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THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

CAREER—by *Phil Stong*—(Harcourt, Brace, \$2)

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE—by *Sinclair Lewis*—
(Doubleday, Doran, \$3)

WINTERSET—by *Maxwell Anderson*—(Anderson House
\$2)

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST, AMERICAN—
by *Mrs. Fremont Older*—(Appleton-Century, \$4)

THE CORPSE IN THE CRIMSON SLIPPERS—
by *R. A. J. Walling*—(Morrow, \$2)

THE STRING GLOVE MYSTERY—by *Harriette R.
Campbell*—(Knopf, \$2)

PATHS OF GLORY—*Play by Sidney Howard from
the novel of Humphrey Cobb—Samuel French, \$2*

Iowa Exteriors

And now we have another novel by Mr. Phil Stong. Phil Stong, you remember, is the author of *State Fair*, which was made, by the way, into the best picture that starred the late Will Rogers. The new Stong book is called *Career* and surely is very pleasant to read, if for no other reason than the fact that Mr. Stong seems to have failed to read Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*. The author of *Career* is still sentimental about life in the small Midwestern town. The soothing atmosphere of the idle easy gossip which hangs over the village store is merely a symbol of the pleasant, easy-going existence that permeates the neighborhood of Pittsville, Iowa.

Career is really the story of Carl Kreuger, the village storekeeper and his son Ray. The time is the summer and early winter of 1928, a comfortable twelve months, you see, before the fateful October 15, 1929, which one generally associates with Wall Street. There is a villain, this time a banker known as Clem Bartholomew. It is the old story of right and wrong, and of course, Ray becomes president of Mr. Bartholomew's bank before the last page of the book is read.

The story is well told and presents a most pleasant evening reading. When you read it be sure to stifle the radio because the two just won't mix.

Sinclair Lewis

Literature has built up and torn down many a Utopia, and if you wish to know the latest along the lines of the Ideal State read *It Can't Happen Here*. It is a fine novel.

It Can't Happen Here is written by Sinclair Lewis. It is like no other book that Sinclair Lewis has given us, and it is like no other book that any other American has written. Here is no satirical representation of people or movements. No, indeed, it is far more. *It Can't Happen Here* is a prophetic book written in words of flame. It carries a message that should burn itself deep into the hearts and minds of all Americans. It is to contemporary political movements what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to slavery, but unlike *Uncle Tom's Cabin* it is not an inspired tract; it is a conscious and perfect work of art.

In this book the reader is made to realize that the Ideal State is one to which we may all aspire but which we can never reach in life. Everchanging, life is in a state of flux, and no rigid system of government can successfully be imposed on a mutable force. All political isms are exposed, and the author shows, in this book, that more than one hundred and fifty years of democracy are sufficient to prove that a democratic government is the ideal one under which to live. It is only under such a form of government that the spirit and soul of man, no less than the tongue and pen, are free.

It Can't Happen Here is not only a book founded on an idea; it is a book of characters as well. And what characters! What light and shade and striking contrasts—Doremus Jessup and Emil Staubmeyer; Victor Loveland and Shad Ledue; Louis Rotenstern and the Reverend Mr. Falck; Lorinda Pike and Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch; and the Great Buzz—Berzelius Windrip. Not puppets, these, but frighteningly real!

The story is touching and its very intonations, no less than the names of its characters suggest Dickens at his best. *It Can't Happen Here* will be read and loved as long as the great books of Charles Dickens are read and loved.

No matter how you have regarded Sinclair Lewis until now, you will, after reading this book, realize that he is indeed worthy of the Nobel Prize for Literature which was awarded him a few years ago. *It Can't Happen Here* is not only the greatest book that Sinclair Lewis has written; it is one of the greatest American books of any time.

Winterset

Maxwell Anderson has published his *Winterset* in book form. It is the story of the down-and-out New Yorkers who live under and in the shadow of the Brooklyn bridge along the banks of the East river, and who fight so courageously against the social laws. *Winterset* has been running at the Martin Beck theatre in New York City for more than five months and soon is to start on tour.

In reading the play, however, I discovered that it is far better than I imagined it to be in stage production. It is written, you know, in poetical form, and equally as interesting as the play itself, is the introduction which Mr. Anderson has written for this publication. It is naturally in defense of the poetical drama, and most honestly he points to the Greek and Shakespearian stages. He stoutly cries that the American drama will die within a scant few years if no poet arises to lift it from its depths. This I seriously question, for it seems to me that no theme such as that of *Winterset* can be best handled dramatically by means of poetry. Mr. Anderson, you may remember, is also the author of *Valley Forge*, a poetical drama about General Washington's fateful winter with the starving army; it, too, is constructed along the lines of *Winterset* in poetical form. *Valley Forge* last winter lasted only a few months on Broadway, and was not taken on tour.

The House of Hearst

If one is interested in reading a success story I feel sure he will like *William Randolph Hearst, American*. Quite apparent, it is, that Mrs. Fremont Older, the author, has had set for her the brilliant task of biographer extraordinary. Through many, many revealing and exciting and interesting pages, Mrs. Older recites the comings and goings of the head of the House of Hearst. Mr. Hearst's possession fill pages: the ranches, the ancient castles in Wales, that magnificent estate at San Simeon, its million dollar bathing pool, the Straganoff tapestry which once hung in the Vatican, the collection of Greek and Egyptian pottery, the collection of old silver that once belonged to Queen Elizabeth, the objects d'art and also some that are not.

Among those that are, however, we find a few in the following quotation:

"He has the finest collection of Majolica or Hispano-Moresque plates. No one has so much antique furniture nor so many paneled rooms as Hearst, particularly English rooms, Elizabethan, Georgian, Jacobean, Tudoresque, and of the time of James the First. Perhaps the most unusual room ever taken out of England is in his possession. It belonged to Queen Elizabeth."

And so, you have a picture of William Randolph Hearst, American.

Chills

If you want a good new mystery story, spend the evening with *The Corpse in the Crimson Slippers*. For the armchair fan it is a splendid brain-twister, a few chills, a clean-cut story, and very well put together.

Still another good mystery is *The String Glove Mystery* by Harriette R. Campbell. It is one of those every-body guilty stories, very complicated and quite exciting. The mysterious murder at a fox hunt is made to look like an accident.

The Ten Best

Time has recently reported that from a poll of four hundred and fifty-one film critics in the United States the following films were considered the best pictures of 1935 in the order named:

David Copperfield
Lives of a Bengal Lancer
The Informer
Naughty Marietta
Les Miserables
Ruggles of Red Gap
Top Hat
Broadway Melody of 1936
Roberta
Anna Karenina

How many of these films did you see and do you agree with the critics? Would you have placed *David Copperfield* at the head of the list and the Garbo picture at the last? After all, just what did you think of *The Informer*? Four of the pictures, you will notice, are musicals.

... . Lead But to the Grave

The Hillel Players, so I am told, are going to turn the dramatic trick once again. About the middle of March they are going to produce in University Chapel the Sidney Howard dramatization of *Paths of Glory*, that brilliant war novel from the pen of Canadian Humphrey Cobb. The novel was reviewed in this column of *The Engineer* several months ago. Since then I have read the play version which was published just before Christmas by Samuel French.

Interesting indeed are the following paragraphs written by Mr. Howard for the introduction of the book version:

When I originally made plans for "Paths of Glory" I took them to Arthur Hopkins because I knew that he would make a superlative job of realizing them. He and I saw the story eye to eye, not as a record of the physical horror of war but as a demonstration of the ruthless workings out of wartime logic. We saw in it something for which we had both been waiting; namely, an indictment of war so direct as to exclude any possibility of confusion. When we had seen that, we turned our attention to the difficulties ahead. "It may be better for screen than stage," I said, thinking of the crackle of Mr. Cobb's battle descriptions. "The danger," said Mr. Hopkins, "is that the screen will make a spectacle of the story. It deserves better than that."

Now about that question of clumsiness. From the start it was evident that the war color of the first two-thirds of the book would be lacking in its performance on the stage. One may

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describe the smell of carrion in print and blow men to bits in print and explode shells and wade knee-deep in mud—these things are obviously impossible in the theatre. So long as there has been a theatre it has been restricted to the portrayal of human beings to the exclusion of almost everything else. That restriction will hold for as long as the theatre endures. Limitation it may be, but it is not necessarily evidence of clumsiness or even, to my mind, of inadequacy.

* * *

Physical horror possesses a fascination of its own which may well obscure more than it adorns. The stoical dignity of "All's Quiet on the Western Front" was lost on the screen in a wilderness of horrific photography. One must, to be sure, admit that physical horror is effective on the screen and wholly ineffective on the stage. Therein lies the power of the photograph: that we are trained to believe in its veracity. When we see a flesh-and-blood actor die an agonized death we know that he will be on his feet again the moment the curtain has fallen. Our theatregoers have given up their fathers' eagerness to pretend. Perhaps the screen has taken it from them. It is easier to believe than to pretend. Faith is easier than imagination.

When this book reaches the screen—in the unlikely event of the French Government's permitting that progression—we shall see Mr. Cobb's bombs bursting in air. We may even see the rat in the chalk pit devour the dead lieutenant's lower lip, if one can train a living rat to devour a property lip, or invent a mechanical rat to devour a living lip. We shall see all that and we may benefit from it. We have seen all that before and shuddered and thrilled, but we have not before seen what Mr. Cobb's book is really about and what sets it apart from other war books and that is its classically tragic theme.

Of all types of stories that which puts the least strain on its creator is the powerful tale with the unpleasant ending. The barest acquaintance with undergraduate fiction will testify to the truth of this. A story must do much better than end badly to attain the pity and terror exacted of tragedy. One may well

grow impatient with what passes for tragedy these days. A shrewd appraiser of "Mourning Becomes Electra" observed of that play that Freud is no substitute for fate. The might of Mr. Cobb's story seems to me his presentation of insignificant men—he has scarcely troubled to develop character—at the mercy of forces far stronger than themselves; in this instance the necessities of military discipline.

* * *

I have thought often of some three or four thousand Italians I saw during the war in France near Clermont-Ferrand. They had survived the awful retreat on the Piave and the necessities of military discipline had shipped them from their native country to the centre of France to live under guard in pens of barbed wire and work in a vast munitions plant making picric acid. Now, a hideous thing about picric acid is that if you have anything much to do with it, your clothing, your hair, your skin and your eyes turn yellow, the yellow of an orange picked before ripening and permitted to spoil. The French, passing to and fro along the roads, looked in at those wretched, saffron-tinted exiles and cursed and spat at them. For something like two years they had to endure this. I have wondered what they were like when peace set them free. And their only crime lay in the fact that the German command was more talented than the Italian.

* * *

There can be no such thing as humane warfare. Once you have taken the initial step, however patriotic your *casus belli* may be ("God helping us, we can do no other"), you have assigned yourself to a goal of butchery and no principle other than the expedient can govern your actions. You have moved from civilized justice and logic into the realm of military necessity which "Paths of Glory" illustrates. "Armies are run by fear," Langlois says. "They have to be." He might have gone on to add that the same is true of many institutions in time of peace. But that is another novel or another play.

I feel quite sure that if the setting of the production by Hillel is well handled that the play can be made tremendously effective. More of these kinds of plays should be produced on the Ohio State campus.

The Germans, so we are told, named their ships after jokes so that the English couldn't see them.

As long as a man has eight hairs left on his dome, he thinks it is up to him to pity a bald headed man.