

autos and steel, it may take more than such a conquest, however spectacular and unexpected, to determine the outcome of labor's civil war. In terms of political influence the American Federation of Labor is benefiting from the existence of a rival to the "left" of itself, producing sympathy among a lower middle class which, while refusing to believe that Franklin D. Roosevelt is a dictator, may be influenced to react differently to Lewis. Bizarre though it may sound to a reading public brought up on the concept of the proletariat—read the factory workers *par excellence*—an advanced economic society shows an occupational structure in which trades and miscellaneous special groups are no less important. Hence the friends of the labor movement as well as of American democracy ought to be straining their ears not for the tolling of funeral bells but for voices counseling compromise and reunion.

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## No Two Alike

**THIRTEEN O'CLOCK.** *Stories of Several Worlds.* By Stephen Vincent Benét. New York: Farrar and Rinehart. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM MAXWELL

AS the subtitle indicates, these stories are various in time and place. Several of them deal rather casually with the supernatural. In none of them does the style have the immediacy and the impact which come from first-hand knowledge, and which we now expect from the modern short story.

But there's a catch in this first-hand business. Try to remember accurately the contents of last month's *Story* magazine. You probably won't be able to do it. But you can stop anybody any time with such a story as "The Curfew Tolls," in "Thirteen O'Clock," which goes back of the realistic pattern to an earlier one where narrative is more important than first-hand knowledge of people or places or things. It is the kind of story which is better read aloud. It belongs to the tribe.

No two of Mr. Benét's stories are much alike—not even the already famous "The Devil and Daniel Webster" and "Daniel Webster and the Sea Serpent." All of them are logical and well-made. Even when they seem to be merely clever ("A Story by Angela Poe") or merely charming ("Glamour") they are not really so. When Mr. Benét approaches an important subject, when he faces the meaning of Nazi brutality, for example, he can carry that kind of story off, too. Anyone who reads "The Blood of the Martyrs" is more than likely to remember it, and if you remember a story, there is little point in worrying about the literary fashion it follows.

## A Rare English Poet

**EDWARD THOMAS: A Biography and A Bibliography.** By Robert P. Eckert. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company. 1937. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

THIS account of a young and remarkable writer who from poetry in prose turned to poetry in verse at the time of the late Great War, and was killed by a German shell at Vimy ridge, is a book overdue, and constitutes a long search and a labor of love on the part of Mr. Eckert, who did not even know Thomas's identity until some seven years ago. His first introduction to him was through that most candidly beautiful of love stories told by the poet's widow, Helen Thomas, in "As It Was." Mr. Eckert did not identify the "David" in it till later. The book was simply signed "H. T."

To many American poets Thomas's work has been known for some time, though his recognition was late. Most of his life of less than forty years (he was born in the Victorian era and died on Easter Monday, 1917) was devoted to prose writing in order to keep body and soul together and support his little family. He produced some most beautiful essays concerning the English countryside, did various works of biography and jobs of editing, and wrote one novel, "The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans." Before leaving England for the Front he gave to Roger Ingpen, the famous Shelley scholar, the manuscript of his "Poems by Edward Eastaway" (using a pen-name he had attached to six previously published poems), and this book was said to have been in the press when Thomas was killed in France on the ninth of April. It was published in 1917. Three years later Walter de la Mare wrote a foreword to the "Collected Poems."

One of the most interesting things about Thomas to Americans was his close friendship with Robert Frost and the influence Frost exerted upon him in turning him definitely to verse in the last phase of his life. They first met at the home of Dorothy and Vivian Locke Ellis in February 1913, at which time Thomas was estranged from his wife, to whom he returned, and who, throughout his life, was his most staunch and understanding comrade and lover. Mr. Eckert quotes

Not so grete feythe in al that londe  
he  
Fonde as in a woman; and this is no  
lye.

The reader should turn to "As It Was" and "World Without End," both by "H. T."

Thomas was by nature highly sensitive and moody, and when he felt he was not properly supporting his wife and small children, though he drove himself to task after journalistic task, the acid



EDWARD THOMAS

Hoppé

ate into his soul. Even so, to the present biographer his best essays ("Rest and Unrest" and "Light and Twilight") reveal one "who was possessed of a deep spiritual beauty of character and a wide and universal sympathy for men and nature; who, with Shelley and Jefferies, was aware of the universe, that nature is vitally alive."

He and his family moved much, from home to small home over the English countryside, but never seemed truly to find a home. Thomas was given to long walking trips, mostly alone. Apparently wrapped in melancholy abstraction, he was yet a close observer of all the characteristics of the country and all manner of minute natural detail.

Edward Thomas's country poetry, in natural turns of speech, has weathered the last twenty years very well. It can be read today with delight in its freshness of observation and expression. His "Haymaking" is full of good things:

The swift with wings and tail as sharp  
and narrow  
As if the bow had flown off with the  
arrow. . .

And here is a brief but much-admired poem of Thomas's:

### COCK-CROW

Out of the wood of thought that  
grows by night  
To be cut down by the sharp axe of  
light,—  
Out of the night, two cocks together  
crow,  
Cleaving the darkness with a silver  
blow:  
And bright before my eyes twin  
trumpeters stand,  
Heralds of splendor, one at either  
hand,  
Each facing each as in a coat of  
arms:—  
The milkers lace their boots up at the  
farms.

## The Federal Theater

(Continued from page 4)

chester, N. H.; Waterloo, Iowa, and Omaha, Neb. Other cities received a mixture of these and livelier and more weighty dramas. San Diego saw "The Wild Duck," San Francisco, "The Emperor Jones," "An Enemy of the People" was unfolded in Chicago, "Twelfth Night" in Miami, and Wilmington was regaled—not altogether to its joy—by "Julius Caesar" in modern dress.

This dramatic bill of fare, a varied and extensive one, was flavored, wherever the flavoring was at all palatable to the audience, with as large a dash of social drama as the audience would swallow—plays like "Triple-A Ploughed Under," "Class of '29," "Battle Hymn," and "Chalk Dust." New York, by the way, got by far the heaviest dose of propaganda. Perhaps the most ambitious scheme of production was the simultaneous presentation of twenty-one acting companies in Sinclair Lewis's dramatized "It Can't Happen Here" in eighteen different cities. Mr. Lewis, also an astute showman, probably realized that 21 times 50 equals \$1,050—higher weekly royalties than most good plays and any bad play—like "It Can't Happen Here"—could possibly receive on Broadway.

Much praise has been bestowed on the Federal Theater for its courage and sagacity in trying out classic and experimental plays which the public would not otherwise have seen. It is true that the best, the most interesting, and—a healthy sign—the most successful Federal Theater shows were all plays of this nature. In this connection, however, there is a point that ought to be stressed in fairness to the hard-boiled men of commerce in the professional theater: namely, that a subsidized theater which does not have to—which is not, in fact, allowed to—make money need not take expense into account or consider risks. With unlimited rehearsal time, and unlimited actors at its disposal—actors who must be given employment at a fixed relief wage—it is not only fun to experiment, it is easy. "It Can't Happen Here," for instance, as presented in New York by the Federal Theater, with a huge cast and multiple scene changes, would have cost a Broadway manager at least \$30,000 to produce and from \$10,000 to \$15,000 weekly to operate. At a \$3.30 top, the show would have had to run for six or eight weeks, at least, at capacity even to get out of the red. The Federal Theater, without any high labor costs (labor eats up from sixty to seventy per cent of overhead and operating costs in the professional theater), with a low theater rental, signed on a long-term basis, and with the material costs of production considerably depressed owing to bulk buying, was obviously able to present the play for a much smaller sum, and it could let the show run ad infinitum at a fifty-five

cent top, if it chose to, without worrying about whether the intake paid for the weekly overhead or the production costs (which, needless to say, it didn't). The Federal Theater, too, could experiment with what is said to have been tremendously expensive lighting equipment for "Faustus," picking and choosing, keeping and discarding material at will (since everything that was not used could be sent to the FTP shop), where a commercial manager would have to count the cost.

There is no criticism, real or implied, in the statement that Federal Theater productions did not have to be governed by the laws of economics—since the FTP was deliberately set up on a basis on which it could not compete with private enterprise and its shows were never expected to pay expenses on a cash and carry basis. But when people wonder: "Why is it that Broadway managers don't experiment the way the Federal Theater does?" there is one perfectly good answer in the oft-repeated phrase: "It's too damned expensive." And when they say: "Well, isn't it grand to see the Federal Theater experimenting?" the answer is: "Yes. Provided the physical cost of experimentation does not consume too much of the money allocated for relief."

To Hallie Flanagan, National Director of the project, formerly professor of drama at Vassar, must go the credit for coördinating the whole unwieldy project, for making order out of the chaos that first reigned in the twelve regional districts set up over the country (now reduced to five), and for accomplishing a gigantic task. Mrs. Flanagan, her critics state, had a tendency to pick the wrong people for important jobs. She certainly gave positions to a great many people who had had little or no practical experience in anything but amateur theatricals. But, in fairness to her, it must be stated that, at first, none of the best professionals would have anything to do with the undertaking. And, considering the tremendous practical difficulties, the Government red tape that had to be cut before anything at all could be done, even her severest critics admit her accomplishment.

The charge that she, more than anyone else, has been responsible for the strong left-wing tendencies of the project, especially in the New York area, Mrs. Flanagan must, at least indirectly, admit. At the outset, she urged all the playwrights on relief (very few of them were playwrights at all, if playwriting is to be judged by standards other than those of wishful thinking) to write out of their own experience. It was only to be expected that most of them would turn to that theme which was nearest to their hearts—bitterness against the social system that had denied them success and a living wage. If any of them had really been fine playwrights, a "Lower Depths" might have resulted; as it was, a series of,

for the most part, petulant and inexpert radical plays were fabricated, which only served, many believe, to turn away from the Federal Theater a large potential audience which was not interested in radical plays, especially when they were bad plays.

The Federal Theater—laying the blame for the charges of radicalism at the feet of William Randolph Hearst and the economic royalists—does not believe that its plays have been too radical. And it denies the fact that any of its audience has been turned away by propaganda. The New York office, in fact, has a list of about 5,000 organizations—social, religious, economic, etc.—to which it regularly sends applications for block booking of tickets and it claims that none of these, so far, has been driven from the fold by the fear of Red propaganda in their plays. On the other side of the picture, a former director of one large FTP unit (an honest man, even if he remains nameless) claims that he saw the responses from one series of applications in New York and that practically the only organizations applying for tickets were left-wing groups. All the vast right-wing audience, he believes, has been alienated, by the propaganda, direct or indirect. And while he does not think that most of the FTP heads would go as far as Miss Whitman in asserting that "no better use for the taxpayer's money could be found" than to "tell the taxpayers how to vote" (at least, not for publication) he is firmly convinced that drama, to the majority of the directors, means theater with a living—and one-sided—message.

Looked at—in too close perspective—as an artistic rather than a relief project, the FTP has accomplished, so far, little of any lasting consequence. It has developed no great actors, playwrights, directors, designers, or technicians—but then no one expected that it would. The one important contribution that it may, in time, be proved to have made to American theatrical history—and this can only be judged in later years—is to kindle and rekindle interest in flesh and blood drama throughout the country among the thousands, or millions, who had not seen a stage play for years or had never seen one. Many people are convinced that it already has accomplished this feat; many others, that the interest aroused is only abortive, that the bad productions and the low price scale of the FTP will hinder rather than help the professional theater. But if even one-tenth of the vast audience the Federal Theater has reached is reclaimed for the professional theater of generations to come, a theater presenting "living action and real theater" throughout the land, then the millions of dollars spent will be paid back, with dividends, to the drama of the future.

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## Woolcott Presents:

From the forthcoming "Woolcott's Second Reader," shortly to be published by the Viking Press, *The Saturday Review* prints three of the eighteen "Afterwords" written by Alexander Woolcott in comment upon certain selections in his anthology. Although addressed to readers who have just finished the books under discussion, they are equally interesting, if not more so, as introductions. We publish them herewith as a unique variant of our occasional feature, "The Test of Time."

—THE EDITOR.

### Kenneth Grahame's "The Golden Age"

IN 1895, a year in which my own reading was pretty much confined to "Tom Sawyer"—after sundown I was under orders to skip the chapter on Injun Joe and the murder in the graveyard because it invariably led me to disturb the family by screaming in my sleep—in that distant era, the Olympians around me had sated themselves on the disturbing delights of "Trilby" and turned to this gentle and delicate masterpiece which had just come out of England. For some years thereafter, "The Golden Age" and its sequel "Dream Days" could be found within reach in every house in England and America where there were any books at all. "The Golden Age" even underwent the experience of being illustrated by Maxfield Parrish. It was read aloud to all the little wide-eyed Roosevelts in the White House, and the Kaiser kept a copy aboard his yacht. One seldom sees it anywhere nowadays; all around me now are youngsters who have never read "The Roman Road" nor heard the burglars vanish into the shrubbery with horrid implications.

The inconsequent chapters of "The Golden Age" were the holiday fantasies of a seemly banker chap who became in due time the Secretary of the Bank of England—this Kenneth Grahame who was born in Edinburgh in 1859 and died in 1932. The haze-hung prelude called "The Olympians" and several other chapters were wrung from him as contributions to the *National Observer*, a weekly of which the stormy editor, William Ernest Henley, tried in vain to persuade this promising pen to abandon the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street altogether. But it was Grahame's own notion that he was a spring and not a pump. Editors would be wise not to count on him. Oddly enough, the bulk of the papers which make up "The Golden Age" first appeared (along with the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley and other agitating ephemera of the mauve decade) in that short-lived periodical called the *Yellow Book*.

After thus momentarily "commencing author," Grahame then took on such exacting work at the bank that some years passed without a word from him. Indeed, he might never have been heard from again had he not married and found himself with a small exigent son—Alastair Grahame, who was known around the house as Mouse. Mouse demanded a story every night before he would go to sleep. One May evening in 1904, Mouse's mother, waiting for her husband to escort her to a dinner engagement, stood tapping her foot in the hallway. "Where is Mr. Grahame, Louise?" Her maid, standing with fan, shawl, and cloak held in readiness, replied with a sniff of disapproval: "He's with Master Mouse, madam. He's telling him some ditty or other about a toad." This was the first announcement of "The Wind in the Willows." For even when Mouse was shipped off with his governess for a summer at Littlehampton, the story had to be continued by post and it was from these fifteen letters, which the governess had the wit to save, that the book was put together. Ever since the first success of "The Golden Age," all American editors had been beseeching Grahame for copy. Wherefore when "The Wind in the Willows" was ready for print he sent it to the editor of *Everybody's Magazine* who turned it down. All that was long ago. *Everybody's* is no more, and Mouse himself was killed at a railway crossing when he was an undergraduate at Oxford.

### Somerset Maugham's "Cakes and Ale"

On the dust-jacket of "Cakes and Ale: or The Skeleton in the Cupboard" in its current American edition, Mr. Maugham's publishers print the following paragraph:

Rosie, the barmaid, was the skeleton in the cupboard, who by her zest for living raised the lives of her lovers to higher and more vivid levels.

Which succinct summary might strike the



R. H. Hoffman

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

From "U. S. Camera, 1935" (*Morrow*).

captious as leaving certain odds and ends of the novel's substance unaccounted for. It strikes even the not overly critical compiler of these footnotes as leaving something still to be said. To be sure, a good deal *was* said when the book was first published in 1930, except, as far as I know, the salient thing—that, as an example of the storyteller's art, "Cakes and Ale" is a masterpiece unsurpassed in our language in our time.

When Boswell's now hallowed life of Dr. Johnson was new, it seemed so freshly topical, so personal and even sensational a work that only after the dust had settled, did many appreciate it as a biography not without merit. In somewhat the same way, "Cakes and Ale"—particularly in its own London—was so promptly identified as a *roman à clef* and as such caused so many outbursts of wrath, so many gusts of nervous and malicious laughter, that its brilliance as a novel—its astounding technical dexterity and its brimming charm—were, for a time, lost sight of. It was surely inevitable that Driffield's achievement of literary fame by sheer longevity should bring to mind Thomas Hardy, that Mrs. Whiffen of English letters, who only two years before had to a great extent—his heart was taken out and buried elsewhere—been laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. Wherefore Hardy's friends were filled with grief in the not unreasonable fear that readers who did not know any better might think of Ted Driffield's personal life—particularly the early part with all its unseemly skulduggery—as having also been patterned after Hardy's. Then all the wiseacres felt sure they knew at whom Mr. Maugham was pointing when