

spread from the meadowland on the Little Laramie River to the dark pine timber that covered the foothills of the Medicine Bow Range, with its perpetual snow." The trail miles wound in and out and around foothills. The distance covered was several times the axis of the ranch. The author assured me it took two full days by pack animal. Today it can be done in one hour.

MYER FELDMAN.

Washington, D.C.

Burns and Burns

DONALD W. COX's letter (SR, Aug. 28), complaining of my review of his book, *The Perils of Peace* (SR, Aug. 7), confuses me with Arthur F. Burns, who was the able chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers in the first Eisenhower Administration. My tour of duty on the White House staff during the second Eisenhower Administration embraced different duties. Probably neither of us deserves the rebuke Cox mistakenly makes in his letter.

In any case, the point has little or nothing to do with the question, "Conversion to What?"

ARTHUR E. BURNS.

Washington, D.C.

Prophetic

THOSE WHO ARE used to fleeing through Irwin Shaw or Daphne du Maurier and stopping at that point are stumped by Saul Bellow or Günter Grass (who, although livelier than Bellow, needs just as much thought). I must place full support behind Granville Hicks and his opinions regarding *Herzog* (SR, Sept. 10, 1964; Aug. 7, 1965). At any rate, Hicks was prophetic in his words . . . "A novel that is certain to be talked about and written about for a long time to come. . . ."

CURTIS M. ARNSON.

Cleveland, O.

Contradiction?

GRANVILLE HICKS [says] of Donald Harington's *The Cherry Pit* (SR, Aug. 21): "Harington writes . . . sometimes brilliantly, and if he comes to no particular conclusions, that can't be held against him. What does bother me is that, like many first novelists, he writes as if he were never going to write another book and must say here and now all that he has to say." Admittedly, an author's conclusions are not always his point. But his points, particularly if they suggest he is saying "all that he has to say," must surely be conclusions of some sort. May I suggest a contradiction on the part of Mr. Hicks?

JANE COLETTE BRITTENHAM SEABOLD.
Altadena, Calif.

De Vries Analysis

ROD JELLEMA has done a most creditable analysis [of Peter De Vries], by very far the best review of *Let Me Count the Ways* (SR, Aug. 28) that has been done in any major periodical. Commendations for you (as always) and for the reviewer. Let us hear more from Mr. Jellema.

HAYDN L. GILMORE,
Ch, Capt, USAF.

Aurora, Colo.

SR/September 18, 1965

The Ripening of the Dream

***The Worlds of Robert E. Sherwood: Mirror to His Times, 1896-1939*, by John Mason Brown (Harper & Row. 409 pp. \$6.95), seeks the secret of the late playwright's growth from a playboy, soldier, and "Shaw in short pants" into a distinguished historian and four-times Pulitzer Prize-winner. Lewis Gannett, the author of "Cream Hill," was for many years subsequent to 1930 daily book critic for the New York Herald Tribune.**

By LEWIS GANNETT

"THERE'S one fundamental subject with which I am concerned," Robert Emmet Sherwood wrote in 1937: "Growth. My own growth and that of the characters I write about." Growth was the subject of the memorable play on which he was then working, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. Growth is the subject of John Mason Brown's lively and sometimes startling account of Sherwood's early years as playboy, soldier, and playwright. Those first forty-two years were preparation for his blossoming in World War II, as assistant to Cabinet secretaries, spokesman for democracy, intimate of and speech-writer for Harry Hopkins and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and, later, their historian and biographer. (Mr. Brown will devote a second volume to

that period.) But for all Mr. Brown's intimate and intelligent probing, Sherwood's growth remains something of a mystery.

Like his hero, Lincoln, Sherwood was a man who, emotionally and intellectually, grew slowly, whereas physically he had shot up phenomenally. Sherwood stood six feet seven when, in 1914, he delivered the valedictory at Milton Academy, but, though he was permitted to appear on the platform, he did not graduate. In four and a half years at that school he always loved, Sherwood had, as Mr. Brown puts it, collected a "grubby harvest" of marks: two B's, eleven C's, thirteen D's, and two E's. His scholastic record in his three years at Harvard was about as dismal: by spring of his freshman year his balance sheet showed two E's and three D's (two of them in English). He had two sophomore years; Harvard never recognized him as a junior, although outside its classrooms he was a man of distinction, an editor of the *Lampoon*, playwright for the Pudding, and author of two lyrics actually sold to Flo Ziegfeld of Follies fame while he was still an undergraduate on probation.

His opinions probably faithfully "mirrored" those of the majority of his classmates at Harvard: he was a staunch Republican, an ardent war man; in favor of prompt conscription for all pacifists, bill collectors, and Cambridge cops. But the American Army had no use for such



Robert E. Sherwood in 1940—his development is beyond analysis.

a skinny beanpole in 1917, when Sherwood tried to enlist. The kilted Canadian Black Watch, however, accepted him with enthusiasm, even though it was unable to find army shoes large enough for his feet, so that he trained, and even slogged into France, in the brown Ox-fords he had worn at college. He must have been a startling sight, towering in his tartan, "acres of knees exposed," above those brown shoes. As was the case with so many in World War I, he was eager for battle; before the United States Army was well on the line, he had had five and a half months of active service. "I can stand anything except the lack of candy," he proudly wrote home. He was gassed in July, and again in August, when he was carried out on a stretcher. Although he sustained a lifetime disability, he accepted his pension for only three years. When the Armistice came, he went AWOL from a British hospital and celebrated in London for four blissfully unruly days and nights.

The mystery of his eventual growth haunts the reader. John Mason Brown probes his background with affectionate amazement: his father would have preferred to be an actor or a poet but instead was pressured into a Wall Street brokerage, and, about the time Bob was approaching the front on the Somme, took sick and went bankrupt for a tidy deficit of \$450,000. His mother, Rosina of the Emmet clan, immediately sold the family's imposing forty-room mansion on Lake Champlain and the large house on Lexington Avenue in New York and set out to support her family by painting—and did so to a remarkable extent, earning \$10,000 a year. But his parents hardly explain the evolution of Robert Sherwood, nor does his grandmother Sherwood, a showpiece of New York society who had, as Mr. Brown puts it, "a strong mind, weakly used"; in her several books, he says, she "did not so much write as pant in print."

Nor does Sherwood's dizzy life in the Twenties. Returning from the war, a twenty-two-year-old "troubled and uprooted young man," he promptly landed a job under his college mate Robert Benchley, then managing editor of *Vanity Fair*, and became a threesome with the increasingly Falstaffian Benchley and his incomparable friend, "Dottie" Parker, a deceptively lissome and pretty girl whose acid phrases remain, after forty years of abrasive quotation, sharp as a stiletto. All three were charter members of the Algonquin Round Table, though how Sherwood managed that—or the poker games of the Thanatopsis Literary and Inside Straight Club (table stakes, \$500)—on a salary of \$25 a week is another unsolved mystery.

By the time Sherwood was twenty-eight he was editor of the old *Life* maga-

zine, helping to keep it alive with pun-gent movie criticism and helping it toward death with his schoolboy humor. John Mason Brown, himself no mean wit, paints vivid word pictures of the murderously articulate and sometimes, as in Sacco-Vanzetti days, intensely serious members of the Algonquin group. But his story suggests that for Sherwood it was little more than café society. Sherwood in those days was no social crusader, no prophet of democracy. His greatest moral indignation was reserved for the Chicago baseball players who sold out to gamblers and threw a World Series game. "The last illusion perished for us," he said of the occasion; the small boy's cry "Say it ain't so, Joe" touched his heartstrings. When he began writing plays, his expressed credo was that "a playwright should be just like a great big, overgrown boy, reaching for the moon."

He himself remained a playboy well into his and the century's Thirties. He who had been a romantic internationalist voted for Harding in 1920 and between wars was a rather naïve pacifist—a "Shaw in short pants," as someone called him. His greatest successes were other men's movies, for which he wrote scintillating dialogue. And yet, somehow, through those very years Sherwood was growing.

Possibly, as Mr. Brown suggests, the frictions of his first marriage had something to do with his new understanding of world tragedy.

However that may be, his first real play with an American theme, *Abe Lincoln*, was the eloquent, original, curiously scholarly story of a man who, eighty years before, had yearned to avert the war he would be called upon to lead. It rose head and shoulders above all that Sherwood had done before.

Perhaps the real moral of Mr. Brown's character-packed and constantly readable if somewhat puzzling biography—which ends with the production of *Abe Lincoln* and its reception by Mrs. Roosevelt—is that such growth is beyond analysis. Some men achieve success early, and stop growing; some passively accept conformity, and rust; a few grow beyond their own, or their parents', wildest dreams. Sherwood grew; but who, among all the relatives, instructors, and friends who loved him, could have foreseen or understood of how much he was capable?

As for the Twenties, which the subtitle suggests he "mirrored," John Mason Brown's own comment is surely the sagest in all the chronicles: "The Twenties were many times at one and the same time."

The Great Ones Loved Him

Reggie: A Portrait of Reginald Turner, by Stanley Weintraub (Braziller. 293 pp. \$5), throws light on the great figures who flitted in and out of the life of an uncommonly witty and charming minor figure in twentieth-century British letters. Arthur Darack is book and art editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer.

By ARTHUR DARACK

STANLEY WEINTRAUB and Rupert Hart-Davis, who edited *Max Beerbohm's Letters to Reggie Turner*, disagree sufficiently on Turner's parentage to arouse suspicion that they may have invented him. In any case, it would have been necessary. Somerset Maugham, for example, called Turner "the most amusing man I have ever known." Beerbohm described him as "the earliest of my great friends, and [he] remained always the greatest — and will always remain so . . ." thus giving Turner the distinction of being responsible for the one occasion when precision of speech deserted "The Incomparable Max." Oscar Wilde loved him (nonscandalously,

though Turner's interest in women was moderate to the vanishing point), and Turner stuck by Wilde during the disgrace and the post-prison tragedy. Even D. H. Lawrence, in his own way, was as fond of Turner as he was of almost anyone, which is hardly an endorsement for the possibilities of friendship.

Turner wrote twelve novels between 1901 and 1911. There was also much journalism for his putative father's newspaper, the London *Daily Telegraph*; letters, short stories, etc. Turner lived most of his life in Florence, where he learned to love all things Italian, even Mussolini. The fact that Turner was half-Jewish made little difference to his way of life, because he died before the full impact of Hitler made itself felt in Italy.

The importance of this book stems from the light it throws on the great figures who flitted in and out of Reggie's life—Wilde, D. H. Lawrence, Beerbohm, and Norman Douglas. Weintraub earlier distinguished himself in the field of backstage literary history with his *Private Shaw and Public Shaw*, in which he proved GBS to be a shrew and Charlotte a major figure in English literary criticism (she encouraged T. E. Law-