

TITLES AND IMPRINTS

POCKET BOOKS has suddenly abandoned a national advertising campaign after about half of a very substantial appropriation had been spent. The reason was not that the copy failed to sell more Pocket Books, but that tests proved conclusively it was stepping up the sale of *all* quarter books just as effectively. This was just one more proof that the general public simply is not interested in *who* publishes a book, but buys because of the title, the author, or, in rare cases, the format. The fact that a twenty-five-cent book has a kangaroo, or a bantam, or a pelican, or a hippopotamus on the jacket means absolutely nothing to the reader. The quarter book market is settling down to normal; the lines with the best titles and the best distribution will survive; the others will disappear.

Sponsors of higher priced books have had their troubles too in persuading the public to take note of the imprint on a title page. Some publishers have spent a fortune to make their colophon stand for something distinctive in the minds of readers, but they have gotten little more than a horse-laugh from the majority, who are quite content to let each individual book on their lists stand or fall on its own merits.

Alfred Knopf has probably gone to the greatest length to make his "Borzoi" label something customers will look for when they enter a bookshop. He ran a full-page ad in *The New York Times* once which simply carried the photograph of a society leader with a book under her arm and a caption reading, "Mrs. Jerome So-and-so Reads Borzoi Books." Whether or not this ad paid out nobody knows, but it is considered significant that it never was repeated.

The argument about publishers' imprints came up one evening at a party of literary folk in the year when "The Good Earth" was the number one fiction best-seller in the country. There were twenty-two people in the group and I offered to bet Eugene Reynal, of Reynal and Hitchcock, even money that the majority would not know who had published "The Good Earth." Gene, mindful of the fact that this was a publisher's home, where the guests might be expected to be far above average in knowledge of book-trade gossip, accepted the wager with alacrity. When we

put the question, it developed that not a single person in the house knew the correct answer!

Do the readers of *Trade Winds* make it their business to know who publishes the new books they read? How about a simple test? Consult the box below!

I will be interested in the results. So will a lot of other publishers. Their future advertising policies may be affected by the statistics you send in. . . .

MOTION-PICTURE producers run into the same problem as publishers in trying to make their names stand for something special in the minds of the public. Reams of publicity, and endless lists of credits in the pictures themselves, have made little impression on the average film fan. To prove my point, I repeat the story I told in "Try and Stop Me" of the time we published Alva Johnson's "The Great Goldwyn." Surely Mr. Goldwyn has been publicized as much as or more than any film magnate in the business, and in New York and

Hollywood at least the countless stories about him are so familiar that people have been thrown out of parties for trying to repeat them. Our salesmen, however, ran into a sea of blank faces throughout the Middle West and South. "Exactly who," asked veteran booksellers, "was the great Goldwyn?" When we reported this to Mr. G., he thought we were kidding him. The simple fact, however, is that the public is interested solely in what's in a book or picture, not who put it there! . . .

REVERTING TO the subject of twenty-five-cent book publishers, it is questionable how long general advertising can be included in their budget under the best of circumstances. Increasing costs all along the line, production and distribution difficulties, and feverish competition already have cut their net profit to something like one cent a copy (before taxes). Rex Stout has circulated figures which indicate that the publisher nets between five and six times that amount, and has threatened to form an authors' coöperative to prove it. I think it safe to say that every publisher in America would like to see him try. A good name for the adventure would be "The Awakening."

I like and admire Rex Stout as a man, and rate him among the top as a detective story writer, but I think

[Here is a list of current best-sellers. I am putting you on your honor not to peek when you fill in the name of the publisher in the space alongside each title. With a view toward getting a representative SRL tabulation, I hope you will clip and send the filled-in box to *Trade Winds*, SRL, 25 West 45 St., New York City 19. Many thanks.—B. C.]

LIST OF BEST-SELLERS

Fiction

Publisher

Arch of Triumph—Erich Remarque
 The Black Rose—Thomas B. Costain
 David the King—Gladys Schmitt
 Brideshead Revisited—Evelyn Waugh
 The Foxes of Harrow—Frank Yerby
 The King's General—Daphne du Maurier
 The River Road—Frances Parkinson Keyes
 Forever Amber—Kathleen Winsor
 The Turquoise—Anya Seton
 Wasteland—Jo Sinclair

Non-Fiction

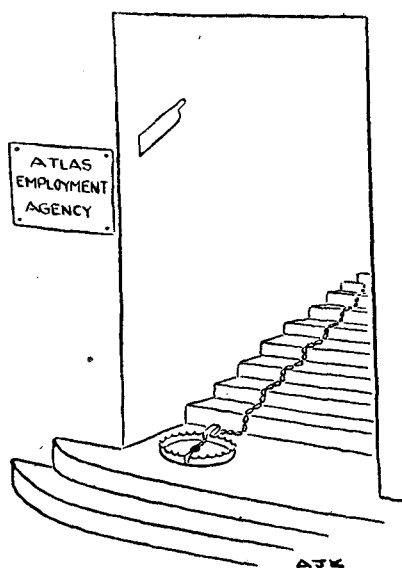
The Egg and I—Betty MacDonald
 The Anatomy of Peace—Emery Reves
 The Autobiography of William Allen White
 Burma Surgeon Returns—Gordon Seagrave
 The Ciano Diaries—Edited by Hugh Gibson
 Farmer Takes a Wife—John Gould
 One World or None—Compilation
 Pleasant Valley—Louis Bromfield
 The Practical Cogitator—Charles P. Curtis, Jr.,
 and Ferris Greenslet
 Starling of the White House—As told to Thomas
 Sugrue

he is the wrong person to spearhead the Authors' League drive for higher royalties on twenty-five-cent reprints. When he is excited he says things he cannot prove, and he is constitutionally unable to listen to arguments of an opponent. If the reprint publishers made even a respectable percentage of the profit Mr. Stout claims for them, original publishers would have demanded a higher royalty rate long ago. They split those royalties fifty-fifty with the authors. Furthermore, the reprint publishers would raise the rates themselves if the profit margin permitted; they realize they are in the limelight, and are most anxious to appear as generous as possible. Isn't it significant that not one of the new reprint houses, all struggling for a place in the sun, has dared raise its royalty rate—and that not one original publisher has backed Mr. Stout's crusade? I hope Mr. Stout isn't going to answer that it's because publishers always stick together. The only thing I ever saw publishers agree on unanimously was a motion to increase their paper allotment.

The standard royalty rate on quarter books today is one cent a copy up to 150,000 and a cent and a half thereafter. If a first printing is 200,000 copies (just about the current average) the author's half amounts to \$1,125. That's exactly what the writer of a run-of-the-mill murder yarn makes on a sale of 5,000 copies in the original two-dollar edition. It's about five times what some of the current quarter whodunits are worth.

The Authors' League and the Mystery Writers of America (whose motto is "Crime doesn't pay—enough") could spend their time more profitably plumping for higher standards and the elimination of trash. The laws of free competition will take care of any upward revisions in the royalty rates.

GOSSIPS IN Publisher's Row would have you believe that Marshall Field is trying to add another reprint firm to his holdings. . . . That although "The Hucksters" caricatures a fictitious "soap king," the employees of a certain very real tobacco tycoon are offering ten dollars apiece for advance copies. . . . That Rinehart has another top-thriller coming up in "Nightmare Alley." . . . That the Dial Press and Crown spring lists have put them in the big leagues for keeps. . . . That the author of "The Egg and I" is burning because *The New Yorker* book reviewer has never even mentioned it. . . . That Random House will name its new home The Palazzo Thickens. . . .



IN A TRIM, inviting bungalow just outside Manhattan there lived a rising young novelist and his wife, presided over by a Scandinavian servant whom everyone described as a gem and who reminded the men at least of Ingrid Bergman. It was this paragon who disrupted the peace of the ménage by approaching her mistress in tears and announcing, "I must leave on the first of the month."

"But why?" demanded the shocked housewife. "I thought you were perfectly happy here." It wasn't that, sobbed the maid; she had met a handsome soldier a few months before, and now—and now—. "Don't do anything," the wife said as soon as she comprehended. "Let me consult my husband." She was back from his study in a trice. "We have decided, Hilda, that you must stay," she announced. "My husband says the patter of a child's feet will help his writing. We will adopt your baby."

In due course, a son appeared upon the scene, the author adopted him legally, and all was serene for another year, when the maid again announced she was leaving. This time she had met a sailor . . . The novelist and his wife went into another huddle, and the maid was told, "It is unfair to bring up a child alone. We will adopt your second baby, to make sure he has company."

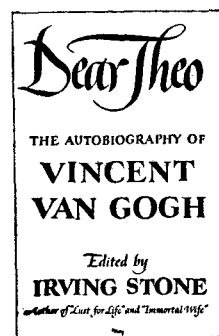
The second baby was a darling little girl, and the bungalow resounded with happy songs and laughter, with the novelist clicking merrily on his typewriter keys.

Then the blow fell. The maid resigned again. "Don't tell me," gasped the wife, "that this time you met a marine."

"It's not that at all, ma'am," said the servant with dignity. "I'm resigning because I simply cannot work for such a big family."

BENNETT CERF.

"From where I sit"



DEAR THEO, madam, if you will stop trying to touch up your lipstick in a careening taxi, **Dear Theo** is not just another book. If you were to stuff it into a bookcase between a stiff, competent biography and a fat, illustrated biography, it would probably squirm out and drop onto your favorite chair. Madam, **Dear Theo** edited by IRVING STONE, is a collection of some 600 letters written by Vincent Van Gogh to his brother, Theo. It's the kind of book you like to have near you, whether you are basking on the lawn, toasting before the fire, travelling across the long prairies, or watching the fjords go by. Madam, you're not listening.

I appeal to the reader of this column and the next one (they are both going to talk about **Dear Theo**.) I assure you I have no axe to grind, for I read **Dear Theo** years ago when it was published by another house. I read it for an assignment in a college art course, and it remains one of the few things I remembered in that liberal educational system which teaches you to cram for one exam and then to forget in order to make room for the next cramming.

In reality, IRVING STONE held the patient's hand. It was Vincent Van Gogh who underwent the operation on his own life. He lost an ear and his own sanity, but through IRVING STONE's patience, it is the reader who survives the operation, the reader who comes out healthier and wiser. It might be said that this lonely, affectionate man died to make men feel. And what an important thing it is that this book should come out in reprint now when men have ceased to feel because they cannot understand.

In the understanding which constitutes wisdom, there must be just portions of feeling, thinking, and imagination. But the efficient machine will not tolerate imagination. Stick your finger in it, and you lose your finger. Through his tender letters to his brother, Van Gogh brings to a world which claims to serve through science, service through understanding. Please read next week's column for a more specific reference to this great book.

paul

DOUBLEDAY

Seeing Things

THE BLUES INDEED!

THIS is playing with fire. I know it, and apologize. I had not meant to do so. Mine are not ordinarily the fingers of a pyromaniac. Still I cannot help it. I have no other choice.

The idea of racial groups protesting humorlessly against plays which they deem unflattering to themselves has never appealed to me. It is an idea full of danger. It is no friend of truth, or art, or of democracy.

I remain astounded even now whenever I recall how the Irish in this country came to the opening of "The Playboy of the Western World" armed, loyally enough, with potatoes to protect the verdant name of Ireland from insult. In the days before the war I used to laugh when the Japanese would seek from time to time to have "The Mikado" banned as being unfriendly to the Land-of-the-then-Rising-Sun. Or when Jewish groups, here and there, would endeavor to have "The Merchant of Venice" excluded from classrooms or the stage.

I am still astonished by the Negroes who, finding insult instead of sweetness and delight in "Little Black Sambo," have sought to make its reading unlawful for school children.

I could not believe my eyes last fall when I read that, due to protests of the CIO Negro group, the Pastors' Association, and the Communist party, a new musical comedy version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was temporarily banned in Bridgeport. Why? Because, of all absurd, ungrateful, and unthoughtful reasons, it was claimed that the play "refreshed memories that tend to portray only the weaknesses of a racial minority, and hold up to ridicule people who in the early days of our country were unfortunately subjected to exposures that today would be considered atrocious."

I worried then about the American sense of humor, not to forget the Negro's sense of his own emerging history. I thought things had come to an unpretty pass. I tried to argue against the ban in these columns by pointing out that history cannot be changed by passing resolutions; that there is something at once sinister and silly in trying to deny what has been; that Mrs. Stowe deserved the Negroes' thanks, not abuse; and that

the point of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," no less than the truth of slavery itself, is that it is the slave-owner rather than the slave who had reason to be ashamed.

But when I saw "St. Louis Woman"* the other night, I found myself worrying about my own misplaced sense of humor. Instead of laughing and applauding along with nearly everyone else in the theatre, I discovered I was sitting granite-faced and unamused. I liked the music,



Vandamm Studio.

"St. Louis Woman" is "old stuff, humanely no less than theatrically."

I liked the costumes and settings, admired many of the performers, and realized the skill of Rouben Mamoulian's direction. Even so I resented what I was seeing, and resented it in the Negro's behalf.

Let me make myself clear. I had no desire to call for the Black Maria; invite censorship; or ask that the theatre be closed. I had not reached that point, and trust I never shall. Yet, in spite of its passable features, I regretted this new Negro musical. I regretted and, as I say, resented it.

It seemed to me that it relies on every formula not only of the Negro-show as it has always been but on every stale idea the white man has tried to keep fresh in his thinking about the Negro. Its characters are mainly slaphappy creatures, eager

* *ST. LOUIS WOMAN*, a new musical play in three acts. Presented by Edward Gross. Music by Harold Arlen. Lyrics by Johnny Mercer. Book by Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen. Settings and Costumes by Lemuel Ayers. Dances by Charles Walters. Directed by Rouben Mamoulian. With a cast including the Nicholas Brothers, Pearl Bailey, Rex Ingram, Ruby Hill, June Hawkins, and Juanita Hall. At the Martin Beck Theatre.

only to erupt into jazz, to cakewalk, drink, kill, chant spirituals, or play the horses. Whether churchgoers or barflies, they are a frenzied lot. They sponge on whatever Negro jockey happens to have won that day. They are grown-up children, boastful, superstitious, irresponsible.

They throw money away, love heavily, and work lightly. Both the men and women go in for pathetic overdressing. They wear tropical colors, sport diamonds, and, at least if they are among the principals, are apt to tote guns. Only their bandannas are missing.

Mercifully they do not believe in ghosts, and are not shown trembling in any graveyard scene. Mercifully, too, they carry no razors, and are not asked to pick cotton, eat watermelons, or wave to the Robert E. Lee from the levee as she steams round the bend. But their eyes and hips are forever on the roll.

In short, they are shown as a people of grace and passion, but without thought, dignity, or conscience. They are not even aware of the problems or humiliations which face, and have faced, them as a race. The sadness underlying "Porgy and Bess" demands no utterance. As they strut and caper, swagger and shout, grin and shoot, you would never guess any kinship existed between them and Richard Wright and Ann Petry.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not objecting to the fact that "St. Louis Woman" is melodramatic in its plot or gay in its trappings. I am objecting merely because its material is so stereotyped, empty, uninformed. It is a "musical play" which reveals nothing, and ignores everything. Although I realize it was not meant to be taken seriously, I believe the people with whom it deals deserve to be treated with greater respect than it shows them. Were I a foreigner, and were it the first Negro musical I had ever seen, I might have surrendered happily to what is buoyant in its spirit and skilful in its execution. But having seen an uncountable number of such sepia offerings, I could not help feeling that in "St. Louis Woman" I was seeing each one of these over again.

The Nicholas Brothers are, and always have been, excellent dancers. As Little Augie, the jockey who, without benefit of clergy of course, wins, loses, and then regains the companionship of Della, Harold Nicholas is all over the place with a small man's energy. Ruby Hill is as attractive as the text demands that Della should be, which is very attractive indeed. And Pearl Bailey, a sprightly singer and comedienne, is amusing both to watch and hear.