

## Letters to the Editor: *Beer and Skittles* *Radio Reviewing and Charm*

### Certainly, We're Interested

SIR:—I recount an incident in which you may be interested.

There is a little short-order eating place out on North Fresno Street which specializes in rather plain food and reasonably quick service. The patrons appearing there during the noon hour are mostly office workers and are invariably in a rush, so anyone languishing in a lassitude over his food or drink is an object of more or less interest.

I lunched there one afternoon and, looking up from the table, my eyes fell upon a weather-beaten man of uncertain years who sat hunched on a stool across the way with his elbows leaning heavily on the counter. A large hat was pushed far back on his head and he stared disconsolately into a tall glass of foaming beer.

He maintained this motionless attitude for full five minutes then, lifting the brimming glass to his lips, drained half its contents in a single draught. He replaced it on the counter and raised and lowered his shoulders in a deep sigh.

He was as oblivious to the bustle going on about him as though he were alone. The waitress smiled at him as she passed to wait on another patron, but his eyes merely followed her to the end of the counter then returned to the sudsy depths of the half filled glass.

After a while he slowly and deliberately disengaged his boot-encased feet from the rungs of the stool and ambled over to the phonograph in one corner. He looked over the list of recordings. After ponderous deliberation he made a selection, pressed a small button and inserted a nickle in the slot. He returned, finished his beer.

A melancholy song of the range filled the place with plaintive notes.

"Give me back my boots and my saddle . . ." a low voice moaned, "Um-m-m-m um-m-m-m um-m-m-m . . ."

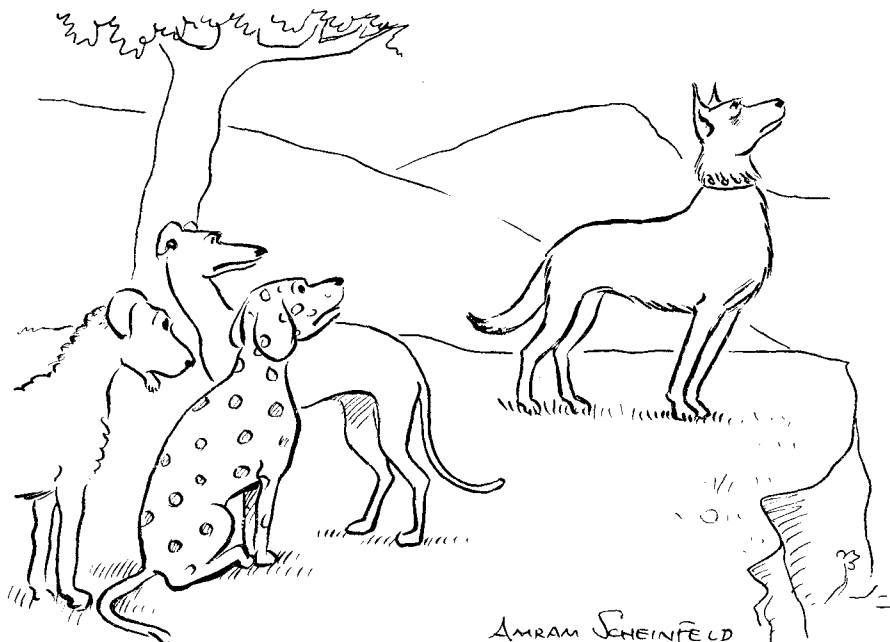
He listened to the entire recording with a dull stolidness. When the last notes had waned he stirred, motioned to the waitress, and ordered another beer.

She filled the glass and placed it, foaming, before him. He rested his arms on the counter, and entwined the toes of his boots around the rungs of the stool. His head hung down loosely. He fixed his eyes on the bubbling beverage and there sat in dejected immobility.

Then, with one hand he started toying with the glass, turning it about in its damp circle. His fingers slowly ran up and down the sides making patterns in the moisture. Then he lifted the glass to his lips and drank long and slowly.

He set it down and started to fumble about in his pockets, bringing out various articles and returning them to the depths from whence they came. He found what he was seeking at last. Getting down from the stool he walked over to the phonograph again and inserted a nickle.

The same song . . . the same voice . . . "Give me back my boots and my saddle . . . um-m-m-m um-m-m-m um-m-m-m . . ."



AMRAM SCHEINFELD  
"SHE'S BEEN LIKE THAT EVER SINCE SHE WAS GLORIFIED IN ONE OF ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE'S STORIES."

He returned to his beer. He played with the glass, turning it first this way, then that. He drank the remainder and ordered another. The waitress filled the glass up and smiled as she placed it before him. He considered it intently.

He drank a bit of it and after a while pulled a folded paper out of his hip-pocket. He spread it out before him and started to read. The song was wailing to an end.

I had finished my lunch and walked over to the counter.

The paper was *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

"He's been here for three hours listening to that cursed song, staring into his beer, and reading that blasted paper!" the waitress confided in a staccato whisper as I paid my check.

KAY KOCH.

Fresno, Calif.

### "Michael Fairless"

SIR:—May I beg the hospitality of your columns for an appeal to all lovers of "Michael Fairless," the author of "The Roadmender"?

She lies buried in this peaceful little Sussex churchyard. The population of the village is just over 300, mostly working farmers and laborers. The church is a beautiful little building dating in part from Norman days, and is kept in good repair. But the spire had fallen into decay, and the reshingling, etc., which were urgently necessary, have cost £180.

It is a wonderful village for giving. Inhabitants of neighboring larger villages often ask me, "How does little Ashurst manage to contribute so much to charitable purposes?" We have even managed to get £150 odd towards this heavy expense (but £70 thereof by surrender of an endowment policy). But the remaining £230 or so will be difficult to get.

Will the admirers of "Michael Fairless" in your generous country; or will those who like to help those who help themselves; or will those whose forebears came from the sweet county of Sussex, feel moved to send any subscription for this purpose, addressed either to the Churchwardens of the parish or to me? It would be most gratefully received, and the names of the donors duly recorded.

(THE REV.) R. F. ASHWIN.

Ashurst Rectory, Nr. Steyning  
Sussex, England

### One Reason

SIR:—Though you do not, in your article of July 17, in the *Saturday Review*, ask for further comments upon the discrepancy between the reviewers' reception of "They Came Like Swallows," and that of the book-buying public, may I offer an experience that may be suggestive of a partial reason.

Two radio broadcasts, in dramatic form, were issued this spring—one of "We Are Not Alone," the other of "They Came Like Swallows." I listened in to both, the former after reading the book, the latter before reading the book.

My reaction to the first was regret that "time necessity" had demanded the sacrifice of many of the more delicate details of the story. As to the second, I found myself convinced that, for the same reason, many hearers would miss the essential quality of the story in a similar way.

As a book reviewer and lecturer and teacher of many years' standing, such means of advertising seem to me deplorable. It is "stealing the thunder," thus to present the form of books, whose major claim to literary merit is in the handling, atmosphere, allusiveness, point of view—in short, the elements of that indefinable quality—charm.

MARIAN LYNNE.

# W. P. A. Workers in Mufti

*AMERICAN STUFF. By Members of the Federal Writers' Project. With 16 Prints by The Federal Art Project. New York: The Viking Press. 1937. \$2.*

Reviewed by EUGENE ARMFIELD

WRITERS employed by the Federal Writers' Project have been making an enviable reputation for themselves with a series of admirable American guide books, the most recent of which is at present creating a furor in Massachusetts. "American Stuff" has nothing to do with work for the Project. It is an anthology of creative work produced by the writers and artists on their own time. The volume makes clear, however, that the excellence of the Idaho, City of Washington, Massachusetts, and other guides is no accident, for these pages were produced by sincere, talented, and industrious artists.

Different from many anthologies, "American Stuff" has unusual unity. Most of the pieces, whether prose, verse, folklore, or prints, are informed by an acute awareness of the experience of millions of people in present day America. Most of them attempt to deal with the world in realistic terms. It's a hard

world, a world of depression and skimping and shattered hopes. It's a world, though, as seen through the eyes of these writers, filled with human beings; and while the writers look at the lives about them with earnest eyes, they are seldom grim. There's a perhaps surprising amount of humor in "American Stuff."

Any anthology is apt to be uneven in quality. The general level of "American Stuff" is high: few of the writers can be said to soar, but not many of them offer work which is downright bad. On the whole the prose is better than the verse, and the work of the little known writers is far superior to that of their more famous colleagues. Vardis Fisher, for example, must have reached far back in his desk drawer to find the thin little anecdote he calls "Martha's Vacation." A list of the most effective prose pieces would have to include Ida Faye Sachs's "Fair Afternoon," the best single piece in the volume; Ivan Sandrof's story, "Just For Fun"; Richard Wright's excellent autobiographical sketch, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow"; Fred Rothermell's "Lexington Express"; Leon Dorais's amusing story of a relief office, "Mama, the Man Is Standing There," and Carl Wilhelmson's Finnish tale, "Juggler's Gold." The

poems of Raymond E. F. Larson, Robert E. Hayden, and Helen Neville, and the prints of Harold Lehman, Hubert Davis, Jack Markow, and Esteban Soriano stand out from not very exciting backgrounds.

A good portion of the volume is given over to a series of pieces called "Americana," songs, stories, and anecdotes set down by members of the Project in the words of the untutored people from whom they came. The best have the racy and imaginative quality that is connected with the word "folk." The worst, like the lists of "Phrases of the People," seem pointless in a volume of creative work. The most rewarding of these folk pieces are to be found among the first Negro spiritual recorded by South Carolina Project Workers, "The Preacher's Song," set down by Maggie L. Leeper, the first convict song, recorded by John A. Loma, the Gullah story gathered by Genevieve W. Chandler, the tall tales of West Virginia, arranged by C. S. Barnett, and the very funny "Lookin' Fer Three Fools," recorded by Luther Clark.

"American Stuff" may very well not set the world on fire. But it contains much good writing and many pages that are interesting and highly readable.

Eugene Armfield is the author of "Where the Weak Grow Strong."

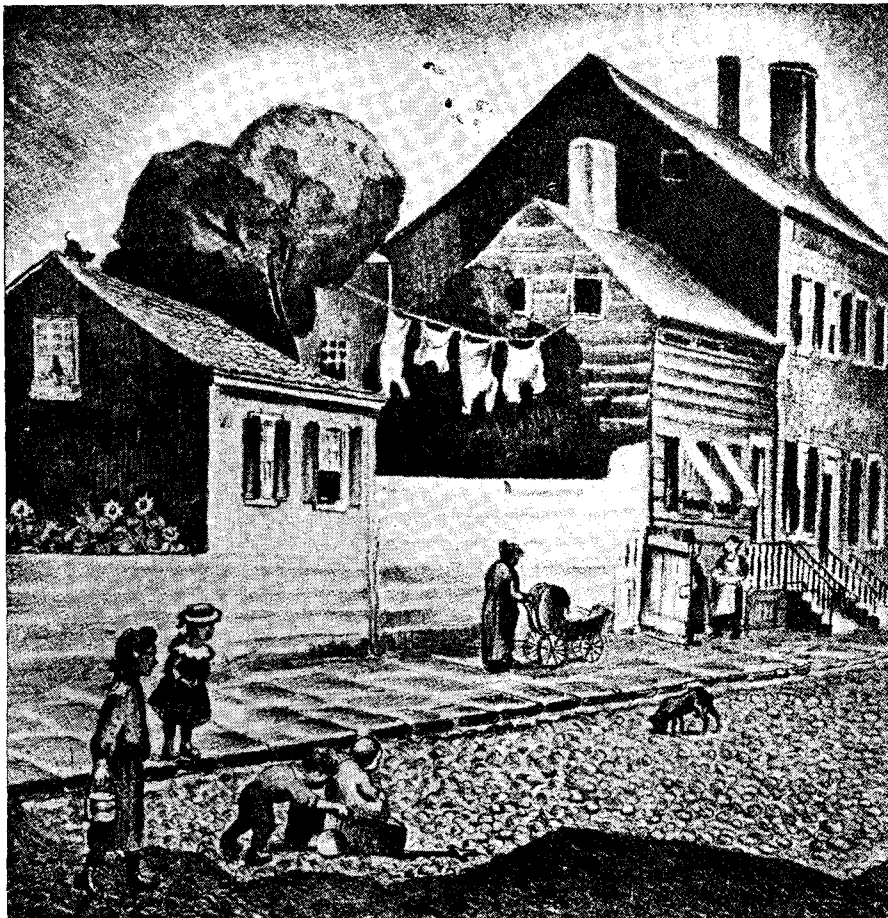
## Brakes on Inflation

(Continued from page 4)

vided it is dogmatically orthodox; but the rest of us need not bother with it until some proletarian writer produces something really good. As yet, none of them has produced anything that is altogether satisfactory to both the proletarian and the bourgeois eye. Strikes offer plenty of material for the novelist, but most of the novels so far written about strikes have been mediocre or downright bad, either because dogma got in the authors' way or because the authors were poor novelists to begin with. By far the best that I have read, Steinbeck's "In Dubious Battle," was not so much about a strike as about individuals whose field of activity happened to be a strike. The economic issue was no more than the accompaniment of soloists; in "The Octopus" it played the part of the orchestra in a Wagner opera.

There are more individual problems of current interest which might be exploited by sufficiently skillful hands. No doubt a great novel could be written about the conscience of a Supreme Court justice, if you had a great novelist to write it. The Dreiser of a decade or two ago could get convincingly inside the skin of a murderer or an embezzler; but that does not prove (I hope) that he could so successfully get inside the skin of a jurist. Supreme Court justices are more interesting just now than a Cowperwood or a Clyde Griffiths, but who knows what to say about them beyond editorial applause or condemnation?

All this may seem to rest on what some consider a gigantic fallacy—that literature



OLD GREENWICH VILLAGE. By MABEL DWIGHT  
From "American Stuff."