

## EAST COAST, WEST COAST

**RAILROAD PASSENGERS** have noticed with surprise and pleasure that they very definitely are being wooed by once-haughty managements. Many of the improvements in equipment and service stem from C. & O.'s persistent gadfly, Robert Young, but his competitors are beginning to step on the gas themselves. The Missouri Pacific lines, for instance, have ordained, "If a passenger wants to know why a train is running late, or why it is standing so long on a siding or in a station, he must be told the reason. The answer 'I don't know' will not be tolerated."

To airplane passengers, accustomed to evasive and unsatisfactory replies whenever they ask a pertinent question, either before embarking or aloft, this will come as a revolutionary step. It's worrisome enough to be circling aimlessly in the clouds minutes or hours after scheduled landing time without being denied the knowledge of your exact location or the reason for the delay. The first airline that insists upon (1) full information to passengers at all times—including the hours they spend waiting for overdue connections in crowded airports, (2) definite seat reservations in advance, to eliminate miniature football scrimmages at loading gates, and (3) adequate and fair-priced transportation to and from airports, will make its competition look sick within a fortnight.

Quentin Reynolds is one globe-trotter who takes transportation snarls in stride. Bill Williams tells of the time *Collier's* sent Quent to California to do a story and notified Jim Marshall, West Coast editor and author of "Santa Fe," to meet and take care of him. *Collier's* received the following telegram from Marshall: "Reynolds arrived 7:04 today. Plane arrived 7:06. Met both. Everything in order." . . . On the other hand, Muriel Fuller cannot face the hazards of

traveling at all, to judge by her "Song of a Would-Be Globe-Trotter":

Buses turn over,  
Airplanes crash;  
Trains are wrecked  
And autos smash.  
Hikers are slaughtered,  
Ships can sink.  
Better stay home  
Is what I think! . . .

**ROARK BRADFORD** recently journeyed from New Orleans to Oxford, Mississippi, to interview Bill Faulkner in his native haunt. The resultant piece, a humdinger, appears in the May issue of '48 magazine. . . . Faulkner gave Roark a copy of his famous letter to the Postmaster General, in which he relinquished his job at the University of Mississippi post office. "As long as I live under the capitalistic system," he stated, "I expect to have my life influenced by the demands of moneyed people. But I will be damned if I propose to be at the beck and call of every itinerant scoundrel who has two cents to invest in a postage stamp. This, sir, is my resignation." . . . Bradford found the Faulkner estate cluttered with livestock: horses, mules, cows, hogs, and several varieties of dogs and cats—and a possum penned up in the barn. Bill proposed eventually to set the possum free and see if his half-breed hound-dogs could trail it. One night, however, the possum broke out of his cage, and took refuge in a nearby tree. Bradford reports, "The household was awakened by the damndest ruckus you ever heard. The dogs, cats, and one saddle horse had formed a circle around the possum. The dogs were yapping, the cats were yowling, and only the horse was silent, glaring defiantly at the possum." When peace had been restored, and the possum returned to his cage, Bradford asked Faulkner sarcastically, "How come the horse wasn't whinnying?" Faulk-

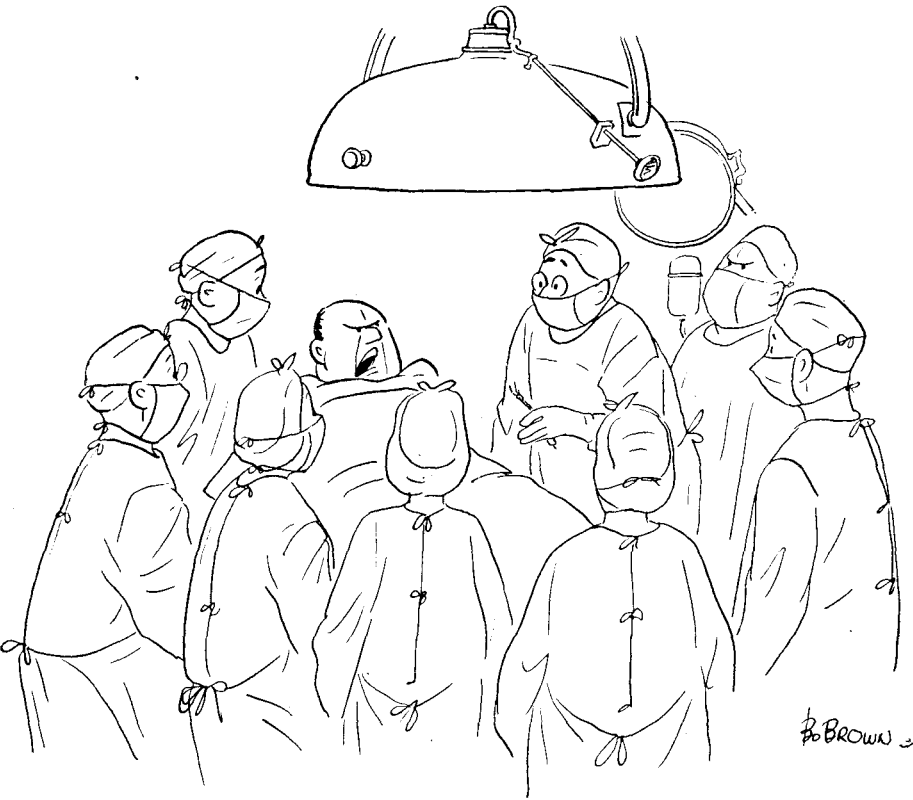
ner informed him, "It just isn't in the nature of a horse to whinny when he trees a possum." . . .

**THE INCREASE IN SUBWAY** and bus fares in New York, delayed so long by political opportunists, finally has been voted, and the Public Library is hoping against hope that city fathers will now feel opulent enough to appropriate \$15,000 for the purchase of a new bookmobile for the Borough of the Bronx. Staten Island's "Parnassus on Wheels" was restored last July, and is doing a lusty business. The Bronx "traveling library," on the other hand, has been out of commission since 1944. In the twelve years it operated, it made twenty-two scheduled stops a week, boasted over 10,000 registered borrowers, and circulated as many as 83,369 books in one year. When the truck collapsed of old age in 1944, it had traversed over 50,000 miles of Bronx asphalt, and was responsible for circulating more than a million books to Bronx children and adults.

The New York City Planning Commission cited the need for at least nine new library branches in the Bronx as far back as 1943, but, to date, the plans exist only on paper. One new bookmobile would fill part of the gap at least. Suggestion to Bronx readers: tell it to City Hall! Meanwhile, don't begrudge your local bookseller a little extra business. . . . Incongruous as it may seem, the librarian of the Staten Island bookmobile, within the limits of the City of New York, was confronted recently by a hausfrau who demanded a book with "remedies for curing her sick chickens," and an importunate youth who wanted "that book you talked me into borrowing three weeks ago." The gratified librarian asked, "Was it so good that you want to read it again?" "Heck, no," said the bookworm. "I wrote my new girl's phone number in it." . . .

**IN AN EXCLUSIVE DRESS SHOP** in Beverly Hills, a regular patroness saw a new creation she fancied, and asked the price. "A thousand dollars," said the proprietor without batting an eyelash. The lady recoiled, and exclaimed, "This time you've really gone





"You mean I gotta pay all these loafers for just standing around and watching?"

too far. New look or not, you're never going to get a thousand dollars for that dress. In fact, I'll bet a hundred dollars you don't." "It's a bet," he replied, "and furthermore, when I do, I'll even tell you who bought it."

As luck would have it, the proprietor did sell the dress for a thousand dollars just a few days later, but he hasn't figured a way to break the news to the lady with whom he bet. The purchaser, it seems, was the lady's husband, making a little gift to his private secretary. . . .

**RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN**, the famous musical-comedy team responsible for "Oklahoma!," "Carousel," and "Allegro," will base their next operetta on James Michener's Pulitzer-Prize winner, "Tales of the South Pacific" (Macmillan), and have flown to Hollywood to recruit a cast. John Logan, who directed "Mister Roberts," and Leland Hayward, who produced it, sense in the Michener book a similar Broadway bonanza, and have climbed on the bandwagon. Those boys are out to break the bank! . . . For years, Dick Rodgers teamed with the late Larry Hart, who was no more than five feet tall. His new collaborator, Hammerstein, is a six-footer. Somebody at the Dutch Treat Club asked Rodgers if the change of partners had made any notable difference in his working day. "One at least," said Rodgers. "When I appeared in public with Hart, people whispered, 'The big one is the S.O.B.'"

Now, when they see me with Hammerstein, they say, 'The little one is the S.O.B.'" . . .

**JOHN GOULD**, in "The House That Jacob Built" (Morrow), tells of a brace of M.I.T. professors who spent a winter night in a Maine cabin. They were impressed by the way a native guide had set up his stove four feet off the floor on chunks of wood, from which position it did a remarkable job of heating the room. A computation of the floor area and cubic content showed that the stove's heat output was tremendously increased by its position. Amazed that an uneducated woodsman could have figured out a thing like that, they questioned him.

"How did you manage to figure it so closely without referring to any mathematical tables?" they asked.

"Well," the guide answered, "I just had so much pipe and where the pipe ended I had to prop the stove up and attach it." . . .

**BING CROSBY WAS INVITED** to attend a wedding at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York recently. As usual, he was accompanied by his pal Barney Dean, and, as usual, he was late. Dean tried to sneak him into a side door, but it was locked. Frantically, he rushed around to the Madison Avenue entrance, and then to one on Fifty-first Street, but they were locked, too. "Holy smoke, boss," said Dean, "I think the joint has folded!"

BENNETT CERF.

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## *The Comics . . . Very Funny!*

FREDRIC WERTHAM, M.D.

**A**N ANXIOUS mother consulted me some time ago. Her four-year-old daughter is the only little girl in the apartment house where they live. The boys in the building, from about three to nine years old, hit her, beat her with guns, tie her up with rope whenever they get a chance. They hit her with whips which they buy at the circus. They push her off her bicycle and take her toys away. They handcuff her with handcuffs bought with coupons from comic books. They take her to a vacant lot and use her as a target for bow and arrow. They make a spearhead and scare her. Once, surrounding her in this way, they pulled off her panties to torture her (as they put it). Now her mother has fastened the child's panties with a string around her neck so the boys can't pull them down.

What is the common denominator of all this? Is this the "natural aggression" of little boys? Is it the manifestation of the sex instinct? Is it the release of natural tendencies or the imitation of unnatural ones? The common denominator is comic books.

I examine in the clinic a boy of eleven, referred because he fights in school and is inattentive. He says:

I buy comic books every week. They kill animals, sometimes they kill people. One of the girls is the best fighter. Sometimes they tie her up and sometimes they put her in a snake cave so that the snakes would kill her.

I examine a boy of fourteen referred to the clinic for stealing. I ask him: "Do you think your stealing had anything to do with the comic books?" He answers: "Oh, no. In the comic books it is mostly murder." This is like the arguments used by the experts under subsidy from the comic-book industry.

A boy of seventeen is referred to me by the Juvenile Aid Bureau because in an argument he stabbed a boy of thirteen in the right arm "with full intent." He says: "I don't read many comic books—only about ten a week.

I like crime comics. Sometimes they kill the girl. In one of the books the girl wanted more money so they stabbed her in the back." Was it "full intent," or was it perhaps imitation that motivated him in his own actions?

A boy of thirteen is a problem at home and at school. He is a real comic-book addict. He says: "They have some kind of guns that shoot out a ray and kill a lot of people." Is that a natural fantasy? Is that a penis symbol? Or is it a kind of reality that a lot of adults dread now and which these kids will have to face sooner or later?

A boy of fifteen took a boy of twelve up a fire escape and threatened to push him down if he didn't give him a quarter. He says: "I read two comic books a day." A thirteen-year-old boy is referred to me by the State Charities Aid Association. He was caught stealing five dollars. When asked why he took it he confided to me that the older boys in school got up a gang and threatened him. If he did not get them the money they would beat him up. So he stole the money and gave it to them. (I verified this later.)

The experts of the comic-book industry tell us that what the children read in comic books is pure fantasy. But when I examine these many children and adolescents who tell me what they read in comic books, I ask myself with Bernardo in "Hamlet":

"Is not this something more than fantasy?"

**T**HINK of the many recent violent crimes committed by young boys and girls. A twelve-year-old boy who kills his younger sister; a twelve-year-old boy who kills his older sister; a thirteen-year-old burglar who operates with a shotgun; a seventeen-year-old boy who kills a thirteen-year-old boy and leaves a note signed "The Devil"; a public school in New York City where two police officers circulate on the grounds and in the corridors to prevent violence; a mathematics teacher who has to give examinations with a policeman present in the classroom; a thirteen-year-old who shot a nurse and was sent to a reformatory (where, incidentally, he will read more comic books); a gang of adolescent bandits led by a fifteen-year-old girl; two twelve-year-old boys and one of eleven stopping a man on the street and shooting him with a semi-automatic; a fifteen-year-old boy third-degreed as a suspect in a murder case; three sixteen-year-old boys killing a fourteen-year-old "for revenge"; a New York City school where the older pupils threaten the younger ones with violence and with maiming them, robbing them of their money, watches, and fountain pens. The young victims don't dare tell the names of their tormentors. When two

