

is to print—and if possible sell—larger quantities of each title they issue. In the old days a publisher might—and often did—agree to publish a book which he believed could not possibly sell more than 2,000 or 3,000 copies. It was possible in most cases to break even on a book with a printing as small as that. Moreover, since his share of the book buyer's dollar was not being pinched as sharply, the publisher could afford now and then to indulge in a little altruism—to publish a book that he felt might not actually make a profit, but which would be a critical success, reflecting glory on his house and on the publishing business as a whole. He could afford to take a chance on the work of an unknown author, supported by the hope that the writer might develop a profitable audience through his second or third work. He was willing to publish occasionally a specialized work designed for a limited audience merely because he felt that the work deserved the dignity of print.

Nowadays publishers are finding that they must print at least 7,500 to 10,000 copies of a trade book to break even on it. As I have said, the market for books has multiplied since the war, but even so it is not as easy to sell 10,000 copies of the average book today as it would have been to sell 2,000 to 3,000 copies a decade ago. Even more important, as far as friends of literature and learning are concerned, it is virtually impossible even today to sell 10,000 copies of many excellent books. And with his finances strained by high costs and

fixed selling prices, no publisher who intends to remain in business can afford in these times to publish a book purely for prestige. It is an unhappy fact that many books by new authors, many deserving books intended for limited audiences, can no longer be published by trade publishers.

The effort of publishers to mitigate their cost problems has produced another situation which is alarming to me as an accountant. With rising costs,

most publishers found it necessary to increase print orders as a means of lowering costs per copy. This has resulted in piling up of larger stocks in publishers' warehouses. A threat now facing the industry is the danger of severe inventory losses unless sales are maintained at current levels—or speeded up.

In 1947 the total inventories of general book publishers amounted to almost 90 per cent of the total capital
(Continued on page 39)

Outliving the Mourners

THE BOOK INDUSTRY. By William Miller. New York: Columbia University Press. 170 pp. \$2.75.

By AARON SUSSMAN

MR. MILLER first fluttered the dove-cotes six years ago with an objective, if surprising, piece about the book business which appeared in *Fortune*. He has since taken a more personal interest in it, as an American historian with a book on the Macmillan list. Therefore, no one can accuse him of being an outsider—especially the sort who “knows the subject thoroughly from a to b.” Mr. Miller does know what he's talking about, and he has developed a restless habit of asking blunt questions.

This time he has surveyed the “changing nature of American publishing” under the most formidable auspices: as part of the Public Library Inquiry initiated two years ago by

the American Library Association, under a \$200,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation, and with the sponsorship of the Social Science Research Council.

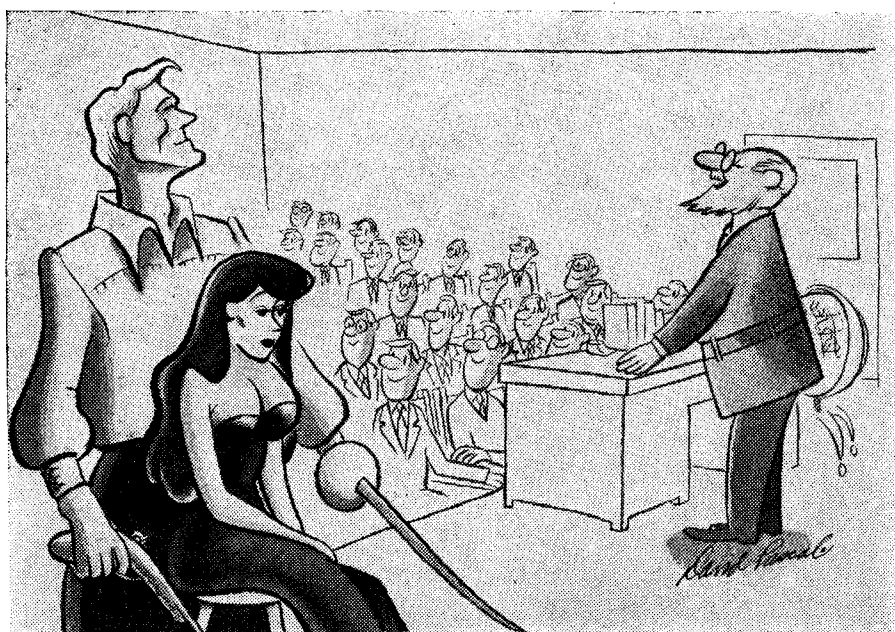
And if all that doesn't impress you, a reading of his book will. For here is the first solid attempt to bring the Cheney Report of twenty years ago up to date. I believe that the sharp-tongued Mr. Cheney would not only have approved most of Mr. Miller's findings, but he would have appreciated the swish of his scimitar. Mr. Miller is not afraid to say what's on his mind. And what he says makes glowing sense.

He points out, for example, that the book business has outlived most of its mourners and will probably continue to do so. In the past, he reminds us, the book industry Cassandras moaned about the pirating of foreign titles, about price cutting, free libraries, book clubs, and twenty-five-cent books, about movies, radio, television, and now high manufacturing costs. But none of these things, it finally occurs to you, ever did as much harm as dull books.

He believes that book buying is a function of book reading, that book reading is a function of education, and, finally, that on the levels which affect book buying, education is a function of income. In other words, too many people are cut off from the book market by lack of money. An obvious fact, of course, but too often forgotten in the discussions among book men.

He ponders the fact that a famous Chicago bookseller recently invested his surplus savings (all of it made by selling books) in real estate instead of in more bookshops. It's, as they say in Brooklyn, a question.

He comments on the strange seesaw which tilts university presses into the blue sky of trade publishing (the publishing of books for mass sale) while trade publishers woo financial



"And now, with the generous cooperation of the publishing industry, we will discuss the role of the romantic novel in contemporary literature."

security in the good earth of college departments.

With a twinkle in his eye, he notes that sex is a staple trade-book subject and "sells well in any literary form."

He is amused by the highbrow label for trade publishers as "businessmen trafficking in books," and by the low-brow label for them as "bookish men in business." Is it possible that he feels they are neither?

Despite what publishers have told him in personal interviews about depending for their profits on extra rights (such as book clubs, reprints, magazine digests, movies, and so on), he just doesn't believe it. He thinks their bookkeeping is at fault. And he is worried about what may happen, and is happening, to publishing as a result of these accounting practices.

He has some uneasy things to say about the danger of having American literature *sindlingerized* (from the Albert F. Sindlinger audience-research organization, which polls the public via recorded digests of an author's work, and an electrical gadget which produces a composite reaction graph, called Tildox). "So Dear to My Heart," by Sterling North, who refers affectionately to the Sindlinger Tildox as "the collective wisdom of the American people," was supposed to have been produced this way.

One of Mr. Miller's footnotes reveals a formula for the success of such best sellers as "Anthony Adverse," "Gone with the Wind," "Forever Amber," "The King's General," "Green Light," "The Keys of the Kingdom," "The Song of Bernadette," "The Rose," and "The Miracle of the Bells." It also explains why "The Big Fisherman" was bound to outsell "The Naked and the Dead."

Among other things which he discusses are these: why Europeans buy more books than we do, why publishers and editors are rarely women; why purely trade publishing is done only by small houses; whether book-club sales destroy reprint sales; that statistics about the industry are still as scarce as they were in Cheney's day; what booms do to the book business; the shifting of editorial responsibilities in publishing houses and what it means; what effect libraries have on publishing and bookselling, and what the demands of the new markets (such as movies and book clubs) are doing to authors, publishers, and booksellers.

If you write, publish, or sell books (and to some extent if you just read them), you will find plenty to think about, worry about, and be glad about, in the pages of this book. It is indexed and has an appendix with many vital statistics.

The World.

Perhaps the most persuasive testimony to the importance of America in the world today can be found by leafing through the pages of foreign newspapers. There, day after day, news of the USA is chronicled in the fullest detail. Such news is printed not because of idle interest, but because the actions of this country must determine, in large measure, the future course of world history. How do Americans measure up to this responsibility? What are the problems they must solve? It is to such questions as these that "Years of the Modern," which we review below, addresses itself. In this symposium, which is subtitled "An American Appraisal," twelve experts attempt to take a creative inventory of our times. . . . One immediate problem which faces us is the fact of a Communist China. Jack Belden's "China Shakes the World" gives a vivid, factual report of life behind the Communist lines.

Appraising Ourselves at Mid-Century

YEARS OF THE MODERN. Edited by John W. Chase. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 340 pp. \$3.50.

By LYMAN BRYSON

THIS book is a consultation on American life. The doctors do not agree but they all expect better times in our national future. Our distraught economy seems to have a future, our distracted souls are finding examples of courage, and our institutions still work. Faith and energy will be needed. Henry Steele Commager begins the symposium with applicable, but predictable, adjectives on the nature of the typical American and he is followed by Alan Barth with an analysis of our method of freedom. We are warned by Frank Ernest Hill's prefatory notes and the publisher's foreword that "several score persons," for more than a year, have been working at a creative inventory of our times and we may begin to wonder if this is just another publisher's enterprise. What Commager and Barth have to say about peace later on, are all readily available in the words of these or similar sound writers in other places. Did the eighty persons creatively rub out all their differences and reach a level

of well-accepted truths? Or did they exclude awkwardly creative expressions of opinion from their inventory in the hope of making an impression of final synthesis? As one reads on, the prospect brightens.

The discussion picks up, in sprightliness and point, when Walton Hamilton begins the third essay, "The Genius of the Radical." Hamilton is a first-rate realistic economist, as well as several other things, and he has radical ideas about what is really radical in American life. He finds it in industrial enterprise. "The free market," he says, "allows the adventurer to crash the gate. It makes bold ideas the price of success." Adventurers, of course, have a bad habit of getting more than their share of the goods; anti-trust laws and regulating commissions are a natural consequence. Big business challenges social control and has its own ways of suppressing radical invention. In Hamilton's opinion, "at the moment, the drive for regulation and the rule of the corporate imperium have united to create a crisis which threatens to destroy the radical and deny to American society his genius." There is something freshly old-fashioned about this warning.

Alvin Johnson, who then follows with "The Fate of a Skeptic," is also vigorous and eloquent as he reaffirms his own faith in our virtues. What is getting to be commonplace and even suspected among us is still new in the world. "But in one point—the crucial point, I think,—our civilization differs radically from that of Rome, and from all other civilizations that have perished. That is our concern for the masses of the population. . . ." In fact, the underlying population is taking over. The trend is general; the most effective form of the new order is

