

p. 2c, makes the point of the newness of "O. K.": "We observed in the Tammany Procession 'the Butt Enders,' 'Indomitables,' and 'Huge Paws,' with the same banners they had last spring. The O. K. concern was the only novelty." In this same procession, according to the *New Era* of April 21, p. 2a, one of the banners had on it "a huge Cabbage mounted upon legs, singing out O. K. to General Harrison, and chasing him like a racer." Even as late as May 8 the Locofocos still regarded "O. K." as their special cabalistic property.

LATE in May, "O. K." had so far passed into general usage that the Locofocos felt free to divulge its original significance. The following, from the *New Era* of May 27, p. 2f, is the passage that reveals the "Old Kinderhook" signification, before "all correct" supplanted it:

JACKSON BREAST PIN. We acknowledge the receipt of a very pretty gold Pin, representing the "old white hat with a crape" such as is worn by the hero of New Orleans, and having upon it the (to the "Whigs") very frightful letters O. K., significant of the birth-place of Martin Van Buren, old Kinderhook, as also the rallying word of the Democracy of the late election, "all correct." It can be purchased at Mr. P. L. Fierty's, 486 Pearl street. Those who wear them should bear in mind that it will require their most strenuous exertions between this and autumn, to make all things O. K.

The first instance I have found of the use of "O. K." by anyone outside New York City is that of a correspondent in Montpelier, Vermont, in a letter dated April 20, 1840. As printed in the *N. Y. New Era*, April 27, p. 2a, he promised to bring about "the redemption of our State from British Whiggery next fall! Will you not say 'O. K.'? Go ahead!" As the presidential campaign grew hot in the fall of 1840, the expression "O. K." swept over the entire country, reaching Ohio, for instance, early in September. Examples showing the historical continuity in succeeding decades are provided in Thornton's *American Glossary* (1912). It was popularized in England at least as early as the 1880's; and according to the recollections of the English scholar A. G. Bradley, it was originally taken over by "Artemus Ward," who was received in London in 1866 with great acclaim.

On the basis of the documentary evidence here presented, the many ingenious etymologies that have been put forward, such as the ten assembled by Mencken in his *American Language* (4th ed.; 1936), must be thrown out of court. In the tracing of word history nothing can take the place of specific historical citations. These are now available for "O. K."

DOUBLE-TALK TALES

BY OTIS FERGUSON

My Heart's in the By-lines: The Word of Harpoot Keoft

THIS is not a letter to the editor like any letter to the editor. It is longer. It is by me, Harpoot Keoft, and it may be one of my best. How should I know, it may be lousy, but it's great.

America is great too, a terrible and beautiful and magnificent and lousy country, I love it. America for the good simple people; I love and understand them and why the hell should I spend my time rolling around with anyone else except producers, agents and Sherman Billingsley? That is the true meaning of democracy, which I am going to put into a play.

The Theatre is dead.

"The Beautiful People" is undeniably the greatest play since "The Time of Your Life." What do I care for prizes? I would turn it down if they offered it to me, which they didn't, the imbeciles. In the Critics' Circle, all five great critics voted for my play. It is nothing to me. George Jean Nathan is a great critic.

What is the theatre? The theatre is life, and life must be lived beautifully, by people. What are the plays today? Dead. Scenes, characters, lines, plot, chairs for the audience, lights, curtains.

Where I am writing this play in a telephone booth waiting for my connection to Los Angeles life flows richly, terrible and wonderful, and my three Syrian cousins and my Russian uncle are gambling at poker with me. I am going to put them all in a play, with a setting of a telephone booth though I am opposed to settings. They

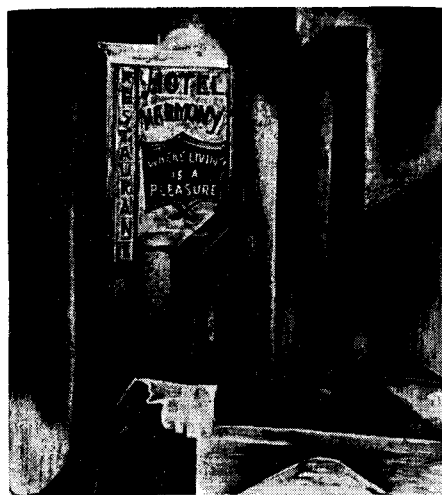
are lovely, unspoiled; they do not know much about poker.

That is the meaning of creation, but that is two other plays.

Now I am writing a play without lights, curtains, scenes, lines, characters or chairs for the audience. Only life. There will be a box office, it is nothing to me. This is while I am waiting for Mannix of Metro, Cohn of Columbia, Zanuck of Zanuck on my Los Angeles connection. Hollywood is dead, there are no good pictures. I want \$2,500. The play is laid on a floor, and there are no lights. An old man walks around through the audience, which is standing, and he holds in his hand an old army bugle which once when I was starving I bought in a hockshop run by a simple wise old man who finally met my price of thirty-three cents. It has no mouthpiece. It is slightly bent since my Fresno grandmother cooked a beautiful pilaf in it. But the old man holds it to his lips and plays. It is beautiful. Tears run down the face of the audience, whip around backstage and run down again. The old man keeps walking through the audience and playing this song on the bugle. It is the only one he knows and it has only one note. He is a great musician.

This is the first half, though I am opposed to acts. My nephew from Iraq has just asked me innocently why his two pair don't beat my three aces. Life is tragic to the young, but lovely, and I am singing him a song my uncle used to hum in the language of the old country, and he is full of joy again. Mannix said \$2,500 a picture or a year? I hung up, my Armenian blood boiling at the tragedy of meanness and my Assyrian accent coming down on the folding. Get me Zanuck at Zanuck.

In the second half, an old dog comes out and follows around in the old man's tracks, sniffing the scent. He is looking for the old man and as he goes he plays the same song on an old army beagle. It is sad and beautiful. He cannot find the old man, who has gone over to Sardi's where I told him to wait for the payola. The old dog searches and searches and his sorrow and search are wonderful, the quest of all people in life. This is the development part of the play, because the dog is carrying the rest of the



—Woodcut by H. A. Mueller.

cast, a troupe of trained fleas I picked up once when I was starving in the cities of the world, and trained myself to sing some of the beautiful sad songs of the old country, near Fresno. This provides a great heightening in the audience reaction as the fleas have also been trained to know supper when they see it. Man in his hunger must be fed, it is the rule of life and symbolic. The dog finally picks up the trail to Sardi's and goes out, mournful and great and two of my nephews aged four come on carrying an old army cannon I picked up while I was starving in the public park at Richmond. They fill the cannon with black powder, railroad ballast, tire chains, broken glass and rusty nails, and blow it up. They are great actors. This is for patriotic national defense, a timely and interesting question.

Zanuck said my agent had already quoted him \$150 for me and got thrown out, it is nothing to me. I have finished

another play and recklessly tossed back the money I have cleaned my relatives for in poker. It was all in Confederate bills.

The old man will have to wait a long time in Sardi's for the payola but I go out of the phone booth whistling, because life is marvelous and breath-taking and lovely and I have to look up Leonard Lyons and that damn double-crossing agent.

HARPOOT KEOFFE.

P.S.: Print it or throw it away, it is nothing to me, though it is always my practice to make a careful word count and I am sending carbons to Photoplay, Theatre Arts, Herman Shumlin, and the Dentists' Annual.

HARP.

"Double-Talk Tales" will be an occasional feature. The editors invite SRL readers to suggest authors as candidates for the parodies.

Tragic Miracle of the Sea

TWO SURVIVED. By Guy Pearce Jones. New York: Random House. 1941. 193 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by ERIC DEVINE

THIS is the story of two British seamen who survived the horrific ordeal of seventy days in an open boat following the sinking of a merchantman by a German raider in the Atlantic. Guy Pearce Jones, a reporter, tells the story in a simple and straightforward manner, without the embellishment or slick-magazine folderol that might have spoiled it. The result possesses those characteristics of an epic: the tragedy, the humor, the strength, and weakness of human beings.

When their vessel, bound for South America with a cargo of coal, was destroyed by gunfire off the Azores, seven men, including the Chief Officer, were able to get into the jollyboat and elude the German raider that obviously intended to sink the ship without a trace. Several of the men were wounded by machine-gun bullets and shrapnel, but all of them at once settled down to the routine of sailing a very small boat westward toward the islands lying between North and South America. The boat was poorly provisioned in every way, and the Mate took charge—dressing wounds, rationing what food and water there was, arranging watches, keeping a log.

But before the little boat had been under way a month, five of the men had died, and the two remaining—Robert Tapscott, nineteen, and Wil-

bert Widdicombe, twenty-one—were miraculously able to live in that boat, baked by a tropic sun, suffering from pellagra, with little water and virtually no food, for seventy days! They land at last on the island of Eleuthera, the Bahamas.

The first of the five to die, Mr. Pilcher, a radio officer whose foot had been shattered by shot and had soon gangrened, is one of the most gallant young men you will meet in any book for a long time. But they were all amazing men. William McFee in his chatty and sympathetic introduction says this of them:

"All these men met death with fortitude and modesty. Their lives were as precious to them as are ours to us. They were all tragically young. They were fighting the greatest battle of our times, the Battle of the Atlantic. It is not yet won. Many more young lives will be lost before it is won. This story of seven men in an open boat, if it proves nothing else, shows how little the breed of seamen has deteriorated, and how richly they deserve our prompt assistance."



Born in the Blitz

SHELTER. By Jane Nicholson. New York: The Viking Press. 1941. 241 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by FRANCES SMYTH

IT is uncomfortable to review a first novel by a young Englishwoman living in England which has as its background bombed London. It is uncomfortable, because it is trivial and tedious and academic to debate whether a young woman with the courage and diligence to produce a piece of creative work in England now has written a good novel or a bad novel.

August, September, and the first two weeks of October, 1940, frame the story. The three chief actors are Louise Mason, her husband, Jos, and Jos's mistress, Camma. Louise and Jos have been married seven years, and still live together, but with increasing indifference. Jos is never more than a nebulous figure to the reader; nor is Camma, presumably beautiful and desirable to all men. In August, 1940, Louise has given up her job as private secretary to a novelist gone to safety in Hollywood; Jos is working seven days and six nights a week with the A.F.S.; Camma is briefly and badly attempting war work; and, during a particularly bad air raid, Louise tells Jos that she is pregnant. Interwoven with this personal plot are all the hideous reported-and-photographed circumstances and events; blazing buildings, corpses, cripples, and blackness. The freshest and almost the most moving scenes are those in which exhausted and jangled people, bathed and tidied, employ all their shrewdness and resourcefulness to get across the city for a proper meal correctly served in one of the good restaurants still open.

The specific human situation in Miss Nicholson's novel is amateurish in conception and in handling; the people have no substance; too much is left out and most of what is put in seems wrong. But the real trouble with the book is hardly her fault. To write about London during a year of bombardment is no task for a beginner. There is too much fearful power in the mere literal labels: direct hit, children killed, houses shattered; only a great and practised writer can master and manipulate events that carry so well their own terrible connotations. Straight newspaper dispatches, bald statements of fact, accomplish what special correspondents have so far failed to do; nobody has seemed able to add local color to an air raid without making it sound invented, however well the reader knows that it has occurred.