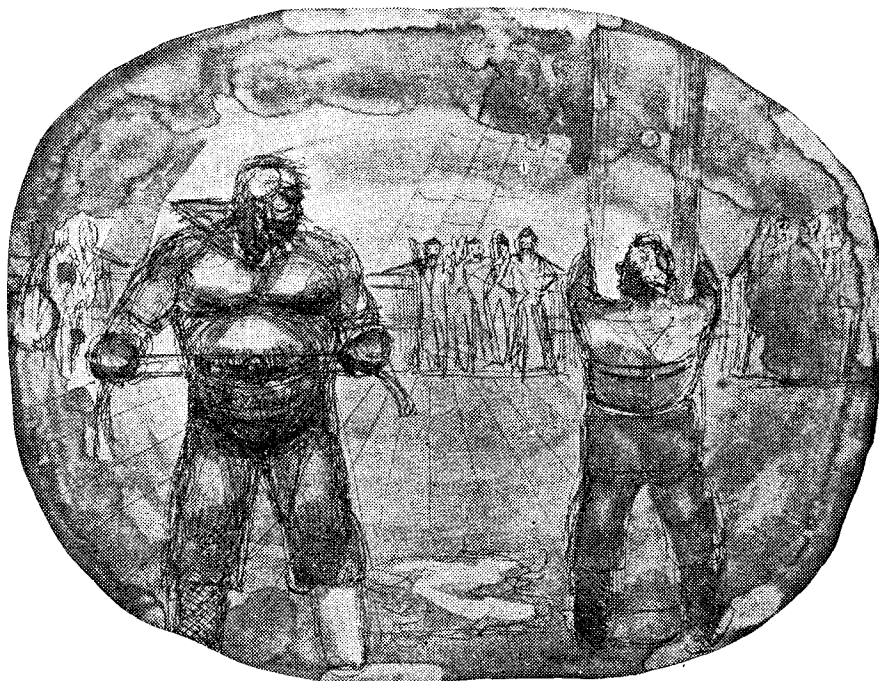


lecting to his heart's content"—and, if his popularity diminished somewhat as the years went by, the total value of his literary output steadily increased. In his earlier stories he had relied largely on skilful management of incident and on his remarkable pictorial sense, which made "a picture the basis of almost every story Kipling wrote." Now, without discarding his earlier ways and means, and while retaining his extraordinary sureness—"the sureness of the artist's imagination, something more realistic and accurate than the reporter's shorthand notes"—he became increasingly interested in using every tale for the expression of an idea. Finally, during his last decade, the craftsman outlived his inspiration. He had never created characters that were complex enough to be psychologically interesting, and he had failed as a novelist. But he had told perfectly a number of stories that will be read as long as men are delighted by the arts of fiction.

Sifting the wheat from the chaff is hardly a delicate critical operation in Arnold Bennett's case, but it is one that Mr. Allen performs deftly and with authority. He tells us that the pattern of Bennett's literary career was established when the author found himself a contributor, simultaneously, to *Tit-Bits* and *The Yellow Book*. He notes that, save for one novel, Bennett's memorable work was all done during the first half of his thirty-year career, and suggests that the author of "Clayhanger" and "The Old Wives' Tale" may have been a war casualty. Mr. Allen also sees Bennett as a victim of the schism in public taste which followed the Education Act of 1870, and which "meant that no serious novelist, unless he was very lucky and was able to tap a huge popular interest, itself the product of the New Journalism, as Wells tapped the popular interest in scientific marvels, could hope to live, except after years of waiting, on his novels." This is a point worth making, and one that supports Albert Jay Nock's adaptation of Gresham's Law—that bad writing drives out good, in a society that believes in universal literacy. In view of Bennett's character, it is probably true that this schism did create a responsive division in his own soul and in his methods of work. His artistic integrity was unequal to the demands made upon it, and he grew rich while other serious novelists were remaining poor as a result of their refusal to write pot-boilers. Had he made the same refusal, he might have survived in a dozen, instead of three or four, novels. But then, of course, he would not have been Arnold Bennett.



—From Gil Wilson's drawings for "The White Whale" music-drama.

"Stubb Is Flogged."

Browne, Beale, Bennett, et al.

THE TRYING-OUT OF MOBY-DICK.

By Howard P. Vincent. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 391 pp. \$5.

By ROBERT E. SPILLER

EVEN though the position of Herman Melville as one of our major authors has been established for little more than a quarter of a century, there are by now probably more special studies of him and his work than of any other major author with the possible exceptions of Poe, Emerson, and Whitman. And with the appearance from time to time of volumes in the new collected edition under the general editorship of Howard P. Vincent, they multiply apace. The present work is obviously a by-product of Mr. Vincent's investigations in preparing his edition of "Moby-Dick" for that edition.

This is the most thorough analysis of the sources of "Moby-Dick" that we have yet had. It is unfortunate that Mr. Vincent felt impelled to lash previous critics for their failure to appreciate just why the novel is great when he himself is so obviously indebted to them for his own insights. It is also unfortunate that he did not have time to read Olson's study of Melville and Shakespeare or Willard Thorp's scholarly edition of "Moby-Dick," both published in 1947, before putting his own book to press, or he might have been spared some of the absurd statements of his prefatory sections. His book is more a synthesis

and elaboration of the work of others than a pioneering study.

Mr. Vincent's thesis that Melville wrote first an outline of some kind, then a largely narrative tale of the sea, and finally the metaphysical prose epic that we know, is by now pretty generally established, and is further supported by F. Barron Freeman's recent study of "Billy Budd." But his inference that these stages were not planned by the author in advance, but were rather an accident prompted mainly by his conversations with Hawthorne, is not so easy to prove. The point is not important because in either case the thesis will serve as a formula for the parallel study of the novel and the books which Melville read and used in its composition. Although Mr. Vincent discusses all sources, his analysis of the philosophical ones is relatively superficial; it is the works on whaling that come in for exhaustive study. The one real contribution to an understanding of Melville that the book provides is the proof that the wide range of reading suggested by Melville's sub-sub-librarian preface is largely window dressing. Melville was heavily indebted to about six books on whaling—Browne, Beale, Bennett, Scoresby, and Chase—for the descriptive and expository parts of his work. This Mr. Vincent demonstrates fully and conclusively; and he also makes it clear that these parts form an integral and necessary foundation for the imaginative construction of this great book.

The Saturday Review of Literature

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Published by The Saturday Review
Associates, Inc., 25 West 45th Street, New
York 19, N. Y. Harrison Smith, President;
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Notes from the Air

TOKYO.

IN A LITTLE more than two hours, the plane puts down at Haneda Airport in Tokyo, from which these notes will be cabled to SRL. From Tokyo, I go on to Hiroshima for ceremonies relating to the establishment of a world peace center on the site destroyed by the first atomic bombing of a city four years ago. The schedule also calls for a visit to Nagasaki, scene of the second atomic bombing in actual warfare. Concerning all this, more later.

Meanwhile, here are some notes about the trip itself—a flight of some 14,000 miles interrupted only for refueling and changes of planes. Sky reading on this trip includes Robert King Hall's "Education for a New Japan," a comprehensive and obviously competent review of facts and factors that must go into the making of a progressive and pacific Japan; Helen Mears's "Mirror for Americans: Japan," a briskly written and sharply argued indictment of American policy in Japan and the Far East in general; the Penguin edition of Conrad's "Almayer's Folly," and the inevitable "Practical Cogitator," an indefatigable and insistent air companion that has shared my seat in perhaps 100,000 miles of air travel since it first clamped down a lien on my reading time four years ago.

But, however ideal the sky may be as a reading room, it is even more impressive as a dining room for the imagination. It spreads a table of such self-perpetuating wonder and variety that the eye and mind become

willing gluttons, the craving increasing, expanding with each dish. No sunset or sunrise seen from a mountaintop ever gave the optic nerves a finer time than when they have the clouds for a floor instead of a ceiling. The spectacle is a total one in the sense that it is circular; everything gets into the act and the picture, held together by a vast frame of continuing color. As for the clouds themselves, Guy Murchie has a passage in "The Cogitator" well worth quoting:

If winds are the spirit of the sky's ocean, the clouds are its texture. Theirs is easily the most uninhibited dominion of the earth. Nothing in physical shape is too fantastic for them. Some are thunderous anvils formed by violent updrafts from the warm earth. Some are the ragged coattails of storms that have passed. Some are stagnant blankets of warm air resting on cold. Some are mare's tails floating in the chill upper sky in the afternoon. I've beheld a quadruple rainbow moving against a stratocumulus layer below. Not an ordinary rainbow that forms an arch, but the special rainbow called the glory, known only to those who fly: a set of complete circles, each inside the next concentrically. These formed a sort of color target that sped along the clouds on the opposite side from the sun with the shadow of the airplane in the center.

If things get too crowded in Manhattan, I'm going to suggest to my colleagues that we publish SRL from a flying office. You get a sense of stretch up here, you have the feeling that this is the natural habitat for men who think they'd like to work together. You find it easy to understand why the Acheson-Lilienthal Report on Atomic Energy was largely hatched up here in the blue. I seem to recall that either in the report itself or in a statement by Mr. Lilienthal the point was made that after long hours of earth-bound indecision,



the Committee members would adjourn to a conference room 10,000 feet up and discover ways of getting the hang of what the other fellow was talking about and of arriving at basic agreements that previously had seemed elusive or impossible. There was little intervention by the individual ego and a good deal of a disposition to consider rather than to confront.

Dealing as they were with what comes pretty close to the ultimates, the members of the Committee had only to look out of their window for establishing the true nature of the problem, which was not the atom but man. And their window was a complete frame of reference. For when you get up above a mile, you see only the evidence of man but nothing of man himself. You see his roads and his fields and his cities, but never man. Going by the evidence, you might conceive of him in terms of units of electrical energy, rather than of matter. And if, assuming you were able to scrutinize him through powerful microscopes and could establish the fact that he was matter and energy both, you would be able to discern virtually no differentiation between one man and another—no matter how many specimens you examined from different areas. And yet you could tell from the evidence that these differentiations seemed to man to be more important than life itself.

You would wonder, considering how small is the fraction of the earth's surface he occupies, how he could find his way from one distant area to the other to get at the throat of someone just like himself. You would wonder at the faculty which enables him to identify such a person as totally different and to proceed to attempt to kill him and his kind for a reason which, from the perspective of your sky platform, would seem as incomprehensible as a war between the forests. Up here, at least, you have some idea of what the real challenge is. You see that the dominant portion of the earth is not land but sea. You can see that very little of the land is congenial to man's existence and development. You can see vast eroded areas and other vital areas threatened by erosion. You see vast areas where there is too little rain and other areas where there is too much. If you fly over Europe and Asia, you can see that the typical city is the destroyed city, and that the pattern of destruction is not static but enveloping, suggesting unity of a sort if man rejects the unity which sanity might produce. If the proper study of mankind is man, up here in the blue is the place for it.

—N. C.