

RAY HEALY AND JIM RUSSELL, mahatmas of bookdom in California, recently locked horns on a tennis court of the Uplifters' Club in Los Angeles. Both boys are disciples of the smashing net game, and at their best could give King Gustave of Sweden a real workout. With the score tied at 16-16, a young lady with three rackets under her arm appeared on the sidelines and asked wistfully, "How about some mixed doubles when this set is over?" Healy's Olympian brow clouded. "Blow, lady," he commanded. "We don't play tennis with little girls. We're he-men in these parts." The young lady reluctantly departed. Healy turned to an attendant, who seemed somewhat dazed, and inquired, "Who is that presumptuous dame anyhow?" The attendant answered, "Her name is Wills, mister—Helen Wills." . . .

CALIFORNIA LITERATI recall another book salesman who cut a swath, particularly with the ladies, during his heyday in the early Twenties. His name was Tom Clagett, and he represented Lippincott's. Jim Crowder tells of the day Clagett spotted a beautiful girl on Market Street in San Francisco and followed her clear to the fourth floor of an office building ten blocks away. She disappeared into a room before he could figure out an opening maneuver. Deeply mortified, he was preparing a dignified retreat when his eye fell on the sign on an adjoining office. It was a new mail-order outfit, organized to spread culture in the West. "Lippincott featured several sets of American history in those days," said Crowder, "so Clagett decided to give the mail-order people a pitch. And believe it or not, the lucky so-and-so walked out with an order for books, to be delivered over a five-year period, that totaled \$90,000!" "Did he ever meet the girl?" I persisted. "He walked in to thank her," laughed Jim, "but the minute she saw him she cried, 'One step further and I'll yell out of the window for a policeman.'" "Poor Clagett," I said. "Poor Clagett nothing," concluded Crowder. "He went down to the Palace Hotel and had dinner with Marilyn Miller." . . .

HEALY, RUSSELL, AND CLAGETT are only three of a great galaxy of book salesmen who have made the Pacific states their happy hunting ground. Harrison ("Sheriff") Leussler and Andy Pierce are remembered with awe and affec-

tion. Floyd Nourse has put away his sample case for good, but his son is following in his illustrious footsteps, along with Jess Carmack, Dave Bramble, and Jess McComas. Carl Smalley, the McPherson, Kan., Phenom, also remains in there pitching. Carl's reverberating laugh once blew a lady customer from Vroman's Pasadena store clear into J. K. Gill's in Portland. And who could forget courtly old Desmond Fitzgerald, who never would be seen in public without his walking stick, gloves, and a red carnation in his buttonhole? Desmond's idea of an immortal novel was Anthony Hope's "The Prisoner of Zenda." He never forgave Donald Klopfer and me for refusing to add it to the Modern Library. . . . "The Prisoner of Zenda" had painful memories for the late John Macrae of E. P. Dutton. The manuscript was offered to him first, and he was all for taking it, but subordinates convinced him he was wrong. The year after Henry Holt had published the book, and sold half a million copies, Anthony Hope sent Macrae a diamond stick-pin for consolation, with a note reading, "In gratitude for your faith in me." John Tebbel, author of "Lorimer and The Saturday Evening Post," recalling his days as an editor at Dutton's, says that Macrae always wore the stick-pin to board meetings. When anybody tried to veto his suggestions, he would silently but ostentatiously begin fiddling with Anthony Hope's keepsake. "You have no idea," sighs Tebbel, "what things got on the Dutton list as a result!" . . .

THE MOST ERUDITE BOOK salesman in history probably was Ted Weeks, now editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, who began his career as a representative of Horace Liveright. One day Ted proudly brought back an order from Gimbel's for fifty copies of a book of essays called "Salvos," by Waldo

Frank. I phoned Alice Dempsey, the Gimbel buyer, to make sure she still was in her right mind. "How come," I said, "that you suddenly buy fifty copies of a high-brow non-fiction book?" "Fifty copies!" echoed Alice. "Cancel it, for the love of Pete. That boy Weeks used such big words, I didn't know what he was talking about!" . . . An Atlantic City bookseller once rebuffed a salesman who was drumming up orders for Samuel Ornitz's "Haunch, Paunch, and Jowl." "Naw," he said, "we got too many books about that game already. People are beginning to go back to bridge." He added, "Tell you what I could use, though. Some kind of comedy or other by a fella named Dant. I had two calls for it this morning." . . . Really discouraging is the story of a very eager and tireless salesman who was called into the boss's private office. "I've been following your movements," said the boss. "No hours seem too long for you. No account is too small for you to visit. You opened four new ones in a single city last month. And I notice, too, that you always find time to visit our best-selling authors along the way." The salesman leaned back happily and began wondering what he would do with the bonus that was coming. "And so, my boy," continued the boss, "I am forced, much against my will, to give you the sack. It's eager beavers like you who start firms of your own and steal all the top names on our list." . . .

WHILE GROSSET & DUNLAP salesmen are pounding the pavements in search of orders, Editor Bernard Geis betrays his *Esquire* training by sitting comfortably in a luxurious office and planning the following menu (presumably for a dinner attended by famished critics): Farrar and Straus-bourgeois goose liver paté; Calf's Liveright; Doubleday lamb chops; Harcourt Brace of pheasant; Dial Pressed duck; E. P. Mutton; Simon and Shoe-string potatoes; Rinehart of lettuce; golden Bantam corn; Lippincottage cheese; and Appleton pie. "By this time," adds Mr. Geis, reasonably enough, "the critics will be suffering



from bauch-and Knopf-weh. To restore them, I suggest Random House of Lords Scotch served in Little Brown jugs at a nearby Sloane. That will make them Bobbs Merrilly away." In my opinion, Mr. Geis has Norton to Crowell about. . . .

TO COMMEMORATE its one hundredth anniversary, the D. Van Nostrand Company is distributing a handsome little volume entitled "A Century of Book Publishing." One incident described therein shows how carefully every decision involving the firm's welfare was weighed, and should give pause to headstrong operators of the present day. In 1890, a daring Van Nostrand employee proposed that a typewriter be purchased. A full meeting of the board of directors was called wherein "the question of the employment of a typewriter was considered and the matter referred to the executive committee with power." The executive committee took the plunge, and the minutes of the next board meeting disclose that "a typewriting machine was obtained, and a person employed by the company to operate same." The treasurer, Mr. William Farrington, refused, however, to have any truck with such new-fangled gimmicks, and continued to do his work in longhand for the next twenty-five years. . . . Van Nostrand's outstanding achievements in the publication of technical books today are a tribute to the efficiency of Edward Crane, president, and Malcolm Johnson, vice president. . . .

THE VAN NOSTRAND BOARD MEETING reminds me of a story about the New York Life Insurance Company. In the old days, every director who attended the annual meeting received an equal share of a substantial sum set aside for this purpose in the by-laws. There were about fifty directors and all of them were wealthy, so under ordinary circumstances a bare quorum showed up. One meeting, however, took place the day after the great blizzard of 1888. The directors all figured that not many of their associates would venture out in such weather, and that those who did manage to make it would receive a correspondingly large share of the fee. The roll call disclosed that for the first time in the company's history every director was present! . . . To give you some idea of how high the drifts were after that 1888 blizzard, they tell of a young couple who went sleigh-riding down Broadway when the storm abated. "Look," said the girl, "there's a chicken sitting on the snow." "That's no chicken," said her companion. "That's the weather-vane on top of Trinity Church."

--BENNETT CERF.

MARCH 26, 1949



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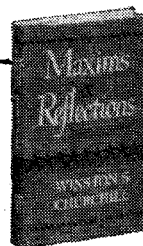
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The Saturday Review of Literature

I Still Believe in Polls

ELMO ROPER



—Bachrach.

Elmo Roper

ON Wednesday afternoon, November 3, 1948, in my office, Eric Hodgins, author of "Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House," made a prophecy which ran something like this: "You'd better get prepared for three cycles of

post-election blow-off about the polls. First, there will come the comedians with their jokes and, at the same time, there will be pent-up screams of anguish and diatribes from the pro-Dewey press and other wrong guessers who will feel the need of a whipping boy. But this phase will last only a month or so."

He went on to say, "Then there will be a wave of pseudo-scientific findings by self-appointed experts, Wednesday-morning quarterbacks and just plain vocal people who have never liked polls. These will bring to light many preconceived and long-harbored prejudices and you'll see the polls serve as a springboard for the advancement of all sorts of theories. These theories will be advanced with an air of 'since the polls were wrong, and I say so, then, per se, I'm right.' This second phase will be harder for you to take than the first—and in the same ratio as intellectuals are always harder to take than comedians.

"Finally, toward the end of 1949 there will emerge some really able analyses of what happened in the election and of why the polls failed to forecast it. In this phase there will be some really constructive lessons to be learned, not only by you, but by all social scientists."

We are, apparently, in the middle of Phase Two. The first phase was a little hard for a polltaker to take, in spots, and some of the jokes seemed a little cruel, but, by and large, they were funny, and I laughed at most

of them too—particularly at Jack Benny.

Phase Two is more confusing. Partly, it's because magazine articles and books seem to *have* to have titles. And a book designed to prove some long-held theory about "The Doakes Theory of Molecular Economics" will sell better if it's called "Why the Polls Failed."

If at times the line of attack in these books seems a bit contradictory, it can probably be attributed to the fact that publishing a book in February based on what happened in November is no mean feat, as any publisher knows! For instance, some of the books' authors think polling is all right, but the men who practise it are all wrong, while still others think both the polls *and* the men who run them ought to be Siberia-bound.

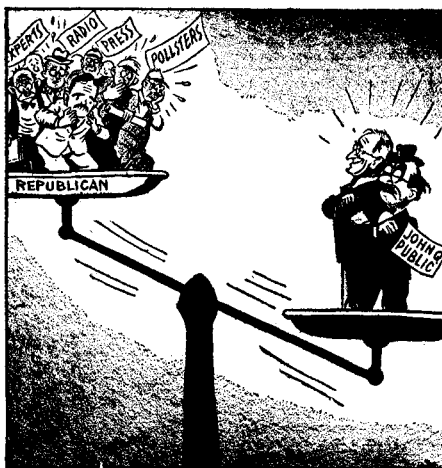
But three general lines of attack do emerge from the maze of criticisms being leveled at the polls:

(1) Perhaps the most common argument is that since the polls failed in the elections last November, they are therefore good for nothing at all. They had best be forgotten. Actually, the critics have a point in one respect at least: it is doubtful that opinions expressed in the present—with the

knowledge any of us now has—can be taken as precisely accurate guides to the *future* actions of individuals. And it is also true that voters *do* change their minds in the course of a Presidential campaign. (Admittedly, this was a somewhat painful learning experience for this particular opinion researcher but it wasn't just the pollsters who held that theory, and there would have been no real proof on the subject had there been no polls.)

But the critics overlook several important points in their blanket condemnation of all activities of public-opinion research. Even on the subject of elections they forget that the polls did predict over 400 elections correctly before stubbing their collective toe last November 2.

But most of the criticisms to date have represented preconceived notions which the authors had about polls, even before the elections. For the past four months these notions have been grafted wholesale onto the prediction debacle of last November and have been passed off as *reasons why* the polls went wrong. There is no reason to believe that such criticisms can furnish us with any part of the answer for the error. The error can only be discovered when the critics first find out *what happened* in the recent elec-



—Kennedy in *The Arkansas Democrat*.

"Showing 'Em Who Carries the Weight."



Loring in *The Providence Bulletin*.

"Move Over."