

PROSPEROUS BUSINESSES have a way of falling into a rut after a certain number of years of operation. The men who furnished the original incentive lose their early drive and sink into middle-aged complacency and routine. One young man often can step into a business of this sort, however, and, by his enterprise and imagination, turn the whole works upside down in two or three years. As a striking example, I cite the case of B. D. Zevin and the World Publishing Company of Cleveland, Ohio.

The founder of this business, and president to this day, is Alfred Cahen. He started on a shoestring in 1905, but introduced so many improvements into high-speed book production that he was hailed in print twenty years later as "the Henry Ford of the book business." His company produced books by the million for premium distribution by newspapers and mail order houses. Why bother with adding new lines, reasoned Mr. Cahen and his associates. When Ben Zevin moved out from New York in 1934, however, and began studying shifting markets and trends, he soon persuaded the directors that changes were in order.

Zevin realized that the dictionaries and Bibles already owned by the World Company were a potential gold mine. He multiplied the line ten times over by producing them in every conceivable size, shape, and price range. By the time he was finished he had dictionaries that could do everything but give milk. One of his exploits was the sale of three million 384-page pocket dictionaries to the Planters Peanut Company, who sold them for a dime a copy. By 1939 he had risen from advertising manager to vice-president, and convinced his older associates that soft jobs and fat dividends weren't everything in life. Experiments made the blood run faster and enhanced the national reputation of the enterprise. The dictionaries and the Bibles were practically running themselves by now; Zevin was ready for new fields. His brainchild was Tower Books, the first series of forty-nine cent non-fiction reprints in America.

Several factors combined to give Zevin such a jump in this field that later imitators, despite unlimited capital, are still miles behind him. Years in his own advertising agency made him keenly aware of the sort of thing the audience he was appealing to would be likely to patronize. The World Company's own printing and binding equipment reduced his manufacturing costs

to a minimum. Through his premium operations, he knew what books to use as the rock base of the new line, and where existing plates for them could be found.

In 1941 Tower Books sold more than a million copies, and this year the total will easily triple that record. Self-help books, hobbies, "how-to's," popular psychology, and health manuals dominate the line. Roget's "Thesaurus" is the best seller. It is available in a dozen other editions, but not at forty-nine cents a copy! Clement Wood's "History of the United States" and Everett's "Hygiene of Marriage" are printed 50,000 at a time. In 1942, fiction was added. John Steinbeck, Jim Farrell, James Gould Cozzens, and Elliot Paul are on the Tower list now, but none of them has sold as well, I am shocked to report, as Gypsy Rose Lee's "G-String Murders." The customers evidently figure that, at forty-nine cents, you can't go wrong with Gypsy.

Competition in the low-priced, mass-production book business is getting tougher every day. To succeed in it requires more sheer business acumen than literary discrimination. Zevin, however, is one of the few men in the field who could step out tomorrow and take over control of a university press. A little house-organ that he edits, called *Counterpoints*, is a neat blend of current humor and pertinent excerpts from really good books. Anthologies having sold exceptionally well for Tower, Zevin is now engaged in editing a few new ones for himself. He's signed up Boris Karloff to compile a collection of tales of terror, and Will

Cuppy to edit a new sheaf of mystery yarns. Also in the offing are "Cooking in Wartime" and "Home Canning." Duplicating titles in all these new low-priced series do not seem to hurt anybody; the boys are all getting rich together—and it's grist for the Morgenthau mill!

The World Publishing Company is now beginning to sample the twenty-five cent market too. At this price, it has sold a million and a half copies of "A Global Atlas of the World at War" and a similar number of "The Simplified Guide to Your Income Tax." A new one coming up is "Vegetable Gardening in Wartime." The initial run is a modest half million.

The New York publishers are just beginning to be aware of Ben Zevin's activities. He built his foundations quietly and without fanfare. Today he's in the big time and, gentlemen, he's going to stay there. Zevin is no shrinking violet. You'll be hearing more about him from now on. Meanwhile, if you would like to have a complete list of the Tower line, drop a line to the New York office, at 14 West 49th Street, or the World Publishing Company in Cleveland. . . .

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS reports that out in Durant, Oklahoma, where men still are men, a lecturer on current books caught a customer in the front row dozing peacefully, and promptly woke him up by throwing a couple of eggs at him. Thereafter the attitude of the audience could only be described as enthralled. That prominent publisher who bored the pants off of a distinguished New York audience for a full fifty-three minutes recently might profit by this technique, if he nurtures any ideas of a repeat performance. Eggs will not be drastic enough in his case, however; he'll need block busters! . . . A personal ad in a Los Angeles paper: "Young girl with two cans of corn would like to meet gentleman with can of lima beans. Object: succotash." . . . A small-town motion picture exhibitor, not too articulate, but with definite notions of the taste of his clientele, warned the MGM studios, "Don't send me no more of those pictures where the hero writes a letter with a feather. My customers can't stand them, and neither can I." . . . After seeing the first three reels of "Young Mr. Pitt," I know exactly how that exhibitor felt. . . . The irrepressible Mr. Goldwyn recently reminded one of his minions, "In times like these, my dear, we must learn to take the bitters with the sweets!" . . . You oldsters may remember Mary Pickford's last stage appearance in David Belasco's "A Good Little Devil" (at the Republic Theatre in New York) but I'll bet you never knew that her



HOME FRONT

"ALLIED HEADQUARTERS IN NORTH AFRICA, May 8th—British infantry, under heavy enemy mortar and light arms fire, have retaken Djebel el Ang and Heidous, key points near the Medjez-el-Bab to Tebouba road that leads to Tunis. . . ."

understudy for the role was Clare Boothe Luce!

DUTTON'S has just published Vincent Starrett's oddly named book of poetry, "Autolycus in Limbo." An autolycus, explains Vincent, is a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles, and he quotes Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale" as authority for same. He autolycus too for reprinting this information. . . . An executive of the Bell Laboratories reminds *Trade Winds* of the telephone exhibit at the World's Fair and the Voder—the electrical device which talked as its operator fingered its keys. The demonstrator used to call for suggestions from the audience of words for the Voder to pronounce. One day a voice from the balcony called out "sphinx." The Voder, which was probably being operated that day by Van Cartmell, shot back, "Well, if it does you don't have to say so. If you don't like it, scram!"

WILBUR CROSS, Dean of the Yale Graduate School, and four times Governor of Connecticut, completed his autobiography on his eighty-first birthday. It will be published in the Fall by the Yale University Press. . . . Henry Cassidy, the man who persuaded Stalin to write two letters for *Life* magazine, has written a book about Russia called "Moscow Dateline." It's on the Houghton Mifflin list for late May. . . . Bill McCue, the Washington bookseller, writes, "It's so crowded down here that when I open my mail in the morning, there's a line waiting to get in!" . . . The jacket design for Ilya Ehrenberg's new novel, "The Fall of Paris," is one of the most striking of the year. It is the work of George Salter, who, with McKnight Kauffer, is revolutionizing the whole art of the book jacket in America. . . .

JOHN KIERAN tells the story of a man who visited Voltaire, and mentioned that he had encountered another literary notable of that era on the way. "A very able man, a fine character," commented Voltaire. "That's very kind of



—Geoffrey Landesman
B. D. Zevin

you," said the visitor, "because he said you were a villainous old wretch." "Ah well," said Voltaire, with a smile, "perhaps we are both mistaken!" . . . Another Voltaire anecdote concerns the time when Rousseau wrote his ode, "To Posterity." Voltaire read it with a frown and remarked, "This poem will never reach its destination." . . . And if you will permit me to jump several generations, here is a tale about the old tiger Clemenceau. An excited supporter burst into his private chambers one day and cried, "Your son has just joined the Communist Party!" Clemenceau regarded his visitor calmly and remarked, "Monsieur, my son is twenty-two years old. If he had not become a communist at twenty-two, I would have disowned him. If he is *still* a communist at thirty, I will do it then!" . . .

BENNETT CERF.



THIS NOVEL shows you why the American dream became a reality. In it George F. Hummel turns back the clock on the Joshua Moores of Long Island. You will see a Joshua Moore bringing his young bride across the waters from Saybrook Colony and building a log cabin for her in the wilderness. You will know a Joshua Moore who fought at the Brandywine and married a Swedish girl on his way home through Pennsylvania. You will meet a Joshua Moore who served as a Colonel under Sheridan, and another who prospered in California; and, finally, you will find that the young Joshua Moore of today who is saying goodbye to Kay, his Polish wife, is identical with those others who came before him — just as resourceful, just as stubborn, just as idealistic.

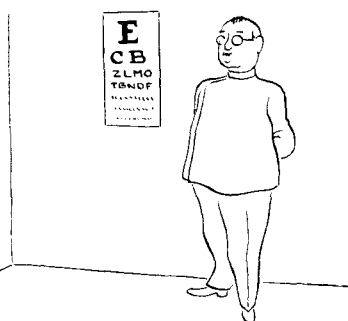
Joshua Moore, AMERICAN

by George F. Hummel

In this book the story of one family becomes the biography of a nation.

At your bookseller's

\$2.75 DOUBLEDAY, DORAN



"Sure I can read the bottom line. It says, 'Five Dollars Please'."

Excursion Among the Infernos

LAST BOAT FROM BEYROUTH. By Royce Brier. New York: Appleton-Century Company. 258 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

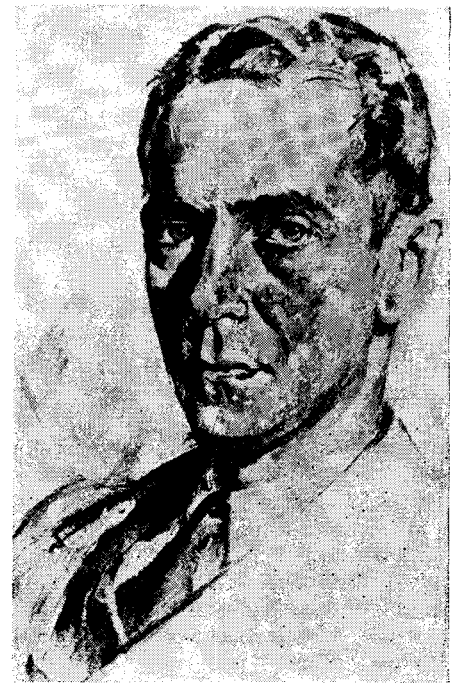
PETER HAMIL is one of those young Americans who, driven by a vague feeling of uneasiness, went abroad in the late thirties, and tired of inactively watching the nearing catastrophe jumped into the thick of it. A Baltimore surgeon, he first lent his help to the battered republicans in Spain, travelled between the fall of Madrid and Vienna through the already terror-stricken capitals of Europe, and joined the battle of Warsaw when the Stukas began the great kill—only to land in the Near East, a fairly disillusioned man without too much hope for the cause.

This is where Mr. Brier's narrative sets in. A day before June 10, 1940 (*"jour funeste et à jamais mémorable,"* as the contemporaries of another French disaster used to call another day), Dr. Hamil boards an overcrowded French army transport which is to bring him from Beirut to Marseille. One of the few other civilian passengers aboard ship is Mary Towne, Connecticut-born and Saks-Fifth-Avenue-dressed foreign correspondent and wife of a British army officer. The two have met before "at a sherry party outside the Damascus Gate, and talked for two hours about Jesus of Nazareth."

Neither the ensuing tale of their hopeless love—the doctor too is married—nor the settings of the novel are particularly original. And the sad story of France's decay has been told more than once through similar mediums. Yet it is a good story. While the boat, heeling over more and more, is sailing into unknown perils, and the two soon realize and begin to discuss their personal problem, they both change. Gradually, they drop their sophisticated hotel lounge lingo, and the coquettish melancholy of their cocktail party "realism" gives way to the simple words

and thoughts lovers caught in distress have spoken and thought since time immemorial. The noble matter-of-factness of Hamil's final decision would hardly have been consistent with the attitude of the man who with a kind of cynical resignation watched the companions of his voyage: indifferent Orientals, half-hearted French soldiers and their selfish officers, pretty whores, fifth columnists, crooks and swindlers, bribers and bribeable. Having met love, he does not hesitate to accept the age-old standards of heroism and self-sacrifice—concepts he apparently would have suspiciously frowned at forty-eight hours ago.

This is a fine and, in a wider sense, most timely thought, and as a whole it is well demonstrated through Mr. Brier's novel. Parts of it are beautifully written. The effects of the author's undeniable psychological insight are sometimes impaired by a certain lengthiness, and an unfortunate shift in methods. As frequently is the case in movies, the episodes are more clearly presented than much of what the protagonists do and feel. That English steward, for instance—"faded and fragile, like the costume of an earlier generation, he had a thin red



Royce Brier

face, a few snaggy teeth, dim blue eyes, and graying hair curling from beneath a dirty cap"—has a Conradian touch, and his character is really carried through with the inevitability befitting a Conradian hero who sails toward his destiny.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

SOME MINOR CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE

Listed below are 33 literary figures whose foremost claim to fame is their association with much more prominent characters. Can you name the person with whom each one is linked? Allowing 3 points for each correct answer, from 45 to 60 is par, 60 to 75 is very good, better than that is excellent. Don't look now, but you'll find the answers on page 20.

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mrs. Bardell. | 18. Miss Mitnick. |
| 2. Constance Bonacieux. | 19. Prof. Moriarty. |
| 3. Brom Bones. | 20. Vincent Nolte. |
| 4. Homer Brown. | 21. Passepartout. |
| 5. Gwenny Carfax. | 22. Aggie Pilkington. |
| 6. William Dane. | 23. Barbara Pinkerton. |
| 7. Fatima. | 24. Marie Roget. |
| 8. Friday. | 25. Schacabac |
| 9. Archie Goodwin. | 26. Schahriah. |
| 10. Max Gottlieb. | 27. Della Street. |
| 11. Jonathan Harker. | 28. Corporal Trim. |
| 12. Joe Harper. | 29. Tubal. |
| 13. Captain Hastings. | 30. Mr. Utterson. |
| 14. John Jasper. | 31. Harriet Vane. |
| 15. Littimer. | 32. Belle Watling. |
| 16. John F. X. Markham. | 33. Sam Williams. |
| 17. Jacob Marley. | |

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 475)

C. S. DAY:
STRUGGLES WITH POETRY
(IN "AFTER ALL")

Bankers long to have nice banker babies. But it seems they are constantly begetting impossible infants . . . Imagine Browning Senior studying *Pippa Passes* . . . What mental pictures of his son's heroine did the old gentleman form . . . ?