

**FOR YEARS** successful playwrights and opulent scribes of screen masterpieces have assured their friends, "Some day I'm going to get out of this rat-race, buy me a little farm in Connecticut, and write some really good novels." One of the few authors I know who actually carried this threat into execution is Percival Wilde. For over twenty-five years he has not



only resolutely kept a promise never to set foot in Hollywood but eschewed even his old haunts on Broadway and lived serenely and well on his estate in Sharon — a gentleman farmer, philosopher, author of over one hundred-and-twenty-five successful one-act plays and four full-length dramas produced on Broadway, and occasional writer of superior detective stories. His correspondence-school detective, P. Moran, for instance, who is never right, is one of the most refreshing creations in whodunit literature. Mr. Wilde credits it all to his removal from city distractions. "I thought the change would be as difficult as nailing jelly to the wall," he laughs. "Actually there was nothing to it."

When an ambitious youngster in the neighborhood completes a manuscript Mr. Wilde always finds time to read and criticize it. One conceited aspirant proved too much for him, however. "You remind me," he told the young hopeful, "of the time a world-famous author came to this part of Connecticut with a pretty girl a third his age. My wife introduced the pair at the bathing club, whose members disapproved volubly. My wife remarked, 'My husband says he is an immortal.' 'Hmpfh!' snorted the president of the club. 'Take one letter out of that word.'" He told another aspirant, "Your novel is like a chorus girl's skirt. It touches everything but covers nothing."

"Authors—and even actresses—get no special adulation in Sharon," says Wilde. "They must win friends on their merits like anybody else. The really important ones prefer it that way. Reminds me of a meeting of the

American Dramatists' and Composers' Guild years ago when a pretty girl confused Augustus Thomas, who wrote 'Arizona' and 'The Witching Hour,' with A. E. Thomas, the author of 'Just Suppose' and 'No More Ladies.' The girl who had erred apologized, 'I hope you'll forgive my mistaking you for an author!'"

Another member of the Dramatists for whom Wilde cherishes fond memories was Victor Herbert. Wilde became, in fact, a virtual understudy to the composer. Every time Herbert debated a motion he would gradually wax more and more furious, and his voice would become shriller. Finally he would lose the power of speech altogether, whereupon he would slap Wilde on the back and sit down. Wilde would then continue Victor Herbert's argument from the precise point at which he had dropped it, while Herbert, mopping his brow, would nod violent approval. "When George M. Cohan wrote 'Over There,'" adds Mr. Wilde, "Victor Herbert's comment was, 'If anybody had told me that a man could create an immortal song beginning with a bugle-call repeated five times I would not have believed it.'"

When Mr. Wilde's son Roger was eight (he's with Dumont Television today) he discovered that one of his father's plays was going to be performed by an amateur group nearby and persuaded his parents to take him to see it. It was his first play. When the performance—a wretched one—was concluded Mr. Wilde asked his



son, "How did you like it?" "It was wonderful," enthused Roger, "but I would have liked it better if somebody had been killed." Mr. Wilde muttered under his breath. "I would have liked it better if *everybody* had been killed." Maybe it was this episode that inspired him actually to write his first murder story. Possibly, however, the impulse was supplied by his other son, who devoured so many gory mystery tales after school that when Wilde persuaded him to read the New

Testament he turned to the last page first to see "who done it."

Percival Wilde has done a great deal of public speaking. After one talk before a club of women writers a member suggested, "Do tell us some stories of the days when you were just a struggling author." Wilde replied severely, "I know only two kinds of authors: those who struggle and those who have given up the struggle."

**AMONG THE PUN-DITS:** At the conclusion of a brief discourse by Clifton Fadiman on the life of an old Turkish despot John Gunther asked, "Kip, are you shah of your facts?" Fadiman snapped, "Sultanly." . . . Five-year-old Wylie O'Hara upon being introduced to a patched-up little girl from Montgomery began warbling, "She Came from Alabama with a Band-Aid on Her Knee." . . . Charles Poore concluded a scathing review of a French art book by admitting, "I speak more in Seurat than Ingres." . . . A publisher who had lost his shirt on a succession of unsuccessful first novels complained, "I'm suffering heavily from new-writus." . . . In "Baghdad 1951" Herb Caen tells about a café in San Francisco where there is a mynah bird that is supposed to talk a blue streak but seldom obliges. The proprietor excuses it by pointing out, "That bird is just obeying the law. After all, this is a bar. No mynahs aloud." . . . In Sun Valley a distinguished professor tried desperately to learn to ski but on his very first attempt unaided described a hitherto unbelievable flip-flop in mid-air and landed head first in a snow bank. "Wow," exclaimed one onlooker, "I bet he couldn't make a diagram of that fall on the blackboard." "Don't underestimate him," warned novelist Clare Jaynes. "He's got a Phi Beta Kappa ski." . . . This one reaches me via an involved but star-studded route: Dorothy Parker told it to Woolcott who told it to Frank Sullivan who has just told it to me. In a discussion of Verlaine and his shall-we-say unconventional ways Miss Parker summed up with: "The trouble with Verlaine was he was always chasing Rimbauds." . . . Joe Jackson thinks those photographs of California professors signing loyalty oaths might be called fealty pictures.

**A PERSISTENT SALESMAN** of accident insurance sneaked past all the barriers to my private office the other day and brought to mind a long-forgotten routine of those wonderful comedians Weber and Fields. Weber was trying to sell an accident policy to an obdurate Fields. "Vot do I vant mit nonsense like dot?" grumbled Fields. "I nefer had an accident in my life." "Our friend Schmidt made der same



# KENTUCKY STAND

BY Jere Wheelwright

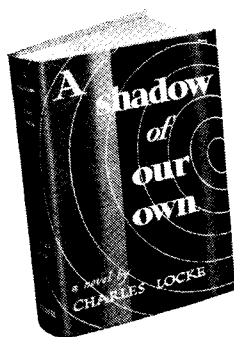
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MARCH 10, 1951

# MORROW

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## NEVIL SHUTE

author of *THE LEGACY*, etc.

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boast," declared Weber, "but I sold him a ten-thousand-dollar policy anyway. Der very next day, mind you, Schmidt got run over and had both arms und legs cut off." "I know," scoffed Fields, "but Schmidt was vun of der lucky vuns." . . . One insurance agent found business so bad he changed his profession and opened a private detective agency. For the first ten days he achieved even less success as a sleuth than Percy Wilde's "P. Moran." On the eleventh morning, however, he was sitting in his office, guzzling scotch and picking his nails with a gat in the best Dash Hammett tradition, when a woman stalked in, flung a hundred-dollar bill on the desk, and launched into a tirade against her husband. "He's taken up with a blonde hussy," she asserted, "and I'm not going to let him get away with it." The private dick managed to look inscrutable and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" "I want my husband and that hussy followed twenty-four hours a day," snapped the visitor, "and then I want you to come and tell me what on earth she sees in him." —BENNETT CERF.

### *Tame Cottontail*

By Ethel Jacobson

RABBIT, did you mind?  
Was I unkind  
To pick you up in the winter wood  
Where you stood  
Beneath the snowy tree,  
Your forepaws at your breast,  
Looking at me?

A starved baby, lost,  
Whiskers stiff with frost,  
Home you came to my sky-high  
warren,  
Frightening, foreign  
To the forest-born—but, Rabbit,  
How swiftly you put on your jaunty  
City habit!

Sleek now, and fat,  
You view my flat  
With bright proprietary eyes,  
Content with plaster skies,  
Your carrot cache,  
The ice cream you beg from my plate,  
And the bed you chose—the hassock  
pulled close  
To the grate.



# Too Late for Calumny

## *An Open Letter to Konstantin Simonov*

MAURICE HINDUS



—Editta Sherman.  
Maurice Hindus

I HAVE been following closely the letters you, Konstantin Simonov, your compatriot Ilya Ehrenburg, and the British novelist J. B. Priestley have been exchanging in the press of Russia and Great Britain.

The correspondence began early last spring, as you will remember, when Mr. Ehrenburg addressed an open letter to a number of leading Western writers, appealing to them to sign the so-called Stockholm Resolution, which calls for the unconditional prohibition of use of the atomic weapon, the establishment of strict international enforcement of this prohibition, and the branding as a war criminal of the government which first uses the atomic weapon against another.

One of the writers Mr. Ehrenburg addressed by name was J. B. Priestley. In a reply published in the *London New Statesman and Nation*, Mr. Priestley cast doubt upon the sincerity of the sponsors of the Resolution and of Ehrenburg himself. "Let me hear you or your colleagues openly denouncing the size of the Red Army, the creation of huge submarine fleets, the work on bombs and rockets and other horrors, the building of a large police force in Germany, the rigid barriers between East and West, and the heaping up of lying propaganda between hundreds of millions of folks who want to live in peace."

This was where you came in, my dear Simonov. You professed in a lengthy screed to answer Priestley, but you dismissed the questions he asked

as "threadbare slanders" which "it would be a waste of time to discuss." Your letter bristles with false and misleading accusations. You say that Priestley "dares to come out against peace," when in fact he demonstrates his devotion to that cause again and again.

In its entirety your letter is an astounding document to come from a man who as editor of the *Moscow Literary Gazette* wields enormous influence with the Russian reading public. It reveals clearly and dramatically the immeasurable gulf you Soviet writers since the war have deliberately dug between yourselves and the writers of the outside world. It does much more: it reveals why the whole world is getting ever closer to the day when it may not have time to choose between life and death—your country, too, Mr. Simonov, at least as much as mine.

Mr. Priestley and other Western writers like myself have good reason to be skeptical about your sincerity in advocating the Stockholm Resolution. It calls for a ban on a weapon in which your country is deficient—the atomic bomb—but says nothing about a ban on tanks, artillery, infantry, and cavalry, in which your country is more mighty than all Western nations combined. If you Soviet writers hate bloodshed as desperately as you profess, why is the Stockholm Resolution so silent on the weapons of death in which your country is supreme? This question bothers a lot of people in the Western world, including the best friends your country has ever had.

Do not for a moment imagine that

the people of America and Great Britain are happy about the atomic bomb. Millions of us have read John Hersey's poignant tale of Hiroshima and have been more broken-hearted about it than you Soviet writers. Some of us wish the bomb had never been invented, and I know not a single British or American writer who does not hope with all his heart that it will never be used anywhere in the world. Nothing would cheer us more if all arms were scrapped forever.

YOUR illustrious Academician Eugene Tarle made some startling observations on Hiroshima in the course of a personal peace appeal to "Academicians, Professors, Scientific Workers in the Universities of Paris, Norway, and Algeria," published last July in the Government-controlled *Pravda*. He asserts that in August 1945, presumably in Russia, there were some who "firmly declared that the annihilation by American bombs of thousands of women and children in Hiroshima . . . had no military significance, was in reality more abominable than any of Hitler's atrocities."

Who were these individuals? Why does not your learned academician mention them by name, if only for the historical record? All I know is that Joseph Stalin was *not* one of them. When President Truman confided to him in Potsdam that America had the atomic bomb did he urge the American President to scrap it? Did he in his indignation scorch Truman with invective for planning to use it? He did none of these "humane" things.

Here is what James Byrnes, then

