

TRADE WINDS

P. E. G. QUERCUS ASSOCIATES

QUESTION: Mr. Bones, what is one of the best selling books in Germany today?

Answer: Well, sir, the best selling book in Germany today is *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie.

Various mediums of information have published and proclaimed this tidbit, but we generally like to end the week with cheerful news.

★ ★

From Houghton Mifflin comes the news they've awarded literary fellowships to Archibald Fleming MacLeish and Mary Benton. The awards carry the sum of \$1,500, of which \$1,000 is an outright grant and the remaining \$500 to be applied against royalties. Mr. MacLeish won his award for working on a novel "from the point of view of the man in the air." Miss Benton, a great-grandniece of Thomas Hart Benton, famous senator of frontier days, is writing his biography. More than 500 entries were submitted in this annual competition.

★ ★

Books in the American Rivers Series published by Farrar & Rinehart are enjoying steady and growing sales. New printings have just been ordered for *The James*, by Blair Niles; *The Wabash*, by William E. Wilson, and *The Upper Mississippi*, by Walter Havighurst. Our own Mr. Canby has joined the ranks of the River historians by contributing *The Brandywine*, to be published early in the Spring. Oxford University Press is on the job again. General Sir Archibald Wavell, the brilliant commander of the British forces in North Africa, has had recently published in London a biography called *Allenby, A Study in Greatness*. The United States will get a glimpse of it this spring.

★ ★

We heard the President's speech last week and we liked it, especially his statement that we're not going to send any of our American soldiers across, but transport loads of fighting materials. This reminds us that Columbia University Press has on its list *Transporting the A.E.F. in Western Europe, 1917-1919*. It's a good book to have around, especially for swivel-chair generals and amateur naval strategists, or for any of our readers who want to know how it was done in those days.

★ ★

The Membership Committee of the Baker Street Irregulars might take a look at W. Somerset Maugham. His qualifications are peculiar. In *The Saturday Evening Post* [Dec. 28], he has written an article called "Give Me a Murder," in which he says some sharp things about the Sherlock

Holmes stories in particular and mystery writing in general. If the Irregulars were not what that word implies, Mr. Maugham would not stand a chance of admittance. He commits heresy at once by mentioning the name of Conan Doyle; then he plunges into an indictment: "I was surprised to discover how poor they [the Holmes stories] were, for, like everybody else, I had read them with delight when they first appeared. The introduction is highly effective, the scene is well set, but the anecdote is thin and you are too often left feeling that you have been cheated. There is poverty of invention and there is lack of ingenuity. The thrill has gone out of them."

That last sentence may be more than the Irregulars can take, but our own hope that Mr. Maugham will reach the Initiating Committee lies in the verdict—the pull of the stories is in the charm of Sherlock Holmes himself. "He was drawn on broad and telling lines, a melodramatic figure with marked idiosyncrasies . . . this lay figure, decked out in theatrical properties, has acquired the same sort of life in your imagination as is held by Mr. Micawber. No detective stories have ever had the popularity of Conan Doyle's and because of the invention of Sherlock Holmes I think it must be admitted that none have so well deserved it."

Mr. Maugham attributes the rise in the popularity of mystery books not only to the skillfulness of modern detective-story writers, but also to the fact that "of late the writers of fiction of a more ambitious character have forgotten to tell stories; it has escaped their notice that action is the mainspring of the novel just as it is of the play; and in their fear of the melodramatic they have eschewed the dramatic . . . the serious novel of the day is regrettably namby-pamby."

Maugham also exposes the amateur detective: "He is a nasty busybody, a liar, a bully and a Nosey Parker who, from sheer love of interfering in what doesn't concern him, engages in work which any decent person would leave to the officers of the law whose duty it is to do it . . . I am waiting for the story in which the amateur detective is shown as the thoroughly despicable creature he really is and in the end gets his deserts."

Mystery addicts will be well rewarded by digging this issue of the *Satevepost* out of the attic.

★ ★

Before we get too far away from our opening note on how to win friends and influence people, we should like to call attention to new books (in addition to Henry Seidel Canby's work on the *Brandywine*) now under way by *SRL* editors. From "sources believed

reliable," we hear that Chris Morley is busy on a book that is not a sequel to *Kitty Foyle*. William Rose Benét's new book of verse will soon be in the bookstores. Coward-McCann has just signed Norman Cousins to write *A Primer for Democracy*.

★ ★

Allison Delarue, editor and publisher of the little magazine, *Letters* (Princeton University Press), announces preparations for a Spring, 1941, number. He is interested in receiving unusual ballet material. Inquiries should be addressed to Allison Delarue, Museum for the Arts of Decoration, Cooper Union, New York City.

★ ★

A Museum of Natural History best-seller and a new title for our private collection—"The Preparation of the Rough Skeleton." Our all-time high in titles is still, "The Frogs and Reptiles of Okefinokee Swamp, Okefinokee, Georgia." But the humor has gone out of an English title we once prized, "The British Navy in Adversity." Last year one of the editors distributed copies of a book whose jacket was titled, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness in the Armenian Northwest," but we suspect the jacket was strictly a made-to-order job. Any more interesting titles?

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