

"Is Moby Dick the whale or the man?" and when he questioned a reference to William Blake—"Who he?"—it was an astonished Gee-Whiz Guy who found that one of his staff could tell him the answer, right out of his head.

Two-hundred-and-seventy-four pages of this wondrous eccentricity do not wholly remove the impression that Ross might equally well have edited a successful tabloid. Believing that the only two characters universally known were Sherlock Holmes and Houdini, he refused to countenance learned, literary, or cabalistic references without explanation, and, in matters of taste, the impression is that he never entirely ignored the famed "old lady in Dubuque." In addition he possessed the newsman's nose which tells an editor when *something* is wrong with a story. (He once returned a perfectly smooth piece of Thurber's with the opinion that eight lines had somehow been dropped. He was wrong. It turned out to be seven lines.) Whether editorial qualities essential to a newspaper can properly be applied to higher forms of literature may be open to dispute: the *New Yorker* is there to affirm that they can. Because of Ross, journalism, in many a writer's mind, has ceased to be a naughty word.

A paradox of Ross's nature was his ability to retain finely talented writers in spite of his own literary limitations. Thurber resolves this by observing that both the writers and the magazine had a hand in the matter: that the flame, not the candle, attracts the moths. This is what Ross might have called chicken-or-egg stuff, a begging of questions which occurs more than once and is probably explained by the writer's proximity to his subject—an experience not yet to be recollected in tranquillity. For the rest, readers of Thurber need only be told that *The Years with Ross* are as Thurberish as ever. Others, knowing nothing of Thurber or Ross, should begin to find out right here. Ross himself might aptly be left where Thurber met him, "standing behind his desk, scowling at a manuscript lying on it, as if it were about to lash out at him."

A MAN WITH A GUN

A GUN IN MY HAND, by Gordon Slatter; Pegasus Press, 15/-.

THIS story of a young man who returned to Christchurch for a war reunion, and to shoot someone, may be our most original novel. It is an impressive study of a neurosis and its origins, set in detailed descriptions of Christchurch life, from domestic homes to breezy gutsy lingo of pub bar and "diggers" gossip. The narrator, Ron Sefton, loaded Luger pistol in pocket, arrives by ferry and notes the familiar scenes. Then, and in his observations and encounters in the city through the one day, he breaks off repeatedly and sometimes with disconcerting suddenness, to recall in a series of flashbacks war experiences in Italy and pages in his aimless wanderings as a labourer. A re-hab. bursary at Canterbury College had led nowhere. These

(continued on next page)

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