

## Footnote to A Preface

ROBERT E. SHERWOOD



Robert E. Sherwood

NOT only does John Mason Brown read the prefaces to published plays, but he manages to remember them, and this is not always convenient for those who wrote them (I am making no mention of GBS in this connection.) Recently Mr. Brown asked me to re-read a preface that I wrote in 1927 for a modest comedy, "The Queen's Husband." I complied with this request and did not have a particularly good time while doing so.

As I read this strange text, I couldn't make out what sort of person I was when I wrote it. I knew I was thirty-one years old at the time but my mental processes seemed much younger than that. Indeed, there were evidences of such juvenility that I found myself inclining toward agreement with some heartless critic of that period who applied the term "knee-pants drama" to my first plays. (I mentioned this critic but not by name in the preface; I evidently was pretty sore at him.)

My principal lament then was that romance, sentiment, enchantment had gone out of the theatre. I attributed this disastrous development to the fact that all of American literature was coming under the dominance of journalism. I wrote: "We have developed a literature that is hemmed in on all sides by city desks—a literature that is not literature but 'copy' dedicated to a muse who wears a green eye-shade, wields a blue pencil, and

asks, in a cold, contemptuous tone, 'Have you verified this?'"

My writing in this preface was not all negative. I came right out with some positive statements, including the following, which I endorse even now: "To be able to write a play, for performance in a theatre, a man must be sensitive, imaginative, naive, gullible, passionate; he must be something of an imbecile, something of a poet, something of a liar, something of a damn fool."

(I heard some of those words repeated several times during the Second World War when I enjoyed the honor of being mentioned on the enemy radio. There must have been somebody in the Japanese propaganda ministry who possessed a copy of "The Queen's Husband"—perhaps he was a former pupil of John Mason Brown's—because I was referred to as "this American propagandist, author of a play called 'Idiot's Delight,' who once admitted that he is something of an imbecile, something of a liar, something of a damn fool." Evidently this went over so well that the Goebbels office in Berlin picked it up and used it.)

I do not want to seem too scornful of myself as I was in the 1920's; I have not aged or improved enough for that. Indeed, I can express some sympathy for myself. That was a dreadful decade for anyone idealistically or romantically or even hopefully inclined. Disillusionment was fashionable. The decade had begun with the realization that millions of lives had been sacrificed and that the world had certainly not been made safe for democracy. It also began with the pro-

foundly shocking (to me) revelation that six members of the Chicago White Sox, including the great Shoeless Joe Jackson, had sold out to gamblers and thrown a World Series; it seemed that the last illusion had perished for us Americans when Jackson, emerging from the Court House, could only hang his head in reply to the little Chicago boy who pled, "Say it ain't true, Joe."

THEN there was the Eighteenth Amendment, producing that temple of cynicism, the speakeasy. There was the rise of gangsterism. There was the assurance of quick millions on the stock market. There was the installment plan; as Elmer Davis put it—and I can quote him only approximately—a woman knowing she could get a mink coat for a small down payment followed by twenty "easy" payments through the years, was apt to believe she could get her sense of moral values on the same terms.

The time was propitious for the emergence of Sinclair Lewis with "Main Street" and "Babbitt" and for all the books and plays that "debunked" previously hallowed figures or sacred traditions. It was a decade when a mighty publishing house, after a nationwide investigation, came up with the conclusion that the two things uppermost in the American mind were confidence in Calvin Coolidge and hunger for pornography (hardly a surprising combination).

When I wrote my first plays—"The Road to Rome," "The Queen's Husband," "Waterloo Bridge," and some other knee-pants dramas that nobody ever saw—I was seeking escape from



**BASQUE WEDDING:** with cakes and gifts and ceremonial sheep-bell. Their customs, like the Basque's own language, date from antiquity. Nearby are Biarritz, St. Jean de Luz, and Hendaye, smart amusing resorts with wonderful beaches, all sports, theatres and Casinos.



**DAGGER DANCE** at a Basque festival. Basques play *pelote*, a dangerous high-speed hand ball game, speak their own language.

# "Basque" in FRANCE



**FRENCH SHOPPING:** Now U. S. tourists may bring in \$400 worth, duty-free. Today shops are filled with attractive merchandise.



**WINTER SPORTS:** the Pyrenees offer excellent facilities, dependable snow, fine slopes. Good skiing from December on.

## Spend Happy Holidays in the Sunny Basque Country—the Pyrenees — Where Summer Dawdles Into Autumn

September at Biarritz is right on time for the Grand Prix at the Hippodrome de la Barre. Swim at St. Jean de Luz or just be lazy in the sunny Basque hills. Tarbes, Pau, Luchon and Lourdes in the Pyrenees offer peaceful valleys, utter relaxation. Whenever you go to France there's *life* to enjoy. The autumn climate is soft, from Paris to the provinces. France is truly the land that knows no season. Food is superb, hotels and transportation are excellent. And everything is moderately priced.



**GALA AT BIARRITZ.** September is the "month of elegance" with remarkable program of balls, races, music, divertimento.



**BULLFIGHT AT BAYONNE**, historic town famous for its Basque museum, its 13th century cathedral, and for good eating.

For reservations and information see your friendly travel agent. For booklets, maps, etc. write Dept. S7, Box 221, New York 10

### FRENCH NATIONAL TOURIST OFFICE

A service agency of the Ministry of Public Works, Transportation and Tourism

NEW YORK • CHICAGO • LOS ANGELES • SAN FRANCISCO • MONTREAL

**"TRAVEL BUILDS TRADE AND AIDS PEACE"**





Top row: New playwrights of the Twenties—Edna Ferber, Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman. Second row: Rising young stars—Katharine Cornell, Leslie Howard, Eva Le Gallienne. Third row: Three trail-blazing directors—Arthur Hopkins, Jed Harris, Guthrie McClintic. Bottom row: Young designers—Robert Edmond Jones, Jo Mielziner, Norman Bel Geddes.

one of the most sordid of periods, and it is of incidental interest to me that, as a writer, I unwittingly discarded the escape mechanism in 1933, when Franklin Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler came to power.

So there was some justification for my gloom at the prospect of things in general in the days when I and *The Saturday Review of Literature* were young, but my remarks about the dismal state of the theatre of that time were just plain silly. Looking back into the 1920's it seems to me that the American theatre was then a wonderfully exciting place in which to work and to progress. Far from being

hemmed in by copy desks or censored by a muse with a green eye-shade, it was as wide open as a virgin continent, and as teeming with chances for adventure and fortune.

**N**EW talents and new ideas appeared and flourished in all the theatre arts. It was at the beginning of 1920 that Eugene O'Neill came to prominence, and here are some of the other playwrights who followed: Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Howard, Philip Barry, Edna Ferber, George S. Kaufman, Marc Connelly, George Kelly, S. N. Behrman, John Howard Lawson, John van Druten, Anita Loos, George

Abbott, Philip Dunning, Kenyon Nicholson, Hatcher Hughes, John Colton, Paul Green, Vincent Lawrence, Ben Hecht, Charles MacArthur. Elmer Rice had had previous success but his real, revolutionary talent developed during the 1920's with such plays as "The Adding Machine." In the next few years came Moss Hart, Preston Sturges, John Wexley, Lynn Riggs, Rose Franken, Sidney Kingsley, Lillian Hellman, Russel Crouse, Samson Raphaelson, Clifford Odets.

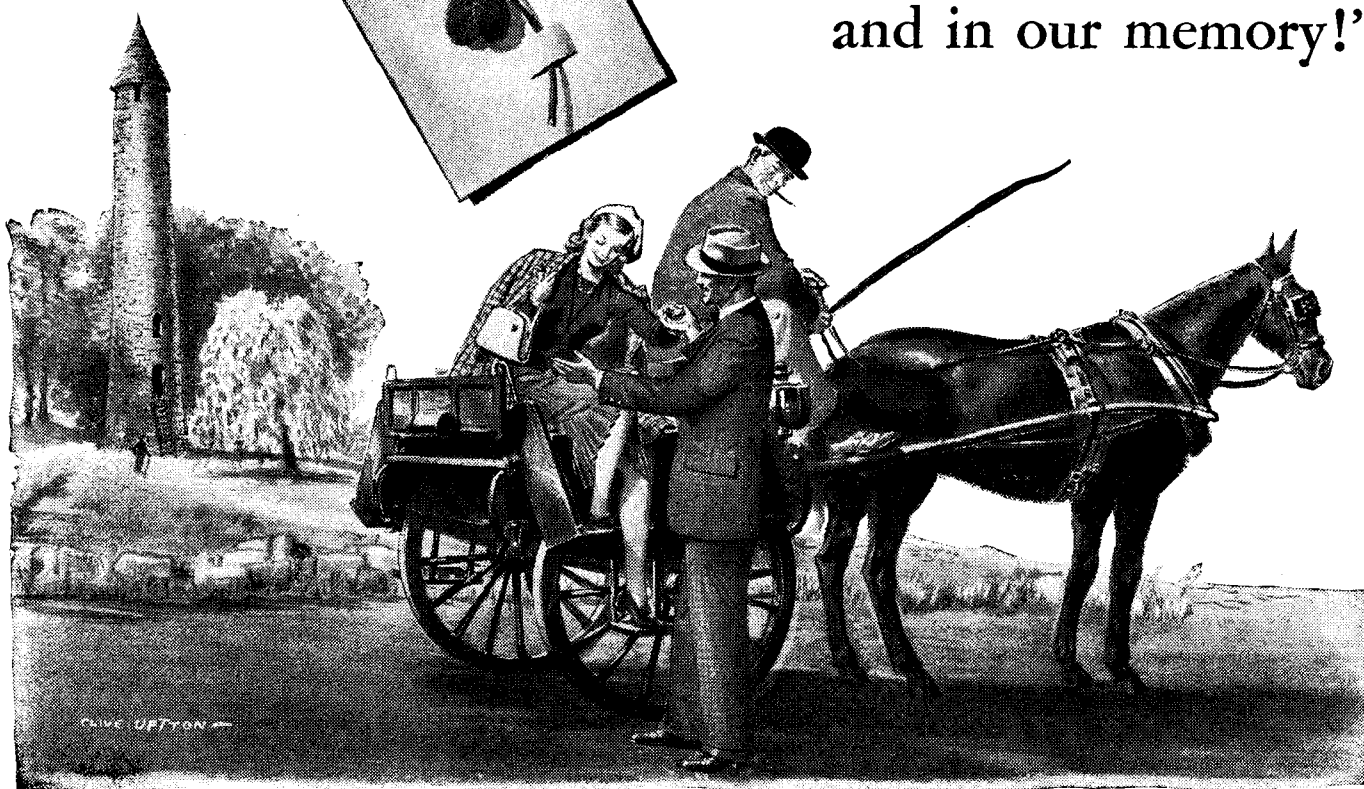
The rising stars of the same period included: Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontanne, Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, Ruth Gordon, Walter Huston, Gertrude Lawrence, Judith Anderson, Eva Le Gallienne, Tallulah Bankhead, Paul Muni, Barbara Stanwyck, Fredric March, Florence Eldridge, Philip Merivale, Roland Young, Louis Wolheim, James Gleason, Hope Williams, Jeanne Eagels, Glenn Hunter, Margalo Gillmore, Winifred Lenihan, Elliott Nugent, June Walker, Joseph Schildkraut, Leslie Howard, Dennis King, Helen Menken, Miriam Hopkins, Os-good Perkins, Lee Tracy.

Here are some other assorted names that came to fame in the Daddy Browning decade: George and Ira Gershwin, the Astaires, Bobby Clark, Oscar Hammerstein II, Joe Cook, Vincent Youmans, Beatrice Lillie, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Paul Robeson, Michael Arlen, Cole Porter, Jimmy Durante, Noel Coward, Brown & Henderson, and the Marx Brothers.

Just how much the new writing and acting talent compelled entirely new concepts of theatrical production, or just how much the new producers gave the talent unprecedented opportunities for asserting itself, need not be debated here. But when the Theatre Guild moved uptown after the First World War and established itself as a solid, commercial success instead of a little band of starry-eyed but undernourished torchbearers, all of theatrical management and direction achieved a radically different character. The ancient and frequently vulnerable theory that a play that was "arty" could never get by in the box office was forever discarded, and among the plays largely responsible for this were "John Ferguson," "Beyond the Horizon," "Liliom," "Anna Christie," "Saint Joan," "The Show-Off," "Beggar on Horseback," "What Price Glory?," "They Knew What They Wanted."

The principal trail-blazing directors were Arthur Hopkins, Winthrop Ames, Robert Milton, Philip Moeller, George Cram Cook, Rouben Mamoulian, Guthrie McClintic, Jed Harris, Howard Lindsay, Chester Erskine. Among the scene designers: Robert Edmond Jones, Norman Bel Geddes, Jo Mielziner, Lee Simonson, Albert Johnson,

"This shamrock has deep roots...  
in Northern Ireland...  
and in our memory!"

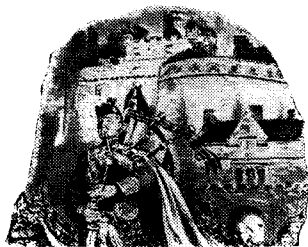


"I can picture the spot where we plucked it—where its plant, no doubt, is still growing—as if we'd left there only yesterday.

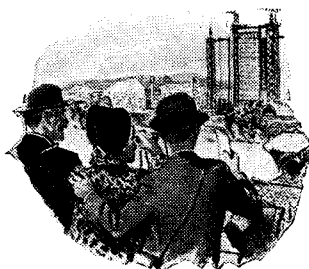
"It's curious how such a small keepsake, itself now dry and withered, helps keep pleasant memories alive!

"Looking at this leaf of shamrock, I can almost hear the creak and jingle of the jaunting car that took us on our picnic to that ancient Round Tower in County Antrim. I even seem to sniff the fragrant Ulster air.

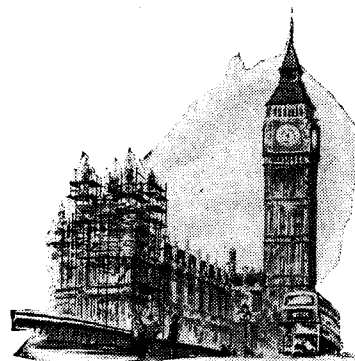
"And, from Northern Ireland, we're carried quickly back through the happy days we spent in other parts of Britain . . . retracing vacation footsteps . . . recalling the warmth of our welcome . . . re-living it all again . . ."



"Remember the wonderful music at the Edinburgh Festival . . . and the Castle, floodlit at midnight . . . and the skirling of those massed pipe bands?"



"Remember our trip to the St. Leger . . . and the thrill of shouting home the American-bred winner . . . and how our English hosts seemed just as pleased as we were?"



"Remember sidewalk-supervising the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament? Remember Westminster Abbey's 'hush of history', as you called it—till suddenly Big Ben's booming voice broke in?"

**Come to Britain**

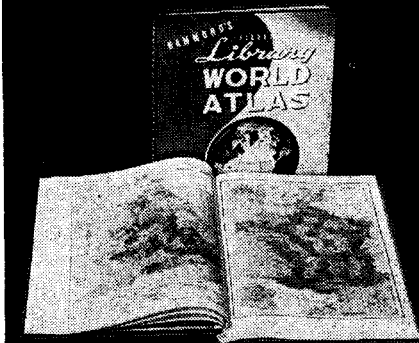
Where more than half-a-million visitors from overseas  
found a Royal Welcome in 1948



**PLAN YOUR TRIP NOW** for  
Sept.-Oct. Illustrated literature  
from your travel agent, or from  
**THE BRITISH TRAVEL  
CENTRE, 336 Madison Ave-  
nue, New York 17, N. Y.**



**NO HOME LIBRARY IS  
COMPLETE WITHOUT**



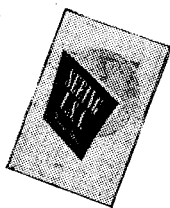
## HAMMOND'S ILLUSTRATED LIBRARY WORLD ATLAS

An invaluable reference work, this fine atlas will amaze you with its scope and cartographic excellence. 328 pages contain 189 maps (112 in full color) of every continent, country and territory on earth. Full color maps of U. S. states and Canadian provinces. There are 250 striking photographs and illustrations, many in full color, PLUS a scholarly anthropological section, the Races of Mankind. There are Airway, Highway and Railway maps and mileages for the entire U. S.; Gazetteer-index of the world; illustrated U. S. Gazetteer with complete descriptive text—literally a world geographical Encyclopedia. Size 12½" x 9⅝". Only \$5.00 at your department or book store.



**FOR TRAVELLERS — Ham-**  
**mond's WORLD ATLAS —**  
**HANDY DESK EDITION.**  
192 pages. Maps of all coun-  
tries. States of U. S. Flexible  
binding. Handy and light.  
Fits purse, pocket or suitcase.  
Perfect for the traveller.  
\$1.50.

**FREE,** this full color story  
in maps of the U. S. Shows  
geography, resources, climate,  
industry. Contains maps and  
tables of Airway, Railway  
and Highway routes and  
mileages. For your copy  
just drop a card to C. S.  
Hammond & Co., Dept.  
A, 305 E. 63 St., New  
York 21, N. Y.



**SHAMMOND & CO.**

Aline Bernstein, Donald Oenslager, James Reynolds, Mordecai Gorelik, Raymond Sovey.

(I am sure that all of these lists of names are inadequate, but I am writing this in a Philadelphia hotel where no reference books are at hand, and the official temperature is 99.2.)

**T**HERE was enough brilliance and even genius in those lists to have produced a golden age and one is inclined to ask whatever happened to it? The principal answer to that is, I suppose, the talking pictures, which came into being in the later 1920's, thereby saving the movie industry from one of its recurrent appointments with catastrophe. It was not the competition the talkies gave the theatre for popular favor that mattered so much: it was the fearful devouring of talent by the insatiable studios. Young playwrights of exceptional promise—and now I am not mentioning names—were whisked to Hollywood and never heard from again. Young actors and actresses were signed up for life before they had finished that first week in Westport. Were lists to be drawn up of the important new talent which has appeared in the theatre in the past twenty years (and remained for any time in the theatre) they would appear diminutive by comparison with those of the 1920's. The theatre still gives extraordinary indications of health—"Anne of the Thousand Days," "Death of a Salesman," "Detective Story," and "The Madwoman of Chailot" are recent ones—but they don't come nearly often enough for the theatre to lose its traditional status as a fabulous invalid.

On the other hand, the American theatre has never known greater vitality in the musical show field—nor greater variety and originality. It is customary to date the recent wave of vastly superior musicals from "Oklahoma!" which has become not only a landmark but a kind of national monument or natural wonder. I think the dating should go much farther back—to the early Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart shows, to the Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein "Showboat" (also "Music in the Air"), to the Irving Berlin-Moss Hart revue "As Thousands Cheer," to the George Gershwin-George Kaufman-Morrie Ryskind "Of Thee I Sing," to the Arthur Schwartz-Howard Dietz little and big shows, to the Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart "Pal Joey" (after the delightful short story of the same name by John O'Hara). "Oklahoma!" emphasized the importance of choreography but so, before it, did 1938's "On Your Toes" (with the superb ballet "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue") and so also did the even earlier exquisite "I Married an Angel."

Whatever the genesis of the present superiority, a theatre which can produce in one season "Lend an Ear," "Kiss Me, Kate," "Where's Charley?," and "South Pacific," and all the talent embodied therein, is not ready for requiems.

In fact, the American theatre today is bristling with potential talent in all departments save one: playwriting. It is a melancholy fact that one needs few extra fingers to count the young or even sub-middle-aged playwrights who have so far made any valid claim to public recognition. There are Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Garson Kanin, Ruth Gordon, Fay Kanin, Robert Ardrey, Mary Chase, Joshua Logan, Irwin Shaw, Arthur Laurents, John Hersey, and, of course, but not for several years, William Saroyan. And who else? Here again I may have made some glaring omissions which may arise to plague me—and this is one way in which I should be delighted to be plagued. But looking back over recent years it seems to me that the theatre has had to place far too much reliance on the works of the weary veterans listed earlier in this piece and has had far too few transfusions of new blood.

Nor is there much hope that I can see of any substantial playwriting reinforcements from overseas. The Soviet Union could be a gigantic source of revitalization but it obviously will not be as long as all art is subject to the censorship of the theoreticians. England, France, Italy—in these countries, as here, the best young talent seems to be going into the films, where it may flare up for a moment and then be permanently quenched.

I don't want to seem despairing now as I was twenty-two years ago in that preface. However, I cannot pretend that I feel particularly optimistic about the future of a theatre in which everything is likely to be excellent except the quality of the new plays.

**O**F course, the libraries are loaded with material ready for revival—Shaw had probably the greatest box-office success of his life with Maurice Evans's revival of "Man and Superman" in the past two years. Some sort of theatre will always exist on the strength of classics alone. But it will be a musty, fusty institution without the frequent airings which only new plays can give, and the supply of new playwrights has dwindled to an alarming extent. There was a time when virtually everyone was a playwright. As Arthur Hopkins pointed out, you could ask the postman, "How's your second act?" and he would tell you. But today the writing of plays appears to be approaching obsolescence. Able

writers tend more and more to seek other forms of expression. (I can repeat the names of Irwin Shaw and John Hersey as examples.) I do not know why this is so. The potential rewards are still enormous. The excitement is as great as ever. Perhaps the trouble is that writers no longer can summon enthusiasm for a medium which depends upon make-believe—but here I am getting back to the preface to "The Queen's Husband" and that muse with a green eye-shade.

And, by the way, I should like to ask John Mason Brown please not to call me when the 50th Anniversary issue of the *SRL* is going to press and request me to reread *this* article. Anyway, I shall not be answering my telephone in 1974.

## Democracy's Temple

**T**HE ONLY faith I've ever had is in democracy, in the ability of the people of every country, when they're free, to somehow find a livable way through this world, and somehow find the leaders who will take them on that way. As I have said before, I believe the theatre is the temple of democracy, that here, as in no other art, the people themselves set standards for conduct, pick the kind of men and women they admire, pick the kind of thing they feel like jeering at, choose patterns of behavior, choose the ideals by which they mean to live.

Let me quote a passage I wrote some years ago—because I still hold the same convictions:

"In brief, I have found my religion in the theatre, where I least expected to find it, and where few will credit that it exists. But it is there, and any man who tries to write plays will find himself serving it, if only because he can succeed in no other way. . . .

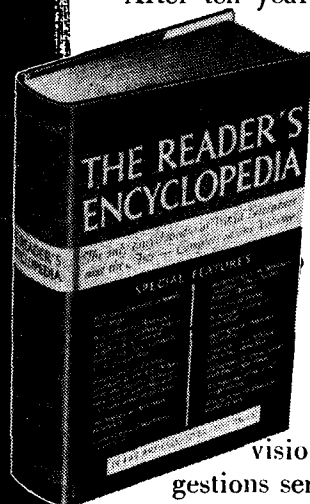
"According to the worshippers of the good who sit in our theatres, a hero may have his doubts and indecisions, for that's only human, but when it comes to the test he must be willing to take steel in his bosom or take lead through his intestines or he resigns his position as a man. The audience, sitting in our theatres, makes these rules and, in setting them, defines the purposes and beliefs of homo sapiens. There is no comparable test that I know of for what is good in the human soul, what is most likely to lead to that distant and secret destination which the race has chosen for itself and will somehow find."

—MAXWELL ANDERSON.

# Back in 1925

— just a year after *SRL* first appeared, we published CROWELL'S HANDBOOK FOR READERS AND WRITERS. This was a basic reference book of literary and legendary allusions. It was in steady if modest demand for the next sixteen years, and sold 8,000 copies.

Crowell does not take such a book and sell it for a while, then make a cheap reprint, and finally abandon it. On the contrary, the steady demand proved to them that people *wanted* such a book, so they set about improving it. They turned to the brilliant *SRL* editor William Rose Benét and asked him to develop this into an even better book. After ten years of work, *THE READERS' ENCYCLOPEDIA* (\$6.00) was brought out, bigger and far more modern and complete than the Handbook.



On its publication, the *SRL* had Clifton Fadiman review it and his lengthy and enthusiastic criticism helped call it to book-lovers' attention. Other major reviewers followed suit. In less than a year 27,500 copies have been sold (and we have no doubt that Double-Croscopic fans are partly responsible!)

Still anxious to improve the book, a revision is already being prepared to include suggestions sent in by readers.

Crowell has followed with *THE READERS' ENCYCLOPEDIA* the same techniques they have used with their famous *ROGET'S INTERNATIONAL THESAURUS* (\$4.50). Since 1911 they have improved and enlarged this basic reference book seven times until it is now nearly twice as large as any other edition, and is the *only* edition to contain modern words, quotations and slang.

And for your fall reading pleasure

<b>THE PLANT IN MY WINDOW</b> by Ross Parmenter. Illus. by the author \$2.50	<b>THE ANGLER'S HANDBOOK</b> by Ted Trueblood. Illus. by G. Don Ray \$4.95
<b>DRINKING'S NOT THE PROBLEM</b> by Charles Clapp, Jr. \$2.50	<b>THE OLD OAKEN BUCKET</b> A novel by Bellamy Partridge \$3.00
<b>TROUT FISHING</b> by Dan Holland. Illus. by photos and drawings \$5.00	<b>RAISING A RIOT</b> by Alfred Toombs. Illus. by Dorothy McKay \$3.00
<b>GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT</b> A novel by H. C. James \$2.75	<b>CALIFORNIA HERITAGE</b> by Oscar Lewis. Illus. with 175 drawings, photos, etc. \$5.00
<b>I MARRIED A REDHEAD</b> by M. M. Musselman. Illus. by Paul Galdone \$3.00	<b>ALCOHOL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</b> A New Educational Approach by Raymond G. McCarthy and Edgar M. Douglass \$3.50
<b>THE MAN IN THE STRAW HAT</b> My Story by Maurice Chevalier. Illus. with photos \$3.50	
<b>JUBILEE TRAIL</b> A novel by Gwen Bristow \$3.00	



432 FOURTH AVENUE • NEW YORK 16