

TRADE Winds

BECAUSE I ALWAYS get a kick out of watching true devotees ride their own particular hobby horses, I was deeply pleased when Bill Hall invited me to the annual conclave, anything but solemn, of the Baker Street Irregulars. This distinguished group, which includes such celebrities as Edgar W. Smith, Chris Morley, Elmer Davis, Rex Stout, Fred Dannay, Fletcher Pratt, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, and Ben Abramson, dedicates itself to the belief that Sherlock Holmes was a real person, and A. Conan Doyle merely his literary agent—a theory that the Doyle estate finds thoroughly distasteful. There exist fifty-six short stories and four novels about Sherlock Holmes, and originally the plan was to limit the club to one member for each story, but so many applicants clamored for admittance to the group that subsidiary chapters were authorized. Thus, I was greeted at the door by hearty gentlemen who identified themselves as “Clapp, of the Dancing Men,” or “Clarkson, Gasogene, of the Six Napoleons,” or “Jones, of the Scandalous Bohemians,” or “Musgrave, of the Five Orange Pips.” My reply, “I’m Cerf, of the SRL,” seemed inadequate.

Dinner and the copious libations disposed of, the Baker Street Irregulars settle down to spirited discussion of various idiosyncrasies of Holmes, sweet Holmes. Rex Stout threw one meeting into an uproar by advancing the theory that Dr. Watson was a woman. Dr. Goodman averred that Holmes was afflicted with pyorrhea, and sniffed cocaine to deaden the pain. Dr. Goodman is a dentist in his spare moments. Another Irregular barely escaped decapitation for daring to suggest that the misanthropic Holmes secretly was “that way” about his landlady, Mrs. Hudson—a notion that permitted him to refer to the rape of the Sherlock. The late Mr. Woolcott drove to one meeting of the Irregulars in a dilapidated hansom cab, attired in the voluminous cloak and fore-and-aft cap that William Gillette affected in his famous stage impersonation of the intrepid sleuth. Woolcott kept them on all evening, though the temperature hovered in the eighties.

A fellow guest at the meeting I attended was Bruce Marshall, author of “Father Malachy’s Miracle,” “The World, the Flesh, and Father Smith,” and “Vespers in Vienna.” Together we blushed with ignorance while the

members submitted to a quiz, in which they were challenged to identify ten of the Holmes stories from a reading of the first and last sentences thereof (Dr. Julian Wolff actually named all ten). Together we hoped we would not suffer the fate of a previous guest, Laurence Paine, who discovered when he returned home that gutter-and-yegg men had burglarized his apartment, and was afraid to tell the police where he had been. And together we perked up when Peter Gregg suggested a toast to each and every one of the solicitors who had had important dealings with Sherlock Holmes. It appears there were thirty of them. . . .

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, suggests the sort of thing A. Conan Doyle might have been exposed to, had he lived long enough to fall under the domination of a high-powered Hollywood producer:

Let’s make Sherlock Holmes more human, Mr. Doyle! In the first place, he’s too aloof from everybody. We’ve got to give him a few vices. Let him keep a bottle of rye in the bottom drawer of his desk. I see you were sort of groping around for something like this when you had him hitting the hop, but we can’t do that on the screen because of the Hays office and, besides, it ain’t the best angle. The best angle is hootch.—People can understand that. You don’t know anybody that jabs himself with a needle, I don’t

know anybody that jabs himself with a needle, and the audience doesn’t know anybody that jabs himself with a needle. But you know guys that hit the booze, and I know guys that hit the booze, and the audience knows guys that hit the booze.

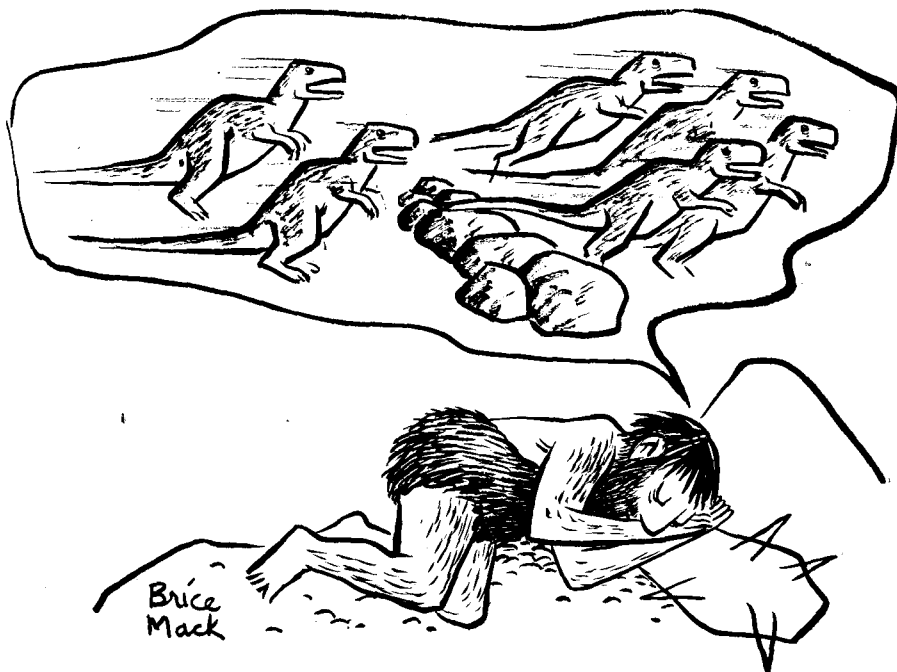
Get the idea, Mr. Doyle? . . .

STRANGE THINGS ARE happening to some of our more modern mystery headliners. Richard and Frances Lockridge, for instance, the creators of Mr. and Mrs. North, were the victims of a whimsical burglar who neglected all their real valuables, and made off only with Mr. Lockridge’s oldest overcoat and page 29 of a new manuscript. And Mignon Eberhart, who saw Harry Maule cut himself in the most inconsequential manner with a bottle opener, fainted dead away. She explained upon revival, “I simply cannot bear the sight of blood.” . . .

RALPH INGERSOLL HAD TO MAKE numerous phone calls to check facts while he was writing “The Great Ones” and he was mighty careful of his manners when he got the proper parties on the wire. He recalls vividly one of his last days on the newspaper PM. He wanted to talk to Mayor La Guardia. The operator had difficulty making the connection. Ingersoll picked up the phone finally and shouted angrily, “Confound it! Isn’t that damn mayor in his office yet?” An equally angry voice replied, “Confound it, yourself! This is Mayor La Guardia speaking.” . . . A five-star General was asked if he knew General MacArthur personally. “Know him!” he replied. “I studied dramatics under him for four years.” . . . In the lobby of a picture theatre where a reissue



“Oh, I haven’t decided what to be — atomic research, disc jockey, sky-writing, bebop. . . .”



of "The Great Waltz" was being shown, somebody said, "Mozart died, you know, in 1791." "You're crazy," declared a man who had overheard the remark. "I'm Moss Hart's father—and I had dinner with him last night." . . .

A RABIES SCARE in Larchmont prompted the town fathers to decree a special inoculation for all dogs in the neighborhood. Several society debutantes volunteered assistance. One of them looked up brightly when Dave Randall, head of Scribner's rare-book department, led in his pedigreed boxer, Lord James Boswell. She opened her record book and inquired, "Name, please?" Randall answered, "Lord James Boswell." Visibly impressed, the debutante continued, "And the dog's name, m'lord?" . . . One of Randall's customers was not so impressed during the holiday rush when he gallantly remarked, "The 'new look' becomes you, Mrs. Blank. That's a fine bustle." "Sir," she replied icily, "I do not happen to be wearing a bustle." . . . Richard Wormser inquires, "After Professor Kinsey has followed his popular treatise with another on the opposite sex would not a few new juveniles be in order?" And Alan Green has the title (but no plot yet) for a sure-fire novel for the fall: "The Man Who Startled Kinsey." . . . An author explained, "There is a great moral value in being represented by the most important literary agency in the world. Now my novels are rejected simultaneously in New York, London, Chicago, and Hollywood." . . . *Punch* reports the mysterious disappearance of a lion-tamer

from a circus troupe, and adds, "Perhaps something he disagreed with ate him." . . .

PAULA STONE and Michael Sloane will produce H. S. Kraft's dramatization of Sinclair Lewis's "Kingsblood Royal." Van Heflin and Marsha Hunt are the leading candidates for the principal roles. The play will open in San Francisco, and is scheduled to reach Broadway next fall. . . . Adria Locke Langley, author of "A Lion Is in the Streets," has dramatized Robert Fontaine's novel "The Happy Time." It will be staged under the banner of Leo Lieberman. . . . Those two famous collaborators, Edna Ferber and George Kaufman, are working together again on a new play. S. N. Behrman, Sidney Kingsley, and Moss Hart also are immersed in new scripts. None of them will be ready until next season. . . . Meanwhile, Tennessee Williams's smash hit, "A Streetcar Named Desire," provides as exciting and soul-satisfying an evening in the theatre as possibly can be imagined, with direction and acting that are simply superb. . . . Williams has dug up the hundred-year-old joke about the colored gentleman who sat in his favorite rocker on the porch and watched a rooster pursue a hen round and round the house. A girl came out of the house and sprinkled corn on the ground in the middle of the race. The hen ignored it, and continued its flight. The rooster, however, gave up the chase instantly and started to peck at the corn. The old gentleman murmured softly, "Lord, oh Lord, I hopes I never gits as hungry as that!"

BENNETT CERF.

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Thirteen Adventurers

A Study of a Year of First Novelists, 1947

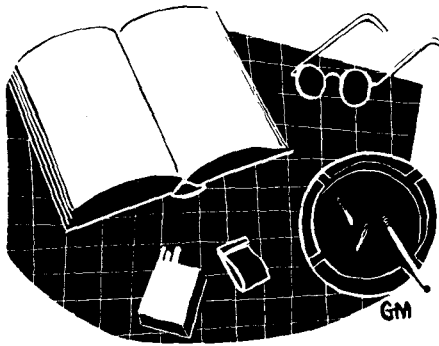
HARRISON SMITH

THE PUBLISHING season and the writers and reviewers who minister to it have a fortnight or so between late December and early January to catch their breath. It is customary at that time to take the measure of the past year, to discover or invent the directions in which writers have been heading, and sometimes to attempt to catalogue them and file them neatly away in graded and labeled little boxes, where they will live safely with their ordained companions. It is simple enough to invent "trends" for new writers and extraordinarily difficult to keep them headed in the right direction. Steinbeck was once enclosed with an agreeable group that specialized in the primitive charm of Mexicans and Indians in the Southwest, but was found later raising a great deal of dust among the writers of social protest in the Thirties. He now has a box of his own labeled, simply, Steinbeck, with these subheadings! Mexicans, California, Natural Man, Monterey. The attempt to closet Hemingway with anyone else proved to be beyond the wits of the cataloguers, for he proceeded from irony at the expense of American escapists, to bullfighting in Spain, and then to the Spanish Revolution.

This preface illustrates the difficulties faced by anyone who attempts to list the new writers of 1947 and to ask himself, "What men or gods are these?," on what manna have they fed that they may then be expected to enlighten us in our days of bewilderment? You discover that many of them have fed at the mess tables of the war in several lands, that others have browsed on Kierkegaard and Kafka, and from thence on existentialism, or have drunk the heady wine of social discontent, poverty, and class prejudice, or have learned the secrets of the psychoanalyst's couch, or have turned from reality to symbolism or fantasy. One or two have found that there is something to laugh about in today's dilemmas. A few

have learned how to divert their readers with a plain tale that has no more undertones than a side of roast beef, and is as satisfying.

Professor Burgum, in his book "The Novel and the World's Dilemma," writes, "Modern fiction reflects both constructive and disintegrating phases of contemporary society. . . . That disintegration of personality which always accompanies social disintegration will not only be registered in the content of novels, but as frankly exposed in their form."



It can be noted that the novels and their authors that follow, like the ships named by Homer, are mostly sturdily built, for battle, and that their captains have no other compasses than their own wits provide. They are blown upon and driven by controversy and human passions. But there is less of the social and personal disintegration of which Professor Burgum writes than was evidenced two years ago, or certainly ten years ago. Whatever these writers have shown of bitterness in writing of Americans in Germany or Italy or at home, it is not based on utter cynicism or hopelessness. There is a sense that if they are evils they may be ameliorated in time; that if the world is half jungle and half desert, man can tame the first and bring water to the second. The writers of the Twenties and early Thirties who led our literary renaissance, and who are now regarded with the reverence given to

our patriots of the Revolution, seemed to believe that an American small town would always remain a cultural desert, the business man a pathetic fool, the South a land of degenerate and shoeless sharecroppers and tortured Negroes. They implied that the morons and the Ku Kluxers, North and South, would in the end take us over.

The predominant theme in the discordant symphony of 1947 is not society at large, but man himself in such forms of society as remain to us after a second world war. Perhaps the spectacle of America, the victor in a gigantic conflict, and now throbbing with power and energy that is directed across the world, has had something to do with this strong and new motive; perhaps these writers have foreseen that in a time of ideological argument, the readers of novels may want some other fare than economic and political controversy. At any rate, these new novelists have turned to the only lasting subject for fiction, humanity itself.

The scenes and action of five of the thirteen novels under review occur abroad. Only one of them is strictly a war novel—"The Gallery," by John Horne Burns—certainly one of the most noteworthy to be published since the end of the war. The author of "The Gallery" was a GI who served in the African and Italian campaigns and who existed for a long time in the heat, eroticism, and smells of Naples, a city swarming with American troops. They seemed to have in their heads only two major ideas—common to most soldiers who had not been taught that they were supermen of a master race—women and alcohol.

BEFORE the war, Mr. Burns was a teacher of English in a boys' school in New England. His book took the form of sharp character sketches of the Italian and American men and women who drifted under the arches of Naples' famous Galleria Umberto.