

## Gaiety on the Land

**"Onions in the Stew," by Betty MacDonald** (J. B. Lippincott. 256 pp. \$3.50), continues the adventures of "The Egg and I" lady, who is now kept busy raising two teen-age daughters and a husband.

By Helen Beal Woodward

SINCE there are people who dislike corn on the cob, never crack a smile at George Gobel, and wouldn't walk a block to see a humming bird's nest, it is conceivable that there are people who could read an entire book by Betty MacDonald without laughing out loud. All I can say of them is that they must be very, very sophisticated and that theirs is a narrow category.

Suppose she does have to try somewhat more self-consciously for her laughs in "Onions in the Stew," her fourth book for adults. (She is also, of course, the author of the beloved Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle series for children.) Grant that this new book never quite achieves the bubbling hilarity of three-quarters of "The Egg and I" and that it contains no one passage as funny as the sylarking first chapter of "Anybody Can Do Anything." Admit, even, that some of the stuff about teen-agers is tiresomely exaggerated and that the teen-agers themselves sound bratty beyond belief except to the parents of other teen-agers. I still say Betty MacDonald can lick—well, maybe not anybody, but most of the writers who write the books and articles officially labeled funny.

The jacket on one Betty MacDonald book refers to her "magic gift of transmuting into golden laughter the experience of an eventful life." I don't know about that golden laughter, but they are right about the gift. It is magic.

Among the many thousands who will read about her life on Vashon Island in Puget Sound at the mercy of guests, tides, ferry schedules, weather, weeds, and "WooWoos," but especially guests, probably nine in ten will put down the book thinking how much they would like to know Betty MacDonald. (Heaven help the author if they act on their impulses.) Her writing is the projection of a remarkably attractive per-

sonality. She manages to sound relaxed, friendly, approachable, and just like anybody else, only a little more worldly and a better cook. What we forget is that only a writer of uncommon talent and considerable sensitivity could create so winning an impression of naturalness.

Part of her technique is her use of slang. She uses it with a good comedian's sense of timing. Her nature writing is so artfully unlyrical that one does not realize until some time later that she is a true nature lover, maybe even a secret agent of the Audubon Society. Her universe is as gay and primitive as a child's. In "The Egg and I" the looming mountains "gave me a feeling of someone reading over my shoulder." In "Onions in the Stew" the wild morning-glory sneaks across the guest-room porch, the fat little ferry swims steadily toward Blake Island, and when the washing-machine is rescued from the Sound its rollers begin turning smoothly against each other, "neatly pressing the water out of a piece of seaweed picked up on the trip."

BUT these touches are the frosting on the cake, or the butter on the clams. The main dish is the story of Betty's relationships to her family and the other people on Vashon Island. There was Lesley, who wore "a different new dress (all cut to the navel) every night" and made Betty feel like a great big botany teacher. Couldn't she come early and help? she asked, when invited to dinner, but Betty said no, "with that tiny laugh with which women indicate that they are so well organized they have had everything done since four that morning." Then there were Elizabeth Gage and mean ole Everett, and the various island handymen, and the hostess who served tuna-marshmallow salad. (One thought bothers me: if these people exist how does Betty MacDonald face them?)

The final pages of "Onions in the Stew" sound successful and contemporary, as though the author's manuscript were beginning to draw abreast of her adventures. We still have the MacDonald grandchildren in reserve, however, and even if Betty MacDonald never writes another book she has earned the right to appear in any anthology of American humor.



—By Vasiliu, for "The Dinner Party."

"... artfully unlyrical."

## Humor on the Menu

**"The Dinner Party," by Gretchen Finletter** (Harper. 236 pp. \$3), the work of the wife of a former Secretary of the Air Force, records the intimacies of Washington life in a style reminiscent of the journals of British ladies of fashion of centuries past. Here it is reviewed by Sophie Kerr, the novelist.

By Sophie Kerr

AT LONG long last a book about a summer-suburban-country-village life with no neurotics, decadents, sex-triangles, or heavy drinking! This seeming miracle has been brought off by Gretchen Finletter in the form of a diary covering five months of our present times—"The Dinner Party: The Journal of a Lady of Today." The Diarist is civilized, articulate, sharp of eye, and sprightly of spirit. She has a husband named Charles who is writing a book terrifyingly labeled a Broad Analysis of Foreign Policy and World Economic Conditions, but Charles is a Nice Man, keen on tennis and dancing, devoted to wife and family, and he possesses an ingratiating balanced humor. The Family is three daughters, eight, thirteen, and eighteenish respectively. And there is a Hungarian cook, Roza.

The story begins with the planning of a Small Dinner which runs into familiar complications: The extra man, invited by Charles, turns out to be married; The Rich Friends blandly propose to bring another couple, strangers to the hosts; Sister Julie long-distances that she has just arrived from Paris and will be right along; the Hick Tracys, dear and cherished friends, must be asked; the Lawlers whom the Diarist aptly terms Kill-offs must also be asked; Extra

Men must be dug up—and the Small Dinner is soon so big that it turns into a Buffet with tables set in the Living-room. Service is the usual hideous problem but the Tracys lend their Annie, Mrs. Blitz from the village agrees to come and Help Pass the Food, Roza does her part well. The Buffet is a Wow. The Diarist Hostess has Coped.

In fact, she copes with such success that I wish she had told whether she chose to sit between the two most attractive men, or whether she nobly took on the Worst Bores. The Diarist is silent on this hot issue, the plague of every hostess.

After the Dinner Party the summer wags on in its usual diversions. Sister Julie's visit is marred by her insistence on her own plans for altering

the Victorian house, but again the Diarist copes.

The Rich Friends give a Big Luncheon with Superior Food and there is also a Luncheon at a nearby Army Base with certain VIPs present, including a Senator's Wife who has brought her Needlepoint—a gently malicious portrait of a certain Washington Lady, I believe. The oldest daughter, Linda, arrives from college with a Boy Friend, a cool Little Monster of Learning who wins Charles's fury for declaring that Toynbee—Toynbee—is Limited! Nor does the Little Monster's definition of Maintenance Conversation win friends or influence Linda's father. (I must say I liked it, also what the L.M. said about Toynbee.)

The Diarist records the Club Gala,

and also the Weekend with the Richer Friends of the Rich Friends, and this chapter contains a nice bit of spoofing of a Visiting Englishman who dotes on Trees. It is only when the Diarist tackles political activities that her chronicle sticks and hitches. But when taking her husband to the station she notes wistfully that anyone Leaving the Country always looks so Blithe; when she tries to tidy her desk and oh, those bills, utterly fails; when she avows that when she visits the Very Rich she wants High Living and no Thinking at all—these and many other crisp tidbits of thought show her as Everywoman, the wonderful universal Feminine. Yes, this is a Very Pleasing book, fine for Summer Reading—also for Winter, Spring, and Autumn.



#### VALEDICTORY FROM THE CAPTAIN

"Even though we only won our opener, the team showed a wonderful spirit . . . and they're the swellest bunch of fellas I ever met."



#### PHI BETA KAPPA'S NEW POPULARITY

"Tell us, Arthur, when did you first realize you'd invented the H-Bomb?"



#### THE COACH ADDS A WORD

"While we're always looking for good students, you men can help us by keeping a sharp eye out for real all-around boys who, incidentally, have some athletic ability."

**NEXT MONTH AN OLD GRAD** named Maurice F. Hanson, a Yale man who is also a vice president of J. Walter Thompson, Inc., the advertising firm, will head back to New Haven for another class reunion. This will be Mr. Hanson's twenty-fifth, and in the past twenty-four of them he has had plenty of opportunity to observe the antics of his fellow classmates. He has already begun celebrating the upcoming reunion with a second book, a collection of cartoons conceived by himself and drawn by another old grad, artist Donald T. Carlisle, University of California '16. In "College Reunion" (Coward-McCann, \$1.50), a group of aging Yale bulldogs at their class reunion cavort through the campus, beginning with the President's Reception and ending up happily oblivious to everything on The Long Road Home. But in the meantime they also manage to get off a few timely remarks in a few typical situations, a few of which are shown here.

—JOHN HAVERSTICK.



#### THE DEAN ENTERS A REBUTTAL

"Good scholarship will always be the bulwark of Old Ivy . . . I hope you men will find time to visit our classrooms while you're here, to see what we're trying to do."



#### CHAIRMAN OF ARRANGEMENTS

"What would we do without good old Gus?"