

TRADE Winds

"THE CUSTOMERS ALWAYS WRITE"

FROM STAFF SERGEANT John McSweeney, who worked in the Marshall Field book department before the war:

Last Saturday I went with a friend to the Little Company of Mary Convent for a visit with Santayana. He was very agreeable and, I think, very lonely, for he seemed so happy to have visitors. He urged us to come back whenever it was possible. He speaks very low and smiles a great deal. I told him I had difficulty in hearing him for I am deaf and he admitted that he too is very deaf and a trick of his is to take over the conversation and not give anyone an opportunity to ask him questions for he's sensitive about his deafness. He dresses in pj's which were badly worn, with a black necktie even more badly worn and a drab brown blanket bathrobe. His quarters are pleasant and his small sitting room has a balcony overlooking the convent garden. A beastly hot day but the room was cool. Walls and woodwork painted light green and the floor a dark oak parquet, highly polished. Some poor novice is probably at work on the floor every morning at four. A few lounge chairs and two tables and some makeshift bookshelves with remarkably few books. He was reading Lucretius—a Cambridge edition. His right hand is badly crippled. He used to see Ezra Pound frequently and thinks him mad. Told of Pound swimming in a brief pair of shorts and wearing a fur jacket. Said he was very comfortable under the Mussolini regime—evidently isn't concerned with the comfort of others and described the life of the convent nuns as being nothing more than genteel communism. Inquired after Henry Canby and Chris Morley. Wanted to know whether they were still on *Saturday Review*. I told him I'd recently received a package of *Saturday Reviews* and agreed to bring them along on my next visit.

Did I write you about the Keats House being put off limits for a time? Some bright MP noticed the number of GI's entering the building and reported it as a bawdy house and they tacked up an "Off Limits" sign. Weeks before it was straightened out.

MARK HOLSTEIN, bibliophile, legal light, and the only man in the world who would choose Princeton typographer Elmer Adler for his companion on a moonlight sail along the Grand Canal in Venice, is also one of the foremost Formosa scholars alive. In proof of this assertion, Mark sends Trade Winds the following contribution, which should have been submitted to *The New Yorker*, and probably was. (The original title, "Our Own Baedeker," is inked out and "Whad-

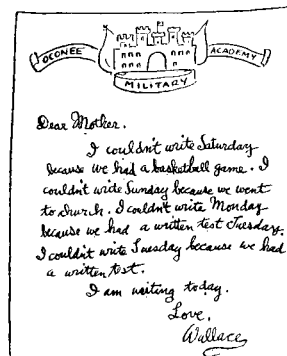
da Ya Know about Formosa" substituted.)

The island of Formosa, which has been so much in the news lately, was once the subject of a colossal hoax, perpetuated by a notorious mountebank who is known to fame as George Psalmanaazaar. He lived to be eighty-four, and late in life met Dr. Johnson who used to sit with him at an ale house in Old Street. Mrs. Piozzi, in her "Anecdotes," wrote that Psalmanaazaar's "pious and patient endurance of a tedious illness, ending in an exemplary death, confirmed the strong impression his merit had made upon the mind of Mr. Johnson."

Psalmanaazaar (whose real name is not known) is supposed to have been a native of the south of France, where he had been educated at a Dominican monastery. He early developed an extraordinary facility for languages, speaking and writing five or six, including Latin, fluently. After wandering as a mendicant student through Germany and the Low Countries, he passed for a time as a Japanese Christian. He then found it more profitable to pose as a pagan, living on raw flesh, roots, and herbs. He invented an elaborate alphabet and a worship all his own, made a prayer book with crude drawings of the sun and moon and stars and chanted some gibberish in prose and verse written in his invented characters.

At the instance of the Rev. William Innes, who, though an army chaplain, was a notorious scoundrel, Psalmanaazaar was baptized and was induced to pose as a native of the island of Formosa. Innes wrote the unsuspecting Bishop of London an account of Psalmanaazaar's conversion, picturing him as a victim of Jesuit persecution. Psalmanaazaar was brought to London and on his arrival became an object of universal interest and attention. He presented Bishop Compton with a translation of the catechism of the Church of England in his invented Formosa language; was introduced to many of the most distinguished residents of London, and even dined off the Royal Society, eating his meat with Sir Hans Sloane, the Secretary, raw.

A movement was set on foot to



raise a fund for his maintenance and better education and at the expense of Bishop Compton and certain of his friends, Psalmanaazaar spent six months at Oxford "to teach the Formosan language to a set of gentlemen who (the Bishop hoped) were afterwards to go with him to convert these people to Christianity."

In 1704, Psalmanaazaar published a book entitled "An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa, an Island Subject to the Emperor of Japan" which he dedicated in flattering terms to the Bishop of London. After describing his reception in England, his travels, and his conversion to Protestantism, Psalmanaazaar described the language, dress, customs, habits, religious beliefs, and political constitution of Formosa. The book abounds in monstrous absurdities and finally resulted in Psalmanaazaar being exposed and discredited. In his memoirs, published after his death, Psalmanaazaar confessed that his book on Formosa was "a forgery of my own devising, a scandalous imposition on the public, and such, as I think myself bound to beg God and the world pardon for writing." . . .

WHEN A BOOK publisher works himself up into a confessional mood, he often goes the whole hog. Consider, for example, the following unsolicited soul-baring from Jae Greenberg:

Dear Bennett:

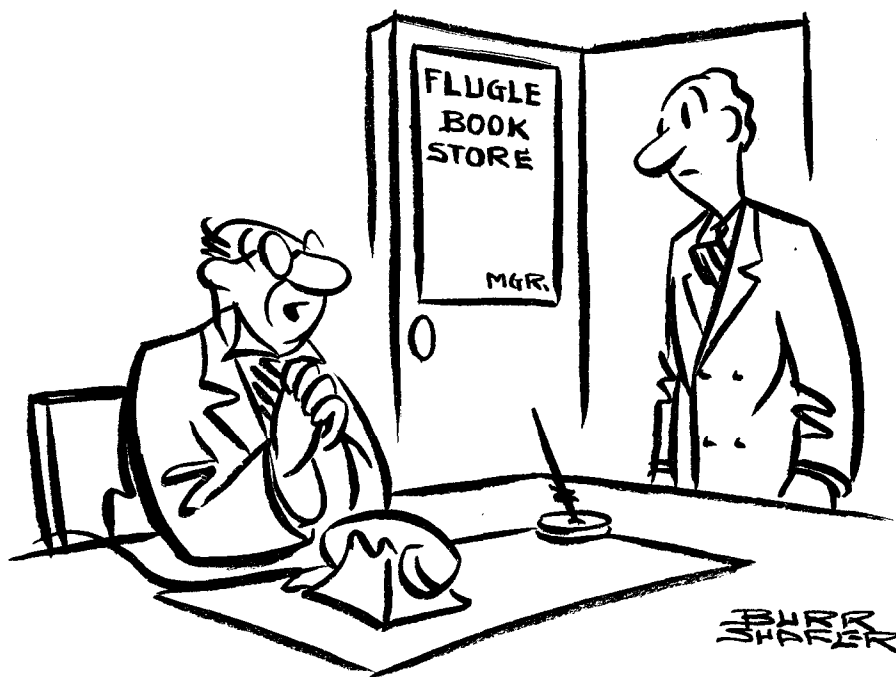
Ben Zevin and I were sitting on the porch of his little cottage on the lake and I was confiding a few stories on myself. Says Ben: "Cerf is making a collection of publishers' bloomers. Send those in to him." Says I: "Well, the laugh's on me, but why not?"

I was busily selling Mr. Cousins, of Angus and Robertson, the Australian rights to a child's astronomy book I publish. It contains pictures of all the well-known constellations (Pegasus, Cassiopeia, Orion and the Bull, etc.). I thought I was doing fine and he let me get all the way through before he smiled and said, "But Mr. Greenberg, we're on the other side of the Equator."

And not long after that, I was hard at it again selling the English rights of a book to a visiting London publisher when suddenly, in the midst of my earnest sales talk, it flashed across my mind that I was discussing a book I had bought from him.

But what made my face really red was the experience I had when I published Middleton Murry's "Wrap Me Up in My Aubusson Carpet" (though Murry's face should have been redder than mine). This was a diatribe against Moore because of his criticism of Thomas Hardy. One of Murry's chief grouses was that Moore had most of his stuff published in limited editions because he knew damn well there weren't customers enough for any more copies. But, unfortunately, Murry forgot that, and I forgot that, when he (Murry) demanded . . . and made it part of his contract . . . that "Aubusson Carpet" be published in an edition "limited to 500 copies, of which 488 are for sale." But the reviewers didn't forget it.

And while I'm in a confessional



"I hate to mention it, but our customers are noticing—you smell too much like soap."

mood, why shouldn't I admit to you that I passed up both the fiction and non-fiction best sellers of the twentieth century . . . "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" and "How to Win Friends and Influence People." You see, I had a sixth sense that warned me of the ninety per cent income tax and of the paper rationing that were to come. Yet to soften the blow for myself, I must report that I have published books of these authors, both before and after their paper-eating, tax-burdened successes. Wishing you the same . . .

FROM HARRY RUBY, or, as Coast scribes usually put it, the "irrepressible Harry Ruby":

I write in reference to your Bond Drive column. I got a kick out of every word of it.

I don't know why I waste a gloomy Sunday morning writing a fan letter. I, who am such a great writer myself, should be composing an epic instead of wasting my time praising you. But that is the way I am. When I read something I like by a friend I just have to tell him about it. My letter to Dickens telling him how much I loved the prison scene in "Pickwick" was just returned, marked "Insufficient postage." . . .

FROM EMORY FERREE, JR., of the American Red Cross:

Since I last wrote I happened to read a book review of a recently published book about war dogs. It reminded me of one of the most unusual sights I've ever seen, and it concerned these same dogs.

This happened on Pelelieu. We had been having considerable trouble with snipers filtering through at night, setting up shop in trees, caves, abandoned buildings, and any other place of concealment, and waiting until daylight to cut loose. To combat this danger mop-up squads constantly searched all areas accompanied by war dogs who ferreted

out the snipers with considerable success.

One morning on my way to the lines with Red Cross supplies I came upon one of those mop-up squads which had just cleaned out a smashed-up hut beside the trail. The boys had found a shiny new Jap bicycle and were taking turns riding it. Weapons were strewn along the grass and the party was getting hilarious. A platoon came up the trail carrying mortar ammo for the front. One look and the ammo was dumped on the ground. It was a free for all to see who got the next ride. All this time the dogs sat quietly on their haunches. Huge, beautiful, Doberman-Pinschers, trying so hard to be dignified and above such foolishness. Finally one young dog could stand it no longer and with a yelp took out after the bicycle—all the others scrambling at his heels. Pandemonium reigned. Yells, barks, spills, Marines, dogs, and bicycle in a whirligig of action and enough noise to make a Banzai charge sound like a prayer meeting. The ruckus lasted for about ten minutes. Suddenly, without a word being said or a command given, it stopped. Weapons were picked up, loads resumed, and the dogs came quietly to heel. A shell rumbled overhead and the war began again. . . .

JOSEPH FLIESLER, of *Look Magazine*, concludes this week's bill with a story of the fellow who decided to sell a long-treasured letter signed by Thomas Jefferson. When the transaction was completed the dealer remarked, "I'd have given you fifty more if it wasn't for those stains. Looks like somebody used ink eradicator on part of this document." "That was me," said the seller. "A fool named Button Gwinnett, or something, wrote 'See me about this' across the bottom, but I managed to get it all off."

BENNETT CERF.

"From where I sit"

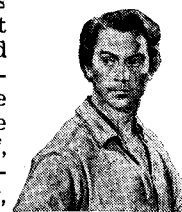
IF I may *Speak of the Devil* again, I notice that the acknowledgement page of that book gives thanks to a whole host of authors, agents, and publishers, while no homage is paid to the Devil himself for submitting to so intimate a display of his person and so analytical a probing of his manifold character. Did the Messrs. NORTH and BOUTELL omit their thanks to the Devil because his address is unknown or because they were not sure by which title to address him? May not the



Devil be paged on every street corner? Isn't he the one who garbled the grocery order, and does he not lurk in every "Djinn" bottle? With traveling restrictions what they have been, surely the Devil must have spent his vacation at home and could easily have been reached. Here on my desk is a letter which I distinctly remember having put in the outgoing box three days ago—what the Devil is it doing here?

★ ★ ★ ★

MOST of the reviews of *Burning Gold* have seemed to appreciate the subtlety of characterization in the book and the depth of thought which underlies its romance. One or two reviewers, however, got bogged down by the language which ROBERT HARDY ANDREWS uses, and were unable to rise and toast the book. There seems to be great difficulty on the part of both authors and critics alike in deciding just how far an author should go in reproducing accurately the idiom of the epoch portrayed. The author, particularly if, like ANDREWS he is thoroughly up on his history, is tempted to recreate with great accuracy. While the critic is concerned with this too, he is sometimes more apt to dislike any speech archaisms which interfere with readability. Both author and critic have their point. In the case of *Burning Gold* I think it fair to say that after the reader has caught on to the idiom, which shouldn't take long, he will not be bogged down by it, and he will come to the last page feeling a little better for having discovered what makes Tom Dover tick.



paul

★ DOUBLEDAY, DORAN ★

Seeing Things

THIRD-STRINGERS

EDITOR'S NOTE: *John Mason Brown is on vacation. This is the seventh of a series of eight guest columns to be published while he is away. The author of Seeing Things this week is John K. Hutchens, literary and dramatic critic now on the staff of The New York Times.*

LOOKING back through the mists of fifteen years and more, I think I may say with detachment and modesty that we were all heroes. Night after night our betters, the first- and second-string drama critics of the New York newspapers, saw theatre that was conceivably worth seeing. We, to the best of my recollection and belief, never did. We dined on "turkeys." Broadway still has, of course, an occasional turkey, which is a little play that has no reason for existing—or, anyhow, no reason that is visible to the naked eye gazing dourly upon it from out front. In my early days—roughly, 1927-32—they fluttered almost nightly over Times Square from September to June, settling down on one protesting stage or another, there to remain sometimes until the next Saturday when Mr. Cain would call for them, haul them away, and embalm them at darkest midnight in his celebrated warehouse.

I can see them now, in one slightly appalling melange, as it were, of bad and poorly directed actors, hopeless scripts, frayed scenery, and inept lighting, the whole business dragging its tired way across a stage in the presence of an audience that was not only fit to be tied but must actually have been cemented to its chairs, else it would have gone screaming into the street. Why did they—the turkeys—happen? In melancholy moments I have often pondered this question, without coming to any exact conclusion. (I submit the problem, *gratis*, to any sociology student in search of a thesis on that period.) In the lush, late 1920's there was, of course, much easy gold with which Wall Street gentlemen who were theatre-struck, or who possibly had a more personal interest in stage artists, were wont to take a flyer. But, incredibly, the turkeys kept roosting for at least three years after 1929. Where did the money come from? There was some rich gangster backing, but that couldn't have explained it all. And there was the promoter who, deliberately planning the presentation of four shows that were as bad as he could make

them, sold "pieces" totaling two hundred per cent of each show to widely scattered backers. (What he would have done if a show had succeeded must still give him uneasy flashes.) But this was an isolated instance.

Generally speaking, it seems that "Abie's Irish Rose" must have been at least psychologically responsible for most of these wayward exercises. The reasoning it inspired is clear. If "Abie" could succeed, to what box-office treasures troves might not "Chippies," "The Rap," "Paid Companions," "Mayfair," "The Blue Ghost," and their unhappy ilk find their way? Naturally, none of them ever did, because even "Abie" was a Pulitzer Prize candidate by comparison with these. But the boys kept trying. Who was to say, after all, that the lightning might not strike again?

But to return to the heroes. We still meet sometimes, in unofficial convention over a glass of mineral water, and, naturally, we reminisce. With the pride of veterans who survived the Battle of the Wilderness, we speak of our fortitude, and with a nicety of distinction usually reserved for higher things we talk at length of the worst plays and players we ever saw. And, though we do not agree on specific instances, we generally concur in the opinion that the so-called farces provided the sternest test of a third-stringer's mettle. A straight comedy, melodrama, or tragedy by one of this playwrighting school was inevitably bad enough. For pure ghastly effect the

farces anticipated the atomic bomb. The ringing telephones, the slamming doors, the husbands and wives exchanging mates at Long Island house-parties, the mustard plasters applied to Uncle Wilbert's aching back after he had been gallivanting around town (and at his age, too), the Negro servants tossed into a shrill dither by sheeted apparitions—this was the kind of thing a dauntless band once regularly reported upon in the newspapers of this city.

You do not believe this? Then time has dealt gently with your memory or, more likely, you were happily unaware of all this in the first place. But you have only to ask one of our little alumni association about, for instance, the item entitled "Bed-Fellows" (*circa* 1929), which some of our group nominate for the very top honors in the department of untoward events. A quick glance at a musty scrapbook tells me that "the first curtain of Mrs. Louise Carter's play rises on the fretful household of the Yost family, over which a bon-bon devouring mother presides. One of her daughters is married to an evidently dull husband, who in turn believes himself in love with the wife of his own wife's admirer." This one was, I agree, a quite perfect sample of what I am talking about, and another one was certainly "Little Orchid Annie" (they had titles in those days), which had a scene in which everyone dressed up in Mother Goose costumes and was so cute that only case-hardened veterans could stand it. Still another that has its partisans was "Hired Husband," in which (again the scrapbook) "Andrew Starr, the great lawyer, rescues a young vagabond from a Gramercy Park bench, brings him to his apartment and offers him in marriage to his beautiful young niece and ward."

My own favorite—and I have spent a long, long time reflecting upon this—was the aforementioned "Mayfair," by one Laurence Eyre, of which you will get no detailed resume here on the plausible ground that it would not be credible. You would have had to see it to believe it, and you are lucky that you did not. Is it not enough for you to know that it was a comedy of London society in which the characters played a game called "I spy with my little eye," and that the butler (a Russian prince) was in love with milady, who feigned off-stage suicide but came back smiling to bring the curtain down? To return to the office after that, and to hear one's first-string boss bemoaning a slight falling off in the talent of a Philip Barry or a Maxwell Anderson whose play he had just seen, was to know the frustration of the thwarted mole.

However, the third-stringers were

