being given largely through the eyes of the boy, it becomes diluted.

The scene of Mr. Bishop's novel is a little town in the West Virginia of the



JOHN PEALE BISHOP. From a painting by Frederick Wight.



early years of the century. Its people are (somewhat refreshingly) gentlefolk; their feeling of being slightly put upon at having to consider themselves West Virginians, instead of Virginians, is wholly warranted, for their breeding is as sound as anything we know. The story flows with a deceptive rapidity, and the reader finds himself, almost before he knows it, in the midst of a major scandal and lawsuit. This comes as the result of an alleged assault upon a woman, who involves Charlie by false testimony.

In itself, Charlie's story is a real thing, worthy of being told throughout from Charlie's point of view; it is of far more significance, I think, than the story of the boy's adolescence. The boy grew up, saturated, like multitudes of others, with pictures of his home and his family; his character was forming, was resulting, in part anyway, from this environment; but except in specific details it is like thousands of other adolescences and not, I think, of first importance. But Charlie is another matter. Charlie's character is formed; it is interesting, rich. And as a result of it, he gets in a tight spot. His story seems potentially great, swept on as he is by forces over which he had no control, one of which is himself.

The trial scene is to me the weakest part of the book, from the points of view of credibility, interest, and drama—although I am quite prepared to be informed that this actually occurred; it has some of the improbability of truth. But in spite of these shortcomings, this novel ought to rank high among the books that are good. It is honest and straightforward, illuminated by some of the sharpest and most well-expressed perceptions of both the outer and the inner world that I remember.

## Supernatural Plays

**WHEELS AND BUTTERFLIES.** By William Butler Yeats. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1935. \$2.

Reviewed by HORACE REYNOLDS

ALL four of the short plays which Yeats has collected in this volume have the supernatural for their theme; in all are bodied forth the spiritualistic beliefs which have been important articles in Yeats's mystical credo ever since the late eighties, when he attended Madame Blavatsky's nightly levees in Landsdowne Road. The spirit of Swift speaks to Stella and Vanessa; Emer's pain and renunciation call back Cuchulain from the Country-Under-Wave; Christ rises from the dead, a phantom with a beating heart, to prove to his doubting disciples that He is really the Messiah; two beggars, one blind, another lame, seek the saint at his holy well, and are healed, very much in the manner of Synge's Martin and Mary Doule before them.

In these recent plays Yeats has deserted verse for prose, and out of mercy for the frailty of the ear he has simplified his language. But still the plays are heavy with abstraction; the climaxes to which they hasten are ideas difficult to dissolve in action: too often they remain ideas, not actions whose fall into the pool of the mind sends out ever-widening circles of thought and feeling. Three of the plays are for dancers, they belong to a form Yeats has made for himself out of the old "Noh" plays of Japan, and from a mere reading of them it is difficult to appreciate just how much mask and dance and music would add to their performance. But certainly "Words upon the Window Pane" reads better than its plays.

Yeats has confessed that he has written plays that he might compose lyrics for their imaginary people. He might well have added—for the opportunity they offer him to write prefaces and commentaries. In the prefaces of these plays, rather than in the plays themselves, lie moments that make the reader catch his breath at the beauty of the thought and its expression. It is in these chapters from the autobiography of his splendid, many-chambered intellect that Yeats is "forging in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race."

# The BOWLING GREEN

## Big Mails Galore

A YOUNG woman (eleven years old at that time) was full of the lively curiosity which is so sweet and commendable in her nature. Also I think she felt that her small pocket-money was insufficient for her large and legitimately growing desiderations. In a corner of some magazine she saw a promise that if she would send her name she would receive Big Mails, Personal Big Mails, A Giant Mail, Big Mails Galore, Propositions Samples and Opportunities, Not Less Than \$25 a Week, a Big Opportunity Package. Whether she also sent 10 cents I don't know: it would embarrass me to ask her. But the Big Mails Galore came along all right. I know because part of my job is to call at the post office.

Fortunately, by the time the Big Mails began coming the young woman's interest had gone on to something else. (Skis, or a bow and arrows.) So when I saw a mass of circulars lying around, my own curiosity, which extends to every kind of printed matter, began to operate. It might interest you to know what the Opportunities are that these Personal Big Mails offer. What would have happened if she had accepted the offer "A TEN POUND package of Big Mail for 25c if you will pay express charges" I dare not conjecture.

I'm not going to go into this in full detail because I still believe that print has valuable reticences. A complete study of these matters would perhaps be Mr. Postmaster Farley's job if he weren't so busy sending out postage stamps. But here are some of the exciting possibilities the young woman might have considered if she hadn't been, fortunately, out ski-ing.

Pittsburgh, for 35c, would send her "one pound of old novels, foreign coins, war money, stamps propositions." (How many old novels in a pound?) Revere, Mass., would print 1000 circulars for 40c. Chicago would guarantee her against loneliness with 30 names of gentlemen pen-pals and a Mystic Photo of future mate; also her own photo, size of a postage stamp, gummed to stick on letterheads, "will say much more about you than any wordy description when writing to pen-pals." Racine, Wis., wants her to show her loyalty to the President: "Beautiful silk banner shows a determined Roosevelt portrait and his signature." The director of the Association for the Development of Mind Power (Chicago) offers her (for \$1) five long Letter-Lectures that will remove fear and ignorance and lead to a New Life. Does her life lack color? (how little he knows her!) These Miracle Working Letters will get her anything she wants. "Written in plain language. Nothing technical. Free from religious prejudices yet in perfect harmony with religious beliefs." Not all the goodly company of Envelope Stuffers are so free from sectarianism, though. Here's St. Croix Falls, Wis., offering an 8-page pamphlet (10c) to prove that baptism does not necessarily mean complete immersion. But the fellow who is really savage is Hermansville, Mich. What has happened to make Hermansville so sore at the Catholic Church? I should not care to quote all his raving absurdities. He thinks the celibacy of the clergy is all hooey and breaks into verse:

Lives of all the priests remind us  
They could lead much better lives  
And departing leave behind them  
Widows who have been their wives.

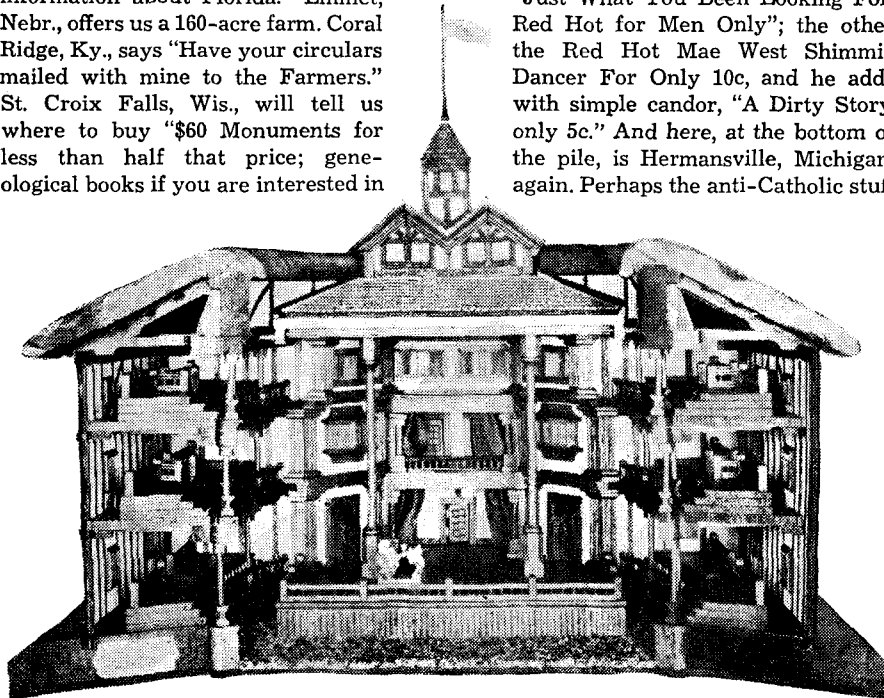
For 10c each he offers a list of books such as *Crimes of Priests*; *Priestly Celibacy Exposed*; *Vile Attacks Upon Women*; *The Priest and the Devil*; *The Sad Story of Mary Lily*. What happened to Mary Lily "within shouting distance of the palace of Cardinal Gibbons," he says "chills one's heart and makes your blood run cold. Buy this book in quantity and circulate it." But *Behind Convent Bars*, which costs

25c, seems to be even more vigorous. I'm saving these obscene oddities until I meet Tom Daly, my favorite Papist, so we can have a good laugh together. Perhaps it's not just a laughing matter. *Priest & Women*, "a book for women only . . . for real red blooded American women who do their own thinking" I suppose I (nor the Postmaster General) will never see. But this fellow in Hermansville is one of the boys who want us to know The Truth. He has some kind of a magazine, *The Yellow Jacket* (20c a year) "The best paper published to swat liars & leaches, hypocrites and humbugs, demigogs and dastards."

Let's get into more agreeable fields. Here's an optimist, in Akron, O., who wants my young woman to go into publishing. "Publish a Paper of your own. Only 50c Capitol needed." Braggs, Okla., wants her to start a hamburger stand, 25c full instructions; "for 10c extra I will give you a recipe of a Cidar without apples. Mix at night, ready to drink in the morning." Tampa confides that "Florida is the virgin mail-order field," will mail our circulars to his own sucker list for \$2.50 a thousand. "Personal services of all sorts, private letters remained, nontechnical information about Florida." Emmet, Nebr., offers us a 160-acre farm. Coral Ridge, Ky., says "Have your circulars mailed with mine to the Farmers." St. Croix Falls, Wis., will tell us where to buy "\$60 Monuments for less than half that price; genealogical books if you are interested in

Angeles is more cheerful and sociable. For only 3 cents they'll send us not only Big Mail but "a mouthpiece which fits roof of mouth, with it you can sing like a canary or squeal like a pig. Astonish and Mystify your friends." Deep Gap, N. C., an appropriate place, wants us to start a Pen Pals Correspondence Club. For 10c they will give "full instructions of this fascinating business."

You divine, shrewd as you are, that I'm only delicately turning over the more mentionable fragments of this mass of rubbish. The various appeals, on grounds of health and prophylaxis, to credulity or prurience, I pass by; though I admit a scholarly curiosity about Cincinnati's offer of "The Immortal Dante Trip Through Hell, 25 Different Cards, 25c." A fellow in Cleveland advertises "Better Printing for Less Money" but doesn't prove it in his list of wares, which include "\$ Powder Compats for 2c, Toote paste 3c per tube, My 6 Nights in a Nudist Camp," and goes off the deep end with fine climax, "600,000 Articles." A "bookshop" in Fort Atkinson, Wis., will send "The Book of Forbidden Knowledge" for half price if you'll write down the names and addresses of five married friends ("your name not told to others"). Looking through this mess of tripe I thought at first that New England was not represented in the jackal industry, but here's Worcester, Mass., supplying (10c, sealed to adults) BIG VALUE HOTCHA BUDGET—"stories, poems, cartoons, also 100 Paris Type Pictures." Gloucester, Mass., has two pornograph peddlers who must be busy rivals. One has the Movie Card Picture Girl, "Just What You Been Looking For, Red Hot for Men Only"; the other the Red Hot Mae West Shimmie Dancer For Only 10c, and he adds with simple candor, "A Dirty Story, only 5c." And here, at the bottom of the pile, is Hermansville, Michigan, again. Perhaps the anti-Catholic stuff



MODEL OF SHAKESPEARE'S "GLOBE"

Built to scale 3/8" to 1'; patented by H. Ernest Conklin, Roslyn, L. I.

your family history; Used Correspondence Courses, and Mexican Jumping Beans." Grandma's Herb Company, right here in New York City, wants to send us a bottle (\$1.50) of tonic bursting with iodine, "phosphorous," and all the mineral salts. Ambler, Pa., for \$1 will teach us how to earn money writing for the papers. Erie, Pa., knows how to print photographs on handkerchiefs, scarfs or neckties. Williamsbridge, N. Y. C., will remove our superfluous hair. Oyster Bay, L. I., wants us to be Sane about Sex. Sarnia, Ontario, if we are lonely and blue, "will make you happy for the rest of your life if you will send only 10c for particulars." Goldsboro, N. C., will supply back issues of a Nudist Magazine, nothing left out.

Raritan, N. J., writes that he has heard of the young inquirer as "an experienced and capable salesman with a good following among the retail dealers." He would like her to represent him in a line of sundries and has a Foolproof Profit Sharing Plane. "To keep the curiosity seekers from receiving this plan, I am offering it to you for \$2.00." An expert chemist of Evanston, Ill., will send (for 35c) our choice of any one of several "monster formulas" from which we can make a Blood Cleaner Compound or medicines for Rheumatism, Heart, Kidneys, Asthma, Hay Fever, Female Tonic or "unpleasantness of entire nervous system" (which might happen to almost anyone). Los

hasn't gone so well for now he's picking on Hollywood. *Harlotry of the Silver Screen* (12c postpaid) "unmasks the immorality of Hollywood and lifts the lid on the vilest ulcer in American life."

But whether ulcers have lids or not, I'm growing a little weary. I fall back with relief on the pleasant fellow in Buffalo who offers a First Aid Antiseptic Kit for 25c; the Novelty Jobber in Miami Beach who sells aspirin and opals; the excellent lad in Greensburg, Indiana, who (for \$1) will give a chemical formula for saving furnace coal. Most of all, I think, I like the sportsman in Sudbury, Ontario, who says, "Surprise Your Friends by sending them Postal Views of Sudbury, the Nickel City." All you have to do is buy 5 picture cards of Sudbury for a quarter. Write your message, address them, and send them back to this gentleman with postage. He mails them for you, and all your friends think you've been staying in Sudbury. Naturally they're surprised.

I like, too, the honest merchant of Des Plaines, Ill., who says bluntly "What I am after is names. I represent a manufacturer who is willing to pay a good price for same."

But the name of that young woman isn't going to do you much good, old shark. Because I go to the P. O. myself, and after this Big Mails Galore and Opportunity Packages drop right in the basket.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.