NEWS AND REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Charlie Chaplin; the Man

By Everett Dean Martin

Social Psychologist, Director Cooper Union Forum of the People's Institute, and author of "The Behavior of Crowds."

MY TRIP ABROAD. By Charlie Chaplin. Published by Harper & Bros. $1.

AS I THINK over the Chaplin films I have seen, it strikes me that the essential element in them is not the pie thrown in the face or the clownish antics. I don't believe that these things in themselves would have given Charlie his almost universal appeal. In his autobiographical book, just published, "My Trip Abroad," there is revealed another quality which, on analysis, is the thing that constitutes his appeal on the screen. There's a deep human sympathy coupled with a touch of quaint humor, and this humor is, after all, a psychological compensation for something which lies much deeper.

Now, here is the thing—Charlie Chaplin uniformly appears on the screen as a vagabond adventurer. He's always on the outside looking in, a lonely figure, undignified, ridiculous, in a world dressed up and formal. This world is presented partly as a joke on him, and in the end the situation is reversed and the joke is on the constituted order of things. In every one of us there is this hidden scamp hero with whom Chaplin identifies himself and with whom the world of respectabilities and conventionalities is in conflict. Chaplin expresses for us an imaginary escape from this conflict and he does it by resolving it into a joke.

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THERE are people who are suffering and lonely and defeated who save their self-feeling with just this sort of humor directed at themselves. The profoundest humor in this world always has a touch of the pathos of a man's struggle with his fate. The established order of things forced on us all remains intact. Chaplin doesn't upset the established order of things, but in making himself ridiculous he is able at the same time to preserve that established order and keep alive that in himself and in us which is in conflict with it by making it, also, ridiculous. Humor of that kind is what psychologists call a defence mechanism. It shows that with all our obedience and conformity to established things there is something in us which is in this world but not of it. Chaplin knows this secret and reveals it in his book.

Charlie Chaplin's book is from the psychological angle a remarkable human document, greatly because of this revelation. It explains the appeal of this poor little feeble creature on the outside of the great big world. To the reader unversed in psychology the outstanding features of the book are likely to be the triumphant return of Charlie Chaplin to the land of his birth—his meetings with the great in politics and letters—his sympathy for the unfortunate—his intimate confessions of his likes and dislikes. However, the real revelation lies in Charlie's visits to the haunts of his childhood.

The whole tone of the book is that of a half lonely adventurer visiting the scenes of his early life, reacting with genuine sympathy to every situation. We learn of Chaplin's early experience as a little ragged urchin. On top of that experience has been imposed this magical thing—for his success has been like an Arabian Nights fantasy—and I doubt if he has ever quite realized that it was he who has had it. This little ragged urchin has stayed with Chaplin all his life and is the main reason for his tremendous human appeal.

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FOUR or five years ago some neighbor child came rushing to me, all out of breath. She was all excited, for she was going to the Hippodrome to see "Charlie Chaplin himself."

At that time "Charlie Chaplin himself" didn't mean any more to me than Charlie in the movies. But after reading his book I feel that I do know Charlie Chaplin himself. In another age, where he would have had to appear directly in person before his audiences, the chances are that the personal side of his art would have been more evident to the people, who are rather inclined to look down on the movies, anyhow, and who have regarded Charlie Chaplin merely as a comedian who makes lots of money.

The motion picture as a medium of expression is a syndicate sort of thing. It takes a tremendous amount of personality to overcome these difficulties. The crowds who have been rooting for Chaplin have been psychologically correct. While he has an enormous popularity, he doesn't make an appeal to the crowd mind, but rather a secret resistance to civilization which is in us all, and he does it because at heart he is really the little ragged urchin—the vagabond adventurer.

The Ballyhoo Ballet : : : : : : : By GENE MARKEY

From the Literary Spectacle "Logrolla"

The Lay Critic: New Vance Novel

By Sidney W. Reich

"IF WINTER COMES" still retains its attitude in the etherial upper regions of the "six best sellers." It is also being syndicated country-wide in serial doses in Everyman's bible—the newspapers.

An accounting for the popularity of Hutchinson's novel cannot help but be in the nature of a commentary on the psychological state of the reading public of to-day.

The book exploits no universal and general idea or ideal; it preaches no doctrine and pleads no thesis; whatever philosophy of life the book contains is so negligible that it can be totally ignored.

What, then, is the reason for its popularity? Can it be Hutchinson's complete absorption in the narrative? Certainly, the book is "all story." The very intensity of its telling, the arrangement of its crescendo, imparts to the story a refreshingly melodramatic interest.

Is it this quality, this nervous, restive intensity, that holds its readers spellbound? Are we, after the deluge of post-war textbooks in the form of novels, plays, autobiographies and every other medium of publication—are we satiated with these "problems" of mundane importance? De we turn with relief to "stories" of no didactic importance, but interest-compelling by virtue of their being pure narrative?

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IT IS a significant fact that the writer, although altogether engrossed in "If Winter Comes" at the time he read it, has at this moment (he read it four weeks ago) totally forgotten even the essentials of the story. He retains only a memory of the naively innocent and pleasantly stupid character of Mark Sabre.

This fact might suggest the possibility that the charm of the book lies in its penetrating "characterizations." But, as a matter of fact, with the exception of Mark Sabre, no other character emerges and chisels a niche in our consciousness or memory. They are rather symbols in a melodramatic pattern; the shrewish and misunderstanding wife, the villanous senior partner, the hypocritical junior partner, the pitiable and betrayed girl, the lovely and unattainable beloved, etc.—these have little if any verisimilitude; they do not pulsate with the breath of life. They revolve about the central character; yanked on the scene by the author when they get their cues and yanked off again when they have suited some purpose. To use an unoriginal and devastating epithet, they are "puppets."

It is profanity to use Thomas Hardy's name in an estimate of such a book as "If Winter Comes," but there is something about the character of Mark Sabre that puts me in mind of Hardy. It is one of the peculiarities of the latter's style that circumstances revolve about his characters, shunting them here and there; a sort of grim fatalism, implying the futility of free will in the final analysis.

In the character of Mark Sabre this idea is carried to the point of burlesque exaggeration. Mark Sabre's incredulity, naiveté and blindness are beyond human understanding. He is adult neither in thought nor action—a character whom the author, for purposes of his own, has caused to suffer from a case of arrested development.

Hutchinson has simplified his task of characterization by laying down the hypothesis of a conveniently transparent nature—transparent almost to the vanishing point—to whom a complex idea is impossible. Sabre records only the most simple mental reactions. He seems to suffer from a case of chronic mental constipation, with lucidity here and there superimposed by the objective hand of the writer. These high lights appropriately occur at each denouement in the story.

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THE character of Sabre is underdone; the rest of the characters overdone. Which accounts for the persistent isolation of Sabre in the reader's mind long after the incidents of the story, or the other characters are forgotten. So much for the characterizations, which certainly offer no clew to the book's vogue.

Perhaps all this rant about present day immorality induced by the war (c. f. daily papers) has something to do with it. Can it be that the age-worn situation of Effie's terrible predicament has a sex interest for present day readers? Shades of Comstock's ghost! Well, it is a fact that the betrayed girl and the falsely accused hero have not put in their fictional appearance for many a day. And there are people who will even take their hash rewarmed.

At any event, although the sex situation in "If Winter Comes" is hackneyed and unpalatable, it is a refreshingly simple deviation from the pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific sex studies (i. e., complexes, inhibitions and all that rot) that have lately plagued us in the guise of fiction. Some there are who like their sex stuff straight and simple. To such "If Winter Comes" is a boon; but on this ground, I hope, the search for the reason of the book's popularity falls down.

So we are left only with the initial idea: That melodrama is now having its new lease of life in books as well as in the theater, and "If Winter Comes" is good melodrama, if it is nothing else.

2849 Forest Avenue, Kansas City, Mo.

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Six Best Sellers

The following list, arranged in the order of their popularity from reports of leading booksellers in every section of the country, is reported by "Books of the Month":

FICTION

"If Winter Comes" (Little-Brown), by A. S. M. Hutchinson.

"To the Last Man" (Harper), by Zane Grey.

"The Sheik" (Small-Maynard), by E. M. Hull.

"Head of the House of Coombe" (Stokes), by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

"Cytherea" (Knopf), by Joseph Hergesheimer.

"Brass" (Dutton), by Charles G. Norris.

NON-FICTION

"Outline of History" (Macmillan), by H. G. Wells.

"Mirrors of Washington" (Putnam), anonymous.

"The Story of Mankind" (Liveright), by Hendrik Van Loon.

"Queen Victoria" (Harcourt), by Lytton Strachey.

"The Cruise of the Kawa" (Putnam), by Dr. Traprock.

"Linda Lee, Inc."

COMING as it does on the heels of the Arbuckle case and the Taylor murder mystery, Mr. Vance's new story of movie life in California may seem tame to his public. Even the thrilling denouement in "Linda Lee, Inc.," can scarcely equal those stories which have been so thoroughly aired in the newspapers. However, Mr. Vance has brought to his material his keen insight into the minds of his characters and his usual knack of story telling.

He has spent some time in the moving picture center on our Western coast and he has seen that life from the inside. Those of us who have read the newspapers in the past few months can find nothing particularly shocking in his descriptions of the mode of extravagant living of the overpaid, undercultured shadow folk.

The story appeared originally in McCall's under the title of "The Cost of Cockaigne," Hollywood being that mythical coast. We are sorry to see the change of title.

Lucinda Druce, wealthy society woman of New York, who is exasperated by her husband's frequent philanderings and his increasing inability to mount to his room on steady legs, visits a large moving picture studio. Accompanied by an old school friend, whose husband is interested in the business, they invade the studios and watch some of the scenes which are being done by a popular screen actress. The party is given a try-out before the camera and Lucinda "screens" so well that the producers offer to star her.

Later Lucinda, having reached the end of endurance, leaves New York for Reno. En route she meets Fanny Lontaine, her school friend, whose husband is seeking capital to produce motion pictures. Also a popular screen actor. They persuade Lucinda to go on to Hollywood. Under the skillful management of the Lontaines the Linda Lee Company is formed, with Lucinda Druce, using "Linda Lee" as a pseudonym, as the star and financial backer.

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IT IS at this stage that Mr. Vance gets into his full stride. He pictures the expensive ostentation of the suddenly rich movie folk as seen through the eyes of the fastidious Lucinda Druce. She is drawn into the life especially because of her infatuation for the popular and spoiled star whom she met en route.

We are inclined to believe that the portrayal of the director whom Lontaine secures for Linda is particularly faithful. One can imagine just such a person as the author of the lavishly expensive, insipid pictures current in our theaters.

It is inevitable that the husband, amazingly sober (physically and mentally) and repentant, should arrive to find his erstwhile wife in the arms of the handsome screen idol.

Here we are treated to some descriptions of life in the movie colony which seem familiar after the lurid stories in the newspapers. Be it said to Mr. Vance's credit that he stops on the sane side in his pictures.

Lucinda allows herself to drift through this without really touching it except through her affair with Lynn, which now rapidly draws to a crisis.

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THIS crisis and the denouement of the book follow Bellamy Druce's appearance and his subsequent début as a producer. After having been saved from certain and most unpleasant scandal by the husband whom she has determined to divorce, Lucinda leaves for Reno. The story ends with the husband again in evidence and in a way certain to be satisfactory to movie fans.

Lucinda Druce is the most thoroughly feminine character we have met in fiction for many a day. Even in the glamour of the life which lures greater numbers of her sex than any other she wishes she were back again the mistress of her home in New York. No, we think, "Linda Lee, Inc.," will scarcely appeal to our feminist friends, but the veteran novel reader and movie fan will gather the beautiful Lucinda with all her woes and triumphs to a sympathetic breast—and love her.

C. W. COFFIN.

74 West 101st Street, New York City.

The Happy Life

SUCCESS. By Lord Beaverbrook. Published by Small, Maynard & Co. $1.75.

DESPITE his title, Lord Beaverbrook speaks a language that plain Americans will find it easy to understand. He regards material success as the consequence and the crown of a moral and happy life, and his little book is really a series of lay sermons to young men on pitfalls to be avoided and qualities to be cultivated. The book deserves a place among the inspirational writings of Mr. Orison Swett Marden and similar writers.

"Oh, Susanna"

By Charles Hanson Towne

A CHARMING book of the sea, called "Oh, Susanna" (G. P. Putnam's Sons), has been lying on my desk, as books for review sometimes have a way of doing, unnoticed for several days. I had read Mead Minnegerode's former novels with a sense of their quiet beauty; but, frankly, I had not been quite thrilled enough to pick up his latest effusion with that enthusiasm one should feel in meeting again with a friend.

But when I finally did dip into these enchanting pages I felt that the loss had been mine for a fortnight, for Mr. Minnegerode captured my interest from the first paragraph—indeed, from the very dedicatory page; and before I had gone very far the poetry of his prose got hold of me.

He never has much use or need for a plot. He ambles along, deliriously young, as I like my author to be, catching the whimsicalities of his people, who, at first vague and nebulous, begin to take on substances and glamour and suddenly become thrillingly alive. He does not "describe" in detail; he does not hamper you with a classification of his hero or heroine's physical attributes; rather he chooses always to allow his people mysteriously to emerge, and before you are aware of it they are walking about revealing themselves through stray sentences, taking you by the sleeve back to some dim time—to old New York, in this happy instance—showing you the days of the clippers and the ancient merchantmen, causing you to ache for those beautiful hours of ease and rest when Murray Hill was a series of farms and Fourteenth Street was way up town.

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There are jaunts to China and far, purple havens; to Panama and a delectable El Dorado; there are dinners that were really dinners, with the rarest vintages in that little town which New York was so long ago; and in the twinkling of an eye you are wondering how it has come to be that life now is so complex and disorderly, when it might have remained so simple and full of loveliness.

A love tale runs like a thread through these richly embroidered pages; a tale that brings you back all your vanished youth and dreams—just enough of a story to carry you, without care, to the realms of romance and fancy. All in all, it is a beautiful book.

Mr. Minnegerode does not write with an eye on the high-paying magazines. He seems content to do the work of the essay-novelist; and there are too few like him in our clamouring midst. "Oh, Susanna" has a flavor, an Old World charm; an odor as of spices and sandalwood. It is a cargo of precious stuffs, not the least of which are the rollicking songs of the sea that stud the text. If you like a book that will take you out of your rut, here it is.

Looking Over the Best Sellers

By William Manly

MARRIAGE seems to be holding its own with novelists as a popular theme, if we are to judge by the list of "the ten best sellers," published in the current issue of the Baker & Taylor Company's "Monthly Book Bulletin." We might more properly say "matrimonial misfits," for in the four novels dealing with marriage not a single couple manages to squeeze even one-half of 1 per cent of contentment out of their union.

Once upon a time marriage was the punctuation on the last page of the book, carrying with it the promise of a beautiful (and indefinite) future. Now we have waked up to the fact that the novelists were just fooling us. Marriage is a bad business. Stay out of it if you can.

Don't imagine that being a man of character, good judgment and even disposition will help you. Mark Sabre in "If Winter Comes" had all of Penny Green to choose from, and he selected Mabel, the choicest nag of our generation.

Age brings no security, for Lee Randon in "Cytherea" had almost reached the half-century mark when he had to get him to Cuba with his Savina.

Youth and a six-figure income merely hasten the dissolution, according to "The Beautiful and Damned." And in "Brass" people of various ages make the best of an unbearable situation (being married) by calling a halt by divorce or accepting their condition as a sacrifice to the good of the nation and the race.

But there are defenders! In "The Great Prince Shan," by the veteran E. Phillips Oppenheim, marriage is a jolly good thing and every one wants to get hitched; in fact, a love match comes along just in time to save civilization from a German-Russian cabal.

In "The Sheik" there is very little time for pessimism. Anyway, if you are a young lady and are captured in the midst of the desert (where you have no business to be) by a band of wild Arabs, you can count yourself lucky if you squeeze out of it all by becoming queen of the tribe.

"To the Last Man," by Zane Grey, is the only one on the list in which gunplay and hoofbeats drown out all other problems. The problem is to keep alive.

"Vandemark's Folly," by Herbert Quick, is No. 10. It is a novel of Western migrations, when men were too busy mending broken hubs and smashed wheels to become introspective or psycho-analytic or anything else requiring leisure.

"Simon Called Peter" is the only candidate which is very much a novel of the war, for the war background in "If Winter Comes" is secondary.

No. 4 is "The Head of the House of Coombe," by Frances Hodgson Burnett, published February 10, 1922.

The student of public taste is recommended to study the list. He will find it very catholic, indeed—it includes novels spiritual, erotic, adventurous, historical—it throws together Hutchinson, Oppenheim and Burnett. It shows that we are not going over wholeheartedly to bitter realism; neither are we satisfied by a whole bill of fare of entertainment. A very catholic list.

1. "If Winter Comes." By A. S. M. Hutchinson.
2. "The Sheik." By E. M. Hull.
3. "The Great Prince Shan." By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
4. "The Head of the House of Coombe." By Frances Hodgson Burnett.
5. "The Beautiful and Damned." By F. Scott Fitzgerald.
6. "Cytherea." By Joseph Hergesheimer.
7. "Brass." By Charles G. Norris.
8. "To the Last Man." By Zane Grey.
9. "Simon Called Peter." By Robert Keable.
10. "Vandemark's Folly." By Herbert Quick.

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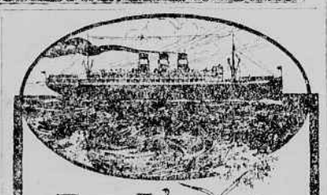

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