



Edna O'Brien—"tangy."

fully, she would have given stature and substance to what has, instead, remained an imaginatively adroit melodrama.

I'm not going to synopsise the plot—a deplorable custom at best—because it would ruin the reading of Miss O'Brien's admirably terse story. Suffice it to say that in the two young women who are her principals she has drawn a stunning study in contrasts: traumatically virginal Willa, who has the fragile remoteness of the glass figurines she sculpts; and brash, life-hungry Patsy, whose earthy assault on living provides a kind of mirror-existence for Willa—an existence that she finally tries to break out of, with fatal consequences.

The very flaws in *Casualties of Peace* reinforce my conviction that here is a writer whose gifts are larger than the uses she puts them to. The book indicates that even Miss O'Brien is beginning to realize that sexual *Sturm und Drang* just aren't enough.



Tinkering with the Irish: Tourists to Ireland may be lucky enough to get a snapshot, on some out-of-the-way country road, of those picturesque Irish gypsies called tinkers, immortalized in a play by John Millington Synge, *The Tinker's Wedding*. If the tourist is not lucky, he can buy slides of a tinker's caravan at almost any drugstore, and the colors will be indescribably brighter than any photograph he could take himself. It is this kind of Technicolor that confronts the reader in Bryan MacMahon's *The Honey Spike* (Dutton, \$4.95)—a little too vivid to be real, but just right for the tourist. Like Synge's play, the novel is about a wedding and its aftermath; and very little seems to have changed in the sixty-odd intervening years.

These people are on the dirty side, con men in their way, stealing, scavenging, and tinkering as they go, followed

by a menagerie of goats and mongrel dogs. But believe me—or rather Mr. MacMahon—they are moral to a fault when it comes to getting married. No Irishman lives in sin. Martin Claffey and Breda Gilligan are hitched by the archbishop himself at the high altar.

What's more, when the baby is due, Breda is all for having it in a hospital in County Kerry, near the "Honey Spike" of her youth, and Mr. MacMahon's story tells of the Claffey's four-day odyssey there from the Giant's Causeway at the tip of northern Ireland. It also deals with the effects of their trip on a number of persons whose lives are touched along the way. And, incidentally, MacMahon is concerned with the neglect, by both church and state, of the tinkers' welfare. Free, they are also forgotten; modern Ireland has no real need for them. Mr. MacMahon rescues them here in a wry, tender, sparsely written novel that is saved by its point of view from being just another borrowing from the poetic past.

—DAVID DEMPSEY.



Incest on Spy-Wagon: John Masters, author of Hindustani melodramas like *Bhowani Junction*, jumps on the spy-wagon with *The Breaking Strain* (Dela-corte, \$4.95). Unluckily the cart has become a bit creaky, and Masters adds to the rust by hauling aboard the familiar defecting Russian scientist and his lovely daughter.

Masters, an Englishman reared in India, displays a good ear for American idiom, and has a bit of fun raking us over the coals for our oft-scoffed-at foibles. But if the play's the thing, then *The Breaking Strain* fails, possibly because its author is not familiar enough with the genre; he seems unaware that he is treading ground that has already been plowed under.

The action begins with an ambush in a thick London fog. The participants are an amoral claustrophobic East African white hunter; his sister, who arouses incestuous desires which he suppresses; a handsome, athletic young American millionaire whose uncontrollable stammer is due to an Oedipus complex; three Soviet spies; and a sex-hungry Danish doll who comes on stage in a wheelbarrow. Perhaps weary of describing physiognomy, Masters tells us his minor characters look like Gary Cooper, General Eisenhower, Stan Laurel, Andrew Jackson, Jack Dempsey, or JFK.

The story seems to be derived from John Buchan, with apologies to Ian Fleming and Alistair MacLean, since it depends upon a staggering chain of coincidences that reach a smashing climax: pursuit on a train, a dogfight between a light plane and the Spanish Air Force, a racing car chase, and a world-in-the-bal-

ance contest between American and Russian jet fighters.

John Masters, whose writing is neither subtle nor graceful, adds nothing to the Fleming-Le Carré lexicon.

—BRIAN GARFIELD.



Embassy Antics: It was back in the 1950s that Lawrence Durrell, the esteemed author of *The Alexandria Quartet*, first introduced the world to Antrobus, Dovebasket, Polk-Mowbray, and other denizens of a fantastic British Embassy in a never-never land behind the Iron Curtain. Durrell served as a British Foreign Service press officer in Athens, Cairo, Rhodes, and Belgrade; thus in *esprit de corps* and stiff upper lip there is just enough authentic background to keep these uninhibited tales of diplomatic life from being completely absurd. Some of the characters bore sufficient resemblance to British, American, and other diplomats I had known for me to urge my friends who had any sense of humor to dash out and beg, borrow, or steal the books. In fact, I even recommended paying hard cash if they could not be otherwise obtained.

Alas, not again. Antrobus is back and still telling the stories, and the illustrations by Nicolas Bentley are just as entrancing, but the tales themselves leave much to be desired, although throughout the book there are passages that will evoke a chuckle, and even once in a long while a genuine guffaw. The title story in *Sauve Qui Peut* (Dutton, \$3.50) is the best. But "The Little Affair in Paris" about Polk-Mowbray's delinquent nephew, whose most cherished possession is the skeleton of his aunt, is unadulterated slapstick. Most of the stories read as if they had been written after a night with LSD or perhaps they might seem better along with LSD. However, there are realistic vestiges of British diplomatic reluctance to call anything by other than traditional British terms no matter what world usage may be. The U.N. is still UNO, Iran is still Persia, and Thailand is still Siam.

This is too bad. The diplomatic corps in any capital city and particularly behind the Iron Curtain, where the members are of necessity constantly living in each other's backyard, affords living targets for satire. The tales our own Ambassador Ellis Briggs has published about his experiences in Czechoslovakia are hilarious—funnier than any of the imaginary antics of Antrobus and his zany friends. Furthermore, for real humor connected with diplomatic life it is still hard to surpass Sir Harold Nicolson's *Some People*, particularly his accounts of "Titty" and "Arkettall." Mr. Durrell has come nowhere near doing so.

—JOHN M. ALLISON.

Major Author in a Minor Key

Mark Twain's "Which Was the Dream?" and Other Symbolic Writings of the Later Years, edited by John S. Tuckey; **Mark Twain's Letters to His Publishers 1867-1894**, edited by Hamlin Hill, and **Mark Twain's Satires and Burlesques**, edited by Franklin R. Rogers (University of California Press. 588, 388, and 485 pp. \$10 each), represent the first installment in a projected series of previously unpublished works perpetrated by the master during his off-moments. Charles Neider is author of the recently published study "Mark Twain."

By CHARLES NEIDER

WHEN Mark Twain died in April 1910 at the age of seventy-four he left behind a vast accumulation of unpublished manuscripts: notebooks, a voluminous and incomplete autobiography, burlesques, satires, unfinished pieces of fiction, essays, ruminations, letters, and so on. Some of these were admitted failures; others, such as his reflections on religion, were not published because Clemens feared public reaction. In the years since his death the cream of this material has been published by various editors; the remainder has been pored over by a growing number of Mark Twain scholars.

Now the University of California Press is issuing these papers in a series that will run to some fourteen volumes. Its primary purpose is to provide easier access and appropriate annotations. The project is sponsored by the Center for Editions of American Authors, which in turn is sponsored by the National Foundation for the Humanities.

Which Was the Dream? is a collection of seven unfinished fictional narratives, traditionally referred to by scholars as the "Great Dark" manuscripts. In them Clemens pursued the bitter notion of life as a kind of nightmare, with no readily distinguishable frontier between actual and dream life. The fragments were composed between 1896 and 1905, when Clemens's memory of three personal disasters was acutely fresh: the death of his daughter Susy, the bankruptcy of his publishing house, and the loss of heavy investments in the Paige typesetting machine. The stories

are of disaster-voyages, dreams of calamity in which lurks the hope that one will suddenly awake to find life rosy again. The dark notes sound the themes of man's stupidity and rapaciousness. Clearly Clemens is thinking of "the damned human race," in his well-remembered phrase.

Speculate as one will about the origin and meaning of these tales, they are unrelieved failures as fiction. It was for this reason, I believe, that Clemens left them unfinished, rather than because, as is sometimes suggested, he was psychologically unable to complete them. They are tedious, overdone, over-literal, banal, stagey, bathetic, ill-conceived abortions, without a grain of the usual saving irony and wit. Albert Bigelow Paine, Clemens's biographer and friend, made the point well when he said that in these fragments the author was writing largely to amuse himself. This is probably why they are so self-indulgent and so given to logorrhea.

Letters to His Publishers consists of 290 letters; twenty-three are taken from *Mark Twain, Business Man*, edited by Samuel C. Webster, and five from *Mark Twain's Letters*, edited by Paine. The other 262 are, according to Hamlin Hill, "either previously unpublished or are re-edited at the present time from holograph manuscripts." The volume cannot be considered definitive inasmuch as the originals of those taken from the Webster book were not available for scholarly examination.

There is no question that the letters are of value to the specialist. The general reader, however, will find little to interest him, unless he happens to be fascinated by book contracts and sales, royalty statements, proposed lawsuits,

Pactolus

By Francis Richardson

WHAT calm, strange things remain
After the hurry passes,
The golden touch.

Hands moving within each other
Wash each other, and blessedly do not
Turn to gold. We are cleansed
Of that richness, the glitter flows
Away as the harmless sparkle
On the top of the water.



—Bettman Archive.

(l. to r.) Clara, Samuel, and
Susy Clemens—memory of
disaster was acutely fresh.

Canadian pirates, the inadequacy of copyright protection, and Clemens's amazing self-confidence regarding his own business judgment. Even the specialist may wish for a stronger stomach when he wades through one-sided letters, some very brief, some almost incoherent, and many heavily annotated. When they are not dreary (as business letters usually are) they tend to display their author's unsympathetic side: his coldness, selfishness, arrogance, and condescension. Above all, they reveal his incredible and infinitely persistent money fever.

THE volume is not all-inclusive. For example, I have counted three letters to Elisha Bliss of the American Publishing Company and two to Fred J. Hall of Charles Webster & Company which were not picked up from the Paine collection. There is only one letter, and that a brief and unimportant one, to Chatto & Windus, the English publisher. Clemens wrote two interesting letters to this firm which were published by Paine; the inclusion here of letters to Clemens's English business agent, Moncure D. Conway, do not explain the omission. It is to be hoped that the volume now in progress under the working title *Letters to H. H. Rogers* (Rogers, the financier, was in a sense Clemens's unofficial business agent during the latter's last years) will contain many of the letters to Harper & Brothers, Clemens's last American publisher.

The least inspired of the present collections is *Satires and Burlesques*, and for good reason. Mark Twain at times mastered the art of satire, for example in *The Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It*; and occasionally he mastered burlesque, as in parts of *A Tramp Abroad*. But burlesque for him was a perilous