

...And She Found It

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE. By Virginia Cowles. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 447 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by LINTON WELLS

WHEN Virginia Cowles persuaded the Hearst Newspapers to let her write "mailers" for them from the Spanish Civil War in 1937, she already had been around the world once, but still was a pretty naive young lady. Her captivating journalistic memoirs—"Looking for Trouble"—reveal that Virginia's unaffected naturalness has not been disturbed very much, but four years of widespread dealings with power politics and the senseless brutalities of warfare certainly have made her "one of the boys."

This American socialite didn't exactly go "looking for trouble" but she found it in large quantities—from the Arctic to the Mediterranean; from the Baltic to the Black Sea—and reported contemporary history so competently as to become one of the outstanding foreign correspondents of our day—better known in England than in America, because her dispatches were written chiefly for the *Sunday Times* of London.

Virginia Cowles was able to hear more than most journalists, because of her astonishingly wide acquaintanceship in high places—particularly British.

You find her dining with Chamberlain, whom she pitied, and week-ending with Churchill, whom she admir-

ers. She calls other cabinet ministers, ambassadors, and military attaches by their first names and is a confidante of their wives. She evaded "passes" made by Balbo in Libya and sunbathed on Italian beaches with Ciano and Alfiero. She was on intimate terms with Unity Mitford, who gave her inside dope about Hitler.

According to Unity, "Hitler had a sense of humor and liked company. He was a man who seldom read, but when he was at Berchtesgaden spent a good time drawing up architectural plans for new housing settlements." (Territorially extensive, one might remark.) "But what he really likes," Unity said, "is excitement. Otherwise he gets bored." And, Unity added, "He says it's very exciting to have the whole world trembling before him. He needs the excitement as other people need food and drink." (As the world doesn't seem to be doing much trembling these days, Hitler must be rather hungry and thirsty.) Unity also revealed that Hitler likes scandalous gossip and "if he were not the Führer of Germany, he would make a hundred thousand dollars a year on the vaudeville stage"

as an imitator. Besides Goering, Goebbels, Himmler, and Mussolini, "sometimes he even imitates himself."

Virginia Cowles quotes Chamberlain as telling her that "unless the French find some new and vigorous leaders at once, they are finished as a first class power." This was after "Daladier and Bonnet flatly announced that France wouldn't fight for Czechoslovakia."

After the collapse of France, Pierre Laval confided in Virginia: "I don't think France is Germany's primary object. I think her *real* aim is Soviet Russia." Being so close to Germany, Laval was in a position to know.

"Looking for Trouble" certainly integrates events and personalities into a compact picture which is as absorbing as it is worthwhile—absorbing because it vividly depicts a courageous American newspaper woman struggling for her stories in the flaming vortex of war; worthwhile because it reveals clearly the history-making things she saw and heard as one nation after another died.

And when you lay down this volume you rather wonder if Virginia wasn't doing a spot of work on the side for the British Foreign Office. If not, then Whitehall overlooked a very good bet.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

10 SHORT STORY OPENINGS

Here are the opening lines of ten famous short stories. How many of them do you recognize? Allowing five points for each story you can name, and another five if you can also name its author, a score of 60 is par, 70 is good, 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 17.

1. East is East, and West is San Francisco, according to Californians. . . .

2. Midge Kelly scored his first knockout when he was seventeen. The knockee was his brother Connie, three years his junior and a cripple. . . .

3. In the very olden time, there lived a semi-barbaric king, whose ideas, though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of his distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid, and untrammelled, as became the half of him which was barbaric. . . .

4. Dennis de Beaulieu was not yet two and twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. . . .

5. Mrs. Ballinger is one of the ladies who pursue Culture in bands, as though it were dangerous to meet alone. . . .

6. "My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."

7. True! nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not destroyed, not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. . . .

8. On all the roads about Goderville the peasants and their wives were coming toward the town, for it was market day. The men walked at an easy gait, the whole body thrown forward at every movement of their long, crooked legs, mis-shapen by hard work. . . .

9. In compliance with the request of a good friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and inquired after my friend's friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. . . .

10. To Sherlock Holmes, she is always *the* woman. . . .



Virginia Cowles

Of Mississippi Folk

MEN WORKING. By John Faulkner.
New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.
1941. 300 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM JAY GOLD

THE publication of "Men Working" marks the literary debut of John Faulkner, who has an older brother named William who is also an author. The book can best be described as a comic folk epic in the manner of "Tobacco Road," which it calls to mind immediately. Its setting is Mississippi, where the tenant farmers found the promise of regular wages on what they called "the WP and A" enough to pull them away from the moneyless drudgery of the land.

When Paw got his "Four Oh Two" slip telling him to report for work, the Taylors simply loaded their few sticks of furniture onto a hired truck and drove into the city to look for a house to live in, even if it happened to be Sunday night. Besides Hub, who was old enough to help with the family affairs, there were eight children. And Maw, of course. And Reno, an idiot son born before Paw and Maw were married, and to whom they complacently referred to as "our monstrous cur'osity."

They found a house in which six or seven other families lived, one to a room, and like themselves, all farmers come into town to adventures on the WPA. Possessed of practically nothing save monumental patience and equanimity, the Taylors scrape out meager existences on Paw's tiny checks, eating the same scrumpy kind of food as always, buying a "raddio" on time and taking it easy. Virginia gets married suddenly, McKinley and Buddy and Reno get sick, the WPA's appropriation is cut and they have to live on direct relief, they get evicted, not once but several times.

There are only three members of the family alive enough to want something beyond what they have: crippled Buddy, who wants paper and "colors" so that he can draw; Virginia, who has brief dreams of a life devoted to the pleasures of the flesh; and Hub, who cares for them all, buying materials for Buddy's drawings, dragging Virginia home from jook joints, and seeing to it that Reno isn't allowed to injure himself. The rest, although they scratch their heads over the incomprehensible notions of townspeople about sanitation, morals, and living standards, and even hesitantly try to understand, unexcitedly accept everything that comes their way, good or bad, with a minimum of emotion.

The tone of "Men Working" is deliberately flat and matter-of-fact, almost

a monotone of calm, objective narrative, highlighted at times by a kind of "voice of the city" commenting on the more ludicrous of the Taylors's doings. For a first novel, the book is unusually sure-footed and direct, rich in its characters and their talk and a detailed knowledge of their customs. Even in his blunt frankness, Mr. Faulkner is not without sympathy for a people represented by Paw Taylor, who was "drawn to a fate that he did not recognize as unkind. . . . Not compelled by seasonal or even yearly mutations, the limits of his developments or even changes were as stagnant as the land from which he sprung. . . ."



Eric Schaaf

John Faulkner

The "Okies" of Australia

THE BATTLERS. By Kylie Tennant.
New York: The Macmillan Co. 1941.
405 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by KLAUS LAMBRECHT

THE Battlers are the "Okies" of Australia, migrant laborers who have been on the "track" for years, following the fruit crops from county to county, living in road camps, stealing whatever they can from farmers, picking up work wherever they can find it, and drawing dole coupons in the towns which lie on their way. That is the background of a simple and delightful and yet deeply moving story.

It is rather obvious that we should be reminded of "The Grapes of Wrath," although the author has in no way been following the great example. The theme is similar, the implications are almost the same, but beyond that any parallel ends. It lacks the dramatic power, the poetic strength, the disturbing essence of Steinbeck. It is a statement rather than an accusation; and problems are raised for which no solutions are given. But the point is that no solutions are expected; even the events, tragic though they are—a flood which drives the wandering families from their river camp, robbing them of their meagre possessions, a fire that destroys the cannery where at last they had found some work—are pretty insignificant because there is not much of a story to which they could give a dramatic turn.

What is significant, however, and

what gives the book its very distinct qualities are the characters, "a dirty crew of vagabonds, blasphemous, generous, cunning and friendly," whom the author has brought to life. There is Snow, otherwise Theodore Grimshaw, a professional tramp, who somewhere has a farm and a wife and children but is discontent and restless; there is the Stray, a toothless girl of twenty who has but one ambition—to get herself a set of teeth and then win Snow's heart; Miss Phipps, who has seen better days and is so intolerably refined that they all would like to get rid of her; and countless other people who follow the road, discouraged and joyful, tragic and funny, pathetic and tender. These people and their stories, their fears and prejudices, their poverty and their longing for security are the carrying power of the book. As a novel it may have its faults, but here the author has brilliantly succeeded.

It is not a great book but certainly a most appealing one, because there is humor in it and a bitter realism, tragedy and love, warmth and cruelty, and a sensitive conception of a peculiar form of life.

Governor Murray D. Van Wagoner, of Michigan, has signed a bill providing for state aid to libraries. The Legislature has allotted \$500,000 for two years to improve existing libraries and to develop new services. This appropriation is being re-established after a two-year lapse.