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of Literature*

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Book of the Year:

"ROOSEVELT & HOPKINS"

By Robert E. Sherwood (Harper)



WITH this Christmas issue *The Saturday Review* announces a new annual award to the American author of the book that, in the opinion of its editors, is the most important and significant published during the year. Nineteen forty-eight, any way you look at it, has not been remarkable for gathering a large number of distinguished and memorable books, though in the field of fiction Carl Sandburg's "Remembrance Rock" and two war novels, Norman Mailer's "The Naked and the Dead" and Irwin Shaw's "The Young Lions," would be starred for their distinction and vitality in any year.

Over the last twelve months historic and enduring contributions have been made in continuing the se-

ries of war biographies and memoirs published since the end of the war, which have illuminated the secret or contentious phases of the great struggle and have revealed the true natures of its leaders. General Eisenhower's memoirs is the most recent and the most impressive autobiography by an American in our day. It will be read in the years to come as a companion to the volumes of Winston S. Churchill's "The Second World War."

Nevertheless, in the opinion of our editors, in which there has been not one dissenting voice, Robert E. Sherwood's "Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History" deserves *The Saturday Review* award, and the reasons are not far to seek. Only rarely does a writer who has won distinction in the past find a subject which seems by some chance to be suited to his hand alone, to belong by right to only one man. Mr. Sherwood fell heir to what was presumed to be a book that Harry Hopkins had started to write some time before his death. Indeed, no other man could have been chosen for the task. The voluminous records contained in forty cases of private documents which he had accumulated through the years of the New Deal and the war were to be the basis of the work which Mr. Hopkins, who had long been an ill and indeed a dying man, could contribute to history. Mr. Sherwood discovered that not even the first page had been written. And thus the man who had been one of Roosevelt's and Hopkins's intimates during the course of the war, who was thoroughly conversant with the grave decisions made in the crises of the war, and with the mentality of the President, found himself involved in a book on which he spent over two years, and which blossomed into a thousand pages and more than half a million words.

The book began with Harry Hopkins, but it soon took on a dual personality and grew into the wartime biography of the President as well, for Franklin Roosevelt was the mentor and the guiding star of the younger man who became an extension of his shadow, the trusted and intimate instrument of his most secret policies, so that he could write to Stalin, "I ask you to treat him with the identical confidence you would feel if you were talking to me."

Mr. Sherwood is one of our finest dramatists, three times winner of a Pulitzer Prize, and there was material enough in the relationship of these two men for a number of plays if he had chosen the theatre as his medium. In the arrangement of the mass of documented material with which he

was inundated the dramatist is revealed throughout; there are evidences of the born storyteller in the easy flow of the narrative underneath the mask of the historian which he had to assume. Mr. Hopkins lived in the White House, so that he was always at hand to listen to the President's ideas and schemes and confidences. The secret history of the war, the solutions to so many riddles and disputes, developed as the volume of his notes, memoranda, and private documents increased. The slim and somewhat ebullient and cocksure young man was for a great part of the time tortured with the pains of an ulcerated stomach. In spite of that his ambitions grew as he became aware that the President was thinking of him, and perhaps training him, as his successor, though he had never made a success of his life, was inordinately careless with his own money, and sometimes with that of other people. The ulcers developed into cancer, an operation finally removed two-thirds of his stomach. It was then when he knew that his time was short that personal ambition, his glittering dream, was laid aside, and he turned into the true and perfect instrument for the execution of the President's will.

He, the little man, son of a Kansas harness maker who started in New York as a humble social-service worker, became, as Joseph Barnes writes, "a close friend of Roosevelt and Churchill and as near a friend of Stalin as any American could ever become . . . a sick man with few friends and many enemies, who never ran for public office, became a key figure in the greatest war in history."

IF Harry Hopkins had never lived out his last years in the White House but was the invention of a novelist, the tale would have been too fantastic to be given reality. As a task for Robert Sherwood, which combined the

Mallard

By Christine Turner Curtis

BEAT home, mallard of dark;
mask with your brown-purple
wings
our frailty, our lack.

For with nightfall pretense is shed
as waterdrops from satin plumage;
and mortality bared.

Tent under your merciful down
the vulnerable psyche,
disenchanted, alone.

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great drama of the President's rise to power and greatness through one election after the other and the "inside" history of the war at its heart and center, it has turned into one of the most dramatic and factual books of our time. The dream of the perfect writer for the perfect story has come to fruition in Roosevelt and Hopkins. Mr. Sherwood's work will perhaps achieve greener laurels than the tribute that *The Saturday Review* is paying him by nominating him the candidate for our annual award. In our estimation he will deserve all of them.

Bookmarks

NEVIL SHUTE'S "No Highway" is as good as his best, in my opinion, and his best is high. It is about flying, and accents the technical side (where Mr. Shute is right at home) strongly and fascinatingly. Mr. Shute could make the binomial theorem a thing of charm and sentiment, a creation of sheer delight, the theme of a thriller that would also be an excellent novel.

Mr. Shute knows airplanes. He also knows some Americans. Yet in "No Highway" he has an American movie queen, Monica Teasdale, whose conversation runs to only a few hundred words altogether but who says "guess," by our count, thirteen times. (There is a Canadian character who also says "guess," but he only says it once.)

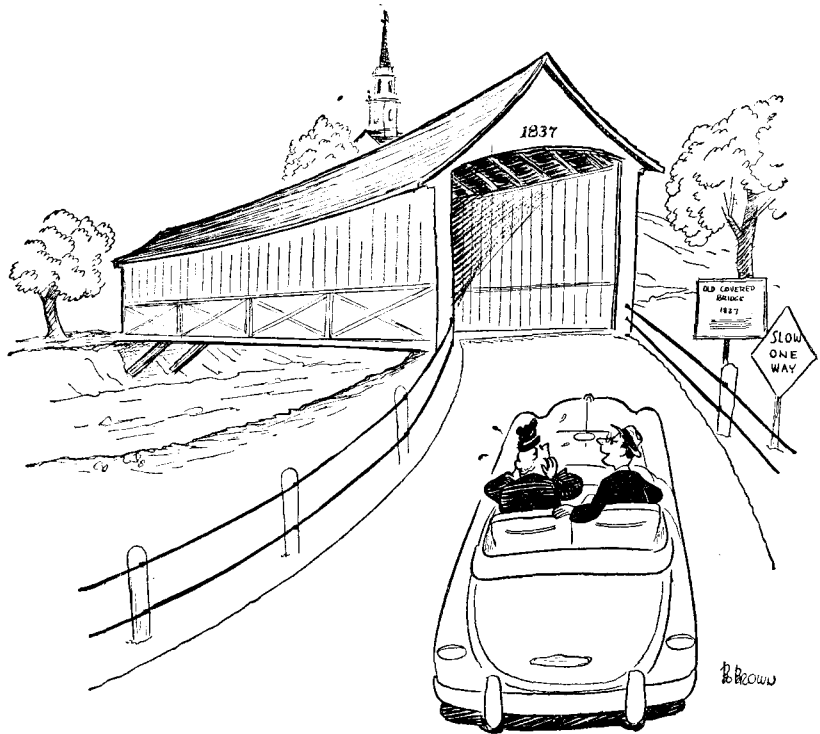
"Guess" remains, and probably always will remain, in British eyes, the sign manual of *Homo Americanus*, including that sterling old Yankee, Geoffrey Chaucer.

* * *

If we were operating a university press, and this is not a bid for a job, we should release most of our books in January, July, and August. We have seen too many excellent university press productions ignored by review mediums, or dismissed in corner-filling paragraphs, merely because the books appeared at a moment when the market was glutted with regular trade stuff. The time to hit the reviews is when the reviews are hungry for copy.

* * *

There are limits to human credulity, as Lincoln and La Rochefoucauld and Pliny the Younger have all pointed out—there are limits to human credulity, and novelists ought not try to overstrain it. People will accept "men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders" and Samuel Hopkins Adams's six-fingered United States Senator. But when Maritta Wolff, in



"Now don't be nervous, dear—just pretend you're putting the car in the garage at home and drive right through—as you so often do!"

"About Lyddy Thomas," says of a bus, just an ordinary steamy, stuffy, smelly, common-carrying bus, that "all the seats were filled and there were already people standing in the back," she outrages belief. There are no such people, Miss Wolff. Nobody ever stands in the back of the bus, not even in Flint or Saginaw or whatever place you had in mind, until the jam at the front forces him back by sheer bulk and confronts him with the impossibility of one object's occupying two spaces at the same time.

* * *

"About Lyddy Thomas" is one of three tolerably recent novels we have read (the other two are Agnes Sligh Turnbull's "The Bishop's Mantle" and Joseph George Hitrec's "Son of the Moon") in each of which a man slaps a woman. What's come over our men lately? Or is it our women?

* * *

Add history repeating itself: The plot of the first English comedy, "Gammer Gurton's Needle" (1565 or thereabouts), revolved around somebody discovering a lost needle by sitting on it, and the high point in the Broadway success "Mister Roberts" is the discovery of a birthmark on a lady's bottom.

* * *

Some day, perhaps, a kind, dues-paying gentleman will take us into one of those richly-paneled, sumptu-

ously-rugged club lounges whose splendid appointments *Newsweek* is making known to millions of non-members by means of four-color double-spreads in other magazines. Plenty of reading matter is scattered about in these intimate glimpses into the haunts of social man, but so far not a single reader has been sighted. Kelly pool game elsewhere on the premises, maybe.

* * *

We had to get a plumber the other day to repair an unshutoffable shower. He told us there were two ways to go about it—either bust into the wall behind the tiles or put an extra valve into the jigger that sticks out. Plan Number Two would work just as well, he said, and cost about a fifth as much as Plan Number One, "only," he added, "it won't look so gainly." We blessed the word and him and plopped for Plan Number Two. Everything fine now. Gainly is that gainly does.

* * *

"When I first saw my writing presented to me in a printer's proof," wrote Wilkie Collins, "I discovered that I was incapable of letting a carelessly-constructed sentence escape me without an effort to improve it." Just the kind of author a printer loves to see step into the shop!

* * *

What ever became of the semicolon?
—J. T. W.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An Editorial Note from Carl Carmer

On the seventeenth of last April, I presented in this magazine under the title ". . . the Rest of His Natural Life" the true story of an inmate of one of the nation's state prisons who, sentenced for life at the age of nineteen, has during the last eighteen years developed without instruction an artistic ability so great that many of America's leading painters recognize his gift as extraordinary.

The article, illustrated by this inmate's drawings of prison life, elicited hundreds of letters from SRL readers. Surprisingly enough, I think, there was only one reply which did not urge the release of this artist on the grounds that he had not only paid "his debt to society" but had, under the most adverse circumstances, remade himself into a man who is worthy to become a free citizen and who has the all-too-rare power of contributing to our national culture.

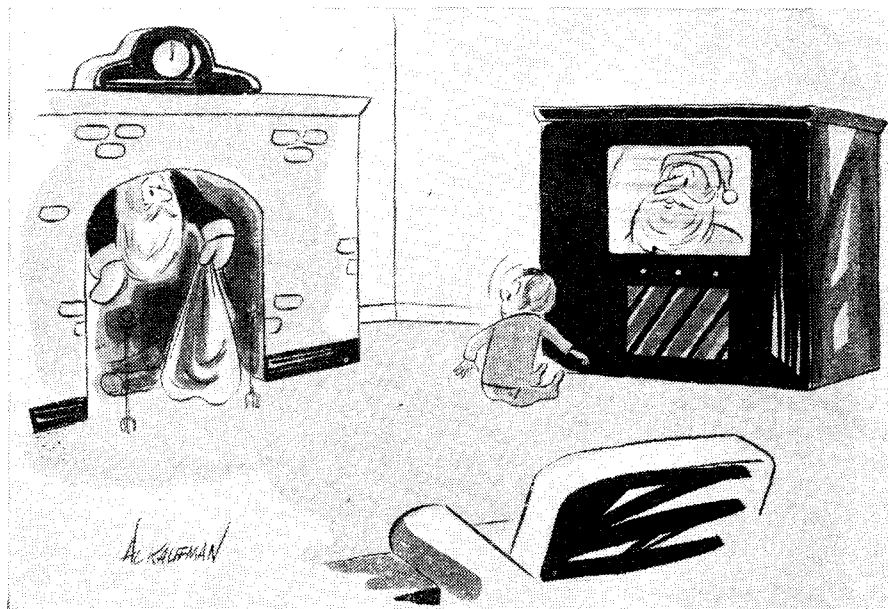
In conversation with those governmental executives who are connected with the administration of the state's prison system, I have however met the following arguments:

1. Because this man's sentence to execution was commuted, he has already received all the executive clemency he deserves and he is lucky to be alive.

2. The fact that he was prohibited from pleading guilty to a lesser charge (a privilege offered him by the district attorney) through the refusal of his companion in crime to join him in that plea was unfortunate, but has no bearing on his case. Had he been allowed to plead as the district attorney suggested ("cop a plea"), he would with good behavior have been a free man several years ago, but the offering of such a compromise is a common practice of district attorneys in their efforts to obtain convictions, and it has nothing to do with the merits of the case or the deserving of the man who is being tried.

3. Though this inmate has been for many years a successful instructor in the prison art school and though he is an artist of admittedly worthy achievement, he should really have no especial consideration since his gifts are not a result of his own efforts to develop himself but were "born in him."

Meanwhile my friend writes me from prison, "Several drawings of sports activities up here have been done in a somewhat neglected medium—monotype. It is the closest approach I can make to lithography



and I'm having a grand time experimenting. . . . The method is very similar to the ancient Chinese 'rubbing,' though only one print of each drawing is possible with monotype. . . . [See page 25.]

"It is impossible to find expression for my gratitude. Enthusiasm over the potent appeal made in my behalf is overshadowed by your personal opinion of me—reflected in every word. It is very wonderful to know I have a friend."

Published herewith is a selection from the letters that have been received with regard to this artist.

—CARL CARMER.

SIR: . . . During the war I was a conscientious objector and spent three years behind prison walls because of that belief. It seems to me that any man who could survive eighteen years of imprisonment without terrible signs of embitterment certainly deserves freedom. This method of punishment is primarily based on an outmoded concept of revenge. There is much talk of rehabilitation but the whole process of imprisonment is geared for punishment; even when the prisoner is released his punishment is continued by an ignorant and insensitive populace.

It would be a wonderful thing if the artist whose work was printed could again taste the joys of freedom. One who is as extremely sensitive as this man's work shows him to be must have suffered untold hell during this time. Perhaps he could interpret to people, as no one ever has, the brutality of the medieval concept of revenge that we continue to impose on our "criminals" . . . many of whom are victims of the very society that we are attempting to protect.

To release one man from this fate is to accomplish little. Yet his message may have a profound effect on

the conscience of men . . . as did the message of another American prisoner who wrote, "As long as there is a lower class I am in it, as long as there is a criminal element I am of it, as long as there is a soul in prison I am not free."

LARRY GARA.

State College, Pa.

SIR: I would be glad to sign a petition to have this artist released from the penitentiary. I agree with you that he has paid his debt to what is loosely called society.

GROUCHO MARX.

Los Angeles, Calif.

SIR: . . . If the evidence Mr. Carmer has placed in the record is near the truth, then all the reader must do is juxtapose the editorial dialectic on the Christian ethic and the story of the artist.

If the record is correct, then society—that amorphous, agonized scapegoat—has a debt to repay to this artist. There is a wealth of writing on the question of who is to blame for murders such as these. Was Bigger to blame, or was Chicago? In my town hardly a week goes by that Bigger does not rise from the newsprint and plead for help. Help comes slowly, and sometimes not at all.

"I believe," says the print, "that his incarceration has satisfied society's demands." This is conventional, and may do for the case. It may be the reasoning that leads some governor from the welter of confusion to the signing of his name on a pardon.

But there is the heart of the trouble, isn't it? It's conventional reasoning that prevents us from clearing the slums. It is conventional reasoning that dominates the selfish. It would seem to me that society in such cases as these commits a most prolonged wrong. It is guilty in the first instance, for it places temptation in the path of those whose maturity is not yet strong enough to enable them to resist, and when the crime is done, it shouts,

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