

**THE SEARS ROEBUCK COMPANY** is about to plunge into the book club field in a big way. Avidly searching for new lines to offset the millions lost through suspended production of pre-war sales leaders, the Sears organization has been quietly investigating possibilities in the book market for months. Now, with a little gentle nudging from the ever alert Simon and Schuster headquarters, it is ready to announce the launching of the Peoples' Book Club. Sears will devote as much as eight full pages of its new catalogue to this project. The monthly choices will sell at \$1.66 a copy, or twenty dollars a year. They will be manufactured by the Consolidated Book Publishers of Chicago (a subsidiary of the Cuneo Press). The first selection will be distributed in September. Members will be required to take a minimum of four books a year, which will entitle them to occasional free dividends (a mode of operation lifted bodily from the Book-of-the-Month Club). The books will also be sold individually in Sears Roebuck retail outlets. Instead of distributing brand new titles, the Peoples' Club will concentrate on proven best sellers that have been on the market six months and longer. No less an authority than George Gallup will conduct monthly polls to determine what books the members really want, and then Simon and Schuster will make the necessary contractual arrangements with the original publishers. The first three choices will be "The Robe," "The Valley of Decision," and "Mrs. Parkington," in the order named. This represents a triumph of epitomizing public taste by all the big shots involved, although it must be admitted that a backward child of twelve could have arrived at precisely the same conclusion by consulting the fiction best seller lists for the past three months in any one of 255 of the nation's newspapers.

Can Montgomery Ward allow this master minding by its great competitor to go unchallenged? I suggest that *they* start a book club, too, specializing, by way of novelty, in the time-honored classics. A board of judges composed of, say, Professor Einstein, the Quiz Kids, and Jimmie Durante might make a poll of all the public libraries and come up with the startling discovery that there is a genuine demand for the works of Shakespeare and the "Pickwick Papers."

Stripped of its high-faluting "public polls" and other hocus-pocus, the Peoples' Book Club promises to be an-

other step in the breath-taking expansion of the American book market. It will not hurt existing outlets at all, since it is fair to expect that a full ninety percent of its deliveries will be made to rural areas a hundred miles and more from a bookstore, and to people who heretofore have never bought books regularly in their lives. . . .

**THE WOOLWORTH AND GRANT** chain stores also have been expanding their book departments in recent weeks. Their first experiments with low-priced reprints were so successful that they now are toying with the notion of displaying \$2.50 novels and \$4.00 biographies. And most phenomenal of all has been the growth of the sale of juvenile books in toy and novelty stores. Three perspicacious publishers installed displays at the annual Toy Fair at the Hotel McAlpin this Spring, and sold thousands of dollars' worth of inexpensive children's books. Salesmen accustomed to selling these books in threes and fives were entranced to discover that toy buyers order things by the gross! When the war is over, and steel and tin toys are again available, this sudden interest in children's books is bound to subside, but I believe that by that time the dealers who now are handling them for the first time will have sold far too many to desert them entirely. An inevitable result of this new market will be to hasten the process of reducing the average prices of juvenile books to a dollar and under. From now on, two-dollar juveniles will



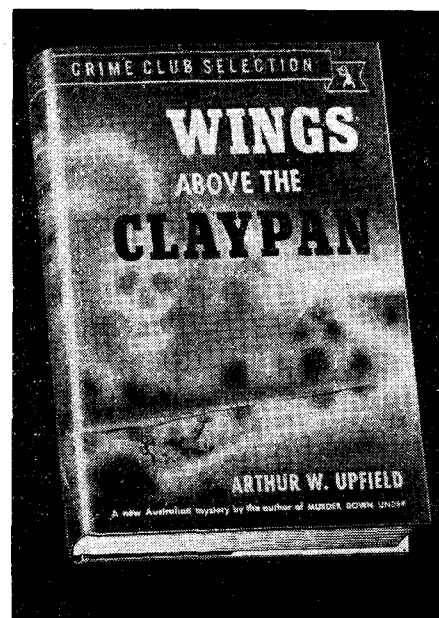
## HOME FRONT

"Before trying to understand how a vacuum tube acts in a circuit, it is necessary to learn something about what makes it operate. We must start at the very root of all matter—the electron. . . ."

be a luxury indeed. Personally, I have never understood why mothers ever were willing to pay two dollars for a copy of "Herodotus, the Herring," that dear little Junior ripped to shreds twenty-four hours later. . . .

**WHERE IS THE** paper coming from to satisfy these huge new demands? Publishers who maintain college text-book departments in peace times, or, like the Cuneo Press, printed hundreds of thousands of books for premium distribution, can devote the paper saved as a result of temporary cessation of such production to regular trade books. A few other houses who had banner years in 1942 still have plenty of paper left in 1943, despite the ten percent cut decreed by the W.P.B. The majority of publishers, however, are wringing their hands and wondering what they will be using for paper, come October. Some of them are hoping for special dispensation from Washington in light of the fact that they have sold thousands of books direct to the Army and Navy, and point out that they should be allowed extra paper for such business at least. One government official has countered with the suggestion that this extra paper be allotted only to firms who would sell the books printed thereon to the armed services on a strictly cash basis, plus a nominal sum for overhead. Most publishers consider this fair. In fact, they have been working out details for a scheme whereby men in service might get special editions for as little as a quarter a copy, or possibly no charge at all. A few noble patriots, however, promptly lost their passionate desire to supply the boys at the front with literature when they heard that the usual profit might have to be foregone. The publishing fraternity unfortunately has its full quota of hypocrites. They give ardent lip service to the Four Freedoms, and spell it out for Democracy in an after-dinner speech with the best of them, but in private life they behave like the most bigoted old goats in the bible belt. . . .

**BRIG. GEN. TEDDY ROOSEVELT**, of the Oyster Bay (who R not in season) Roosevelts, has been cited for gallantry in action in Africa, and will be sporting the silver star and oakleaf cluster award when he comes back to his desk at Doubleday, Doran after the war. . . . The Council of Books in Wartime, with the help of the Carnegie Foundation, will soon send an emissary to China. Leading candidate for the mission is Henry Holt's William Sloane, nominated by this column as 1942's Man of the Year in the publishing world. . . . Marion Dodd, head of the well-known Hampshire Bookshop up Smith College way, is a first cousin of Frank Dodd,



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# WINGS ABOVE THE CLAYPAN

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of Dodd, Mead. She is also one of the smartest and nicest ladies in the book business. . . . Archibald MacLeish has bought the old Robert E. Lee mansion in Alexandria. Next door is the old schoolhouse, unchanged, that Lee attended as a boy. MacLeish was no sooner installed in his sumptuous new home than he discovered that the plumbing was also unchanged from Civil War days. He and his family have been camping out in one room while the old pipes were being ripped out of the premises. . . . Ensign Roger Linscott, son of Houghton Mifflin's Robert Linscott, has married Lucy Goodlatte, one of the bevy of beauties who toiled for the Council of Books in Wartime. Said bevy have been whisking off to domestic bliss even faster than the Floradora sextette. Picture talent scouts might investigate the Council's Irene Rakofsky and Peggy Jones, of the New York O.W.I., before they vanish in the same direction. . . . The Heritage Club is planning a special, deluxe edition of Wendell Willkie's "One World," illustrated with photographs of some of the people and places encountered in the course of the journey. "One World"

will be published in England by Cassell. . . .

**I RECENTLY** had occasion to introduce Clifton Fadiman to an expectant audience. "But for me," I stated confidently, "Kip might be rolling in the gutter instead of sitting astride the very pinnacle of literary eminence. Many years ago—in 1925, to be exact—we wanted a new translation made of Nietzsche's 'Ecce Homo' for the Modern Library. I asked Irwin Edman at Columbia to undertake the job. He was too busy, but allowed that one of his graduate students, Clifton P. Fadiman by name, could do it as well or better than he could himself. The deal was struck, and Kip's name was attached to a literary work for the first time."

Fadiman graciously acknowledged the truth of my introduction, but pointed out a minor error in the chronology. "It was *after* Cerf paid me for that job, and not before," he remarked calmly, "that I was rolling in the gutter!" . . . It doesn't pay to stick your neck out with those slickers from "Information. Please!"

BENNETT CERF.

MAY 22, 1943

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# Lowell's Moral Certitude

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL. By Richmond Croom Beatty. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press. 1942. 311 pp., plus index. \$3.

Reviewed by NORMAN HOLMES PEARSON

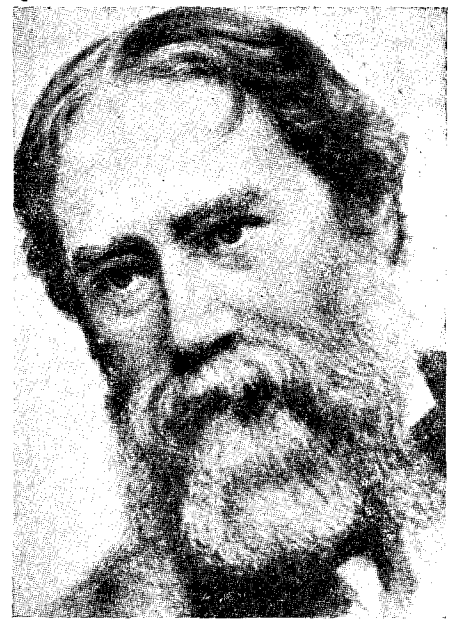
THE time has passed when James Russell Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" was called America's greatest poem. Only to teachers in elementary schools is there still nothing so rare as his day in June, and the gloom of a New England winter seemed to have settled about his elegant figure. Now, however, Lowell has a new biography and it is likely he will henceforth be seen in a new light.

Mr. Beatty's first memory of Lowell is in sepia, one of the "seven of them," as he describes the favorite literary Americans of the nineteenth century. "The beards of the last three [Bryant, Longfellow, and Lowell] were remarkably rich, leaving nothing below the nose particularly visible, so that the name of each author had been discreetly printed beneath his face in a delicate arc." Fortunately the frontispiece to Beatty's biography shows the subject with only the lightest of youthful beards and at least the suggestion of a chin beneath. The inference is that he now sees more of his subject.

The discovery of the chin is important, not only to Beatty but to the rest of us; and for this we are grateful. Lowell emerges not only as a poet but more vigorously as a political figure and commentator. He stands with

Bryant not as rhymers only but as a man of action. The vigor Beatty admires; the stand he cannot tolerate. For Lowell was an abolitionist and a moralist. Beatty is a professional Southerner and an ethical relativist. Lowell's chin comes in for a good many socks.

It is somewhat surprising to observe the Civil War refought with so much enthusiasm, and it is no mean tribute to Lowell that his writings maintain so much freshness that they can rouse such opposition. Mr. Beatty has been educated in an age of economic determinism. The same decades which stripped the First World War of all pertinent idealism are responsible also for the interpretation of the Civil War as, in Beatty's words, "a Cause whose issue was piracy," and in connection with which the abolition of slavery is to be mentioned only with apologetic blush. "It is no mere accident," Beatty says, "that the library of Harvard University, so modest in its resources before the war, is at present greater in its resources than those of all the Southern universities combined." Re-reading Lowell's views that the franchise should be granted the Negroes, and that "as to any prejudice which should prevent the two races from living together, it would soon yield to interest and necessity," Beatty sees "these complacent words today with a cold and quiet amazement." "It is," he says, "the point of view of the Communists of our own era, of those bright and utterly emancipated reformers who have never been able to comprehend the meaning of tradition in a society that once respected it." Lowell might have commented in return that any review of Beatty's biography should be titled "On a Certain Condescension in Southerners."



James Russell Lowell

The issues of the Civil War occupy by far the greatest portion of the biography, serving to illustrate what Beatty terms the "fanatic" in Lowell, that moral certitude which kept him from agreeing with any umbrella-like compromise in relation to slavery and Southern lebensraum. Beatty neither likes this earliest surety on moral issues nor Lowell's later Ministerial speeches at the Court of St. James, which he dismisses as attempts to make everybody "happy and consoled." As a poet, he finds him sentimental and didactic, except for the "Bigelow Papers" which were misinformed. As a critic Lowell's allegiance to the discursive impressionism of Hazlitt and Lamb is equally repugnant, nor does even Lowell's still somewhat remarkable choice of major subjects stand him in better stead. In fact Lowell as very much more than a political commentator does not very graphically emerge from Mr. Beatty's study. Yet for his rediscovery of Lowell as a subject for biography we can be glad. It is safe to say that this book will be followed by others by different scholars, impelled in part by Lowell's own worth and in part by irritation.

## Social Planners and Students

"Public Recreation in New Hampshire," a report on the history, development, administration, and financing of public recreation facilities, with a proposed plan for future systematic development and administration. An example of modern research and planning. Issued March 1943; now in second edition. \$1.

State Planning Commission, Desk 14, Concord, N. H.

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## SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 477)

NATHANIEL WARD:

(THE) SIMPLE COBLER  
(OF AGGAWAM)

It is a more common than convenient saying that nine tailors make a man. It were well if nineteen could make a woman to her mind. If tailors were men indeed, they would disdain to be led about like apes by such mimic marmosets.