

with minor inconsistencies in individual parts of his demonstration, or occasional contradictory endeavors to make the same characters exemplify both defeat and victory. But one defect cannot be passed over in silence, a stylistic quality that may be illustrated by the following: "The proper model of the universe in 'Our Mutual Friend' is not that of a non-Euclidian

space filled with incommensurate local monads entirely isolated from each other. . . . Each of these worlds is a particular constitution of the same unattainable substratum, rather than being wholly isolated." Such linguistic convolutions sometimes continue for pages. Despite them, however, Mr. Miller's analysis is rich in creative insight.

gaudy with familiar names and events.

Born on a Fairfield County, Connecticut farm, Barlow moved up to nearby Yale, afterwards taught school, became a chaplain in Washington's army, then a lawyer, land salesman, statesman, business agent and, finally, foreign minister to France. The common denominator of his vocations was preaching, exhortation, and giving advice. Long on energy and optimism, short on talent and humility, he was at an early age bitten by that poisonous bug which makes a man want to write—at all costs—big. Barlow's ambition was to be the Homer of his country, write the "Iliad" of its struggle to birth. He began with a work which he called an epic, "The Vision of Columbus," spent twenty years in rewriting and making it worse; ultimately got it out as "The Columbiad."

Whatever his fame, Barlow won fortune. For seventeen troubled years he lived in France where, as an agent for American shipping interests, he made huge wartime commissions. He acquired a Parisian establishment so large he never was able to furnish it. Opportunistic, tasteless, and also good-hearted, he invariably took his stand on the liberal, deistic, and humane side amid the battles and confusions of his age. He befriended Tom Paine—and, of course, tried to write like him, too. Childless, he acted as a veritable father to the young engineer, Robert Fulton. And he seems to have achieved a deep and lasting relationship with his one wife.

Mr. Woodress writes: "In March, 1792, however, the dawn of the brave new world was coming up like thunder from across the Channel, and Barlow went on pamphleteering." The manner is perhaps not inappropriate.

## Head of the Hartford Wits

**"A Yankee's Odyssey: The Life of Joel Barlow,"** by James Woodress (Lippincott. 347 pp. \$5.95), is a biography of an eighteenth-century American poet, diplomat, and pamphleteer. Walter Magnes Teller, who reviews the book, is a professor of English at San Fernando Valley State College.

By Walter Magnes Teller

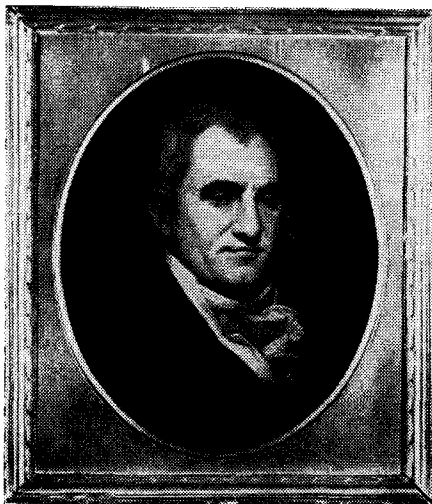
SINCE the first formal history of American literature was written, the first organized course in it given, professors have been palming off Joel Barlow (1754-1812), the subject-hero of "A Yankee's Odyssey," as a poet. But I think that trick, thank heavens, has about had its day. Barlow, lodged in the breach between our lowly poetic beginnings and, say, the pastoral rhymes of Bryant and Whittier has had a long and undeserved reputation. Nothing he wrote can now be read with pleasure.

James Woodress, his latest biographer, says that Barlow's "humorous 'Hasty Pudding' alone gave him a chance to be remembered as a poet." However, if such a chance once existed, it surely evaporated long ago. The literary flavor of cornmeal mush—"hasty pudding" it was called by earlier generations of Americans—will not be remembered by virtue of Barlow's effort, but rather because the unknown author of "Yankee Doodle" wrote in lovely, simple lines:

Father and I went down to camp  
Along with Captain Gooding,  
And there we saw the men and  
boys  
As thick as hasty pudding.

Indeed, it was not academic fellows like Barlow and his literary friends (the Connecticut, or Hartford, Wits, they called themselves), who wrote the signifying verse of their time; instead, it was the ballad-makers and the nameless writers of songs.

Drawing on prior biographies, a



—Portrait by Charles Willson Peale.

Joel Barlow—wanted to be America's Homer.

couple of unpublished dissertations, and plentiful manuscript sources, Mr. Woodress presents a detailed account of the Barlow life and times. Since the eighteenth-century literary ruling-class in America was small, and since Barlow made it his business to know everybody who was anybody, his story, as unfolded in this book, is



## Pick of the Paperbacks



**SOUTH WIND.** By Norman Douglas. Bantam. 50¢. Anything can happen, and generally does, to the uninhibited inhabitants of a Capri-like Mediterranean isle, in a sprightly satire about morals and moralists.

**SELECTED STORIES.** By Liam O'Flaherty. Edited by Devin A. Garrity. Signet. 35¢. Twenty-nine stories, selected from the volumes of O'Flaherty tales, are choice examples of his own distinctive, lilting Irish prose.

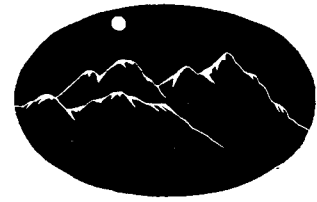
**A WALKER IN THE CITY.** By Alfred Kazin. Evergreen. \$1.45. Remembrance of things past—boyhood in Brooklyn's

Jewish section—as recalled by a leading American literary critic, with little detachment but with great warmth, beauty, and veracity.

**WINESBURG, OHIO.** By Sherwood Anderson. Compass. \$1.25. Winesburg, like any small town, had a sub-surface life, which Anderson discerned, with poetry and artistry, in these tales of midwestern USA.

**STUDS LONIGAN.** By James T. Farrell. Signet. 75¢. The saga of a rough-tough boy from the grim South Side of Chicago told in three books collected into one volume.

# Tragedy and Triumph at the Top



**"Avalanche!,"** by Joseph Wechsberg (Knopf, 254 pp. \$4) and **"Coronation Everest,"** by James Morris (Dutton, 144 pp. \$3.75) are two books about mountains, in which the former records the tragic events in Blons, Austria, while the latter is a journalist's report on the 1953 Everest Expedition. They are both reviewed by Wilfrid Noyce, a member of the Everest party and the author of *"The Gods Are Angry," "South Col,"* and other books about mountaineering.

By Wilfrid Noyce

**B**OTH "Avalanche!" and "Coronation Everest" are about the mountains. But there the resemblance ceases, for the episodes described among the mountains could hardly be more different.

The year 1954 is still remembered for the many avalanches that wrought havoc in the Alps. But the fate of one small village, Blons, in the Austrian Vorarlberg, eclipsed and at the same time summarized all others. On Jan-

uary 11 two avalanches descended from the peaks that overlook the village's two parts, and obliterated each in turn. One-sixth of the total population was killed, many more were maimed; about one-third of the houses was destroyed.

It would have been possible to write a scientific treatise on avalanches; to analyze famous falls; even to select and compare the avalanches of that disastrous January. In "Avalanche!" Joseph Wechsberg has chosen cleverly to concentrate all that he has on this one village, on the drama of its one twenty-four-hour ordeal. He has visited Blons, spoken with the inhabitants, and documented his story from the records. An air of personal reality hangs about the telling.

Inevitably, twenty-four hours do not make a book, and also some background is needed. It is certainly necessary to say something of wet and dry snow, of the varieties of precaution, the situation of villages, and the history of Blons. But, to my mind, this is the only part of the book that does not move. The author has tried to enliven it with references to the

avalanches we are to see, but this gives still more the sense of marking time to fill out a requisite number of pages.

Once January 11 is reached the story moves quickly, and I have nothing but praise for the dramatic way in which it is told. Also, much of the earlier information does fall into place. The author takes a number of important villagers and places them in the positions they occupied at 9:36 A.M., when the first avalanche descended. Many were killed, many buried in their homes. There followed bewilderment, pain, grief—and courage. In crisp prose the various threads are followed through. Clique jealousies forgotten, the little society, now cut off by snow from the outer world, seems to operate almost in a vacuum as it sets about its own rescue work. With sympathy and a realistic reconstruction of dialogue, Mr. Wechsberg leads the survivors through to evening. Then, at 7 P.M. the second avalanche descends, with chaos and terror once more in its wake.

Among the most important actors, of course, are the avalanches themselves. (Continued on page 28)



**ALL THE WORLD LOVES A LOVER** has been the highly successful maxim of Raymond Peynet, a French cartoonist whose sprightly, thatch-haired sweethearts have endeared themselves to some forty million Frenchmen and a goodly number of Englishmen. Now, by virtue of *"The Lovers' Keepsake"* (British Book Centre, \$2.75), Americans too will have a chance to see what Peynet ("the cartoonist with the poet's soul") is all about. Mostly he is about a pair of lovers whom he calls the *Poète* and his *Fiancée*, a fanciful couple who

explore, through Peynet's indefatigable sketches, the limitless possibilities for the lover and his lass. In the drawing below, Peynet makes it perfectly clear that nothing—not even a locomotive at full steam—can keep true lovers apart.

