

# TRADE Winds

**THE SONGS OF** Abe Burrows, which have convulsed the cognoscenti of Hollywood and Broadway, will be collected and published in book form next spring. Some of the titles: "The Girl with the Three Blue Eyes (What Makes Her Different?)" ; "I'm Walking Down Memory Lane, Without a Thing to Remember" ; "Have You Ever Seen Levine in His Flying Machine (My God, What a Horrible Sight)" ; and "I Wasn't Cured by a Doctor or a Vet; I Was Cured by the Song of Bernadette." Burrows wrote the Duff's Tavern radio scripts for five years, and helped create that wondrous character, Two-Headed Gruskin. His "documentary" on Boulder Dam made Henry Kaiser cry with laughter at the Cecil Browns's one evening. His take-off on a Norman Corwin radio show is so devastating that Corwin (a wonderful sport about it) fears it will haunt his creative hours for months to come.

Burrows served a brief spell as producer at Paramount. "I prefer not to stub my toes at the outset on a new picture," he told the Board of Directors. "Won't you let me get into my stride by doing a good remake first?" "That's very modest of you and very wise," said the Chairman. "What picture would you like to remake?" "'Going My Way,'" said Burrows. In more serious vein, he hopes some day to write a book that will trace the influence of humor on world history.

Burrows told me he was riding in a car with a nervous playwright in New Jersey a few weeks ago. The driver was reckless and erratic, and had his passengers on the edge of their seats. When the towers of the George Washington Bridge loomed in the distance, the playwright tapped the driver on the shoulder and suggested, "Don't cross that bridge till you come to it!" . . . That calls to mind Earl Wilson's story of the time Beatrice Lillie offered a lift to an actress she loathed. In her sweetest manner, she asked, "Can I drop you anywhere—off the George Washington Bridge, for instance?" . . .

**THE LAST TIME** Booth Tarkington's "Monsieur Beaucaire" was done in the movies, it starred a fellow named Valentino. Heavens to Betsy, who do you think is going to make the new version? Bob Hope! Mr. Tarkington says, "This is just one more choice item for my autobiography—if I ever finish it!" . . . Another tid-bit for the "It Only

Could Happen in Hollywood" department is the selection of Aldous Huxley to write the scenario for Walt Disney's "Alice in Wonderland." . . . All this had nothing to do with William Faulkner's decision to quit the Gold Coast and finish his new novel in Oxford, Mississippi. He's driving home with a trailer that contains his horse. The horse is "expecting" and Bill explains that he wants the colt to be born "at home." . . .

**IN A TALK** recorded for the British Broadcasting Corporation, V. S. Pritchett delivered some straight-from-the-shoulder comments on present-day book publishing, a few of which I quote herewith:

There are three evils in the present happy-go-lucky system: first, high-pressure, speculative publishing of the American kind in which author and publisher are like gamblers aiming at a quick return; it was typical of modern business between the wars and turned writers into race-horses. The second evil is the fact that millions of readers read books without paying a penny directly to the author and publisher. The readers of public and private libraries ought to pay a tax of a penny, twopence, or some sum like that, every time they take out one of my books. The green-grocer does not expect to have to give away nine-tenths of his stock, just because the other tenth has been paid for. The third evil is that after a certain number of years (fifty-six in America) an author's property becomes, not public property, but the private property of anyone smart enough to speculate in it. The profits made out



"Guess Who?"

of the publication of books out of copyright ought to be taxed and the tax paid into a literary fund . . .

My ideal publisher is either himself a critic or employs one as his literary adviser. One of the greatest of these was the late Edward Garnett, and we can see how important and grateful his service to literature was by reading his correspondence with such writers as D. H. Lawrence and Conrad and Galsworthy. A publisher is often obliged to be tactful and reticent with an author; but authors can always see through this. They need to find, in their publisher's office, a man who applies disinterested criticism to their work, who helps to provide that warm climate in which their work can grow. One may quarrel with him, as Lawrence quarreled with Edward Garnett, but the quarrel will be real, an issue of literature, and the kind of thing which writers are used to and by their nature understand. This literary adviser must be a man with a vocation. It is hopeless if, like the editors of so many American magazines, he is a disappointed writer.

I doubt if the speculative commercial publisher who, of course, often publishes excellent books, will provide this advice; for he will have little notion of the vocational sense of literature. It is this sense of vocation which I want to see revived. Many of the old-fashioned publishers subscribed to it: they were proud of the great names on their lists; and it is to this principle that publishing must return now that author and publisher are faced by the enormous new literate class which desires to share in the heritage of the educated. . . .

**THE AUTHORESS** of a current best-seller very obviously considers herself an irresistible glamor girl, conveniently disregarding a formidable set of buck teeth. An ungallant soul at a literary tea created a furore by telling her, "I'll bet you're the only person in New York who can eat a tomato through a tennis racket." . . . A couple I know took their young daughter to her first movie, "The Keys of the Kingdom." On the way home, they passed several nuns. The little girl tugged at her mother's sleeve and said, "Look, mama. Actors" . . . On the first morning of the elevator strike, most of the employees of Grosset and Dunlap shuffled uncertainly in the lobby. Berney Geis, with a jug of brandy tied under his chin, resolutely set out to climb eleven flights of stairs to the office. "I know John O'Connor got in, as usual, at eight—before the strike started," said Geis. "If he wants you all to climb up, I'll wave a poster for 'Brave Men' from the window. If I display our 'Thurber Carnival' poster, you can go home." O'Connor said their individual consciences would have to be their guides, so Geis waved *both* posters from the window. About three out of four turned out to be brave men and women. . . .



**VAN CARTMELL** divided his leisure time during the month of September between profiling Roland Young for *Pageant* and getting through the second wicket of Margaret Emerson's croquet course. According to Van, Young, never partial to physical exercise, once was persuaded to take up tennis, and was quite bucked about the improvement in his game until somebody told him it was permissible during actual play to remove the press from the racket. . . . If you have any friends who seriously echo the stuff they read in O'Donnell and Pegler's columns, I beg you to give them two books: Henry Morgenthau, Jr.'s "Germany Is Our Problem" and Andrew Roth's "Dilemma in Japan." Then hold a gun to their heads until they read them. . . . Chester Feitel is back with Kay Kamen. Watch for bigger and better Walt Disney books! . . . Fathers-to-be get a hilarious going over in "Stork Bites Man," written by Louis Pollock, illustrated by Carl Rose, and published by World. . . . Macmillan has reissued H. G. Wells's "The Shape of Things to Come." Mr. Wells wrote this book in 1933; his predictions that sounded most fantastic at the time have come true already. . . .

**OVER THE RADIO.** George Agnew Chamberlain heard the voice of Bing Crosby: "A mule is an animal with

long funny ears; he kicks up at anything he hears; his back is brawny but his brain is weak; he's just plain stupid with a stubborn streak." Chamberlain was stunned and outraged. In his opinion, "No other animal, and only a scattering of outstanding men, can approach the intelligence, fidelity, and single-hearted love of a mule." He dashed to a typewriter to prove his point. Three weeks later, Robert H. Reed, editor of *The Country Gentleman*, declared that "Scudda-Hoo! Scudda-Hay!" was the best serial the magazine ever had bought. It will be out in book form soon. If Mr. Chamberlain is a sport, he'll cut the author of Crosby's song, and The Home for Over-age Single-hearted Mules in on his royalties. . . .

**BEATRICE KAUFMAN'S** love of life and laughter, her abiding interest in the affairs of a myriad of friends, were so great that it will be a long time before they realize she is gone. She was the core and connecting link of scores of people in every walk of life who owe some of their success today to her ever-ready counsel and sympathy when the going was roughest. Part of the fun of doing things was telling Beatrice about them. Her death will leave an unfillable gap in our lives.

BENNETT CERF.

## "From where I sit"



**A**N Eastern story-editor of a motion-picture company suggested to one of our editors that we try and find a novel about a Southern Baptist minister which would make a good movie. Our editor thought he knew just the guy for it, a client of the agent, Harold Matson. He phoned Matson, and to their joint dismay they found that the client was what people in big cities call *all-tied-up*. Then Matson snapped his fingers and exclaimed, "JAMES STREET! What about JAMES STREET!" STREET liked the idea too, and thus was born **The Gauntlet**, STREET's first serious contemporary novel. What neither our editor nor Matson knew at first was that JAMES STREET had been a Southern minister.

Stories like this one of how books are born are interesting because they show that the world is full of wagons waiting to be hitched to stars. Sometimes the wagons are little shays or buggies which fly lightly and gaily across the brief twilight of an evening's reading. Sometimes they are great harvesting machines with arms and cogs and teeth, mowing their way across the literary firmament. Judging from advance notices, this book is a harvester.

★ ★ ★ ★



**W**OLCOTT GIBBS gave GERTRUDE LAWRENCE'S **A Star Danced** seven columns in *The New Yorker*, a little publication having its desks in the same office building with the Hays Office and undertaking

some censoring of its own. What censoring Mr. Gibbs did of Miss LAWRENCE's book was sprinkled over seven columns, and do you know how much a square pica is worth on 43rd St.? All in all MISS LAWRENCE was highly pleased and so were her publishers. In fact, she even wrote some verse to Mr. Gibbs, replying to an uncensored verse of Noel Coward's (addressed to Miss LAWRENCE) with which Gibbs ended the review. Her five stanza ditty ends:

So dear Mr. G.  
Accept thanks from me  
That my work filled you not  
with abhorance.  
You've guessed it by Gum!  
The time has now cum  
It rhymes! So I signs—

Gertrude Lawrence

paul

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN

# Seeing Things

## SLICE OF LIFE?

ONCE, when a bad little play, the very name of which is now happily forgotten, crept onto Broadway, Richard Lockridge described its arrival by saying it had opened like a yawn.

Incredibly enough, it was with much the same exposure of tongue, tonsils, palate, and molars, that "Thérèse" \* opened recently in New York. I say "incredibly enough," because "Thérèse" is, of course, nothing more nor less than Thomas Job's adaptation of "Thérèse Raquin." And "Thérèse Raquin," when Zola first wrote it as a novel nearly eighty years ago, and then turned it into a play a few years later, was anything but yawnful.

Shocking, yes. Revolutionary, certainly. Daring. Audacious. Appalling. Any of those adjectives which are heaped upon works for which neither the critics nor the public are quite ready. But yawnful, no.

Sitting before Zola's melodrama at the Biltmore, it is difficult if not impossible for us to realize that a play which will no doubt soon go out like a lamb had once come in like a lion.

We accept its innovations as commonplace. We take its conquests for granted. To most of us it seems merely dull; badly acted; unfortunately directed. We see it not for what it contributed to the theatre as we know it, but as a part of the theatre we know. Its tale of how a wife and her lover drown her husband, and then are haunted not only by his memory but by the accusing eyes of his paralyzed mother, we judge solely as melodrama; as a psychological thriller; as present-day entertainment. As such, both its story and its devices are bound to seem tame to audiences accustomed to such stronger fare as "Angel Street," or even "Uncle Harry."

It is hard to look at embers in the grate, and imagine the fire which once burned there. Boston is always susceptible to outrage. But why, when confronted with Mrs. Potter's and Kyrle Bellew's production of "Thérèse Raquin" as late as 1892, should the critic of the *Boston Gazette* have felt violated by a play most of us deem merely sleepy, talky, and outmoded?

\*THERESE, a play by Thomas Job based on Emile Zola's "Thérèse Raquin." Presented by Victor Payne-Jennings and Bernard Klawans at the Biltmore Theatre. Staged by Margaret Webster. Setting and Costumes by Raymond Sovey. With Eva Le Gallienne, Victor Jory, Dame May Whitty, Berry Kroeger, Doris Patston, John F. Hamilton, Averell Harris, and Annette Sorell.

At any rate, it stoked him into saying:

One of the most revolting plays ever presented in this city. It reeks with morbid nastiness and is disgusting, not to say sickening to witness. Dramas of this hideous order are outside the pale of art. . . . Their odor is that of the dissecting room and the pleasure that seeing them affords is of the kind that is derived from gazing on a corpse sweltering in corruption. Its themes are vulgar salaciousness, adultery, murder, carnal passion changed to satiety, loathing, hatred, paralysis and suicide. It illustrates coarse lust at its lowest, brutality at its zenith, and morality at its nadir. It may be true to nature, and the story may be told with thrilling power; but it is none the less filthy, prurient, shocking and repulsive. . . . Etc., etc., etc.

When he sat before the same production in the same season, why should William Winter, the *Tribune's* ever-moral "Weeping Willie," have been as insulted by what he saw as if his prejudices had been affronted by Ibsen or "Mrs. Warren's Profession"? Where "Thérèse" leaves us relaxed and drowsy, it caused him to huff and puff. Mustering his adjectives, he referred to Zola as "that pestilential scavenger." "To describe this noxious rubbish in detail," he roared,

would be to offend the readers of this journal. . . . Whenever it becomes right to dip into a sewer for refreshment, it will become right to present upon the stage, in a work of art, persons who are monsters of depraved carnality and pictures that reek with vulgar crime.

How can a gasp have turned so utterly into a yawn? Why have we so changed? Have we lost our decencies? Are we tougher, less sensitive? I always remember John Addington Symonds's disturbing explanation of why the spank-spots on the writhing figures in Signorelli's frescoes at Orvieto are moss-green. "Continual growth in crime," droned Symonds, "distorts the form that once was human."

Should we be alarmed about ourselves because we now complain that in its present guise "Thérèse Raquin" is too tepid to hold our interest? Or should we be thankful? Most probably, neither. We live in a franker age. We may have pruderies of our own, but the old pruderies are not ours. Our different response is a mat-



—Vandamm Studio

"No matter which way you slice 'Thérèse' nowadays it is still baloney."

ter of changed tastes and altered expectations. We go to a realistic theatre which Zola helped to bring about. This makes it difficult for us to understand the older theatre which he helped to bury. We acknowledge our debt to Zola by being bored by him. This is a fate not uncommon among the innovators who have won their battles in art.

When the curtain goes up at the Biltmore, what we see is a combination livingroom-diningroom designed by Raymond Sovey. Although French in its details, it is the kind of setting we have seen a thousand times. It is old hat now, not new. It smacks of the daguerreotype rather than the barricades. Unless we are historically-minded, we fail to realize that Zola's demand for such a setting was in itself revolutionary.

"The room is high, dark, and dilapidated," the original stage direction reads, "hung with gray, stained paper; decorated with broken pieces of furniture; filled with boxes of merchandise. A bed is in an alcove; a window opens on a blank wall." Certainly a stage so set offers little that is unorthodox to contemporary playgoers.

The fact that we take such a background for granted, instead of being appalled by it, is one of the reasons why the melodrama lacks the power to shock which it could once claim. When Zola turned his novel into a play, he was ahead of his time. Most decidedly, he was a man with a mission; a crusader for the truth.

In his famous preface to his dramatization of "Thérèse Raquin" (1873) he mentioned Naturalism for the first time. In other words, he spoke of it fourteen years before Antoine was to introduce naturalistic productions to the French stage at his Théâtre Libre.