

acter, too, that defy transportation. We find them in the original of "Childe Harold," in such lines as

*Die verummten und verstumten  
Leichenheiter sitzen drin.*

And we find them again when Heine listens to the North Sea, and hears

*Ein seltsam Geräusch, ein Flüstern  
und Pfeifen,  
Ein Lachen und Murmeln, Seufzen  
und Sausen,  
Dazwischen ein wiegenliedheimliches  
Singen.*

Mr. Kramer's versions inevitably challenge comparison with Mr. Untermeyer's renderings of the same poems, and it is a comparison which sees neither the older nor the younger poet bearing off the palm. When one is at his best, the other frequently is not; one scores with a stroke of inspiration here, the other there. But it is fair to say, I think, that Mr. Kramer often manages to remain a bit more faithful to his original than does Mr. Untermeyer—and this without any sacrifice of poetic quality. If anyone will place the old favorite "Ein Fichtenbaum" side by side with the two English versions under discussion, he will have an example of what I mean. It is also fair to say that Mr. Kramer's translation of "Deutschland" is, on the whole, considerably more satisfying than Herman Salinger's translation of the same poem pub-

lished here in 1944; although, again, there are individual verses in which Mr. Salinger fares more happily than Mr. Kramer.

Heine was not a creator of characters, for he was not a novelist; but his own character is as fascinating as any a novelist could conceive, and it stands revealed in this book; even if Mr. Ewen, in his introduction, prefers not to dwell on its more disagreeable aspects. Louis Untermeyer has insisted that the essential truth about Heine resides in the fact that he was "a Jewish Jew," not "that fictional creature, an Hellenic Jew," nor, "except in a geographical sense, a French or a German Jew." The point is worth making and well made, and essential truth is there, but not the whole truth. Heine may not have been what he liked to fancy himself as being, but he was still an exceedingly complex person, whose nature was subject to torturing stresses and strains.

He was not a Greek, of course, but he longed for Greek serenity and light, even while he avowed his inescapable Judenschmerz and clutched his dark heritage to his bosom. For purely practical reasons he had himself baptized into a religion that he really despised, and he was condemned thereafter to mock his own action, while secretly envying the little Hamburg peddler who could sit down before his clean cloth and seven-branched candlestick to praise King David from a full and grateful heart. He loved Germany, whose faults he castigated with a lover's passion, and he lived in Parisian exile. While he scourged false romanticism, he could no more resist borrowing its medieval props for his own purposes than he could resist singing of palm trees, lotus blossoms, and sultans' daughters. He was a revolutionist and humanitarian who could not down his affection for monarchy, who bewailed the passing of heroes, and who feared the rising power of the masses. He was a worshiper of what he called "whole men," and he was doomed to spend eight years disintegrating in his bed. But there was no slow torture to which approaching death could subject him that would suffice to bring him to surrender. To the end he would call on God to witness that it is bitter to die, and sweet to dwell in our earthly nest.

That was his indomitable strength. That is why we can read him with a quickening pulse today. He wrote no great book, but he never wrote a dead phrase or sentence. His unflagging vivacity is almost unique. It is as if he were determined to revenge himself upon his dying flesh by remaining, to the last—and for generations to come—master of the living word.

## Cloaked Genius

FRANZ KAFKA. By Herbert Tauber.  
New Haven: Yale University Press.  
1948. 252 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

ORIGINALLY published, as I seem to recall, some time in the late 1930's in Switzerland, this essay is happily ignorant of the sectarian feuds which, in the intervening decade, have marked and marred Kafka research in this country. Mr. Tauber does not squeeze the corpus of Kafka's work into the strait-jacket of a preconceived thesis; he remains conscious of the reservations of Kafka's symbols as well as their meaning. "Kafka's words always appear as if veiled by a protective cloak, a garment woven out of his special experiences." Or, in other words, Mr. Tauber keeps in mind that Kafka, the suffering man, the tortured soul, the struggling believer, the introvert, the mystic, the never-satisfied artist and seeker of the truth, the German-writing Jew living in a German enclave amidst the expanding Czech nationalism within the decaying empire—Mr. Tauber keeps in mind that this strange genius, who died convinced of his failure, was above all what Kafka's language untranslatably calls a *Dichter*. If in a restricted sense only, Mr. Tauber very aptly compares Kafka's readers to the man in the parable, "Before the Law," who is aware of "a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the portal of the Law."

The essay examines Kafka's works one by one, with cross-references pointing along the way to kindred motifs latent, growing, or fully present elsewhere in Kafka's writings. Though this method does not exactly ease the task of the reader, it gives him in the end a fairly coherent picture. Sometimes the wealth of detail, together with a rather academic style, encumbers the view for long stretches. Some of Mr. Tauber's suggestions are provocative, and some are really penetrating; the comparison between Amalia in "The Castle" and Dostoevsky's Sonia Semonovitch, for instance, throws a completely new light on Kafka's conception of surrender.

Surprisingly enough, this German-speaking Kafka critic has about as little to say as his English-speaking confrères about Kafka's relationship to certain elements of German literature and folklore obvious in his work.

No Kafka study, these days, can hope to satisfy all his devotees. To say that not too many of them will take exception to this one is to say a lot in its favor.

### FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 284

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 284 will be found in the next issue.

D USDNZMZS UISWRCI D  
ARTUQ SWDA TUSZOZA  
DFWSVT WV UIZ MZD,  
DVA WVZ UWWG SWWU  
DVA CSZO JVUW D  
DV CSZO JVUW D  
USZZ. — TLDMM EZCJVJVCT.  
—FIDSMZT LDFGDQ.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 283

Train up a child in the way he should go, and walk there yourself, once in a while.

—JOSH BILLINGS.

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## Humor.

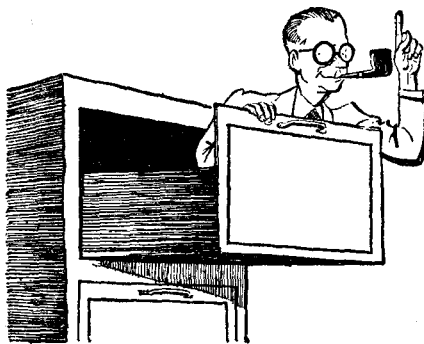
Few forms of literary merchandise are more perishable than humor, as anyone who has browsed through the funnybooks of the past can attest. The jests compiled by the British actor Joe Miller, the sallies of such Americans as Petroleum V. Nasby, Josh Billings, and Mr. Dooley—even most of Mark Twain and Will Rogers—seem pointless now that the era that evoked them is gone. Two books reviewed here seem destined for a place on the shelf of memorable humor. Bennett Cerf's "Shake Well Before Using" is in the tradition of Miller himself; Billy Rose's "Wine, Women, and Song" combines the narrative quality and barbed jape of Twain and Damon Runyon. Whether or not they elicit a smile from readers a century hence, this seems certain: they represent the most widely esteemed, typically American humor of the 1940's.

### The Frothy Cerface

EVER since men first started making jokes other men have been writing them down. I have little doubt that when some cryptographic genius succeeds in penetrating the secrets of the ancient Chaldean alphabet he will discover that a good portion of those clay tablets were inscribed with some hot one a chieftain got off at the council meeting. In the history of the publishing trade there have been thousands of volumes of quips, jests, japes, boners, sallies, and bright sayings.

As a close student of joke books (I once wrote "comedy" for the radio), I discovered that these compendiums have one characteristic in common: they are impossible to read. Everybody loves jokes. They are the golden currency of our conversation, the seasoning of our magazines, the base material of the amazingly large industry that is entertainment. Yet no man can read through a joke book; that is, no man can read through it and still be laughing on page 50. A man can take ten jokes, or eighty, but he swiftly reaches a saturation point, and a long session with the telephone directory or Toynbee's "A Study of History" is required to restore him to a state of receptivity.

Into this unsatisfactory situation came bouncing Bennett Cerf. To start off, Mr. Cerf had a delicious collection of smart cracks, accumulated during a lifetime spent among New York's literary and theatrical wits. He had an appreciation of the curious circumstance that anything funny seems funnier if a famous person said it. He combined the quipsters with their quips, introduced a moderating material in the form of amiable chit-chat about the famous persons, and turned it all into a series of short chapters rather like magazine



—From the book.

articles of a very nifty caliber. The result: "Try and Stop Me," a book of awfully good jokes that could be read, from first page to last, without setting it down. It made publishing history and high finance, selling 252,000 copies in the three-dollar edition and over a million more at a buck or less.

Mr. Cerf's encore is "Shake Well Before Using,"\* which is the mixture as before, but still mighty powerful medicine.

**WORKING METHODS:** Bennett Cerf collects raw material in a dozen different ways. Sometimes he simply happens to be among those present when Kaufman, Hart, or Levant r'ars back and lets one fly. Dozens of jokes are sent to him in the United States mail. On his tours around the country he is invariably treated to samples from the repertoire of the local wits, and there is occasionally a fresh item among the twice-told tales which make up the major portion of these performances.

This material is sifted, expanded, and packaged by Mr. Cerf; and his longhand scrawl typed by his energetic secretary Pauline (he calls her Jezebel). The finished product is then

\*SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING. By Bennett Cerf. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1948. 306 pp. \$2.95.

retailed via three channels, his SRL column TRADE WINDS, which gave him his first chance to get his jokes into print, a King-Features-syndicated column called "Try and Stop Me," which is published in fifty-two papers, and occasional pieces for *Good Housekeeping*, *Holiday*, *Coronet*, or other magazines.

"Shake Well Before Using," was compounded from all this material, with the addition of certain other writing which has never before been published. Wherever possible, original sources of the items are credited.

Once the pieces have been assembled for the book, the job has just begun. Cerf trims, rewrites, and rearranges like a play-doctor perspiring over a show in a New Haven tryout. Every slow spot is red-penciled and an earnest search is made for the wowser which will bring it to life. Cerf likes to say, "This book wasn't written, it was built."

**PUBLISHING RELATIONSHIPS:** Since Bennett Cerf is the bossman over at Random House and the publisher of Modern Library, he is frequently asked, "Why didn't you do the books yourself instead of taking them over to Simon & Schuster?" The answer is in three parts: (1) Wartime paper shortages at Random House in 1944. Cerf would have been in a handsome hassle with his unhappy authors if he had used some of RH's precious paper quota on his own "Try and Stop Me." (2) Mr. Cerf's long-time friendship with Max Schuster and Dick Simon. (3) His belief, now well substantiated, that S&S could do more for this type of book than any other publisher in the country.

The author-publisher relationship is one haggard bookmen see in their happiest hasheesh dreams. Cerf is crazy about everything his publishers do, asks no questions about the size of the advertising appropriation, and takes no advance. When faced by recalcitrant writers, Essandess probably uses B. Cerf as Exhibit A of the co-operative author.

The first printing of "Shake Well Before Using" was 35,000 copies. A second edition of 15,000 is already on press. Advance sale was 28,000.

**THE AUTHOR:** Back in the early days of World War I, a Columbia senior of iconoclastic bent wrote an editorial in the *Jester*, the university's humor magazine, in which he suggested that Nicholas Murray Butler, Columbia's president, was not quite right in the head. The senior was conducted firmly to the gates of the university and told to keep walking. That senior was