

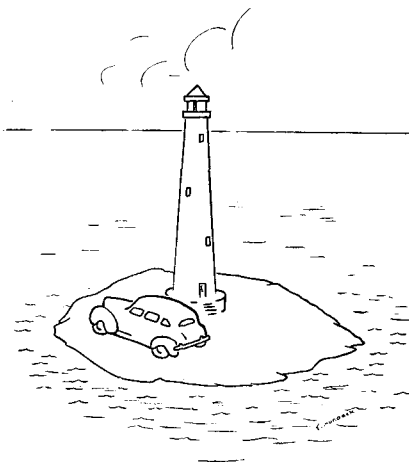
## YEAR-END MISCELLANY

IN HIS BIOGRAPHY of Laurence Sterne, called "A Fellow of Infinite Jest," Thomas Yoseloff declares that the body of the man who wrote "Tristram Shandy" did not rest long in the grave to which it had been committed. Ghouls dug it up and sold it to Cambridge University, which had been experiencing trouble in obtaining bodies for dissecting purposes. (Such practices were regarded with deep suspicion in 1768.) One of the doctors who participated in the experiment had been a longtime friend of Sterne, and when the cloth was removed from the face, and the doctor recognized it, he ran screaming from the hall. What a plot for a story by August Derleth or Guy Endore! . . . Dana Lyon writes that a well-known citizen of San Jose met his ex-wife at a cocktail party, and warmed by the libations, suggested that they have another go at connubial bliss. "Over my dead body," said the lady haughtily. "My error," said the erstwhile spouse. "I see you haven't changed a bit." . . .

DR. GEORGE PEIRCE bought a copy of "The Lives of Winston Churchill" at the Stanford Bookstore. Helen Stirling asked him, "What do you think of the current political situation?" Dr. Peirce answered, "Have you ever tried porridge after a cocktail?" . . . A visitor to the SRL, casting a jaundiced eye over recent appointments by the President, remarked, "It's becoming obvious that Truman is using his present office merely as a springboard for the next election. That man's real ambition is to become governor of Missouri!" . . . Clifton Fadiman has embarked upon a three-year project entitled "Living Literature of Greece and Rome." It will run to two or three large volumes and will consist of sixty to a hundred thousand words of original commentary (Mr. Fadiman prefers the word "conversation") plus a full selection from whatever in classical literature still, in Mr. Fadiman's phrase, "speaks to us today—and nothing else." The finished work will probably exceed a million words plus the editor's extended comment. . . . When J. Edgar Hoover agreed to write a foreword to "Inside the F.B.I.," author John J. Floherty expansively promised to autograph as many copies as F.B.I. staff men requested. The total to date is 5231. It's a Lippincott book. . . . Tom Powers,

the man who dreamed up the title "Virgin with Butterflies" for his last novel, informs Bobbs-Merrill that he's calling his next one "Sheba on Trampled Grass." . . . The thirty-seventh edition of "Anthony Adverse" will contain illustrations by Rockwell Kent, Covarrubias, Douglas Gorshine, and Umberto Romano. . . .

IF IT'S GOOD, simple amusement you are looking for, and you don't mind the fact that some of the stories are as corny as anything in "Laughing Stock," there are three new humorous collections on the market that merit your attention. Harry Hershfield, Joe Laurie, Jr., and Ed Ford have crammed the funniest of their radio stories into "Can You Top This?" (Didier, \$2). Milton Berle's "Out of My Trunk" is also very amusing in spots, although there are pages that make you wish he had confined himself to the top layers (Grayson, \$1). Boyce House's "Texas—Proud and Loud" (Naylor, \$1.79) contains some of the newest stories of the lot. Like all joke collections, these volumes are meant to be dipped into, and not read through at one sitting. They also overlap in spots. The true connoisseur will derive added pleasure from noting the devices employed by experts to make genuine antiques seem glisteningly new, and to chip just enough of the rough edges from smoking-room classics to make them suitable tid-bits for a D.A.R. tea-party. . . . If you would open your repast with caviar, dip into David McCord's new anthology of American and British humorous verse, "What Cheer" (Coward-McCann, \$3.50). And for a fine old brandy to leave just the right taste



in your mouth, wind up with "The Practical Cogitator," by Charles Curtis, Jr., and Ferris Greenslet (Houghton Mifflin, \$3). . . .

A TRADE WINDS AWARD to Ben Abramson for restoring to print Charles S. Finney's unique fantasy, "The Circus of Dr. Lao." . . . A prominent critic confused a Boston audience recently by introducing Elizabeth Janeway as "Kate Greenaway" (who died in 1901). As a matter of fact, there has been some talk lately of reissuing a few of the juveniles containing the famous Greenaway illustrations. . . . Tom Lamont, longtime friend of the SRL and one of the finest gentlemen in these parts, has donated \$1,500,000 for a new library at Harvard, explaining that he is "still moved by the sense of exhilaration and stimulus" of his undergraduate days there. . . . Houghton Mifflin's next Life-in-America prize book will be "No Time for Tears," by Lora Wood Hughes, a seventy-year-old nurse from the State of Washington. . . . Leo Guild, whose Trade Winds contribution, "It Could Happen Any Edition Now," was reprinted by Reader's Scope, has a book coming up called "You Bet Your Life" under the Marcel Rodd imprint. Guild claims that he struck up a conversation with a waitress in Hollywood last week. "I saw 'Mildred Pierce' on the screen," she told him, "and that decided me to take up the profession of waitress." Guild warned her, "For God's sake, steer clear of 'Forever Amber.'" . . .

IT WILL BE plain "Doubleday & Company" after January 1. . . . John Farrar's re-entry into publishing (Straus & Farrar) probably means a change in the firm name of Farrar & Rinehart too. . . . Dorothy Parker complained of the cold. "Go to Mexico," said S. J. Perelman. "Why?" queried Moss Hart. "Because," replied the japester, "down there it's chili today and hot tamale." . . . Louis Sobol reports that the critic of the *Bartender's Journal* gave "The Lost Weekend" four hiccoughs. . . . Peter Lorre arrived very late for a dinner party. "I couldn't get rid of some guests I had in for cocktails," he explained. "They were the kind of people who think when they've gotten up to say goodbye that they've gone." . . . Salvador Dali has started a "newspaper" called *The Dali News*. It's on sale at some bookstores at a quarter a copy, and is intelligible in spots. One of his latest paintings is entitled "Napoleon's Nose, Transformed into a Pregnant Woman, Strolling His Shadow with Melancholia Amongst Original Ruins." That's clear enough, isn't it? . . .



"'E pluribus unum' . . . 'E pluribus unum' . . .  
what's the matter . . . can't you speak English?"

"COUNTRY ROAD" is a new volume of poems by Leone Rice Grelle, published by Macmillan. It includes one called "Auction" that is reprinted here by permission:

How much am I bid for a proud old wall  
That a forefather built in the long ago?  
And how much for the acres, the reaching rods  
That climb the way that the tall winds blow?

And what will they give for the rambling barn  
That brought and sheltered the new-born things  
That knew his love, in their helplessness?  
And what is the price his silence brings?

And who will offer a worth-while sum  
For a house that was never a house to me,  
But a home? And what for a pasture gate  
And a spring; and the soul of a hemlock tree?

And how much for the road that searched the hill  
And led his feet to the setting sun  
When his work was finished, his great hands still?  
And what for a heart, when the sale is done? . . .

BROADWAY PRODUCERS complain that it's futile for them to discover promising new talent; the moment a newcomer

makes a hit, he (or she) is seduced by the siren song of a Hollywood scout and vamooses for the Coast without so much as a thank-you to the man who provided the opening chance. "To rub it in," added one showman, "the film companies who steal our talent usually demand four pairs of free seats for the openings so they won't overlook any bets." Oscar Serlin, producer of "Life with Father," had an experience this season that emphasizes the point.

Serlin was casting a new play, and wanted a fresh, unknown beauty for the leading ingenue part. He was impressed with the reading of a youngster whose only previous professional experience was a couple of walk-on extra roles in pictures a year before. She hadn't had a job in months, and was tearfully grateful when she heard that Serlin would seriously consider her for a big part on Broadway. "Come back tomorrow," he suggested. "Oh, I will, I will," she promised happily.

The next morning he offered her a run-of-the-play contract. Her reaction was not exactly what he had expected, however. Evidently she had been talking things over with a friend from Hollywood. "I don't think I can sign this," she told Serlin. "For heaven's sake, why?" he asked. "Suppose this show is a smash hit and runs for two years," she explained. "I'd be stuck in it!"

BENNETT CERF

## "From where I sit"



BECAUSE we are in publishing and because it is a business, sometimes we sit around and try to think up good ideas for biographies. But we know that there are

obvious pitfalls to this sort of a policy, and only sometimes do we indulge it. A biography has to have something more than just a likely subject, especially in the case of a living subject, because many other houses are liable to do one on the same person, and naturally we want ours to stand out above the others.

A biography, to use the common phrase, has to be a full-length portrait, it has to be both a composite picture and an accurate record—accurate enough for historians to refer to with confidence. Otherwise it gets bogged down with references which come to mean nothing as time goes on.

Take Eisenhower, for example. There are already several biographies of the man and there will probably be many more. So how do you choose which one is best?

In the first place, it was not a question of looking around for some correspondent to write a biography of Eisenhower. We knew that KEN DAVIS had worked with Milton Eisenhower, Ike's brother, and we knew that DAVIS had been collecting data from the Eisenhower family out in Kansas with the idea of doing something on the man. DAVIS got his information firsthand. He knew a good deal about Eisenhower's life and background long before he was sent to SHEAF headquarters in Europe. His experience with the General overseas supplemented what he had already collected, and he was ready to write the book. But the important thing is that DAVIS was a writer first. His novel, *In the Forests of the Night*, got the good press that a good piece of writing deserves.

In *Soldier of Democracy* DAVIS has revealed himself to be a swell biographer. He sees things like a writer. He knows how to take facts and anecdotes, trends and thoughts and impressions and put them together so that they form a continuously interesting and informative picture. He is never side-tracked by trivial recitations of dates and rosters and lunches and debates and asides. The result, I think, is the best biography of Eisenhower that will come off the presses for a long time to come.

paul

★ DOUBLEDAY, DORAN ★

# Seeing Things

JESSNERTREPPEN

**T**HE last play you would expect Hitler to enjoy was apparently the first one he saw. The drama in question was "Wilhelm Tell," and the future Fuehrer a boy of twelve when in Upper Austria he was taken to see it.

Although words seldom failed Hitler, except when it came to having them make sense, he has nothing to say in "Mein Kampf" either about Schiller's ode to liberty or his own reactions to it. He merely confesses that he saw "Wilhelm Tell." Then, in the same sentence, he rushes on to add that a few months later he sat before "Lohengrin" and "was captivated at once."

Hindsight is as easy as conjecture is dangerous. But, what with one thing and another, my own guess is that, when confronted with Schiller's play, the budding Adolf did one of two things. Either he was taken home before it was over, as sometimes happens to bad children, and hence missed its ending. Or, if he stuck it out, he gave his heart not to Tell but to Gessler, that tyrant whose first name was Hermann.

Schiller's drama and Hitler's share in Germany's fate came jointly to my mind when, two weeks ago, I read of Leopold Jessner's death. Jessner, you see, was himself not unconnected with "Wilhelm Tell." He had produced it at Berlin's Staatstheater twenty-two years ago. I can still recall that production, though it was not one of his best. Unless my memory fails me, he had even staged the play in Hollywood after the advent of the Nazis had driven him to this country as a refugee. As one of the illustrious many from the German theatre.

To most Americans Jessner was doubtless unknown. But to all students of the stage, especially those of us who had been in Germany just after the last war, Jessner's name meant much. It was second only to Reinhardt's. The position he held in the theatre was the highest the young Weimar Republic had to offer. He was the director of all the State theatres in the land; to be more precise, the Uberintendant.

More than standing for a man, his name symbolized a period. The period in question represented a phase in

dramatic history. A hunk out of our lives, too; an interlude which now seems (as in the way with things past) both remote and near; as distant as if it had never occurred except in a dream, yet as insistent as if it had taken place yesterday. In this respect, it makes me think of what a young officer, just back from two gruelling years in Europe and about to turn civilian, said to me recently when I asked him how real his war experiences remained for him. "I remember them," he replied, "the way I do an exciting feature film seen six months back."

In the twenties the German theatre was very much alive. For the stage-struck of every land it was technically the Mecca that the theatre of Soviet Russia was later to become. The poverty to be found in Berlin and Frankfurt, in Darmstadt and Munich, in Dresden and Mannheim, in Stuttgart and Leipzig, had proved enriching rather than curtailing. It had presented a new challenge to the invention of theatre-workers, if for no other reason than that it made a costly realism unthinkable.

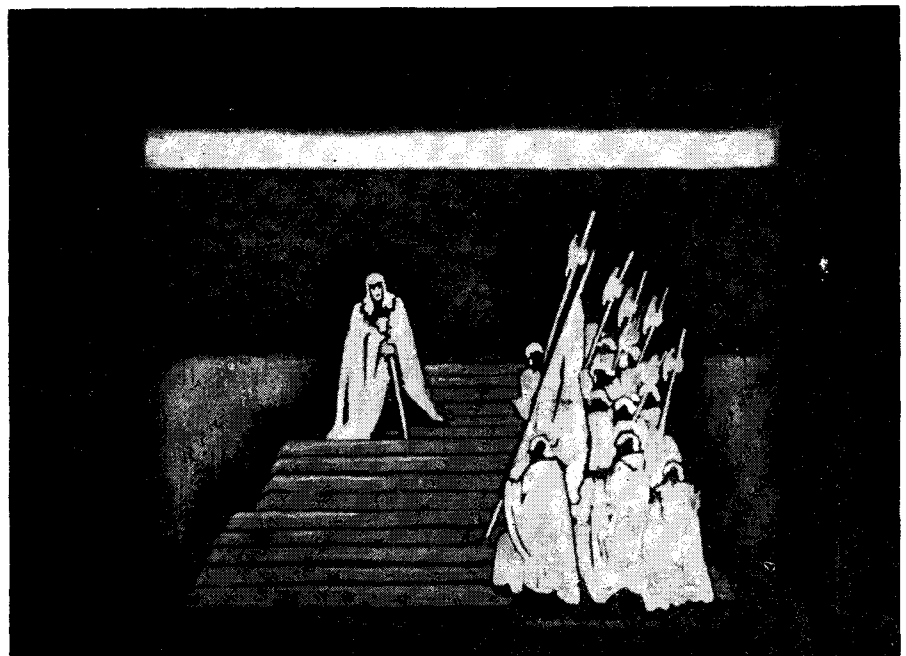
German audiences were composed

of determined drama lovers, shabby and gray looking, however plump. Each night that they assembled in a playhouse, carrying thick brownbread sandwiches with them, they had had to choose between a regular meal and a drama. If they chose the latter, why not? German actors then included such players as Moissi, the Thimigs, Hartmann, Bergner, Pallenberg, and Wegener.

The work of German directors and designers was, if anything, more compelling. It was a show in itself. Whether they were reviving a classic or producing a new play by Toller or von Unruh, the touch of these men was virtuoso. In those days they came in pairs, Ark-wise, to the service of the stage. Reinhardt and Stern in the greasepaint empire over which Reinhardt ruled. Weichert and Sievert at Frankfurt. Fehling and Strohbach, Jessner and Pirchan in Berlin. Pinched budgets released their large imaginations.

The New Movement in the theatre, now almost as forgotten as the glories of the Daly company and as taken for granted as a streamlined train, was then still new. In scenery and the subconscious, in a cross between what Craig and Freud had cried for, and a complete surrender to what Shaw's Louis Dubedat had described as "the might of design, the mystery of color, (and) the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting," the post-war theatre of those years appeared to be reborn.

The stress everywhere was noisily upon stagecraft; upon the manner of



— "From Continental Stagecraft"

Jessner "loved stairs—indeed, swamped his stage with them—because they freed the movement of his actors." The sketch depicts Jessner's setting for Richard III.

*The Saturday Review*