

CHRIS MORLEY and Henry Mencken, who dearly love to bedevil their readers by the use of archaic and obscure words, were given cause for reflection by Somerset Maugham's statement to a PEN audience: "The nicest compliment ever paid me was a letter from a private in the Pacific during the war. He wrote that although he never had graduated from grade school, he had read an entire story of mine without having to look up a single word in the dictionary." . . . Speaking of Chris Morley, you probably know that the model for his haunted bookshop was Leary's, on Ninth Street, Philadelphia. Pete Martin recently told the colorful history of this store in *The Saturday Evening Post*. A high spot occurred in the 1920's, when Gimbel's, eager to erect an annex on the plot occupied by Leary's, offered a very fancy price for the property. Leary's said "no." "Better grab our offer," urged Gimbel's. "We can put you on Easy Street." "We don't want to be on Easy Street," insisted Leary's. "We just want to be on Ninth Street." And there they are today, doing fine. . . . When John Farrar went up to New Haven to see his son Curtis graduated from Yale, a lady button-holed him in front of Mory's and inquired, "Is this the place in the song and may I go in?" "It's the place in the song all right," said John, "but, unfortunately, ladies are not allowed in." The lady consoled herself by remarking, "Shucks, it doesn't look the way I thought it would anyhow. It isn't even spelled right. I always thought it was Morley's. You know, Christopher." . . .

TED WEEKS, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, expresses surprise at the scarcity of novels which have caught the true spirit of our biggest colleges. "For Princeton," he recalls, "F. Scott Fitzgerald told the story in 'This Side of Paradise.' For Harvard there are two: 'The Diary of a Freshman,' by Charles Flandrau, and the provocative 'Not to Eat, Not for Love,' by George Weller. Owen Johnson, whose books about Lawrenceville, 'The Varmint' and 'The Tennessee Shad' were as lively and full of character as 'Stalky and Company,' was not nearly as successful when he wrote 'Stover at Yale.' It is, I think, the best novel about New Haven, but there ought to be a better. Percy Marks turned Brown upside down in the days of flaming youth with his two books, 'The Plastic Age'

and 'Which Way Parnassus?' And that's just about the score. Elusive, apparently indifferent, never the same from one generation to the next, college spirit is not easily to be captured." . . . I'm sure there must be important additions to this list of Ted's, but offhand I can think only of books I read in my youth by George Ade, "Holworthy Hall," and Ralph D. Paine. Can any undergraduates—or their parents—help us out? . . . There's one new novel about prep-school life that I don't think is getting the attention due it, and that is John Horne Burns's "Lucifer with a Book" (Harper). The author of "The Gallery" has let personal anger get a little the better of him this time, and at least one of his more shocking episodes struck me as unnecessary, but the book certainly bowls along on the double, and had me with it every page of the way. . . .

LEO GUILD REPORTS from Warner Brothers that Ayn Rand finished her book about a woman executive in the railroad industry on the eve of the release of her first novel, "The Fountainhead," in motion-picture form. She worked five years on the new opus, untitled as yet. New York reviews of the screen version of "The Fountainhead" were brutal. . . . Another Warnerite has written a whodunit called "Some Like 'Em Shot." . . . A sales manager met a bookstore owner from the Midwest and invited him to lunch. "I'd be coming under false pretenses," warned the owner. "Things have turned sour for me. I'm out of the market entirely." "You come with me," urged the sales manager. "I wish I had a hundred like you." "You must have misunderstood me," said the owner. "I said, I'm out of the market entirely." "And what I said," insisted the sales manager, "was that I wish I had a hundred like you. Right now I've got a thousand." . . . The Junior Literary Guild is celebrating an anniversary too—its twentieth. When it set up shop in June 1929 at 55 Fifth Avenue, Katherine Ulrich was editor-

in-chief. When Miss Ulrich left to get married Helen Ferris replaced her, and what a fine job she has done! . . .

WALTER BARNEY, WHO DOESN'T seem to care how he spends his time, has fallen to speculating on how the ghost of Hamlet's father would behave if he came back to earth today. "I can see him now," boasts Barney, "registering at the Ectoplazma Hotel, breakfasting on Ghost Toasties, lunching on Shade row, riding out to Belmont in time for the second wraith, and telling friends, 'I specter see Charlie's Haunt before I dissolve.'" What Mr. Barney doesn't know is that the ghost remained permanently in New York. He took apparition with Phantom Books. . . . Sydney Dreyfus reports that a young lady bookseller he knew spent her honeymoon on Canal Street and thought it was Grand. . . . Bernadine Scherman, seeking to prove how unobservant she can be on occasion, cited a time when her son Tom, now an outstanding orchestra conductor, was a boisterous lad of ten. Seeking quiet, Mrs. Scherman suggested, "Why don't you go down and play in that empty lot at the corner?" Tom obeyed, but returned presently to report, "Mother, there's a twelve-story building there!" . . . The author of "The Unvanquished" and the editor-in-chief of *Time* were fellow passengers (decidedly not by design) on the *Queen Elizabeth* recently. Farrar, Straus's Pyke Johnson headed the story, "Playing Fast and Luce." . . .

ROOTS—According to Betty Pilkington's *American Notes and Queries*, the first book of matches to carry advertising was manufactured by the Diamond Match Company in 1892 for the Mendelson Opera Company. The advertisement was hand-lettered. The only existing copy was insured by the Diamond Match Company this April for \$25,000. . . . When Carolyn Wells earned enough money to buy a collection of books for her library, she pasted this plate into every volume: "They borrow books; they will not buy; they have no ethics or religions. I wish some kind Burbankian guy would cross my books with homing pigeons." . . . *The New York Times* insists that the phrase "Iron Curtain"



originated with neither Churchill nor Goebbels. It appears on page 69 of George W. Crile's "A Mechanistic View of War and Peace," published in 1915: "France is a nation of forty million with a deep-rooted grievance and an iron curtain at its frontier." For the word "France," of course, all you have to substitute is the word "Germany" for 1938 and "Russia" for 1949. . . . The original Brentano, founder of the famous bookstore chain, once sold a valuable collection of books to a millionaire after all the clerks on the floor had failed to clinch the deal. As he was writing out his check, the millionaire said, "I wonder why you persuaded me so easily to buy these books, after I turned your salesmen down cold." Brentano answered, "They're all fine men, with years of experience in their work. But I have something in my heart they lack. My salesmen *know* books. I *love* them." . . . When Fulton Oursler interviewed Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister graciously volunteered to show his paintings. Oursler regarded a whole roomful of canvases with a knowing eye, and finally announced, "This landscape over the door is far and away the best." "Damn it," blurted Churchill. "That's the one picture in the room I didn't paint!"...

TIDE, WHICH WATCHES television announcers like a hawk, caught up with a beautiful snafu at a New York station. A young lady was demonstrating the proper way to mend a hole in a piece of cloth. She put the cloth on an ironing board, the mending material on the hole, and then, as the announcer declared confidently, "In ten seconds the hole will be as good as new," she placed a hot iron on top of the material, and smiled coyly at the audience. The announcer counted to ten, the young lady lifted the iron—and the camera revealed a big, black smoking hole where the iron had burned through the mending material, the torn cloth, and the ironing board itself. . . . Richard Bissell, of Dubuque, has been checking up further on John Marquand's "Point of No Return." "Father Gray," he points out, "gives his daughter and son-in-law a flashy Duesenberg, because 'he had always wanted a foreign car.' Doesn't Mr. Marquand know that the Duesenberg wasn't a foreign car at all? It was made in Indianapolis." I referred Mr. Bissell's note direct to John Marquand, who replied promptly, "I can take no personal responsibility for this error. It was made by a character in the book, Mr. John Gray, and it simply goes to show that Mr. Gray lived in a provincial atmosphere." —BENNETT CERF.



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"Pitching Tents," by John Urbain, U. S. Army.

— From "As Soldiers See It."

What the War Did to Prose

RUDOLF FLESCH

FOUR years have passed since the end of the war. It is history now—literary history, too. What has it done to our prose? Has it started a new way of writing? Has it interfered with the growth of literature? Was this war—literally speaking—a stimulant, a handicap, or just an interlude? It's time to have a look.

Spotting trends in prose style usually begins with spotting new words. But the pursuit of vocabulary is futile; new words are apt to tell much about history but little about literary style. There are deeper changes in prose than those visible on the dictionary surface of the language. They are basic shifts in literary technique, in the writer's attitude toward his subject and readers. The war, to be sure, gave us many new words; but has it really changed our way of writing?

Let's look at one of the books that came out of this war: James Michener's "Tales of the South Pacific." It is not a "typical" war book; there is no such book, of course. But it is straight out of the author's war experience. This is how it starts:

I wish I could tell you about the South Pacific. The way it actually

was. The endless ocean. The infinite specks of coral we called islands. Coconut palms nodding gracefully toward the ocean. Reefs upon which waves broke into spray, and inner lagoons, lovely beyond description. I wish I could tell you about the sweating jungle, the full moon rising behind the volcanoes, and the waiting. The waiting. The timeless repetitive waiting.

And when things are getting exciting, Michener writes this way:

"I'm reporting for patrol," Grant said briefly when he had deposited his gear. "The Jap fleet's on the move."

"We heard something about that," I said. "Are they really out?"

"We think the entire Southern fleet is on the way."

"Where?" we asked in silence that was deep even for a jungle.

"Here," Grant said briefly. "Here, and New Zealand. They have eighty transports, we think."

We all breathed rather deeply. Grant betrayed no emotion, and we decided to follow his example. "I should like to speak to all of my crew and all of your ground crew, if you please." We assembled the men in a clearing by the shore.

Michener's style is easy to analyze. It is as simple as can be—conver-

sational to the point of buttonholing "you," the reader, studiously avoiding the display of "fine writing," and carefully hiding emotion behind casual-sounding dialogue. This style comes straight out of the tradition of colloquial, reportorial, unemphatic writing that has been with us since long before this war. In fact, it is the tradition that produced the most famous novel of the other war, Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms."

It is the fashion among literary critics to call this style, with some disdain, "journalistic." The reason is obvious: the plain, unadorned style is best suited to reporting facts and events; it is, and always has been, the style of day-by-day writing. So the simplest description of the war's effect on prose is that it has carried journalism farther into literature than ever before.

Now this statement may mean two things: It may mean to the high-brow that literature has degraded itself by stooping to the level of journalism or to lower brows that journalism is in the process of reaching full literary stature.

The evidence, it seems to me, is on the side of the defenders of journa-