

STAGE

"Merman's a Wow!"—*Chapman, News*

ETHEL MERMAN
In the "World-Wide Musical Smash"
"ANNIE GET YOUR GUN"
with MILTON WATSON
IMPERIAL THEA., 45 St., West of B'way
AIR-CONDITIONED. MATS. WED. & SAT. 2:30

New Stages, Inc. presents **JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S**

The RESPECTFUL PROSTITUTE

CORT THEATRE • 48th St. E. of B'way • CI 5-4289
Evas. 8:45. Matinees WED. and SAT. 2:45

MAX GORDON
presents **BORN YESTERDAY**
AIR COND. 
The LAUGH HIT by GARSON KANIN
with JOHN ALEXANDER • JEAN HAGEN
LYCEUM Thea. 45 St. E. of B'way

HENRY FONDA
Mister Roberts
A play by THOMAS HEGGEN & JOSHUA LOGAN
with DAVID WAYNE
ROBERT KEITH • WILLIAM HARRIGAN
ALVIN Thea., W. 52nd St., Eves. 8:30, Mats. Wed. & Sat.

NATIONAL COMPANY
Opens Sept. 7th. **ERLANGER THEA., CHICAGO**

BROCK PEMBERTON presents
JOE E. BROWN in
The Pulitzer Prize Play by MARY CHASE
"HARVEY"
with MARION LORNE
Directed by ANTOINETTE PERRY
48th ST. THEATRE, East of Broadway
Evs. 8:40. Mats. Wed. and Sat. 2:40

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details of cremation, embalming, preparation of corpses for burial, and other such vivid detail, the novel soon becomes a test for the reader with a touchy stomach, and a trial as well. Its insistence on naturalistic detail often blunts whatever satiric darts Mr. Belfrage has to offer.

Through this lurid funeral procession parades a collection of subsidiary characters of whose creation the best thing that can be said is that very few of them occupy many pages. Lincoln Hope, the single-minded hero, whose desire to "go into partnership with God" by creating a cemetery unsurpassed throughout America, is

too much of an American fictional stereotype. He rarely emerges as a human being. More often, he fades into the anonymity of a black-coated undertaker, faceless as a Dali nun, as lacking in character as one of the pieces of statuary dotting his own Vale of Hope.

The quality of Mr. Belfrage's prose, which is high enough to indicate an occasional successful island of wit, cannot ever rise sufficiently above the murkiness of the subject he has chosen. Now that he has sufficiently explored this abysmal crypt, let him find a more worthy subject for his undoubted talents.

Auld Sod and American Dream

THE PARISH AND THE HILL. By Doyle Curran. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1948. 221 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRY BULL

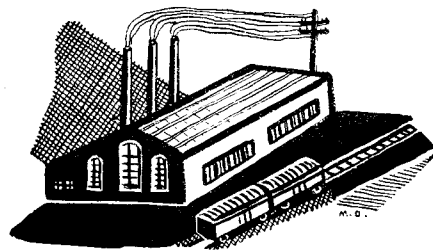
IT is almost as difficult to know how to appraise these highly personal memories of an Irish-American childhood as it is to handle an Irish-American workman exerting his voluble charm to prove that your idea must be carried out his way or not at all.

As inconsistent and diversified as people long and intimately observed, Mrs. Curran's fictitious friends and relations at first baffle the subsurface-reader, the reader who wants from fiction more than mere escape, in the same way they must have baffled the child Mary who found herself growing up among them. But as we begin to see that this little girl gradually acquired all her positive characteristics from her mother and grandfather, we discover that events and characters are reported with a remarkably accurate reference to her earlier outlook, and we can add our own judgment to savor the fuller significance of developments.

Sometimes with nostalgia, sometimes with dramatic impact, Mrs. Curran's story tells of Grandfather O'Sullivan's migration from Kerry and of the two succeeding generations that tried to make their way in a New England mill town. Mrs. Curran, now an English teacher at Wellesley, supplies all the signposts, but unless we are content merely to enjoy the rich flow of emotional scenery, to identify ourselves with figures presented poetically against a landscape, we shall have to find our own way through the parish and the hill.

The former locale is the section settled by the immigrants. With its overcrowded tenements, its bars bursting with convivial and belligerent "harps," it remains the home of the

shanty Irish after the successful followers of the shrewd Yankees have turned into lace-curtain Irish, with addresses on Money Mole Hill. Little Mary's own family is violently torn between the traditional pull of the auld sod from the wake-ridden parish and the appeal of the American dream, advertising version, as exemplified by the hill. But if the girl views the struggle as one between spirit and matter, between a rich, imaginative culture and the imitation of a threadbare heritage, we are still shown enough of the rest of the picture to see that it is much more complicated than that. Loyally as she upholds every stand of her grandfather and mother, Mary still lets us see that this favorite daughter was the only one of John O'Sullivan's seventeen children who made any sort of a good life. And even with her great natural humanity, her warmth and compassion, Mary's mother seems so ignorant and superstitious, so hopeless a judge of character and of the consequences of a given line of behavior, that after a long courtship she still marries a dour, totally uncongenial man and then proceeds to spoil their children. When she has finally struck the worst of them with a poker (with at least the momentary sympathy of the reader), we begin to realize that it was training in reality that she most lacked. Certainly she was humble enough to try to face the facts, but where had she ever been given the chance to learn how? Bigger in spirit



than the community priests, she adjusted to life as well as she did in spite of the deliberate limitations of church and parochial schools, in spite of the neglect implicit in so large and poor a family, in spite of the bitterness of exploitation by the mill owners.

Like her father before her, Mary shines forth as a rare beacon of the Celtic spirit not turned to bitterness by years of opposition to the English. In the midst of the pervading atmosphere of Coughlinism, John O'Sullivan and his daughter have no need to bolster any sense of inferiority to Anglo-Saxons here or abroad by stooping to attack races still a step below them on the social ladder.

The less appealing relatives, including seven alcoholic brothers, of whom several belong to the plentiful Irish type whose whole personality seems to be corroded with a negative charge, they too are scattered through "The Parish and the Hill."

Mary Curran the author has, at least unconsciously, used her gift for dialogue and character, her appreciation of both the wit and the lyricism in her people, to illumine one of the American minority problems that has still to be faced realistically before it can be entirely resolved.

Intrigue in Michigan

RAVENSWOOD. By Mary Frances Doner. New York: Doubleday & Co. 1948. 254 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by EDWIN SEAVER

WITH auctorial eye in a fine frenzy rolling, Mary Frances Doner has written a feverish novel of love and sin, of intrigue, jealousy, and the lust for power in the Blue River country of Michigan. "Ravenswood" is a thickly-plotted, thickly-populated chronicle of a family in whose past, apparently, more has happened than meets the eye. Unfortunately, the skeletons in the St. George closet are too obviously simulated to frighten us; and the evil so unconvincing, the retribution so unshattering, we are not so much purged by pity and terror as by boredom. There is a lot of sound and fury, signifying very little.

The fortunes of the St. George family are founded, not on a rock but upon salt, and this gives Miss Doner an opportunity to slip in some information about one of the major industries in the Great Lakes region—quite the most interesting reading, incidentally, in "Ravenswood." The novel opens with thunder and lightning and what the author tries to build up as a brooding sense of evil. We are thereupon, after an introduction that reads

like a resumé of preceding installments of the story and the characters involved in it, plunged into the intricate involvements of several generations of the St. George family. At either end this family would seem to be quite all right; the founding grandfather was a fine, upstanding gentleman, and his grandson Thad is a veritable young knight in shining armor, born to slay the dragon of failure, restore the family fortune, and have an altogether brilliant future.

If this reviewer were to tell the reader who was the illegitimate child of whom, he would be guilty of giving away the plot. Perish the thought! However, somebody did somebody wrong in one generation and, his offspring's teeth being set on edge, he proceeded to do somebody else a little wrong on his own. There's the crack in this not very subtly imagined Michigan house of Atreus.

To sum up, "Ravenswood" is a slick magazine novel "famoused up" with somber overtones that never amount to much more than stage directions or window dressing.

In a Serene World

THE WASHBOURNES OF OTTERLEY. By Humphrey Pakington. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1948. 303 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by PAMELA TAYLOR

ENJOYMENT being highly contagious, it seems likely that a good time will be had by all who read "The Washbournes of Otterley," for it is quite obvious that the author has thoroughly enjoyed creating this period piece which might so easily have been quaint or sentimental but is, in the end, deftly amusing. Content to let other novelists shock, startle, or arouse their readers, Mr. Pakington goes on adding to his list of highly entertaining tales, iridescent with nimble and subtle humor.

"The Washbournes of Otterley" carries us, in the span of 1845 to 1895, through three generations of one family, serenely happy in its ownership, since the days of Henry VII, of its beautiful Severnshire estate. Inevi-

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