

most crushing critical comment of the year. "What did you think of so-and-so that opened last night?" someone asked him. "I thought it was frightful," said Mr. Kaufman, "but you must remember that I saw it under particularly unfortunate circumstances. The curtain was up!" . . .

SOME OF THE less brilliant early season stage and screen offerings have put our critics into a testy humor. Richard Lockridge, of the *Sun*, and, with his wife, incidentally, creator of the very excellent "Mr. and Mrs. North" mysteries, began one of his reviews: "A strikingly peculiar musical called 'The Time, The Place, and The Girl' arrived here last night after an insufficient number of postponements." David Lardner opined that the picture version of "Panama Hat-tie" needs a certain something," and added a pensive "Possibly burial!" George Kaufman is the author of the

WILLIAM WHITE'S "They Were Expendable" is the kind of book that everybody is anxious to boost. A number of publishers, in fact, have been running trailers on it in their various advertisements. This unusual display of friendly cooperation led an executive of White's own house, Harcourt, Brace, to remark the other morning, "This business has certainly come to a strange pass when one of my authors can come to me and demand 'Hey, why aren't Appleton-Century advertising my book this week?'" . . .

BENNETT CREEP.

Innocents Abroad

OUR HEARTS WERE YOUNG AND GAY. By Cornelia Otis Skinner and Emily Kimbrough. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1942. 247 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by AMY LOVEMAN

BLITHE spirits were Cornelia Otis Skinner and Emily Kimbrough when in the early 1920s, not quite twenty themselves, they set off on a trip to Europe without incumbrance of elders. Their hearts were young and gay, and Europe, just emerging from the nightmare of war and believing that peace and happiness were around the corner, lay athwart their vision a delectable and alluring land. They were "innocent" with an ignorance which the nineteen-twenties dispelled in young women forever; they were romantic, they were eager, and they were engaging, and they gathered in experiences as the sun sucks in the dew. There never was a

more salubrious book for grim days than this; it is like a whiff of pungent mountain air through fog and storm.

Merriment bubbles through the narrative from the instant that the girls arrived at Montreal, whence they were to sail, until they cast their last glance at the Eiffel Tower. Under the gay humor and delicious sense of the ridiculous of the authors, every slightest incident becomes of moment,—the start to sea, the grounding of the *Montcalm*, the return to and enforced stay in Montreal, the second departure, the trip abroad. Happy days and hilarious memories—life on shipboard with its grand finale when with the assistance of two now very eminent and then very young Boston physicians Cornelia Skinner held back a severe attack of measles long enough to elude the ship's doctor and the health authorities at Southampton, of daily bouts with the mysteries of "geesers" and boarding house keepers and money in London, of dining with and non-plussing Miss Skinner's parents (who tactfully stayed at a different hotel and no less tactfully issued invitations to dinner), of Dieppe and French travel, of the comfortable night in Rouen, when, all unconscious of its character, they slept soundly in a brothel, of encounters with bedbugs and beguiling and deadly concoctions in Paris, of dancing and teeing and sightseeing there with charming American youths and taking lessons with actors of the Comédie Française. The book is compact of little nothings, made electric by the irresistible delight of youth in life and adventure. We defy anyone to read it without laughter or recall it without a smile.

The Lost Realm

THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM. By Eudora Welty. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1942. 185 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

PERHAPS you will remember the days when you sat quite alone somewhere in a chair too large for you, reading the Blue Fairy Book, or the Yellow, or the Red. You have been reading since in a thousand better, wiser, realer books, yet you may have glanced back with some longing at that first perfect literary experience, a total immersion in simplicity as in water, echoless, questionless, and free of afterthought. This is surely a child's world; adults admitted by special dispensation only. Perhaps you might try reading Eudora Welty's fairy tale, to see whether you can still enter. Miss Welty knows the lost realm as thoroughly as though she had never left it, as well as Lewis Carroll or Andrew Lang knew it. She deals as easily as they with wonder and legend, with the evil witch and the simple maiden, with lockets that speak, and severed heads.

But unlike them she is writing not for children but for the rest of us, who trail our aura of adult memory. She is using not their legends but ours, and some of our knowledge too. Thus we are somewhere in the dark Mississippi woods, meeting American Indians, and legendary woodsmen like Paul Bunyan and Mike Fink, as well as her own redoubtable Jamie Lockhart. There is the golden-haired Rosamund who moves in loveliness among malign spells, and the incredible Goat and Big and Little Harp. And something new has been added: sex, a thing as simple and calm and unblushing here as it would be if people in children's tales knew anything about it. The whole thing is a miracle of imagination, done with a prose forged especially, it seems, for this, in simple, singing sentences like struck notes of music. Perhaps you will not like it, since it really means nothing, tells nothing, is only an experience. Miss Welty will probably not do it again, having done it once. She seems a writer dedicated to experiment and imagination, with her subject matter unpredictable and fine writing her only constant.

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## Sanctity in Ohio

COME BACK TO WAYNE COUNTY.

By Jake Falstaff. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1942. 245 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by PHIL STONG

**"JAKE FALSTAFF"**—Herman Fetzner—wrote a little like Mark Twain and a little like Walt Whitman; that is about as close as you can come to him without saying that he wrote like Jake Falstaff. His affection for God's creation, including people, back in the Ohio farmlands, is so profound and perceptive, that any suggestion of sentimentality or any other phoneyess is completely out of the question. He saw the high points and places of human behavior and interpreted them kindly—if he had written the biography of Hitler he would have said that he used only the best paint and was kind to his grandmother.

The thing that is emphasized in these sketches of an adolescent boy in Ohio is the sanctity of human acquaintanceships. Lemuel is shy because where he gives his hand, he gives his heart, and he does not acquire his jewels without appraisal. When he gives his affection to some harsh old farmer, or an old bootlegging bum, or a horse or dog, or the hired girl, he concentrates on their twenty-four karat aspects and ignores the dross.

The humor and drama of the stories—they are strung along as a little saga of Lemuel and have a casual continuity—are completely unforced and without any distinguishable artifice. The people behave that way because they behave that way, and they are touching, or funny, or exciting because that is the way God "flang" them.

There is the farmer who is "bucked" by a bull. His dying instructions are as simple and splendid as anything since Boris Godunov. There is the young swain who goes on a tentative courting. The farm father begins to chaff as if the boy were already engaged to the girl, till the embarrassed girl cries and runs out of the room. The father confesses his awkwardness to the boy as if he were another man. By and by the girl comes back and is reconciled to her father. The boy sits silent. But riding home, in a quiet spot of the road, "he threw his cap in the air and yelled as loud as he could." "She's for you," as Josef Marais would say.

And Ispshan is far. Grandpa's brother had been there once. There is a little weaving of farm problems, dogs and cows, and a splendid rainy day under the roof of a hayloft, with Malory and a cockle-burred dog, and

Grandma said that Ispshan was far. So why go there? The other farm author made it Carcassonne. Home is a good place to be.

It is impossible to describe the richness and warmth of Jake Falstaff's writing without writing it, and that cannot be done now that Jake Falstaff is dead. We used to see him around the *Sunday World*, before torpedoes hit the place, spelling F.P.A. on his summer vacation. He looked like an older and wiser Orson Welles, though he could have been little over thirty. He was diffident—Lemuel explains the reason—and we were understaffed and busy, so none of us got to know him. He wrote one great column, among others, about his tremblings in "la civita terribile."

He died at thirty-five. Chatterton

died at eighteen and Marlowe at twenty-nine. Some folks get their chores done early.

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