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TRADE WINDS

P. E. G. QUERCUS

THIS week—the anniversary of a battle at Waterloo—Old Q. doesn't feel much like talking about books. He has been keeping grimly inside his own particular concentration camp. When asked about politics, he replies that his choice is Willkie for Vice-President; while they are figuring out what that implies, he escapes. It would be however, a pretty sound idea. When Old Q. gets blue about what America means, he refreshes himself with one of the finest photos ever printed in *Life* a year or so ago. It showed Marian Anderson, the Negro singer, at the microphones in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington; and the seated figure of Old Abe showing faintly in the background.

The press has not always been very helpful in this war. It has been brisk in emphasizing the errors of statesmen; it can do no harm to remind itself occasionally of some of its own. On September 25, 1939, *Life* said: "Germany has mostly light tanks. France and Britain, with more big tanks, have clear superiority over Germany." On February 17, 1940, the *N. Y. Times* reported Philadelphia's exultation at getting the G.O.P. convention. The headlines said: "Philadelphia expects 100,000 visitors; estimates they will spend \$12,000,000." On March 31, 1940, Captain Liddell Hart said in the *N. Y. Times*: "The issue of this war is more likely to depend on a psychological than on a military initiative." On May 3, 1940, a Dutch correspondent in the *London Spectator* said "Holland has not allowed herself to be frightened. The natural defences of the country have been exploited to such purpose that invasion is made extremely difficult." On May 6, 1940, the *London Times* said in an editorial "The Germans will presumably now try to overrun Northern Norway." On May 17, 1940, the *Manchester Guardian* said: "Military men look for Marshal Gamelin's counter-stroke with confident expectation." On May 18, 1940, *London Cavalcade* ("The Journal That Keeps Thinking People Well Informed") said "The Man of the Hour Is Generalissimo Gamelin. A philosopher of war with an ice-cold brain. . . . he has the measure of the house-painter-turned-Napoleon."

It is painful to quote these things, but it may be useful to do so in a week when American journalism is assuring us it is turning over a new leaf. In some diligent reading of a batch of foreign weeklies, the best line we encountered was à propos Italy's entry into War: "Mussolini

clad in shining blackmail." (*New Statesman & Nation*.) Two days before the Nazis entered Paris we were talking with a broker about stock exchange trends; we said we anticipated a severe fiscal prostration about the time Hitler made his formal entry; the man of Wall Street made an enigmatic comment: "The fall of Paris is already discounted marketwise."

The upshot of all this is, watch yourself. Truth is already on war-time rations; watch what you read, and listen to what you hear. A world in which babies have to be carried from one country to another in a gas-proof box, and church bells reserved for air-raid alarms, is not a world to take at face value. Rosamond Lehmann, whose *Dusty Answer* is well remembered, wrote in the *London Spectator*: "I wonder for how many years we are doomed to a spate of bright frivolous novels designed to 'lighten the black-out.' My feeling about war-time reading is that scarcely anything is bearable except the best works of the greatest writers of fiction." Russell Doubleday in his excellent little book *Tree Neighbors* (which illustrates and describes 32 kinds of trees frequent in the East) pays tribute to a famous oak tree on Long Island. If it is *Quercus Gigantica*, the one to which we have alluded before, Mr. Doubleday even underestimates its dimensions. One of our clients took the trouble this spring to measure the oak which Old Q. adopted years ago as his special namesake. At the base its circumference is 24 feet 4 inches; diameter 8 feet. Limb spread 136 feet; estimated height 90 feet. According to Walt Whitman's old paper, *The Long-Islander*, this tree still holds the title we bestowed upon it as Largest Vegetable in the East.

Another check-up: a novelist was reproached for having made one of his characters, in the years 1911 and following, a devotee of a certain brand of Scotch whisky—which he identified by the nickname "the Pope's telephone number" (Vat 69). The objection was made that said brand was not introduced in the U. S. until after 1918. Old Q. himself looked the matter up, and is assured by the distillers (Messrs. Sanderson, of Leith, Scotland) that Vat 69 has been available in this country since 1903. We haven't heard anything lately about our old favorite, the Belgain artist, Felicien Rops, so we are pleased to note in a catalogue from Argosy, 114 East 59, two rare and costly volumes containing many reproductions of his etchings.