

THE HEROINE of Laura Hobson's new novel, "The Trespassers," is in love with one of the most unlikely recipients of a damsel's affections you will encounter in the fiction world this year: A ruthless, high-powered egomaniac who doesn't care how many people he has to crush to reach his notion of the pinnacle of success. He probably is a composite portrait of some of the tycoons Mrs. Hobson herself has mixed up with in her busy and varied career at Batton, Barton, Durstine and Osborne, the *Post*, Altman's, *Time*, and Lord knows where else. . . . This has been Harry Hansen's week for feeling sorry for himself. "You won't believe me," he laments, "but there are boys and girls in college who actually hope to become book reviewers. They think of reviewing as just a lot of fun with books you like. Alas, let them be warned in time. We reviewers have to tolerate characters that go in for pregnancy, sterility, homosexuality, and incest, and report on them to our public. We put the best face on it that we can, but you don't see us leaving the books around on our living room tables!" . . .

BOOK REVIEWERS have had just a soft touch recently in comparison to the New York drama critics. First, Owen Davis served up a moronic little thing called "The Snark Was a Boojum." Statisticians proclaimed it his 305th play. It combined all the worst features of the other 304. Still shaky at the knees from this ordeal, the critics were summoned next to an exhibit sponsored by Mr. Irving Caesar, called "My Dear Public." This was so unbelievably bad that even the most articulate reviewers were left floundering for words, and sought refuge in remarks like: "We have come to bury



Caesar, not to praise him." . . . As an indication of a punch-drunk public's unprecedented craving for a little amusement, I saw numerous people actually going back for a second act of "My Dear Public" of their own free will. . . .

VINCENT STARRETT recalls one of the funniest incidents in the late Frank Harris's alleged autobiography, that amazing three-volume conglomeration of literary lore and sophomoric por-

nography that under-the-counter specialists peddle for as much as fifty dollars a set. Harris described a crucial international conference with all the wealth of detail that only a man who had not been present could supply. At the height of the confab an English munitions king let out a cry of anguish. His valuable time-piece had been hooked. The chairman—prime minister of a great European power—was properly outraged. "Gentlemen," he declared icily, "this will never do. The lights will be extinguished for five minutes. All of us will file out of this chamber in darkness. The thief, as he exits, will place the watch on the table there beside the door, where the buhl clock now stands." Thereupon, concluded Harris, the delegates filed out in silence and darkness. Five minutes later the room was relighted. Not only was the watch still missing; the buhl clock also had disappeared!

Frank Harris had just made his exit from the New York literary scene in 1923, when I got my first job in a publishing house. Embittered and in dire financial straits, he had taken himself off to the South of France, where he stayed until his death eight years later, convinced to the end that he was the world's most unappreciated genius. He was a boor and a blowhard. He dressed and acted like a tin-horn gambler. Oscar Wilde noted that he was "invited to all the great houses in London—once!" (Harris paid him back for this, and other taunts, in a brilliant but inaccurate biography.) Yet people who could put up with his eccentricities considered Frank Harris one of the keenest judges of literature of his generation. In his heyday he edited *The London News*, *The Fortnightly*, and *The Saturday Review*. He always claimed that he discovered George Bernard Shaw. Shaw denied this, but when Harris undertook a biography of Shaw as his last major literary effort, and bogged down in the middle of it, Shaw, in an uncharacteristic burst of generosity, edited the script himself, correcting a hundred misstatements and filling in countless gaps. It was rumored at the time that what part of the final manuscript was not Shaw's own contribution had been written by Frank Scully, but all parties concerned decline to substantiate the tale.

Harris was supported in his last years by indulgent American tourists, who bought volumes of "curiosa" from him for admittedly exorbitant sums,

and fed his ego by pretending to believe his preposterous reminiscences. When Donald Klopfer visited him in 1930, he insisted on reading aloud his latest short story. In the middle of it, he burst into violent sobs, announced: "This is the greatest short story ever written," and staggered from the room. He was waiting at the exit gate, however, all smiles again, with "My Life and Loves" under his arm when the Klopfers departed. Don paid him four hundred lira for the volumes; swapped



them in Paris for an autographed copy of Ludwig Lewisohn's "The Case of Mr. Crump," which he lost in a taxicab a few moments later. . . .

DEVOTEES of the late Don Marquis will be pleased to hear that that superlatively good actor, Charles Coburn, plans a Broadway production of "The Master of the Revels" next Spring, and that Doubleday, Doran have published a wartime edition of the imperishable "archy and mehitabel." . . . Watch for an epidemic of pin-up books in the Spring. Shortage of paper is all that has held up a half dozen of them this season. . . . Three out of every four spy stories now in search of a publisher are accompanied by a note explaining "this is ideal material for Humphrey Bogart and Sydney Greenstreet!" Last year it was Alfred Hitchcock. . . . Churchill's speech caused a sudden demand for Richards's "Basic English and Its Uses." . . . The two liveliest items on the new Princeton University Press list are Ed Earle's "Makers of Modern Strategy" and Tannehill's "Weather Around the World." Both have first printings of 10,000. Tannehill's "Hurricanes," published in 1938, sold 700 copies in four years, then sailed through four revised editions in the following eighteen months! Army and Navy demand, of course. . . . If P. G. Wodehouse can ever tear himself away from Berlin long enough to return to America, he'll find a tax bill of \$21,328 waiting for him at the dock, not to mention a little item of \$17,382 for penalties and interest. . . .

LIN YUTANG has embarked upon a foreign mission that will take him far from home (*you* guess!) for many months. Regardless of the dangers he will encounter, he will never come closer to disaster than he did a few Sundays back. Dr. Lin, his wife, and his three children were aboard the Congressional Limited when it was wrecked outside of Philadelphia. They escaped with a severe shaking up. Five minutes earlier they had returned to



"Richard, lieber Richard, Der Fuehrer wants to know about that 'Rule Britannia' overture!"

their seats from the diner, where a dozen passengers were crushed and scalded in the crash. . . . Roy Howard also escaped injury in the same wreck. . . . Henry Giersburg, long a fixture at Putnam's, is now at Brentano's Fifth Avenue store. The sixth Brentano branch in Washington has just been opened in the Pentagon Building. All you have to do is find it. . . . Walter Winchell reported on a once-famous English author whose luck in Hollywood had deserted him. "Since he's lost his stake," said Walter, "half his friends don't talk to him." "How about the other half?" he was asked. "They," was the reply, "don't know it yet!" . . .

CHRIS MASSIE, author of "The Green Circle," writes that just after the armistice of the last war, when the Germans were moving out of France, and the British were following on their heels, his brother Douglas, with the First Division, was amazed at the variety of flags which were being displayed in the French villages. Besides the French, Belgian, American, and British emblems, there were Italian and even Japanese flags. He wondered that such a stock should be on hand, and asked a Frenchwoman about it. She smiled and replied, "The Germans brought them down in trucks before they went away, and sold them to us for five francs apiece!" "The economic war had begun," comments Massie, "and the Germans were setting about winning it even before their defeated soldiers were off the battlefield! Let's see to it together that they don't have

the chance to play that sort of game again!" . . .

FRANK GERVASI says that, if he ever writes a book about Greece, he's going to call it "Death and Metaxas." . . . Inspired suggestion from a Des Moines bookseller: a Shotgun Edition of "Ideal Marriage." . . . Ring Lardner liked to tell his friends of an eccentric in the Adirondacks who constructed a building entirely of knot-holes. "What kinda holes do you call dese?" asked a visiting Brooklynite. "They are knot-holes," said the builder. "Hmphh," persisted the Brooklynite. "Dey look like holes to me!" . . . "This dog," Mr. Weber once said to Mr. Fields, "is worth five hundred dollars." To which Mr. Fields replied, "How could a dog save that much money?" . . . Henry Morgenthau introduced Bob Hope on the radio as "the funniest man in the world." "Thank you, Mr. Morgenthau," responded Hope, and added "Say, that's the first time I've ever said *that!* Up till now, it's always been 'You're welcome, Mr. Morgenthau!'" . . . And Cecil Brown passes on the story of the correspondent's daughter who landed a Government job in Washington. Her first day on duty, she handled an incoming phone call. "Is Colonel So-and-so there?" the voice asked. The girl covered the receiver with her hand and asked her superior, "Colonel So-and-so has gone to the United Kingdom," she was informed. "I'm sorry," she said to the caller with gentle dignity, "but Colonel So-and-so is dead."

BENNETT CERF.

"Because it is interesting and absorbing

and has romance and adventure in it, it packs ten times the punch of a social tract. Will mark an important turning point in the increasing literature of Negro life in America."

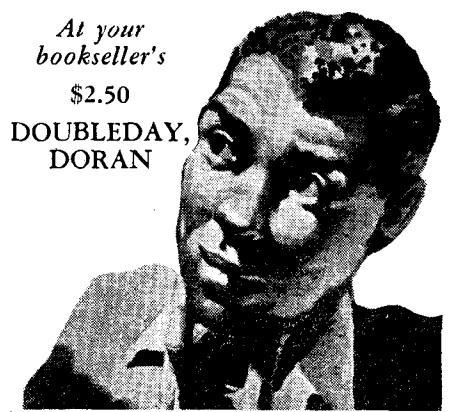
—CHICAGO *Sun*

"Beautifully written, magnificently and brutally honest. If you have the courage to read it, you'll never be able to be complacent about the so-called race question again." —WALTER WHITE

THE Darker Brother

A Novel by
BUCKLIN MOON

At your
bookseller's
\$2.50
DOUBLEDAY,
DORAN



The Editorial Writer as Columnist

AN AMERICAN DIARY. By Samuel Grafton. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc. 1943. 246 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

HISTORY as it has developed in these last few tragic years has been kind to Samuel Grafton's opinions. Step by step, events have justified his positions. Of course, he chose the pieces which appear in this book. Some other things he has written might have marred the pattern here presented. Nevertheless, his writing does come together in this book as a record of wise and passionate comment on what he calls "the development of the ideal of a more democratic world, as that ideal has advanced and receded, flared up and died down, become too ecstatic and then perhaps too morose, since summer 1939."

The important thing about Samuel Grafton is not merely that he is probably the leading "liberal" among practising columnists in American newspapers today. In Grafton terms "Liberalism" means both a faith in a dynamic democracy and a willingness to fight dictatorship from the beginning to the end and everywhere. There is in it an equal willingness to fight demagoguery and meanness at home. It includes an admiration of U.S.S.R. which was not marked by "party line" American isolationism before the Germans invaded Russia. Grafton was for fighting Germany when American Communists were isolationists by instruction. Nor is the significant thing about Grafton that

he has been so often right. The importance of the man in print in America today is that there is in him a hardly equalized combination of passion, lucidity, and the ability to put words together with both wit and a wallop.

Perhaps more than any other recently practising columnist Grafton is entitled to the mantle of the late great Heywood Broun. He speaks most forthrightly from the same general position. But the succession can be over-emphasized. Grafton at his best is an effective commentator on current events. But his comments are more tightly tied to the hour and the day of his indignation than Broun's work was. There is no item in this collection which stands as a piece of writing with such qualities of permanence in charm as Broun often put into pieces designed for a day's col-

umn. Grafton is the editorial writer as columnist and a good one. He nowhere in the writing collected here makes pretense to the qualities of artist as columnist which Broun put into his work and which is to be found there still.

Such a comparison may be entirely beside the point. The real point is that in Samuel Grafton those who really believe in democracy with a little "d" as well as a big "D" have now an effective, persistent, passionate champion in the daily press. Occasionally his patience in a world of censorship is as short as his sometimes limited information. Certainly that patience is always shortest with stuffed shirts and phonies, the scant of faith, and those short on good will. Though he more often speaks in importance than in praise his essential strength lies in his faith in people, in their courage and dignity, in their capacities for freedom in a free and decent world.

The Price of Immortality

THIS WAS LIDICE. By Gustav Holm. New York: G. P. Putnam's Son. 1943. 235 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

ONLY recently a spokesman of one of the European governments-in-exile rightly remarked that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of "Lidices" all over the Continent. Yet it is that one Czech village which has caught the imagination of novelists and the reading public alike, not to speak of Hollywood. Perhaps it was Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem which set the pattern, perhaps the publicity given by the Nazis themselves to that one act, among innumerable similar atrocities, of their barbarism. Be that as it may, the name of Lidice seems to have outgrown its individual meaning and gained the strength of a symbol.

Probably it was a feeling of this kind which made the present author write his novel the way he has. He makes no psychological pretensions whatsoever. His characters differ in no way from the by now well-known cast of all popular underground stories; they all are present again: the idealistic schoolteacher, the old priest, the good innkeeper and his heroic and lovely daughter, the loquacious barber and—since this is Bohemia—the self-styled half-wit who outwits the tyrants. (Unlike the author of the much-overrated "Hostages," Mr. Holm, as should be pointed out, has given full credit to that figure's original model, the Good Soldier

Schwejk.) Equally patterned on familiar clichés are the representatives of the opposite side—including the one "just" German who, while serving the Fuehrer, clings to the "Germany of Schiller and Goethe."

But it is precisely this unpretentious black-and-white method which gives Mr. Holm's narrative, despite the merciless naturalism of its details, a definite element of legend and folklore, heightened by an excellent presentation of the peculiar atmosphere of Czech village life. Surrounded by that fairy-tale aura, even such an utterly fantastic scene as an encounter between the righteous Schwejkish pauper and the all-powerful villain, that is Hitler himself, becomes almost credible. In the traditional happy ending of the fairy-tale is substituted the indomitable spirit of a good and freedom-loving people, the defying "Né-dame se" of the enslaved Czechs which forecasts the downfall and the punishment of the coarse oppressor.

The author's straightforward plot, the warmth of his sentiments, and his unobtrusive intimacy with the milieu add to the commendable qualities of his volume. In Mr. Holm's account, the pathetic story of Lidice remains as deeply moving as it was the morning the newspapers revealed to its horrified readers the scope of that monstrous crime. And this cannot be said of all anti-Nazi and underground tales.

WAR BONDS

Not a Gift, But Thrift



Samuel Grafton