

# Life Kept Intruding

*Men at Work*, by Honor Tracy (Random House. 244 pp. \$4.95), depicts a novelist whose search for privacy is continually disrupted by eccentric visitors and incidents. Lawrence Graver is a member of the faculty of Williams College.

By LAWRENCE GRAVER

IN A conventional picaresque novel like *Tom Jones* the innocent hero is sent into the world to be played upon by experience. In *Men at Work* Honor Tracy neatly reverses the pattern and brings the bizarre world home to her retiring hero.

After five published novels and a four-year stretch of writer's block, Timothy Beauchamp, in search of privacy and renewed inspiration, buys a Suffolk house. Yet even before he can unpack, the world begins to penetrate his defenses. Having burned books and sauerkraut, his German mother-in-law threatens to take her own life. His housekeeper, the unhinged Mrs. Nightingale, cannot be kept from spilling confidences in the sanctity of his study. The irrepressible Mrs. Beauchamp, troubled by nothing but "silence, solitude, and lack of incident," joyfully torments her husband with bargains and house guests, two of whom arrive *en famille* "like an Egyptian plague." As the bank demands money and the agent a new manuscript, Beauchamp's best friend unleashes an insane American professor hunting for a Briton to teach creative writing at Salamanca University, Kentucky.

Just at the point when the sequence of disruptions has reduced Beauchamp to sullen dejection, he discovers that "a curious, merciful dispensation went along with it all. The more the horror piled up, the more intolerable the externals became, the better he found himself working."

Given the frail, episodic structure, the success of *Men at Work* depends on the resiliency of Beauchamp's reactions and the vividness with which the farcical in-



Honor Tracy—"a compulsive comedian."

vasions are described. Unfortunately, he rarely rises above "infernal helplessness," "growing bewilderment," "prostration," or "open-mouthed dismay"; and after the fourth or fifth humiliation his ordeal loses its point. Two hundred pages are spent to reveal the pomposities of a man Pope would have impaled in a couplet.

The incidental farce is often telling; Miss Tracy adds new specimens to her gallery of fraudulent artists, lovable eccentrics, and jazz-age clergymen. Her best effects come in epigrammatic dialogue, descriptive detail, or deft satiric portraiture. Yet even the inspired moments in *Men at Work* exist alongside comedy that is feeble and satiric targets that have been overexposed. Characters have names like Montague Butterworth and Marcus Pilkington; American colleges stockpile British literary manuscripts in Padua, Texas, and Heidelberg, Indiana; and Professor Amadeo Frosch not only plans to negotiate with Tolstoy for the manuscript to *War and Peace*, but sees *Hamlet* and tells his host: "Now this guy is mad at his uncle, see, who bumped off his father and married his mother, and he plans to give him the works. But he has a procrastination problem and he can't seem to get busy. Hamlet's one of these compulsive talkers, like Myron K. Schreiber, our Dean."

Miss Tracy is a compulsive comedian; nothing odd is alien to her. Delight in eccentricity gives her work flamboyance, but since she lacks the ability to integrate

plot and develop character, *Men at Work* remains static and anecdotal.



**Mixed-Up Marriage:** It's irresistible: *Prudence, Indeed* is a failure, in fact. I can't think of anything better or worse to say about Anne Bernays's third novel (Trident, \$4.95) than that it is slick ladies' fiction, a not very probing story of a not very interesting New York marriage between a Jewish psychiatric social worker, Sophie Goldman, and a gentle research chemist, Nick Brean. Sophie discovers that Nick is less perfect than she had thought him to be during their engagement—as brilliant perhaps, but not as kind, not as compassionate or understanding, not as pure about his science. There is nothing earthshaking here, especially since Sophie, for all her ostensible training, leaves a lot to be desired in the way of either generosity or insight.

Unhappily, I am sure Miss Bernays did not intend this slick-fiction result. Her characters are quite patronizing about, for example, *McCall's*, and the writer character in the book reports reviews of his book by *Midstream*, *Commentary*, and the *Partisan Review*. The trouble is that it is difficult to understand just what the author's intentions were. The title, for example, is taken from the Declaration of Independence: "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes." Such relevance as I can find for this is so meager that I can't hold on to it long enough even to explain it.


The social conscience Nick suddenly develops halfway through the book (he begins taking part in sit-ins in the South) can only be ascribed to the author's need for some concrete issue on which Sophie can base her final ruminations: "... at last she began to comprehend a little more about Nick's concern, his intensely personal, bleeding concern for those deprived by society of mercy; it was all very well as long as the sufferers remained as abstract as the gray dolls hopping around the television screen, but as soon as Nick was confronted by the *reality* of human need—he could be as cruel as the rest of them No—crueler. And was it always like that with the reformers and champions?"

Now here is an interesting theme for a novel. But even though Sophie is specifically involved as a caseworker (and Nick as a chemist) *Prudence, Indeed* cannot be said to explore the subject.

—LOUISE ARMSTRONG.

## LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column One should read: 5L, 9E, 3B, 2F, 8G, 4A, 6J, 11D, 7H, 12K, 10I, 1C.



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# SR's Check List of the Week's New Books

## Classics

THE GOLDEN ASS OF APULEIUS. A new translation by Robert Graves. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$4.75.

## Crime, Suspense

THE ARTIFICIAL MAN. By L. P. Davies. Doubleday. \$3.95.

THE FURTHER SIDE OF FEAR. By Helen McCloy. Dodd, Mead. \$3.50.

KINDS OF LOVE, KINDS OF DEATH. By Tucker Coe. Random House. \$3.95.

THE LAST ONE LEFT. By John D. MacDonald. Doubleday. \$4.95.

MADAME AUBRY AND THE POLICE. By Hugh Travers. Harper & Row. \$4.50.

THE ROSE WINDOW. By Suzanne Blanc. Doubleday. \$3.95.

TWINKLE, TWINKLE, "KILLER" KANE. By William Peter Blatty. Doubleday. \$3.95.

## Current Affairs

THE BITTER HERITAGE: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1966. By Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Houghton Mifflin. \$3.95.

IN A CAUSE THAT WILL TRIUMPH: The Goldwater Campaign and the Future of Conservatism. By Karl Hess. Doubleday. \$4.95.

INCREDIBLE LOS ANGELES. By John L. Chapman. Harper & Row. \$6.50.

INSIDE INTERNAL REVENUE. By William Surface. Coward-McCann. \$5.

THE INVENTION OF THE NEGRO. By Earl Conrad. Eriksson. \$5.95.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A SATELLITE. By Alfred Bester. Little, Brown. \$5.95.

WASHINGTON EXPOSE. By Jack Anderson. Public Affairs Press. \$6.

## Economics

MARK'S ECONOMIC PREDICTIONS. By Fred M. Gottheil. Northwestern Univ. Press. \$7.50.

## Essays

LANGUAGE AS SYMBOLIC ACTION: Essays on Life, Literature and Method. By Kenneth Burke. Univ. of California Press. \$10.

## Fiction

BALLOONS ARE AVAILABLE. By Jordan Crittenden. Atheneum. \$4.50.

THE CORNER SHOP. By Elizabeth Cadell. Morrow. \$3.95.

DEATH ON THE INSTALLMENT PLAN. By Louis Ferdinand Céline. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New Directions. Hardbound, \$7.50. New American Library. Paperback, \$1.25.

THE FORTRESS. By Henry Jaeger. Harper & Row. \$5.95.

THE GLAD SEASON. By Paula Elizabeth Sitts. Dutton. \$4.50.

THE HOT MONTH. By Clifford Hanley. Houghton Mifflin. \$4.95.

THE SYMBOL. By Alvah Bessie. Random House. \$5.95.

A TRIP TO CZARDIS. By Edwin Cranberry. Trident. \$4.95.

## History

ACHIEVEMENT OF GREECE. By William Chase Greene. Barnes & Noble. \$7.50.

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR: Joseph C. Grew and the Development of the United States Diplomatic Tradition. By Waldo H. Heinrichs, Jr. Little, Brown. \$10.50.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI AND THE ORIGINS OF ITALIAN COMMUNISM. By John M. Cammett. Stanford Univ. Press. \$8.50.

THE CATSKILL MOUNTAIN HOUSE. By Roland Van Zandt. Rutgers Univ. Press. \$12.50.

CORREGIDOR: The Saga of a Fortress. By James H. Belote and William M. Belote. Harper & Row. \$6.95.

MAKERS OF MODERN ENGLAND: The Force of Individual Genius in History. By Giovanni Costigan. Macmillan. \$6.95.

THE ONIN WAR: History of its Origins and Background with a Selective Translation of *The Chronicle of Onin*. By H. Paul Varley. Columbia Univ. Press. \$7.50.

THE SOUTH SINCE APPOMATTOX: A Century of Regional Change. By Thomas D. Clark and Albert D. Kirwan. Oxford Univ. Press. \$7.50.

THE SPANISH INQUISITION: It's Rise, Growth, and End. By Jean Plaidy. Citadel. \$10.

THE TROUBLED GIANT: Britain Among the Great Powers 1916-1939. By F. S. Northedge. Praeger. \$17.50.

## Law

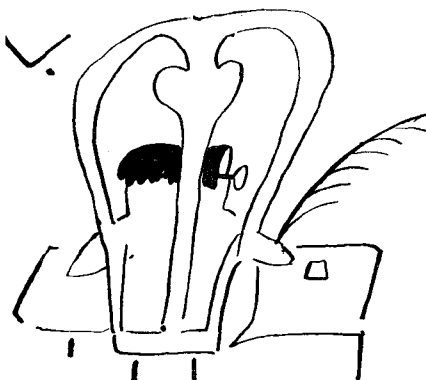
THE MARK FEIN CASE. By William A. Reuben. Dial. \$5.

## Literary History, Criticism

MARK TWAIN. By Charles Neider. Horizon. \$6.50.

THE STYLE OF LA FONTAINE'S FABLES. By Jean Dominique Biard. Barnes & Noble. \$6.50.

WORDSWORTH: The Chronology of the Early Years, 1770-1799. By Mark L. Reed. Harvard Univ. Press. \$9.



## Miscellany

THE COMPLETE BOOK OF FAMILY SKIING. By George Sullivan. Coward-McCann. \$5.50.

COMPUTATION IN LINGUISTICS: A Case Book. Edited by Paul L. Garvin and Bernard Spolsky. Indiana Univ. Press. \$7.95.

DIVISION STREET: America. By Studs Terkel. Pantheon. \$5.95.

The Family Game Book. By Robert V. Masters. Doubleday. \$5.95.

LEONE'S ITALIAN COOKBOOK. By Gene Leone. Harper & Row. \$6.50.

MAN ON THE MOVE. By Harvey Firestone, Jr. Putnam. \$7.95.

1967 BLOCK INCOME TAX GUIDE. By the H. R. Block Company. Macmillan. \$1.95.

## Personal History

THE BENEVOLENT MAN: The Life of Ralph Allen of Bath. By Benjamin Boyce. Harvard Univ. Press. \$7.95.

DAG HAMMARSKJOLD: The Statesman and His Faith. By Henry P. Van Dusen. Harper & Row. \$4.95.

THE INNOCENT ASSASSINS. By Fred A. Salazar with Jack Herschlag. Dutton. \$5.95.

MACHIAVELLI. By Giuseppe Prezzolini. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$8.50.

T. E. LAWRENCE: An Arab View. By Sulaiman Mousa. Oxford Univ. Press. \$6.50.

## Poetry

THE BLOOD THAT IS LANGUAGE. By Louise Townsend Nicholl. John Day. \$5.

BRATSK STATION AND OTHER NEW POEMS. By Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Praeger. Hardbound, \$4.95. Paperback, \$1.25.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF LOUIS MACNEICE. Edited by E. R. Dodds. Oxford Univ. Press. \$9.75.

## Psychology, Sociology

THE BETRAYAL OF THE BODY. By Alexander Lowen, M.D. Macmillan. \$6.95.

CATHOLIC ACTION IN ITALY: The Sociology of a Sponsored Organization. By Gianfranco Poggi. Stanford Univ. Press. \$8.

THE EMPTY FORTRESS: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self. By Bruno Bettelheim. Macmillan/Free Press. \$9.95.

## Religion, Philosophy

IN THE HUMAN GRAIN. By Walter J. Ong, S.J. Macmillan. \$5.95.

THE MINUTE PARTICULAR. By E. G. Lee. Beacon. \$4.95.

RELIGION IN A MODERN SOCIETY. By H. J. Blackham. Ungar. \$5.

THE VISION AND THE WAY: An Interpretation of Jewish Ethics. By Jacob B. Agus. Ungar. \$8.50.

WE ARE ALL BROTHERS. By Louis Evelyn. Herder & Herder. \$3.50.

## Travel

JOURNEY THROUGH THE HOLY LAND. By Betty Hartman Wolf. Doubleday. \$4.95.

—Compiled by NAJD SOFIAN.