

constantly aspired to the condition of literature. One may add that, in the same degree, after about 1900, literature as constantly tended to the condition of journalism . . . What Theodore Dreiser said about manners in 'A Traveller at Forty' is relevant: 'Our early revolt against sham civility has resulted in nothing except the abolition of all civility'. . . It is not clear to me how Rasputin's conception of 'salvation by sin' differs from our fashionable contemporary Graham Greene's . . . St. Paul rebukes them both in the Epistle to the Romans: 'Shall we continue to in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!'

On the Literary Life: "Get the reputation of being a recluse. Spread it about that you are a chronic invalid. Tell them you have leprosy or rabies. You must be 'instinctively thorough / About your crevice and burrow' like Robert Frost's Drumlin Woodchuck. . . . What else did Ruskin mean when he said that 'an artist should be fit for the best society and keep out of it?'"

ARCHITECT OF THE BRAVE NEW WORLD: Nowadays people talk about "1984," and "Brave New World" seems a bit dated, even (in view of the rush of events since it came out in 1932) a little naive. But it is still a suggestive guide book to the prospect before us, and its unwearied author, what with rediscovering the music of Gesualdo on the one hand and trying out mescalin on the other, has declined to perch on any shelf. The amazing range of Aldous Huxley's intellectual interests is surveyed in John Atkins's "**Aldous Huxley: A Literary Study**" (Roy Publishers, \$5). Descriptive rather than critical in his approach, the book is most useful for its tracing of the evolution of Huxley's mind, from the cynical estheticism which won him his first fame to the mystic conception of a unitive life with God which he has recently achieved. As Mr. Atkins points out, the multiplicity of Huxley's concerns, polarized around his social criticism and his spiritual odyssey, implies a compartmentalization which does not in fact exist. His thought, running simultaneously through many different channels, actually is a single stream, and Mr. Atkins deftly demonstrates the interrelationships. Whether or not one can agree that Huxley has improved as he has grown older (after "Do What You Will," we are told, he "went from critical strength to strength") depends not solely on his progress as a thinker but on what he has done lately with his considerable artistic gifts—a question which Mr. Atkins does not face.

—RICHARD D. ALTICK.

AMERICANA

When Manhattan Was Younger

"It Happened in New York," by M. R. Werner (Coward-McCann, 256 pp. \$3.95), is a collection of sketches of episodes in the life of the nation's largest city when it was smaller, younger, but not necessarily better behaved. Bruce Bliven, Jr., author of "Battle for Manhattan," reviews it.

By Bruce Bliven, Jr.

M. R. WERNER'S new book, "It Happened in New York," is a delightful love letter of an unusual kind addressed to his favorite city—the place where he was born and where he has lived during the better part of sixty years. He would not want to live anywhere else, he says, although he would not mind revisiting Paris, London, and Venice. New York, in Mr. Werner's estimate, "is the best place in the world to work for a man who knows when to go to bed and as good a place as any to play almost any game."

Feeling about the city as he does, Mr. Werner naturally looks back upon New York's past with extraordinary sympathy. He makes no moral judgments. Even when he is writing about something quite horrid (police corruption, for example), he implies that most of the worst of what has happened in New York may have had some good effect, one way or another, upon the city's personality. He steers clear of analysis, comment, theory, and interpretation. He simply wants his readers to know, with as much vivid detail as the archives contain, what New York was like at various times when it was younger. He has selected a small group of revealing episodes, and he hands them to you, with a certain modesty, for your delectation.

They are candid pictures. Most of the book's chapters, including three pieces that have already appeared, in slightly different form, in *The New Yorker*, catch the city at least slightly off guard. In two of them New York, for all its traditional indifference, goes overboard in enthusiasm for visiting celebrities, first Jenny Lind in 1850 and then, in 1906, Maxim Gorky, who came to the city trying to raise money to finance a revolution in Russia. In

a third, by far the longest chapter in the book, New York is shocked, quite uncharacteristically, by the almost unbelievable extent to which the Police Department, in 1894, was shown to be corrupt by the Lexow Committee of the State Legislature, sent down from Albany to look into charges that had been raised, starting two years earlier, by the Reverend Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst, pastor of the Madison Square Presbyterian Church. A fourth chapter tells about the city's first large-scale strike, "The Great Strike," as it was known at the time. It lasted for nearly two months in the spring and early summer of 1872, and although it was not, in fact, one big strike but an epidemic of small walk-outs, about 70,000 men (out of a total population of roughly 1,000,000) left their jobs in more than thirty different trades because they felt that they ought not to have to work more than an eight-hour day, as the State law, passed two years before the strike, had provided.

A FIFTH chronicle, in quite another mood, describes New York's Metropolitan Fair in 1864, a mammoth bazaar on Fourteenth Street at Sixth Avenue and in Union Square, which raised more than one and a quarter million dollars for the benefit of Union Army soldiers, and was, in the language of one newspaper, "the greatest and noblest charity ever produced in this, the Empire City of the Union." In every case, after the excitement was over, New York regained composure quickly and New Yorkers went back to minding their own business, which is one of the qualities Mr. Werner likes best about his eight million neighbors. ("It is a bad place for those who want to fraternize or manage other people's lives.") But the temporary stir was highly illuminating, and the reader, guided by Mr. Werner's pointer, really sees the city as it was.

For anyone who likes New York, this small collection is certain to become a treasure. The danger that it may fall into the hands of hostile provincials is, one supposes, slight; if it should they will simply be baffled that such a series of accounts, each as solid as the granite of the island, can be considered as the nicest kind of tribute.

A Steamboating Epic

"Fastest on the River," by Manly Wade Wellman (Holt, 234 pp. \$3.95), is a popular account of the exciting race between the steamboats Robert E. Lee and the Natchez in the heyday of the Mississippi River.

By Rufus Terral

THE Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis was one vast stage on which the biggest show in the country was running for three tempestuous days a long, long while ago. The story of the great race between the steamboats *Robert E. Lee* and the *Natchez* in 1870 is told now at its most complete by Manly Wade Wellman. His account recreates to a surprising degree the excitement and suspense of one of the most thrilling chapters in American legend, for he has sought out his facts with commendable industry. He tells his story with an affectionate admiration.

Like the boats they commanded, Captain John Cannon of the *Lee* and Captain Thomas Paul Leathers of the *Natchez* were large and vital characters eminently suitable to legend.

Cannon, a giant of a man with a black chin beard, combined the temperament of a master gambler and opportunist with that of a meticulous businessman. He was a friend of Jefferson Davis and of Northern political bosses alike; the carpetbag Governor of Louisiana accompanied him on the race, and General Robert E. Lee's eldest daughter greeted him on his triumphant arrival at St. Louis.

His opponent, Leathers, red-haired and violent, was even bigger in stature than Cannon; he refused to fly

the American flag over any of his boats until the election of Cleveland ended, for him, the Civil War; and he wore the Confederate gray to his death.

These two men hated each other so roundly they did not speak to each other. Leathers designed and built his *Natchez* at a cost of \$200,000, specifically to beat the *Lee*. The two boats were of almost identical size, nearly 300 feet long and forty-odd in the beam. It was a contest filled with peril, not only from the notoriously treacherous Mississippi but also from the ever-present possibility of boiler explosions, which were frequent on the river—and particularly so under the stresses of overheating in a race.

For its crucial effort Cannon stripped his beautiful luxury vessel to a gaunt hull, took on no freight, stacked hold and deck with fat, firewood, resin, lard, oil, and kerosene to make his boilers burn their hottest; and he carried his seventy passengers non-stop, transferring those bound up the Ohio, together with their baggage, by gangplank to another vessel running alongside his own. (Leathers ran the *Natchez* as it was, crammed his hold with freight, burned only coal, took on ninety passengers and made all his usual stops for passengers and freight.) In addition to these due advantages, Cannon took the undue one of jumping the gun at the starting point four minutes, further delaying the *Natchez* by the rough wash of his wake.

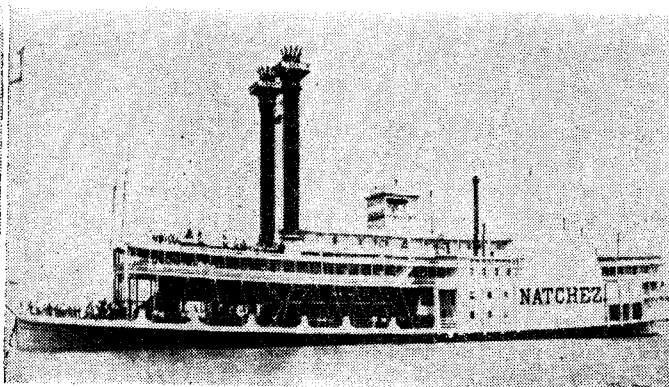
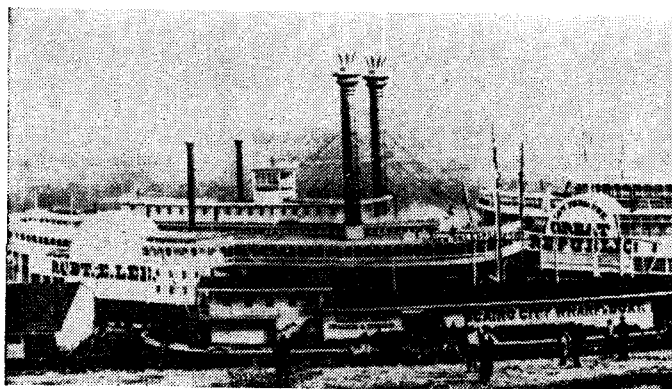
Bonfires, the saluting roar of guns, firecrackers, fireworks, excursion trains, and banks lined with people greeted the boats along their way. Low water ran them aground; the

Lee, in questionable repair from the start, sprang a leak in a boiler, which was ingeniously plugged by feeding shredded hemp into it; but it was fog, thick and deadly in the most dangerous reaches of the river, that proved finally decisive. Leathers tied up the last night out of St. Louis to wait for the fog to clear. Cannon indecisively thought to tie up, but weakly let a subordinate's insistence on going ahead prevail. A few boat-lengths ahead the fog dispersed.

Even after the *Lee's* conquest of the *Natchez* by a good six hours, the title of "fastest on the river" was still questioned in men's minds, including those of the two competitors. Leathers subsequently beat the *Lee's* record time to Natchez; Cannon responded by beating the *Natchez's* new time. Many rivermen felt (and Mr. Wellman seems to feel with them) that the fastest boat on the river was neither the *Lee* nor the *Natchez* but John Tobin's exquisite new steamboat the *J. M. White*, whose owner forebore a test out of consideration for his friend Cannon, by then in failing health and failing business. So it was the *Lee* was never challenged by its likely master, and the race between Cannon and Leathers went down as the brightest gleam of steamboating on the Mississippi in the twilight of its heyday.

DOWN EAST: For the lover of the ways of State-of-Mainers, Horace P. Beck's *"The Folklore of Maine"* (Lippincott, \$5), will be an exciting book in the perusal and a disappointing one in retrospect. Dr. Beck has the folklorist's indiscriminate enjoyment of "local tradition" but little preference for history. Although the author intends to disarm the critic when he says, "This is not a scholarly book in the pedantic sense," he invites the retort, "Alas, it isn't scholarly, period."

The best chapter is about lumbering, with vivid descriptions of timber cruisers, "swampers," river drivers,



—*"Fastest on the River."*

The *Robert E. Lee* and the *Natchez*, famous competitors to be "fastest on the river."