



LEANE ZUGSMITH

Brittle Compassion

"HOME IS WHERE YOU HANG YOUR CHILDHOOD." By Leane Zugsmith. New York: Random House. 1937. \$1.50.

THE NEW YORKER has had a good deal of recognition for having revolutionized the humorous picture legend from the two-line question and answer to the one-line caption. But not so much has been said about the fact that this magazine has evolved a new form in short fiction writing. A *New Yorker* story seldom runs as much as 3,000 words. Plot is present in character form. Compression is vital, but a sense of illusive leisurely unfolding must prevail; a sort of conversational intimacy must seem to have existed for years between the writer and his reader. *The New Yorker* molded such stories, and by and large the best ones still appear in its pages.

Some of the ten stories of Leane Zugsmith collected in this book originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, some in other magazines. It would be instructive to try to guess which one *Story* took, and which one *The New Masses* favored. They vary in subject matter only; the voice is now and again the voice of *The New Republic*, but the hands are always the hands of the F-R Publishing Corporation.

And the stories are well done. They would be more arresting individually than read one after another between the covers of a book. That admirable manner tends to seem monotonous after a bit. "Room in the World" appeared in this year's O'Brien collection. "The Betrayal," which also deals with the hopeless problems of the exploited worker, is an even better sketch. All of Miss Zugsmith's conceptions are tragic ones; all are authentic enough. But despite her compassion and subtlety she is a shade too brittle and more than a shade too determined to deliver her message whether you like it or not.

Seething City

FERMENT. By John T. McIntyre. New York: Farrar and Rinehart. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by N. L. ROTHMAN

IN the midst of the generally enthusiastic chorus which greeted "Steps Going Down" this reviewer found himself maintaining a discordant solo, with certain objections to that story's possessing "nothing we think about, nothing that happens in our own world." That book seemed rich enough in technical deftness and prolific invention, but it seemed also to be as meaningless as a beautifully geared perpetual motion machine suspended in air, with no attachments to transform its power into work. "Ferment" is quite another matter. All of that same deft power is here, but now it is doing something, telling a story that counts, working out some of the basic ideas and forces that are even at this moment crowding the news and forcing our attention. "Steps Going Down" was a prize winner, but "Ferment" is a finer, more thorough, much more significant piece of work.

The difference resides chiefly in Mr. McIntyre's definitions of his characters and of their functionings. The people of his earlier book were shadowy, "flat" types, interesting and incredible. Here at the very center of "Ferment" we have the half-brothers, Steve and Tom Brown, thoroughly developed with all the complexities of light and shade, of passion and irresolution, of the genuine quirks and angles of character, that could possibly be brought to play upon them. More than that, Steve is not only a flashy, smooth opportunist, but he is also an undercover worker for a strike-breaking agency; and Tom is not only sturdy, slow-thinking, sentimental, but he is also treasurer in a cabbies' union. Their story is the hinge upon which a greater problem swings open. As we follow them along we penetrate deep into those obscure layers of

city life that have long fermented and are now emitting spurts of steam and stench. This is today's news, illumined with data the newspapers cannot provide: the machinery of labor politics, the making and breaking of strikes, the tentative grappling for the strangle-hold, and the parasites of the labor world—spies, provocateurs, racketeers. It might be possible to doubt Mr. McIntyre's accuracy, so startling is some of his material, if it were not for the fact that the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee in Washington is now turning up the very same material in the course of its investigations, item for item.

The long, varied gallery of characters that stream through "Ferment" are tribute again to Mr. McIntyre's proven talents for swift delineation and for the setting down of hard, true talk. Sometimes it

seems as though the book were made of talk. Not very much happens before us; almost everything has just happened or is about to happen, while we are listening to this modern dialogue-commentary as it gives us the mirror of action in racy speech. Yet every one of the speakers has a particle of the whole truth in him. As they meet, in one group or another, crossing and re-crossing paths, the effect is as of the shifting of the pieces in a kaleidoscope. Every now and then we suddenly perceive the design in the making. It is a subtle and difficult method, which works out beautifully here. One



WATER STREET STAIRS: A scene in Philadelphia, the city where "Ferment" is laid. Etching by Joseph Pennell.

great advantage it has is to permit Mr. McIntyre a kind of objectivity which perhaps no other approach would afford. It gives him the freedom of being no man's advocate, unless it be for the good man against the vicious. The argument will be made that this is a cold and useless freedom, and that such books as "Ferment" should be written with more heat and anger in them; but it may be that those who hold this view will in the end be best served by the clarity and precision of such uncompromising writing as this.

Hollywood Legend

THE GREAT GOLDWYN. By Alva Johnston. New York: Random House. 1937. \$1.50.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

SAMUEL GOLDWYN, as virtually everyone knows, has two contradictory reputations—one as Mr. Malaprop, an assassin of English words and locutions, and one as the greatest producer of art for art's sake in motion pictures. Alva Johnston, as capable a writer and reporter as we have among us, is far too wary to vouch for the accuracy of either legend, but at times as he assembles his evidence he carefully says "legend" when it is fairly obvious that he is thinking "myth."

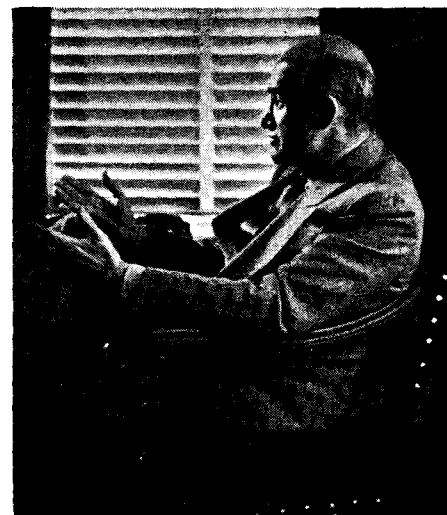
"The Great Goldwyn" is neither iconoclastic nor idolatrous. The Goldwyn pictures are more regularly superb, sublime, colossal, and magnificent—or at least, good—than those of any of the other studios; real triumphs like Goldwyn's "Stella Dallas," "Arrowsmith," "These Three," should go into the permanent literature of motion pictures. It is even possible, as Mr. Johnston suggests—though not on his own authority, the craven—that if Shakespeare were alive Goldwyn would have him. Some of the dismal evidences of fallibility in even the greatest human genius—"Cymbeline," "Titus Andronicus," "Troilus and Cressida"—might have been improved by correction which the author suggests as beginning like this: "It stinks, Wagspeare. It's lousy. It's terrible. It's ghastly. You're ruining me, Wagstaff."

On the other hand, art or no art, Mr. Goldwyn produces Eddie Cantor's con-

sistently rowdy and profitable pictures, and he is not above an occasional device that will wow them and roll them in the aisles, because it always has. He does not have the gaping maw of an exhibitors' chain to cram and can take his time and all the advice he needs. This comment, however, does not affect the fact that Mr. Goldwyn's pictures are usually distinguished but it may help to explain why his ratio of quality is so high as against that of the other studios.

The Mr. Malaprop tradition which furnishes such an entertaining contradiction to the undeniable fact that Mr. Goldwyn produces articulate and frequently beautiful pictures may have any one or all of several sources. It seems possible that coming into the windy and rhetorical business of pictures, the former glove salesman may have tried rashly to beat his associates at their own game with lamentable results. The corollary might be that he accepted the unavoidable and took up a policy of strategic non-resistance, like a wrestler suddenly falling with the hold or the Russians retreating from Moscow.

There is a possibility, not too remote, that Mr. Goldwyn has a dramatic flair for the part of the inspired fool, an elocutionary Parsifal. That would not be a new role even for Hollywood. Mr. Will Rogers always contended in public, that all he knew was what he read in the papers, and Ed Wynn boasted that he was the Perfect Fool before commercial opportunity made him the Fire Chief. Gracie Allen would not be at large if she were the triumphant imbecile she amusingly represents. Wynn and Miss Allen are known to take off their clown's caps, away



SAMUEL GOLDWYN

from the stage, but in the case of Rogers there was a question of whether motley was his only wear or merely his Sunday suit. The same holds true of Goldwyn.

The internal evidence, the context of Mr. Goldwyn's violations of literary decorum, proves nothing whatever. Some of his errors are too effective and too cunning to be accidental; some are too spontaneous to be studied. Many statements that are represented as Goldwyn howlers would pass from other men's mouths as whimsical or lightly fantastic or even witty.

If Nunnally Johnson had said, "Gentlemen, include me out," the remark would have been considered a shrewd thrust at the ordinary pomposity of diction in Hollywood business conferences. Coming from Samuel Goldwyn it raised a laugh from coast to coast, though it may easily have been the irony of a man irritated by too much pretentious gabble. A metaphor as weirdly mixed as the one Goldwyn applied to directors—"they're always biting the hand that lays the golden egg"—takes a deal of mixing. "I would be sticking my head in a moose," is simply incredible. "You're always taking the bull between the teeth" seems calculated, or else frenzied. Almost anyone might have said to a bridge partner, "Didn't you hear me keeping still?"

Mr. Johnston's hypothesis is that a fair share of Goldwyn's blunders are invented by his publicity men and that most of them are due to careless preoccupation—who cares about the American language when there is a picture to be made! The idea holds water. No one in his right senses, and there is no question about Mr. Goldwyn's sanity, thinks that Indians are kept in reservoirs, or that race-horses are ridden by caddies, or that trumpets (this has been censored since it left the Coast and went into the *Post*) are served with tea, or that people are "laid up by intentional flu."

Most impressive of the anecdotes that Mr. Johnston has conservatively interpreted are those credible ones which bear



DURING THE FILMING OF "BARBARY COAST"

From left: Miriam Hopkins, Samuel Goldwyn, Edna Ferber, Howard Hawks, Lawrence Tibbett, and Edward G. Robinson.