



the true essence of freedom. If Mr. Green has purposely stacked the cards to put over his message of love and contemplation of the spirit, then he has stacked them against himself.

No matter how many flights we take into the stratosphere with his singularly priggish, anti-social hero, Jack Kaspan, or appreciate fully the implication of Kaspan's discovery that freedom is only a state of mind found, in his case, "in the silence and the squalor of the prison cell," we come away from the book with the strangely dissatisfied feeling that Mr. Green knows less about our human needs than he thinks he does. He undoubtedly set out to show us what is wrong with this materialistic world but got confused on the way. And perhaps if he had not tried to impress upon our minds that there were so few cruel Germans during the war we could then commence to believe that there were as many Germans as kind as the three martyrs in the book.

## *Fascism in America*

*THE BOILING POINT.* By Richard Brooks. New York: Harper & Bros. 1948. 312 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HARRISON SMITH

WHEN Richard Brooks's war novel "The Brick Foxhole" appeared in 1945, it stirred up the dust of controversy and marked the author, a sergeant in the Marines, as a young man with a future in literature. Critics were searching then as avidly as they are now for the new writers who were expected, when they were out of uniform, to bring order out of chaos, and to illuminate the darker aspects of civilian life. Mr. Brooks did not suddenly emerge unknown from his foxhole; he had been a sports writer for a newspaper, a radio news-analyst and script-writer, and a screen writer in Hollywood. He had established his career, and he knew how to entertain the public before he joined the Marines. The motion-picture version of his first novel, "Crossfire," was a violent, disturbing drama, the first of the two successful screen protests against anti-Semitism.

Both the public and the critics have the right to expect a great deal of a writer who, while he is still young, has made so handsome and lucrative a place for himself. His new novel is the story of what happened in a year in a Southwestern oil city whose prosperity is founded on tourists and oil. The town of Crowell was in the hands of a reactionary political machine that ran the state. The only people whose vote counted for anything, or who were even allowed to vote, were anti-Negro, anti-Semitic, anti-Mexican, and, of course, anti-American. All of this seems true enough, and bad enough, as it rolls out of Mr. Brooks's typewriter; but as the plot develops a sudden doubt of the reality of the scene strikes the reader.

The plot itself follows the conventions established for the popular novel of small-city politics, and his characters are shopworn figures from magazine fiction. There is the virile garage mechanic who falls in love with the beautiful millionairess, the tough sheriff whose heart is in the right place, and the local leader of the Veterans, a Nazi in spirit, who would like to see the boys get out their guns and begin shooting the citizenry. Add to these a New York liberal who directs the attack on the political machine, a philosophic garage owner, and assorted sharecroppers, and you have two entwined ideas that make up the substance of "The Boiling Point": one, a synthetic political novel properly sparked with sex; two, the love story of an oil millionairess and a modern knight of the highways. Both fuse in the last chapter in a scene of such incredible violence for peacetime America that it would, had so dismal a coincidence occurred, have made the front page of the reticent *New York Times*.

This is Mr. Brooks's dramatic tale of what is happening in the Southwest today, or what may happen tomorrow. Consider some of his sentences. His syllables echo the staccato of his typewriter. Surely, the author did not take the trouble to edit his copy.

How could Mr. Brooks have written on page twenty-eight this sentence, without beginning or end.

Al Hertz's department store, a hardware and electrical supply

company, the State Bank, an Indian mission, several churches, an insurance company, the cotton gin (a huge tin shed with gray peeling paint), the oil refinery with its acid smell, oil derricks, and oil vats (from the distance like poker chips planted haphazardly), tents for itinerant workers and newly arrived sharecroppers, red brick houses in the residential district (most office and government buildings were of prison-manufactured brick).

How could he have written later, "Marge's deepest meaning of existence was the expression of love," or "At first fornication their emotions ranged from esthetic beauty to the depths of degradation. . . . Their love-making was filled with joy, pain, tears, laughter, aching loneliness, and complete satisfaction." Then there is this sentence: "Something in Corcoran began to cry."

The reader may sense what Mr. Brooks should have said, supplying the missing conjunctives; he may be willing to accept this kind of writing for the sake of an exciting and conventional story. Richard Brooks's further adventures into literature will be halted at the threshold of Hollywood and the radio studios if he does not take some pains with the English language; and if he continues to try to interpret post-war America through similar hackneyed and worn-out symbols.

## *Laddie in the Dark*

*THE TRAIN FROM PITTSBURGH.* By Julian Farren. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1948. 247 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by LEE ROGOW

"THE TRAIN from Pittsburgh" might have been a pretty good novel. Plotwise, it offers little more or little less of what-happens-next interest than may be found in the works of those young writers who are described on dust jackets as "sensitive" and "perceptive." Its central character is that fellow who dominates modern fiction as Crosby looms over the music business: the modern man who can't make up his mind—Laddie in the Dark, if I may be permitted. Many writers—from John O'Hara in "Appointment in Samarra" to Jean-Paul Sartre in "Age of Reason"—have made electric reading of the ambivalent male who finds himself confronted with problems of self and society which he has neither the equipment nor indeed the resolution to answer.

Julian Farren's first novel reveals him as rather a decent chap, earnest-

ly and courageously intent upon examining focal problems of our times—anti-Semitism, success-versus-social-conscience, the love relationships of a troubled man. In such works, the difference between good, bad, and please-don't-ask must be found always in the mind and gifts of the writer. These books tower or tumble on the basis of the author's illumination of character, his revelation of relationships, his play of language. It is here that Farren fails his theme. With the exception of the main character, his people are stated, rather than explored, and even the central protagonist suffers from a rather catchpenny application of the psychoanalytic understanding.

Mr. Farren, a young New Yorker with magazine and advertising experience, has written his novel around a day in the life of Tom Bridges, key man in a plush advertising agency some ten years after V-J day. (The novel is laid in 1956 for no essential reason this reviewer can discover.) This is a day of crisis for Bridges. He has suggested to a young friend in Pittsburgh that he come East to take a job with his agency, yet he fails to make a satisfactory answer to the head of the firm when the question of his friend's Jewish extraction is raised. He meets an anti-Semitic Christian Fronter in a bar, and finds himself paying for the lout's drink. He promises his mistress of three years' standing he will force a showdown with his unfaithful, bitchy wife, yet as he goes home on the commuter train he is aware of his inability to break through his wife's domination and sexual attraction. He is tortured by a sense of having abandoned his youthful social ideals for the money-grubbing world of advertising and the emptiness of upper suburban society. He is beset by guilty memories of an old love, a Jewess, never certain whether it was her religion or her wartime infidelity which caused him to shut her out of his life. He decides to blot out his problems by murdering his wife and killing himself, but finds his resolution sapped by a sudden display of sexual acquiescence on the part of his wife, who is having a child by another man and wants Bridges to think it is his.

His day ends in drunken despair. He is beaten, hopeless, completely unstuck, destroyed by flaws of self, betraying and betrayed, denied even the release of death.

Written with imagination, perception, and eloquence, "The Train From Pittsburgh" might have become an affecting document of our times. Lacking them, it is little more than a depressing case history of a man's disintegration.

## American Wodehouse



—Myron Ehrenberg.

Jack Iams's mixture "comes out light and fluffy, with a heady aroma."

**PREMATURELY GAY.** By Jack Iams. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1948. 248 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

MR. IAMS has written several books before this one, and undoubtedly my comments on "Prematurely Gay" will not be news to those who have read them. Iams is news to me, and I should put it this way: that Wodehouse is no longer in a class by himself. Some few of the faithful may mutter "Blasphemy!"; but for the rest of us who recall that peculiar distillate of gaiety and whimsy and unreality, and the oh so gentle, so loving, spoofing of the upper classes, it is not too difficult to recognize that someone else can do it, that the mixture as before may be stirred by another hand. This is good American Wodehouse, of course, a little rougher on gentility, a little softer on love, a good deal sexier all around, than the original W. However the pattern is essentially the same, involving as it does an inextricable tangle of impossible circumstances, all about nothing, touching earth nowhere, giving off a shower of witty sparks, and involving the zaniest of characters in a mad rat-race.

There is, for example, Mr. Thaddeus Hollister of the House of Hollister, which has for generations provided the public with hair-dyes, especially that one for the graying hair of gentlemen of distinction, triumphantly named "Heigh-Ho Silver." Mr. Hollister has an innocent penchant for publicity, and there is that gay and imaginative young publicity man, Whit Blake of Bunbury and Blake, to provide it for him and his unguents. There is no Bunbury. Bunbury is a

good name out of Oscar Wilde, borrowed by Whit to give the firm class, and one of Whit's problems is to keep his clients from demanding to see the senior partner. There is Hollister's fair young daughter, Felicity (the Hair Apparent!), who will and won't and will again be Whit's, leading him the usual farcical race for love. There are also some relics from Whit's unsavory pre-publicity days (a matter of degree), such as Commodore Inch the midget, and a circus albino named Whambo the Whatsit. Whambo is a masterful creation, monosyllabic out of necessity, happily uninhibited in instinct and behavior, and covered all over with luxuriant pink hair. Now imagine a resounding national campaign whipped up by Whit for Hollister, to choose Mr. Distinguished America (the man with the most distinguished head of gray hair, attributable naturally to a thoughtful use of "Heigh-Ho Silver").

Add to all these a dozen more possessed characters, stir into a narrative rising steadily to the pace of an antic hay, and you have the right to hope for the very best. It depends entirely upon treatment, and Mr. Iams has the touch, definitely. The whole thing comes out perfectly light and fluffy with a heady aroma and no aftertaste, and absolutely no unhappy suggestion of This World in it anywhere. Isn't that like the Old Master himself?

## Isle of Caprice

**THE HILLS AROUND HAVANA.** By Carl Bottume. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. 1948. 297 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ARTHUR C. FIELDS

THIS is a well-written book designed for pleasant, quick reading. The author has produced a light, casual tale which is, in its own quiet way, very effective. For Mr. Bottume has successfully brought to life the tropical atmosphere of Havana, the Havana of play; he has created an island paradise where food and drink and sex are the staples, and where the dangers of a world-wide global catastrophe seem quite remote. That is not to say that Mr. Bottume's characters do not have problems; they certainly do. But as one of them remarks: "Let's you and me not worry about it." . . . And they both set out to get drunk."

"The Hills Around Havana" is the story of a group of people drawn together by rather contrived circumstances, who reach a climax of in-

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