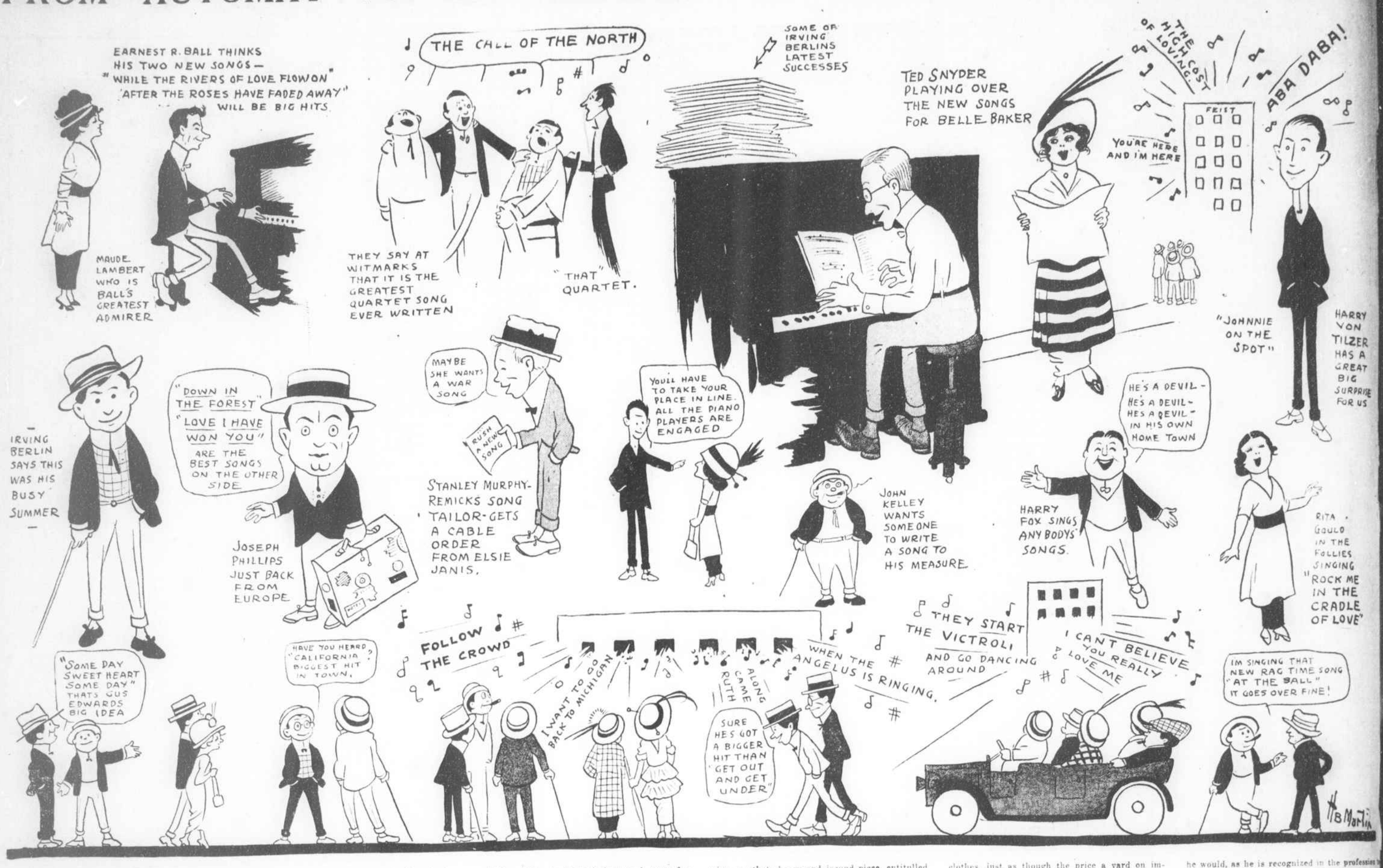
FROM AUTOMAT TO AUTOMOBILE—THE TALE OF SONG-HIT WRITERS



By EARL N. FINDLEY.

IT MIGHT seem that writing war songs in neutral territory would be soothing to every one concerned. So far as has been discovered in a two-day scouting trip through Tin Pan Alley, in its revised location in West 47th st., writing war songs to meet President Wilson's ideas in the matter of sterilization is as exciting as Liege to those actively engaged in the production of popular ditties, and in many respects more harrowing to the innocent bystander.

The song shops are busy twenty-four hours a day manufacturing battle songs for Broadway and camp refrains for the cabarets. These martial pieces must not offend any member of our alien population. To write a war song full of pith and merit that will make everybody cheer requires genius—a quality that Tin Pan Alley is seeped with—each song writer proving the truth of this statement by taking the visitor aside and whispering the name of some other fellow who possesses all the attributes of enduring fame.

Two days in Tin Pan Alley should be followed by a month in Antwerp, or along the French frontier, where the attack is suspended now and then. In 47th st. the struggle for victory never ceases, hundreds of poets, piano pounders and publishers torturing themselves, each other and the sleepless neighborhood while in the throes of composition and automatic stimulation of sales.

THE TENSE EXCITEMENT OF A DAY IN TIN PAN ALLEY.

It is an interesting experience, going through the foundries where the two arts of literature and music are welded together. Being shot at and missed is interesting, they say who have tried it. But in the latter case one hears the "This way out!" command so soon that it's all over before the exhilaration of the experience has more than got started. In Tin Pan Alley the excitement is just as intense, while side-stepping hits calls for a sustained effort at agility on the part of the non-combatant that leaves him as good as dead and far more unstrung.

But the public must be kept advised as to all the events of the war, and I was told to advance upon 47th st. and uncover the secrets of the production of popular war and other songs. Long before I reached the headquarters of the lyricists I heard them at work—heard them above the clanging of streetcars, the tooting of automobiles, the spirited tapping of riveters and the jangling of bells out of tune.

In Tin Pan Alley noise is the work of experts. Men with large families to support make a good living out of noise. The kind and number of gowns their wives wear depend upon the quantitative noise friend husband produces. The publishers are always hungry for a "noo" song. "I wanna noo song," they say. That's the answer. You can't get a "noo" song without noise.

Showing how lucky a scout will sometimes be, the first song writer apprehended in the trenches of the tone poets was Ballard Macdonald, author of the war song that is now being exploited by Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., each copy of which carries with it the publisher's guarantee that the words, by Macdonald, and the music, by Harry Carroll, will help bring about the conditions so ardently requested by President Wilson.

It is so written that no one in any audience can be hired by competitors to hiss the sentiment of the war song. Suppose a man in the audience to have a father who was born in Germany, a mother in France, one grandparent in Belgium, another in Austria and a sweetheart in Russia or England, this song will satisfy all his emotions.

It's a trick—which, by the way, is what all the successful song writers say about the writing of all successful songs. In this case the trick is turned because the singer sings with all his might about the fatherland, the motherland and the land of his best girl.

Macdonald locates the father in Berlin—father in song has always been placed anywhere at all—and the mother in sunny France. The best girl is located by the audience to suit individual taste. Macdonald apparently believes it is better not to mix up too much in geography since he wrote "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine." He told me that in that song he placed the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, and did not know until after he had received $11,000 in royalties at half a cent on 2,200,000 copies that said mountains were in Kentucky.

They are a happy lot—writers of popular songs.

Irving Berlin acknowledged that the most money he had made in any one year—yet—was $100,000. He is young. He is the author of—see theatrical programmes for last five years, and later in this report.

When I first saw Macdonald he was wearing a black and white check suit and a coat of tan such as only royalties could purchase. I was with him two hours, during which time he was in two suits of clothes, with neckwear, shoes and walking sticks to match, three taxicabs and imperturbable good humor.

He would have been an ingrate if he had been anything less than the latter, when all he has to do to make the chauffeurs go is to spend a few minutes a day dictating immortal lyrics, dealing with the ache of separation, to gather in three times the pay of an associate justice of the United States Supreme Court.

He taxied to Pach Brothers, in Fifth av., at 2:30 o'clock, where he posed three times in front of an imaginary fireplace, for the picture of the war of the emotions that will be printed in lurid colors on the outside cover of the war song. Mr. Bernstein in my presence had told Mr. Pach on the telephone that he was sending Macdonald because the proofs submitted showed a man in evening clothes, with cane, silk hat and a broad smile, all of which, said Bernstein, seemed incorrect when it was recalled that the subject of the song was torn feelings and all that sort of thing.

GOT HEART-WRENCHING SONG FROM PATTER OF DRUNKEN MEN.

Macdonald, though one of the biggest money makers in the song writing game, is essentially frank about the tricks of the profession. He says he got the inspiration for "I'd Like to Get the Old Girl Back Again," popular several years ago, from overhearing a conversation between two intoxicated Irishmen in the smoking car of a train coming in from New Brunswick, N. J.

One of the men asked about Maggie. The other said he had done with her, she was no good, she was awful—she was that—and yet, he said, "sometimes, do you know, Mike, I'd like to get the old girl back again."

When asked to pose as he looks when writing a popular song Macdonald called to the office boy to bring him a drink. He says the first three songs he wrote were successes, and he used to go in to see his publisher and talk about himself.

One day the publisher said to him: "Mac, you're a clever boy, aren't you?"

"You bet I am," replied Mac, losing no time at all.

"Well, why don't you give the other fellow a chance to tell you about it once in a while?"

And Macdonald says that suggestion, together with some lean years, has done him good.

He says he has free-lanced and free-lunched in this town, written hits for carfare, and that he likes success much better. All told, I met a dozen song writers who held similar views. They eat at Rector's, although the Automat is closer to their factories, and the way they address chauffeurs indicates that long association with them, in the capacity of employer, has taught the song writer how to be at ease in their society.

At two tables in Rector's last week were five hit writers. Joe Goodwin did the lyrics of "Billy," "My Creony Melody," "Your Daddy Did the Same Thing Fifty Years Ago" and a dozen others. Grant Clarke has reaped his from "Get Out and Get Under," to mention only one. Bert Grant has given us that cheery and jocund piece entitulled "When the Angelus Is Ringing." Berlin and Macdonald answered to rollcall when twoscore songs were mentioned.

Irving Berlin is a modest, quiet, unassuming young man, who dresses in dark, close-fitting clothes, just as though the price a yard on imported fabrics could possibly worry him. It was noticeable that throughout the luncheon Berlin talked of a new play, written by somebody else, and how fine a piece he considered it. He did not mention song writing, whereas it was to be hoped he would, as he is recognized in the profession to be the representative man in America in his particular field.

Later I called on him at his studio in the Strand Theatre Building. Two young chaps were dancing in the hall, one flight up, while waiting for somebody connected with the Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Company to receive them. They rehearsed a peculiar sort of step for some little time, and then I found that by jumping and making a slide for Room 206 it might be possible to get that much nearer the musical centre of our glorious and neutral country. Which I did.

There are fifteen music rooms the rental of which is paid by this firm, and as this is the season when theatrical stars are looking for the melodies with which to charm us all all the music rooms were filled to overflowing with music when I called at 2 p. m.

Some of the music might probably best be employed in the open air. It would require somebody who knows more than the writer about how to listen to music to state positively as to this.

A SCENE OF STRESS AND CLAMOR THAT WAS BEWILDERING.

It might be that with fifteen music rooms disgorging different music simultaneously, with telephones rang in every nook of the executive offices of the company, and fat comedians bumping into thin comedians without waiting to apologize, and golden haired stenographers called Mr. Joe to the front office, and everybody was in a hurry to get in and then immediately seemed possessed with a longing to get out, it might be that one must undergo an apprenticeship before one can hope to extract a song that is really a song poem from something that sounds like a bunch of junk that has been thrown on the pavement from the twentieth story window. This is scarcely fair, perhaps, as in the case of the Strand Theatre Building the furthest that any junk could be thrown is six stories.

With only an untutored ear to guide me it seemed that the aim of the majority of the compositions was light diversion for the multitude. Joe Goodwin told me that I had discovered the secret of the firm's success. Berlin's "He's a Devil in His Own Home Town" had been written, he said, with precisely that end in view. It was the same with "If That's Your Idea of a Wonderful Time," "I want to Go Back to Michigan," "Follow the Crowd" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band," all written by Berlin, and the last named piece having sold, he said, 2,000,000 copies.

In reply to a question whether he would advise the amateur to take up song writing, Berlin said it might be all right if each amateur would hold on to his milk route while breaking into the profession. For three years, he said, he had received an average of fifty songs a week from amateurs and had never found one that he could make use of whatever.

Louis Bernstein says that the business of making a song a success keeps him occupied and, for the greater part, happy. Exploitation of a song in New York costs as much as $10,000, he says. He mentioned such incidents as hiring the chorus of a musical comedy to sing a song in the cabaret after the closing of the regular show. It was one to see that chorus girls come high.

Earl Carroll, twenty-three years old, the writer of the lyrics for "Dreaming," "Isle d'Amour," "Do the Funny Fox Trot," "'Neath the Shadow of the Pyramids" and many more, said a cheerful word to toilers in other professions.

"Don't forget to say," he whispered, "that we are all supposed to get $25,000 a year, but all we really get is $2."

It was a gracious thing to do, and I borrowed carfare from him and went to my apartment in The Bronx.

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"GENIAL, GLITTERING & GORGEOUS"
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Motto: "Hevv to the line, let the chips fall wvhere they may."

The Rich Poor Man.

"I have no gold," the poor man says,
"No factories nor lands;
But these are mine, these muscles stout,
And these sinewy hands."

"Disdain to work? Ah, no, not I,
I prize my hardy frame;
'Tis few rich men have gifts like these,
Nor may their gold lay claim."

"Better than gold and silver bright,
The useful toil I share;
No idle, kingly heritage
In merit can compare."

"My toil brings me inheritance,
Refreshing, restful sleep;
And many kings and rich men long
E'en this fine gift to keep."

MARY C. BURKE.

ART NOTES.

Ken Chamberlain and Morry Becker gave a barn *dansant* at the studio of Geo. Bellows, in the absence of the latter. Among those present were Miss Nessa Cohen, the sculptor about whose name we refuse to make a pun such as *nessa*sary, but who is one of the most beautiful and brilliant girls we have ever met, and the following artists and Bohemians: Mr. & Mrs. Bob Bergman, the Misses Simpson, A. S. Baylinson, Sam Zagat, E. E. Caflinger, Lee Worthen, Erle Prior, and your cor., who wore a clean collar.

The affair was featured by a piano playing contest between Miss Nessa Cohen and your cor., which was stopped by request. Mr. Bellows is out of town, and couldn't prevent the party. A pleasant time was had by all.

James B. Townsend, of the American Art News, is still sojourning in Europe, but your cor. does not know exactly where. Stick around, Jim, there'll be something doing there yet.

We are in receipt, from old Bill Clayton, of the advance covers of the October "Romance" and "Snappy Stories," and we think they are very nifty, even if he has left our name off each, thus causing our friends to say aha, you're losing your grip. LEJEM.

BELMAR BRIEFS

Our genial P. M. Cy Honce is thinking of putting up some mail boxes here and there. Cy always was a pro bono publico.

A. Carnegie's generous gift to our lovely boro is now nearing completion, Jim Moore being busy putting on the stucco.

Syd Sieward the thespian has left these environs to learn his part in Geo. Cohan's new show. We venture that Syd will be good even if the show isn't, though it probably will be.

Lee Whitehead which is a peculiar coincidence because he *is* a blonde Chalmered through here Tues, ultimo, en route to Bay Head. Ah there Lee.

Roger Simms, bro of Polly ditto is now with the Coast Gas Co. in ye corr's. place, the latter reluctantly giving it up for personal reasons. Anyone wanting a good summer job we advise the C. G. C. to. STAS.

NEW ROCHELLE NUBBINS

C. Hank Niehaus, the sculptor, and better ½, who is quite some art critic, are spending the summer at their residences on Quaker Ridge.

SH-SH - wedding bells next week.

Old George Borski says he's selling more newspapers, magazines & like that than ever, war, politics and everything going on.

Eb Adams has run the P. O. more successful than any post-master New Rochelle ever had, we guess. Eb is putting up a new P. O. and besides he & the missus are about ready to move in their new stone house in Sutton Manor.

It makes us tired to see a eminent contractor like Pete Doern rolling around in his fine 2-ring car when he borrowed our wheel-barrow which he didn't bring it back. Pete O 2 realise it's the only conveyance the cor. has got.

Mrs. Chris Krooss has gone to Sheffield, Mass with the children.

O. F. Zollikoffer and wf. are spending the summer at their Cedar Road home in good old New Rochelle.

ESMERALDA

Brooklyn Bits

Ye cor. will not ever again take 2 wks. vacation like we did of late without saying anything to Editor Adams about it. The Editor laid us off 1 wk. last wk., without pay. It made us pretty sore, but what could we do about it?

FAMOUS INTERVIEW No. 2.—"What is the best feature of THE GAZETTE?" asked we of Charley Ebbets, the b.b. magnate, this wk. "Bklyn Bits," Charley replied without hesitation. All we got to say is, if Charley would give us a season pass like he ought to, without hesitation, to see his 9 play, he could say Bklyn Bits was THE GAZETTE'S worst feature, for all we would care.

Ye cor. is contemplating to hire Harry Romer, the w. k. camera fiend, to take photos to illustrate Bklyn Bits. We will do that if THE GAZETTE will guarantee to pay Harry's expenses, which must be something awful, to hear Harry tell about his experiences.

Fred Bradshaw, of Flatbush, was to Bayonne, N. J., on business of importance this wk. Hey, Fred?

Bill Hershey of here is anticipating something. Bill told THE GAZETTE cor. what it was, but darn it, he pledged us to secrecy about it, otherwise we would hope it would be a little boy.

Eddie, the Boston cor., postcarded ye cor. last wk., which was pretty kind of him, thought we, after our being sore because he had a vacation given him when we didn't have any except the I we took & got laid off without pay for.

Ye cor. has got a lot of troubles to contend with these days, but doubtlessly many GAZETTE readers have their own, without our advertising ours, so we do not. More anon. SCISSORS.

LOCAL NEWS

The town is pretty replete with mosquitoes yet.

Well, see how the Bostons did play this week!

Pete Dunne is enjoying dolce far niente somewhere.

Mrs. Sam Blythe came home from Europe where Sam is Mon.

Bob Warwick is quite a tennis player also these mornings.

Grim-mantled war, as the poet says, is the order of the day.

Mrs. F. P. Adams is visiting E. C. Willey of Denver, Col., at this writing.

Sam McCoy of Philada was a pleasant and la grippy caller Wednes. night.

We forgot to say a couple of wks. ago about Irene Franklin Green being the mother of a fine 9-lb girl up at Mt. Vernon.

Reinald Werrenrath entertained Len Liebling at tennis and cards Wednes. eve'g.

Kathleen Norris's new book "Saturday's Child" has some mighty good things in it, is our opinion.

Quite a hot day was Wednes., only not in ye ed's. apartment, which is cool all the yr. round.

W. R. Hearst the w. k. lover of Kipling poetry contemplates spending the autumn days in the metropolis.

Clare Briggs the pop. cartoonist got back from a 1 wk's vacation in Chicago Mon. We missed his pictures considerable during his dereliction.

Mrs. Belle Goodman and ye ed. couldn't best Joe Wise and Charley Riegelman, but Charley and Mrs. G. beat Joe and ye ed. We walloped Charley easy, so this kind of shows up Joe, is our verdict.

Mrs. Geo. Creel, Blanche Bates that was, happened to quite an accident last Sun. that might have been more casualtish. She was riding in the automobile of Mrs. Henderson of Buena Park, Chgo., and a trolley car ran into the auto., injuring same and those in it escaping only by great luck. The accident was somewhere near Rye.