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A new play by **PAUL OSBORN**  
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## Broadway Postscript

### PICKWICK FOR PICKWICKIANS

WHEN American playwright Stanley Young saw his adaptation of Dickens's "Pickwick Papers" produced in London last season, he felt "like a tourist wearing kilts in Edinburgh." Now "Mr. Pickwick" is being smuggled back to Broadway and Mr. Young is in the even more awkward position of having to sport his British creation in front of home folks.

"Dickens is really not as peculiarly British as people think," explains the Indiana-born writer. "For all his heavy local coloring, the characters in 'Pickwick Papers' have counterparts in our contemporary society here and even in many other countries where English is not the native tongue. Pickwick is essentially a man capable of living with his own crotchets. In some ways a sort of Senator Tobey."

When Mr. Young, who is a former English instructor at Williams, undertook the task of putting into play form the discursive episodes which Dickens had composed singly from one week to the next, he decided to work backwards. Selecting the end of the famous trial scene as his climax, he preceded them with those episodes from the book which were most colorful and at the same time could be made to carry the thread of plot from the double-entendre scene between the ivory-towered Pickwick and his housekeeper (half-way through Vol. I) into the savagely real clutches of shyster law. Actually there is quite a bit of rearrangement, with early sequences sometimes fitted in after later ones, and characters occasionally popping in on episodes at which they had not been present in the book.

"Since 'Pickwick Papers' does not represent life exactly as it was in 1827, but is instead a highly exaggerated satire on some of the absurdities of the period," says Young, "I felt I might take liberties with the plot much the way an adaptor does when making a book into a musical. In fact, I like to think of 'Mr. Pickwick' as a musical comedy without music."

Because of the exigencies of the stage, Mr. Young was forced to pare the list of characters from ninety-eight to twenty-four (Bob Sawyer, Ben Allen, Job Trotter are the leading victims) and omit a couple of the famous episodes ("I killed me not to be able to find a place for 'Christmas at Dingley Dell'"). Dickens fans will



—Erich Hartmann.

Stanley Young—"worried look."

probably not be bothered by the omissions as much as they may be by such things as seeing the heretofore celibate Pickwick now enjoying some romantic escapades previously reserved for Tupman; or finding Sam Weller extorting his master's release from prison by physically threatening Buzfuz; however, they will very probably be pleased that the endearing Pickwick Club of Mr. Young's play is not disbanded as it was in the book, but is left enduring at the final curtain.

WHATEVER the changes in plot, the playwright has made every effort to preserve the characters intact.

"You can't draw them quite as subtly in a play as you can in a book, but that is less important in 'Pickwick' than it is in most other books. You see, Dickens meant for these people to be caricatures suitable for illustrating with two-dimensional comic strips. In addition, all of his figures in 'Pickwick' are shot through with innocence, and the audience, just like Pickwick, acquires more sweetness and tolerance as the adventures progress until by the end of the book you don't hate anyone, even Jingle and Buzfuz."

Since character growth is the substitute for plot in this kind of play, Mr. Young is underlining his point by amending the London script to bring Jingle and Mrs. Bardell into the final scene so that Mr. Pickwick's forgiving nature will be demonstrated as it was in the book. "The play is a great part extravaganza, laughter, and poking fun at some of the institutions which Dickens found inane," admits

the playwright. "But there is also a quality of quaintness and pathos which, if we've been successful, ought to touch you a bit."

"**M**ISTER Pickwick" will be the fourth play the forty-six-year-old writer has had produced on Broadway in fifteen years of trying (previous entries were a verse drama entitled "Robin Landing," a play about Byron called "Bright Rebel," and "Ask My Friend Sandy"). The play he believes to be his best is "The Big People," which was written several years ago but so far hasn't been able to work its way north of Philadelphia. That he is a man of high principle can be inferred from the fact that although he makes his living as a partner in the publishing firm of Farrar, Straus & Young, he sanctions his novelist-wife, Nancy Wilson Ross, writing such best-sellers as "The Left Hand Is the Dreamer" and turning them over to the rival Random House. He doesn't carry this principle too far, however, and his next play is an adaptation of Fritz Peters's "The World Next Door," which was published by his own company. Young's almost constant worried look belies the fact that he feels happiest writing in the comic tradition of Dickens, which he defines as getting at the truth through broad caricature. He agrees with the assessment of Dickens in Louis Kronenberger's new book, "The Thread of Laughter," which places him as the one man who might have brought back to English stage comedy the quality that went out of it after Ben

Jonson. But the finest tribute paid to Dickens is perhaps the statement Shaw made in the January 2, 1911 edition of *The Bookman*, which Young has copied into a sheet of paper he carries in his wallet.

Upon being asked about Dickens's influence on him GBS replied that his own work was "all over Dickens" and that what appealed to him were "the monstrous and side-splitting verbal antics that never for a moment came within a mile of any possible human utterance; that is what I call mastery; knowing exactly how to be unerringly true and serious whilst entertaining your reader with every trick, freak, and sally that imagination and humor can conceive at their freest and wildest."

With such a document burning a hole in his back pocket, it is little wonder that Mr. Young should have a worried look.

—HENRY HEWES.

## Drama Note

**BEHIND THE VELVET CURTAIN:** The British have far more respect for their theatrical past than do we for ours. This respect accounts for a great many differences between their theatre and

Broadway. It also accounts for the flood of reminiscences that keep appearing. The most recent, "*Edwardian Theatre*" (Macmillan, \$4.50), covers the period 1901-1910. In it A. E. Wilson describes a world of entertainment and spectacle where the charm and beauty of the performers was infinitely more important than the shallow plays they appeared in. The author defends what would seem a fattening diet of bon-bons, by pointing out that the Edwardian theatre also found room for the unsugared wares of Shaw, Granville-Barker, and Galsworthy.

Reassuring to contemporary playgoers will be the discovery that this glamorous era of popular theatre was marked by frequently stated misgivings that drama was going to the dogs, a highly ballyhooed inquiry into the censorship problem which accomplished nothing, and a raging controversy about poetic drama with Stephen Phillips rather than Christopher Fry as the protagonist.

These values partially offset the book's inevitable weakness, which is its relative inability to pinpoint the hundreds of personalities mentioned in such a way that each will have a special life in the eye of an absent reader.

—H. H.

## The Factory

By Kenneth Chertok

**T**HE world is set in sadness  
And the children  
Shaded by the factories  
Feel the sadness  
Whisp'ring  
From the windows where the workers  
stay

The world is set in darkness  
Yet the workers  
Jaded by the factories  
Feel the darkness  
Leaving  
When the morning sends the moon  
away

Oh the world is set in madness!  
Can the children  
Faded by the factories  
Feel the madness  
Deep'ning  
In the marrow of each coming day?

# PSST!

Remember *Pygmalion* and  
*Major Barbara*? Well, wait'll  
you see what I've done to  
*Androcles and the Lion*!

—GBS



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