

Reporter's Story

I FOUND OUT. By Nat Ferber. New York: The Dial Press. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by JOSEPH F. DINNEEN

NAT FERBER was a Hearst crusader, assigned as often to create news as to report it, and although his autobiography contains a few more counts in the general criticism of Hearst, some mild and some important, it seems to me that he has written his eighth book a bit too hastily with the pressure of a deadline upon him. I think he could have written a much better autobiography if he had only taken his time and discussed more fully the persons he interviewed and the things he had seen.

Clemenceau invariably pointed out to me that he once taught school in New York. . . . As often as I interviewed Sarah Bernhardt, she reiterated "Camille she suffers, but not Bernhardt." . . . Jane Addams and I had a running friendly squabble born of my jocular insistence that she transfer her work to New York City. . . . I stood within a foot or two of Mrs. Hylan when the royalties from Belgium were received at City Hall and must confess that I did not



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hear the mayor's wife make the crack which has since been heard around the world, "You said a mouthful, Queen!"

Casual references like these sprout like weeds throughout the entire book, without any further explanation, description, or elucidation, and of the hundreds of persons mentioned in page after page the reader is left with curiosity unsatisfied. Where did he meet these people, under what circumstances, and what, as a journalist, did he think of them?

Things happen too suddenly and without preparation in this biography, and it seems to me that Ferber painted a picture that he did not intend to paint. During the World War, for instance, he seems to have made an investigation of a coal shortage in New York. He says such a coal shortage existed, and you'll have to take his word for it. There is no proof of it in the book. Through Hearst's Washington correspondent, Ferber arranged an interview with Woodrow Wilson. He walked into Wilson's office with blueprints and charts and, to quote Ferber: "I set to work like a sidewalk medicine man. With the wave of a magician yanking a rabbit from a top hat I rolled my blueprints on his desk."

Ferber reports the interview that followed in less than one hundred words. Apparently it ended when Wilson said: "What do you know about the coal business?" and arose to bid him good morning. Here Ferber naively explains that all he knew about the coal business he learned by studying the tables and blueprint. This was not intended to be funny. It is the serious report of a Hearst reporter talking to the President of a country at war about a coal shortage, whether real or imagined.

Ferber yearns with nostalgic twinges for the good old days of American journalism when an exposé or a narcotic racket or organized crippled begging would lead Page 1 on all New York papers. As I read it, I couldn't help feeling thankful that those days in American journalism are gone forever; and yet some of these pages I read in sheer amazement, because I could not bring myself to believe that some of Ferber's revelations are really intentional. Nat Ferber had a chance to do a great job here, but I'm afraid he missed the boat. I hope he makes it next time.

Joseph F. Dinneen, a Boston newspaper man, is the author of a novel, "Ward 8," and of a recent life of Pope Pius XII.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 270)

JOHN L. LOWES:
THE ROAD TO XANADU

The Coleridge notebook . . . is a record of the germinal ideas of one of the most supremely gifted and utterly incalculable spirits ever let loose upon the planet. . . . It is a jungle . . . peopled with uncanny life and strange exotic flowers.

American Opinion or British Propaganda?

PROPAGANDA FOR WAR: The Campaign against American Neutrality, 1914-1917. By H. C. Peterson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1939. \$3.

Reviewed by RAYMOND J. SONTAG

MR. PETERSON'S book, one may suspect, completes a cycle in historical writing. Disregarding earlier fragmentary studies, the cycle began a decade ago with C. Hartley Grattan's excellent "Why We Fought," and perhaps reached the high point with Walter Millis's "Road to War," although there is little perceptible decline in later works such as Charles C. Tansill's "America Goes to War." Mr. Peterson supplements the materials at the disposal of earlier writers. In particular, he gives many valuable quotations from the American Press Résumé of the British war-time propaganda office. On the whole, however, the plot unfolded in these pages has become slightly stereotyped, and there is a good chance that events of 1939 will shift our perspective on the years from 1914 to 1917.

The plot may be summarized as follows: it is impossible for a country to be unneutral and keep out of war; the United States government was unneutral from 1914 to 1917; British propaganda was the most important cause of American lack of neutrality; therefore, British propaganda was the most important cause of American entrance into the war. Now, the first link in this chain of reasoning is obviously weak. Britain was unneutral during our Civil War; neither Germany nor Britain was really neutral during the Russo-Japanese War—it is difficult to find examples of real neutrality during the wars recorded in history. The second link is much the strongest. Granted that our government and most of the articulate elements in American society were unneutral, how is that fact to be explained? British propaganda was copious, well financed, and well organized; Mr. Peterson makes that fact abundantly clear. He does not, however, prove his contention that the American attitude of mind was "the product of British propaganda." He shows that both the Allies and the Central Powers were responsible for the war; but that American opinion, like the British propagandists, held Germany responsible. He shows that the war was "a natural concomitant of the political transition caused by Germany's rise to power"; but that American opinion, again like the British propagandists, interpreted it as a struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. At one point after another he is able to show the agreement between what Americans thought and what the British wanted them to think.

Until a year or so ago, those who agree

with Mr. Peterson that America was the victim of a "confidence game" had the field pretty much to themselves. Today, however, the forces of light and the forces of darkness are again at war. Again, there is British propaganda. Again, a large part of articulate American opinion is saying what the British propagandists are saying. There is just as much, or just as little, cause and effect relation between British propaganda and American opinion in 1939 as there was in 1917; the issues are the same, whether expressed in terms of idealism or power politics. Then as now, idealism concealed the cold calculation that American interests would be jeopardized by a German victory.

Raymond J. Sontag is head of the department of history at Princeton University.

Nutmeg State

CONNECTICUT: PAST AND PRESENT.

By Odell Shepard. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1939. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

PROFESSOR ODELL SHEPARD, favorably known for his Pulitzer biography of Bronson Alcott and his excellent edition of Alcott's Journals, is also an essayist of distinction, and a lover of his state who is able to apply both grace and style and easy erudition to his subject. His book on Connecticut is the best of the series that has been appearing on that state, fruits presumably of its recent tercentenary.

The reader who expects a formal history or formal guide book will be disappointed. That is not Professor Shepard's method. He proceeds by a series of essays on stones in the field, on Connecticut wits, on little republics, on the Indians, on the lie of the land, very informal and written with leisure and charm. As the reader proceeds, however, he discovers that the author has all the available facts at his finger ends, and has done much shrewd historical thinking. He demolishes the legend of the pure democracy of early Connecticut and substitutes for it a Connecticut politically experienced, which is more concrete and equally important. In no other book is the curious social and political structure of Connecticut, which was determined both by the nature of its immigrants and the lie of the land, so well analyzed and described. If there is no chronological history of the state in this book, there is more essential history than in many much more pretentious volumes. Indeed, unlike the many publications that have been appearing, it is definitely a book for people to read who want to understand Connecticut, as well as a book for dwellers in that interesting state. Perhaps it rambles too much; but so do the back roads of Connecticut, and so seems to ramble the shrewd and reflective Connecticut mind.

Speaking for America

CORN. By Paul Engle. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1939. \$2.

Reviewed by SELDEN RODMAN

DIVIDING contemporary poetry between the heirs of Baudelaire and those of Whitman, we must admit that the broader tradition has been the more barren. With the possible exception of Carl Sandburg, no voice has been big enough to speak for the whole country. Jeffers might have done it, but the voice that refused to take the evil with the good was lost in the Pacific Ocean. Mr. Engle's "American Song" (1934) was one of many attempts to recapture the continent. The critics were on their toes, but they picked Paul Engle before he was ripe.

He had written "Now it is time . . . for this country to twist a lariat of us and throw it over the ocean-to-ocean-flinging land." Two years later, after a siesta in Oxford and a grand tour of the Continent, he addressed America again in the indignant "Break the Heart's Anger":

Because you thought you had a date
with a dame
Called Easy Money, for a thousand
years,
You took the immeasurable cloth of
time
And used it for a rag to shine your
shoes.

In his third book Paul Engle has settled down and is taking stock. He pays his respects to England's "Great cities of ghosts, larger than the living." He says good-bye to the totalitarian utopias. No longer interested in "the hopelessness of hope," but preferring Iowa where "The dead are so few and the alive so many," he seeks "not wisdom but a human sympathy." "Too long," he says, "I went with a great urge and shouting into life." For the first time there is an indication of concern with craft, approach to style. "March" and "Windy Night" are not only the best poems Paul Engle has written, they are the first completely successful ones. And, significantly, they are the shortest.

Which is not to say that Engle has mastered his medium. The very opening poem is a hopeless tangle of stylistic influences. "Give us the taste of our life here for the cold/Ache in our guts and the groan of our tongue telling" is perilously close to MacLeish's "Even the voice of the English has gone dry/And hard on the tongue and alive in the throat speaking." And MacNeice's "The gun-butt raps upon the door" is not improved by "the black gun-butt beating on the door." Trite images, "the rat trap of false hope," "the bullet's lust," have not been scoured away.

But for all that, "Corn" is a better book than its author's first two. Less pretentious, more honest, quieter, it quickens our hope that the Whitman tradition may still give the Wallace Stevenses and Delmore Schwartzes competition.

WOMEN UNDER FASCISM

In Germany and Italy women are in a position of medieval slavery—according to Sylvia Pankhurst in a masterly article in the June LIVING AGE. Quoting Fascist and Nazi official statements and describing new laws against the freedom and rights of women, Miss Pankhurst presents a terrifying picture of the fate of a young girl in a totalitarian state.

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