

What Happened?

SIR:—During the summer of 1918 while occupying a dugout close to devastated Ypres in Belgium, I came across a book left by some former tenant. At that time our division (the 30th) was attached to a British Army Corps and we relieved and were relieved by English, Scotch, Australian, and Canadian troops in turn.

I had only completed half the book when orders came to advance, and the unfinished book was left behind. Since then, almost a quarter of a century has passed by and I still find myself wondering about the conclusion. Only a few meagre details of the story are remembered, which I will proceed to give hoping they will be enough to identify it to some of your readers.

Told in the first person, it was the story of revenge to be exacted upon a relative or associate who had caused the narrator to be wrongfully imprisoned. After his release or escape from prison the narrator made an effort to free himself of all of his former acquaintances until he could reappear completely, changed in speech, bearing, and appearance. The method of disguise was very elaborate and was described lengthily. Especially do I remember how, by introduction of metal into his mouth, the hero managed to completely change the tone of his voice. These are the only details of the story which I recall. I will be eternally grateful to you if you can aid me in identifying this book.

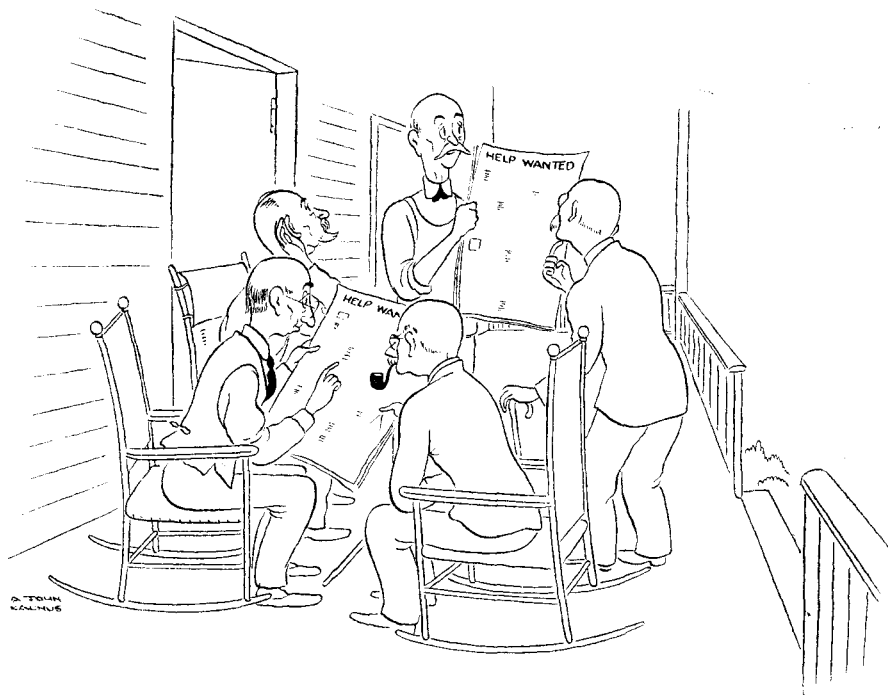
ALFRED H. ISELEY.

c/o U. S. Engineer Corps
Punahou Campus
Honolulu, T. H.

Finnegan's Teeth

SIR:—Your recent seizure of Thornton Wilder "emerging from an uninventoried treasure cave with a pouch full of sparklers" moves me to report that I have caught him doing mayhem on André Obey's "Le Viol de Lucrece." (Mayhem, meaning "maiming by depriving a person of the use of members necessary for self-defense.") When Cornell, hoping to repeat the fine performance of Obey's play by Les Quinze, put herself into Thornton Wilder's hands, the play was a flop and all the critics gave Obey the blame.

Wilder had not given Obey credit on the cover of the published book, only on the title-page. It would be hard to discover Obey's lusty homespun play in the banal billowy English which Cornell's cast found so baffling. That a professed translator should misrepresent the author in tone is a more serious indictment, isn't it, than that he should make elementary mistakes such as rendering "Jaloux de qui?" as "Jealous of what?" or using "frog" as



a term of insult, even though Le Petit Larousse illustrates Obey's "crapaud?"

It seems to me even more surprising that a man who has written plays should omit vital speeches, rearrange and transpose scenes, destroy small precisions of the author's in the order of epithets, should compose lines which suggest she - sells - seashells — for instance saying of two hearts beating in juxtaposition, "each is as loud, each is as fast as the other." That he should make Lucrece say, alone, after the rape, "Myself. The very heart of myself is gone" when Obey's Lucrece had moaned, "My honey is lost. The treasure of my summer." That her "Pauvre femme!" should become, of all senseless things, "Poor child!" Cornell could have made the whole play a tragic comment on humanity with her "Poor woman!"

Delicate deletion seems to have been Wilder's slogan. His version might be used in the schoolroom of a female academy. He even omits the word "rape" from the title. He leaves out the sweaty smell of Tarquin's armpits. Lucrece's "shriek" becomes "hides her face in woe." The bed is "all disarranged" though Obey's verb is the one by which the French describe the overthrow of a state.

Obey's climaxes are lost. The litany intoned between Lucrece and the Narrator—Wilder calls her merely "the Second narrator," by the way, missing the structural value of the male and female narrators throughout—that litany slows down from:

"By courtesy!"
"By charity!"
"By my spilling tears!" to
"By the grace of courtesy!"

"By the laws of chivalry!"
"I implore you by my tears!"

And when the Narrator describes Tarquin's ride to Rome, working up to a high pitch:

"He's off! Tarquin is off! The king's son has quit the army! The future king of the Romans is abandoning the camp, deserting his post, leaving the war itself in the lurch!" Wilder says (adagio adagio) "Tarquin has called for his horse (he did that two pages back) and has left the camp. My lord Tarquin, the king's son, the future king of Rome, has left the camp and the army behind him."

Poor Tarquin is deprived of several of his few good lines, but he seems most unlucky in having to be compared to "a wolf serenading wild beasts." Larousse again could make that cryptic passage clear by revealing that bêtes farouches "deer."

I wonder Cornell did not become suspicious of the translation when she was required to ask her maids for "the black dress my mother wore in mourning" instead of "the dress I wore to mourn my mother." And when Wilder's maid merely "hands" her the dress, instead of, as the French idiom has it, "puts it on" her.

I charge Thornton Wilder with having made off with a good copper cooking pot, leaving a brummagem pair of candle-sticks (wobbly, too) in their place. With having converted a leaping granite-cleaving mountain brook into a meander in a soppy meadow. With having deprived André Obey of members necessary for his self-defense.

KAREN BARRETT.

5859 Freeman Avenue,
La Crescenta, Calif.

The Personal Historian Returns

BETWEEN THE THUNDER AND THE SUN. By Vincent Sheean. New York: Random House. 1943. 428 pp., with name index. \$3.

Reviewed by PAUL SCHUBERT

VINCENT ("Jimmy") SHEEAN gets around. In his capacity as a "name" foreign correspondent, he meets everybody and goes everywhere. He writes despatches for top newspapers; at regular intervals he writes books itemizing the places he has visited and the "names" with whom he has dealt, and then he comes home and lectures across the length and breadth of the land. Just now the lecturing and foreign corresponding are off for the duration, as the author has been a Major in the U. S. Army Air Force since last May.

"Between the Thunder and the Sun" covers the period between 1935 and early 1942—a period in which an entire world was engulfed by war. The narrative of this era must ultimately become, as the facts are revealed and seen with perspective, one of the great historic dramas of all time. We have been living through a power-contest between titans—between super-personalities of politics, industry, and the military who have risen up out of the ruck of mankind to wield entire states as weapons—equally between great inchoate masses of men and women who find themselves pitted against "the enemy," fighting for their lives and their futures as war blasts into the streets of great cities and the fields of fertile countrysides.

Mr. Sheean's account of this era has something the atmosphere of a volume of Palace Memoirs. Mr. Sheean assures us that he is a born Middle Westerner, and that he is deeply touched by the struggle and sweating toil of mankind. But he tells us frankly that by preference he lives and moves in the world of aristocracy, wealth, and privilege—the great glamorous "inside" world that seems to do most of the string-pulling. One after another of this world's "greats" is paraded before us in close association with Mr. Sheean—Maxine Elliott, Winston Churchill, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson (his father-in-law), G.B.S., Juan Negrin . . . name after name, great house after great house, city after city across Europe, America, and Asia.

Saturday night after dinner I had a fairly sharp tilt with the Archduke Robert of Austria on the subject of the Red Army, on which he claimed special information. I had none and claimed none, but Maisky (and also Benes) had given me considerable confidence in it. I was therefore surprised to hear the Archduke state

that it was without modern equipment, devoid of discipline or spirit, and certain to collapse in any real test against the Germans. The Archduke was young, but like many other royalties he had superb confidence in the validity of his own prejudices.

This portrayal of events as seen by a world of manners and polish, in which it is bad form to reveal particular depths of emotions, lends to Mr. Sheean's book a curiously emotionless character. Certainly Mr. Sheean's own emotions must have been stirred far more deeply than he allows us to feel. He seems far more concerned that we judge him by the soundness of his forecast that a great and total war was brewing, and by what he obviously feels is a unique oneness with the very great.

The deep and unspoken sympathy I have always felt with Mr. H. G. Wells is due, I think, to this characteristic (or peculiarity) which we have in common. He moves in the society of the rich, the great, the privileged, without for one moment forgetting either the kitchen stairs at Bromley or the supreme purposes for which he has lived. In my less effective or enduring way, I think the same is true of me.

"Between the Thunder and the Sun" opens at Salzburg and passes swiftly to Maxine Elliott's villa on the Cote d'Azur, pointing up the artificial glitter of Europe's seasonable resorts of fashion as symbolic of what was about to be blasted to eternity—neglecting the great suffering mass of European humanity which formed the true Dramatis Personae of events.

The outbreak of war, the fall of France, the air "blitz" on England. . . . Mr. Sheean, viewing America as an outsider, felt unable to convey to America, in writings or broadcasts, the factual urgencies of the sights before him. The fact was, he had lost touch, as men so often do when they live too long away and in environments that take them out of their own land and its way of thinking. He thought he knew what America was thinking—what he could not feel was the per-



Vincent Sheean

spective that made many of America's judgments more sound, historically, than those of people caught in the surf of Armageddon.

The Hess Affair, the German attack upon Russia . . . that autumn of 1941, Mr. Sheean flew out to the Far East, went to Chungking, added Generalissimo and Mme. Chiang Kai-shek to the "names" of this book . . . flew home inches ahead of the hot blast that seared Pearl Harbor, Manila, Wake. . . .

And at the end he seems to be rediscovering America in his contact with men who are doing things instead of talking about them, instead of string-pulling to make others do things.

The reality of American aviators, construction men, a sense of American power, of the destiny wrapped up in America's mastery of the gasoline-engine . . . the book closes on that note, and on a Mr. Sheean humbler than the man who clashes wills with Maxine Elliott in Chapter I by steadfastly refusing to change into bathing apparel during the hours consecrated to the Elliott villa's pool.

Paul Schubert, radio news analyst and newspaper columnist, lived for eight years in Europe. He is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. His most recent book is "Sea Power in Conflict."

The Imponderable Gift

By Dilys Bennett Laing

I SHUT my eyes, stretched out my hand and touched the fingers of a friend—a friend I had not known was there—a friend I had not known at all. I opened my eyes on empty air and softly in my hand there fell a flower not plucked from anywhere.