

The Saturday Review



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Book Dumping, Among Other Things

THIS is about the book-publishing industry and its assorted troubles.

We begin with an apology and an explanation to the authors of the following six books, all of which are published this week:

"*Scenes and Portraits*," by Van Wyck Brooks, an autobiographical memoir by the dean of American literary historians.

"*Man's Unconquerable Mind*," by Gilbert Highet, a tribute to the immortality of the mind and a call for its increased and widened use.

"*Shirt-Sleeve Diplomacy*," by Jonathan Bingham, the first full account and appraisal of the historic program of American technological assistance.

"*The Test of Freedom*," by Norman Thomas, an attempt by the leader of the Socialist Party in America to find a democratic way between the extremes of McCarthyism and Communism.

"*Moscow*," by Theodor Plevier, a fictional account of the downfall of the German army at Moscow.

"*The Cobweb*," by Walter Gibson, an uncommonly fine first novel, laid in a clinic for nervous disorders, that probes some of the most fundamental of man's problems.

Each one of these books—and perhaps others as well—deserves to appear on our cover as the leading title of the week. Whether in terms of literary appeal or timeliness or importance, each book clearly qualifies for such recognition as may be provided by special cover treatment. Our selection of Stuart Chase's "*Power of Words*" comes as close to being an arbitrary cover choice as it is possible to get. It is no disparagement

of Mr. Chase's work to say that the cover could have gone just as easily to any of the six books listed. It just happens—literally so—that they were all issued the same week.

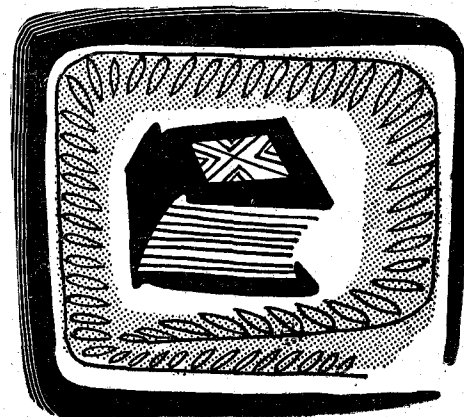
The point of these remarks is that it needn't have "just happened." With only routine planning, the publication of these books could have been spaced so that each one could have received the spotlight it deserved. Sometimes a month or more will pass without the publishing of a truly outstanding book. At such a time it becomes necessary to stretch our yardsticks in selecting a title for the cover. Then in the space of, three or four days, important books will erupt all over the place. These books will impose upon us, and upon our colleagues in the business of reviewing books, the unhappy responsibility of discriminating against deserving authors.

THE selection of a magazine cover is perhaps a minor aspect of the problem. At its worst the problem concerns books in general. During some weeks of the year hundreds of books will be tumbled onto our review editor's desk. Only a fraction of these titles can possibly receive proper notice or attention. We have the unhappy job, therefore, of discarding many books which would ordinarily warrant review. The authors of these discards worked just as hard to get a hearing as the authors of books who were lucky enough to avoid the book-dumping seasons. What the unlucky authors had to say was just as important; their hopes for winning a reputation and making money were just as high. But they became the innocent victims of book-dumping.

Whenever the suggestion has been made that the publishers pool their information about release dates and prepare some sort of master scheduling calendar for the guidance of the industry the reply has been made that such a project would be too difficult to undertake. Nothing is easier, of course, than to continue with the present unorganized system and its hundreds of resultant casualties. There is no problem that we know of in acquiring and combining the necessary information. In fact, the information is readily obtainable in *Publishers' Weekly* or the various advance literary services, even though master scheduling of the type we have in mind would have to be done much earlier, and the information would have to be centrally coordinated and carefully maintained on a master scheduling board. The principle, however, is a simple one: Only so many eggs from different hens can be put in a certain size crate without the mathematical certainty of breakage.

It isn't true that the only thing a good book needs for its success is to be born. Bringing a good book to life is an exacting and demanding affair. Good books have died virtually stillborn for want of air and light and constant attention. First of all, the fact of a book's existence must be made known to the nation's book readers. A book needs the widest possible discussion in the reviewing media of the country—whether magazine, newspaper, radio, television, or public platform. It needs special attention by the bookseller. It needs window space, counter space. More than this, it needs the bookseller's personal support.

But the deserving book is not going to get very much of this kind of attention if the publishers persist in their apparent belief that the reviewer and bookseller are so unimportant in the total scheme of publishing that their needs and capacities can be ignored. Reviewers and booksellers owe their allegiance



to the entire world of books. Too many publishers, however, act as though each one of them owed allegiance only to his own books, hoping for an occasional lucky strike, such as a book-club selection or an occasional best seller. Only a significantly small number of publishers seem to see themselves in relation to the entire industry, or are concerned with all the component parts. In the long run the publisher's survival depends more upon the existence of a healthy industry than upon his occasional access to a jackpot.

IT strikes us that the publishers as a whole have never really dealt with the fundamentals of their own business. To be sure, they have established the American Book Publishers' Council, Inc., in order to advance the cause of the book and to represent the industry before the bar of American public opinion. In this way they have battled competently and effectively against higher postage rates, censorship, and rising costs. They have also attracted widespread attention for books through the annual National Book Awards. They have aided libraries. And the Council is now in the process of establishing a long-overdue national citizens group which will be concerned in general with the right to publish and the right to read. In such efforts the publishers have been singularly fortunate in staffing the executive positions on the Council with highly competent, imaginative, responsible people.

All this, of course, has been eminently worthwhile. But the publishers have not faced up to the problems of the book industry itself, of which book dumping is but one unhappy example. Another example would be the relationship of the publisher to the bookseller. Books are basically a retail business. Yet the book industry is unique among American businesses in that its own policies serve to weaken the retail outlets on which its well-being depends. Indeed, it is not at all unusual to hear a publisher express scorn for the type of person who sells books, but one seldom hears him talk about the need for creating the incentives that would attract more people to bookselling.

Not long ago the pharmaceutical industry faced a crisis because of the epidemic of cut-rate sales in drug stores, indicating a profoundly unstable condition in the retail trade. The members of that industry lost no time in coming together to devise such programs and policies as would make it possible for the individual drugstore merchant to exist on something other than a cut-throat basis.

No such comparable effort is being made today by the book publishers, despite the fact that the condition of the retail bookseller has become increasingly precarious. Each year more and more bookstores are going out of business. Many bookstores would go into bankruptcy tomorrow if they had to depend on books alone. If this is of concern to the book publishing industry it has yet to show it by adopting such practices as will convince the individual bookseller that his place in the world of books is more than merely incidental or accidental.

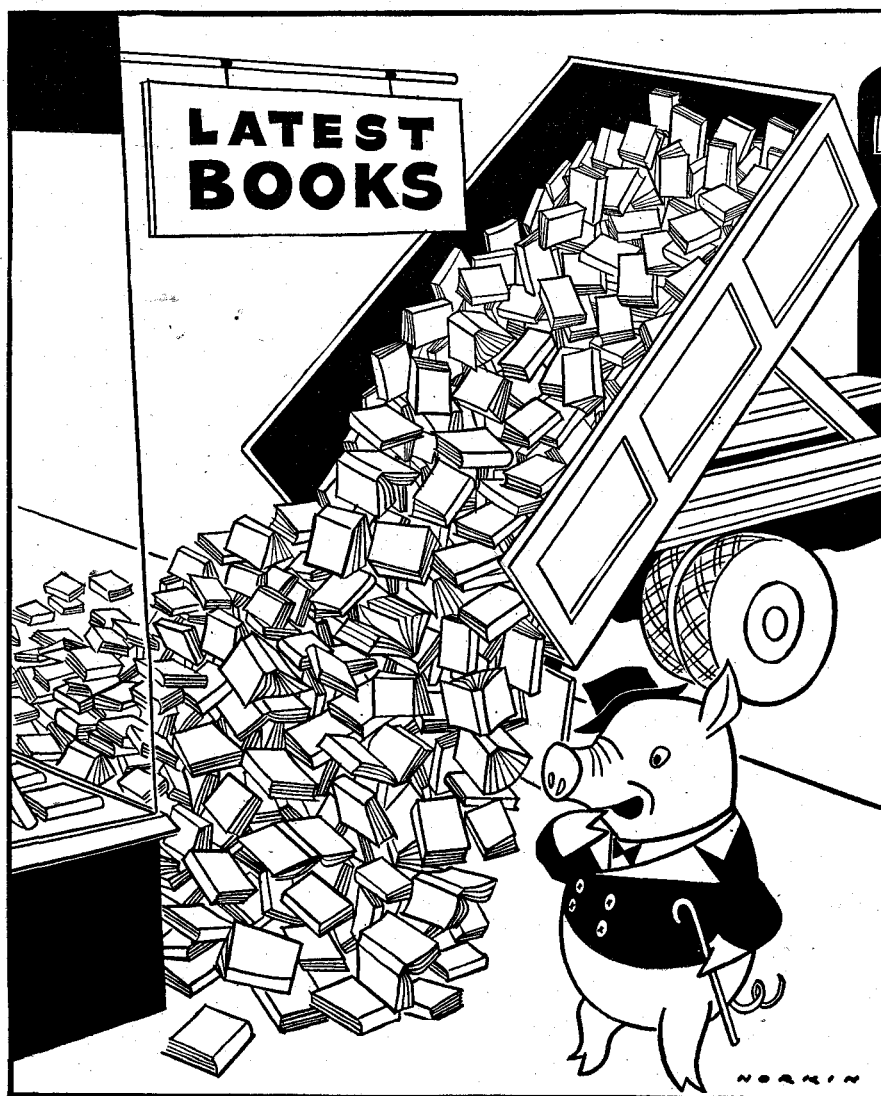
Publishers often complain about the paucity of first-rate reviewing media around the country. Yet the 'book industry as a whole has failed to support national book-reviewing media. It is difficult to think of an American business that has been more favored with free publicity, or one that has shown less awareness of the value of that publicity.

The Saturday Review has been allied with the book industry for

thirty years. It would have died ten years ago if it had depended on the publishing industry for support. Nor is it any secret that the book-publishing industry expects—and receives—preferential treatment with respect to advertising rates. No other branch of the arts—music, theatre, films, etc.—has ever been granted comparable favors.

Here, then, is a picture of an American industry vital to the national culture—custodians in a sense of infinitely valuable literary properties, the future protectors of talent yet to be developed. Yet it is a weak and uncertain industry. Its symbol is less the book than a tin cup. What it needs is not so much help from the outside as an internal upheaval in its premises and propositions, in its policies and practices. It needs not merely lower production costs or higher retail prices, but a thoroughgoing recognition that issuing a book is not quite the same as publishing it, and that a proper approach to the marketplace is an art in itself.

—N. C.



"Well, at least there's a law that says they can't do that to me!"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MORE ON MescalIN

THE ABSTRACT OF ALDOUS HUXLEY's essay on the effects of mescaline [SR Feb. 6] illustrates the cyclic return of interest in drugs which absorbed the attention of romanticists of the stripe of DeQuincey and Poe. These drugs produced effects approximating the disintegration of perception and the heightening of emotional reactions frequently associated with mental diseases—such as schizophrenia. They had the effect of modifying the tensions ordinarily associated with the human problem of facing reality. Mescaline, as well as the others, has been studied intensively by psychologists since the days of Havelock Ellis and Weir Mitchell.

This scientific interest has been extended to peyote, which incidentally is not synonymous with mescaline chemically. The writer and Dr. Charles L. Tranter made a careful study of the psychological aspects of the "Peyote Rite" (*Jour. of Nerv. and Mental Dis.*, Vol. 97, May 1943) occurring among the Indians of Nevada. We demonstrated that although peyote relieved "the basic anxiety for survival" and promised the Indian user the eternal power of Father Peyote, it also increased their psychologic isolation from the reality of American life around them.

Dr. Cutting's comments have indicated the natural tendency of a physician to search for detrimental effects of any drug used uncontrollably—a supposition which our studies confirm. Tied in with the use of mescal, peyote, or marijuana—or even whiskey—is the problem of handling anxieties that are an integral part of our psychic and social life. Peyote may be romantic and anthropologically attractive, but it is a great question whether this drug or mescaline is superior to alcohol or tobacco.

WALTER BROMBERG, M.D.

Sacramento, Calif.

SKIMMING THE UPPER HALVES

IN "THE ABC AROUND US" [SR Jan. 2] Frank Denham brightly riddles a lot of straw targets but bags no game. It may be difficult for an adult, uneducated foreigner to learn to read English, or to learn anything else from books. But it is not at all difficult for a child to learn to read English, if he doesn't go to a progressive school where reading isn't taught. I've read for pleasure from the age of six or seven, but then I was no prodigy—many brighter children read for pleasure from the age of five.

All reading, of any alphabet or language, depends on prior knowledge and associations, which can be accumulated with considerable speed. Mr. Denman should familiarize himself with the research that has been done on the optics of reading and the legibility of types. It is true that we read the appearance of words rather than their letters, but it is equally significant that we recognize



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"A fine Minute Man You are—we've been waiting half an hour!"

ognize principally the upper halves of words. We skim the tops of lines. Also the normal reader recognizes words in groups of three to five at each eye pause, while swiftly scanning a line. What difference if the same letter arrangement may have different meanings or sounds? When I read "The redskin raised his trusty bow," I know he wasn't hoisting the front end of a boat, or straightening up from the hips.

Thanks to skilled type designers such as Garamond, Caslon, and Goudy, we have simple but well-differentiated letter forms which make it easy to recognize the profiles of words. When Robert Bridges adds diacritical marks to these letters he is merely distracting my eyes from their proper line of march without telling me anything I don't already know; I can recognize "success" without a cedilla under the second "c." What Mr. Bridges achieved was a kind of post-dated medievalism—like Chatterton's much prettier but equally phony Middle English. What Mr. Denman seems to want is a similar complexity.

WALTER DORWIN TEAGUE.

New York, N. Y.

GLOBAL AMBASSADORS

IN THE CLOSING sentences of your editorial "E Pluribus Unum" [SR Jan. 2], alluding to the oneness of the human family, you made special reference to the tourist's role as an ambassador for a sane and decent world, wherever he goes.

I believe you and your readers would be most heartened to know of the extent to which this editorial precept is acknowledged in fact by the world tourists

whom it has been Pan American's privilege to fly.

Many hundreds of U.S. citizens have circumnavigated the globe aboard Pan American Clippers since this first became possible in 1947, and we have been at great pains constantly to keep in touch with these round-the-world passengers following their return. Their comments—on any aspect of their trip—are particularly solicited, since the opinions and observations of such experienced travelers can be of inestimable value to us.

One might expect the readiest comments of all, from these pioneers in round-the-world air travel, to concern such things as international customs formalities, clothing tips, praise or condemnation of the crew with whom they traveled so far, or the particular convenience or inconvenience of a departure or connection en route—matters of service directly related to the newest medium in round-the-world travel.

To be sure, such comments are there. But the readiest and most steadily repeated comment of all testifies, humbly and unselfconsciously, to the global responsibility that you yourselves have outlined for the modern-day tourist. It is a comment reflecting gratification at having had the opportunity to discover how the rest of the world lives, of having had the opportunity to impart a little of how America lives, and to have gained, as an overall result, a better understanding of the oneness of the world and the global responsibilities of all its citizens.

WILLIS G. LIPSCOMB,

Vice President,

Pan American World Airways.

New York, N. Y.