

BOOK RECORD

Lowell Thomas Manipulates Spotlight On The Stage

For some years Lowell Thomas, author, journalist, radio broadcaster and news-reel commentator, has been singularly fortunate in his association with interesting people who, having good stories to tell, preferred, for reasons best known to themselves, to tell them through a second person.

Like too many journalists, the same Thomas has shown in the past that he was not averse to sacrificing facts rather than spoil a "good story"; his exposed embellishments of his Count von Luckner and Lawrence of Arabia narratives gave us good cause for doubting Thomas. . . .

IN his latest role as a literary entrepreneur, Lowell Thomas has struck some exceedingly interesting material and must be congratulated on retailing it in a most readable and attractive form.

Paradoxically enough, in this instance he introduces a man who has spent a lifetime presenting other people to the public; and who, perhaps, finds it both novel and profitable to have someone "present" him for a change.

He is Percy Burton, a celebrated English theatrical manager who, in his time, was connected with some of the greatest personalities in the history of the stage. Thomas tells the impresario's stories of his "intimate associations" and experiences (in England and America), under the somewhat florid title, "Adventures Among Immortals."

All those interested in theatrical history and anecdote—and they are legion—will enjoy this book and find it a valuable source of reference.

It is, of course, slightly disconcerting when one, in reading one man's story "as told to" another, finds oneself constantly speculating as to which is the principal "speaking" and which the "middle-man."

The frequency of certain clichés, for instance, provokes my suspicious mind. And when, at the end of a long and exceedingly interesting section devoted to the great Sir Henry Irving, whom Burton man-

aged and admired devotedly, both as master and friend, for some years, and who was with him when he died, I find Burton capable of expressing his emotions in nothing better than this journalese:

"But more particularly will Sir Henry Irving's name be always enshrined in the hearts of those who were associated with him. To see and hear him was an education—nay, more, an inspiration! His appreciation was an inestimable reward." . . . Then, I say, my guess goes to the journalist!

IT is a broad stage bright with many arresting characters that Percy Burton presents, and upon which Lowell Thomas manipulates the spotlight with style and efficiency.

As a youth, Burton started with James A. Bailey, then sole proprietor of the Greatest Show on Earth. Later, he was to manage artists like Wilson Barrett (author and star of that old favourite, "The Sign of the Cross"), Sir Henry Irving, about whom he relates a shoal of reminiscences and anecdotes, some old, some new, Sir John Hare, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Eleanor Duse, Sarah Bernhardt, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Sir John Martin-Harvey, and, in more recent years, the popular film and stage star, Leslie Howard—"I have been personally criticised for including him 'Among the Immortals'; still, time will show!"

BURTON was also closely associated with (among others) Lawrence of Arabia and George Bernard Shaw. He tells several delightful stories about Shavian wit, Shavian spleen, Shavian genius, and the proverbial Shavian postcards.

I relish the story which, while not directly involving Shaw, follows a vogue set by him. A manager was interviewing an actor who applied for a part in a play.

"You appear to be the type," said the manager. "But—have you a step-mother?" "Oh, yes," replied the actor cheerfully, "My step-mother is living in Streatham." "Sorry," retorted the manager, "but the actor for this part must have had a step-mother who was drowned at sea."

I must not keep to myself, however, the yarn concerning one of innumerable weird letters Tree received during his heyday. A man wrote saying that "circumstances over which he had no control had recently rendered him subject to epileptic fits," so he would be glad to accept a part in Tree's next production.

He added: "To prove to you that I am not lacking in dramatic instinct, I enclose a newspaper cutting, which please return." Underlined in red ink on the cutting were the words:

"The prisoner, who denied the assault, conducted his own case and defended himself in a somewhat dramatic manner."

—A.R.M.

["Adventures Among Immortals." Percy Burton, as told to Lowell Thomas. 16 illustrations. Hutchinson. Our copy from the publishers.]

Quackery In Small Country Village

ALTHOUGH "Quack's Paradise" may not cause the world-wide sensation created by "The Citadel," it should prove a best-seller. It exposes the "racket" carried on by "specialists" who receive their diplomas—by a mail-order course—from little-known American "universities."

The story carries conviction and many people may be saved from needless expense and disappointment if they read and digest it! It condemns a system—a pernicious system—which, unfortunately, is not altogether unknown in New Zealand.

It opens with the experiences of two medical students who are facing up to their final examinations—one a keen, conscientious student; the other, a happy-go-lucky take-what-comes young Irishman.

Fate decides that the happy-go-lucky one should fail; he embarks on a career of quackery, and, with the assistance of a country editor, who skilfully prepares "health" articles and then shows how the amazing discovery of the local "professor" will solve all the difficulties, sets about amassing a fortune.

In love with his wife—but infatuated with a follower of the sun-bathing cult—he is faced with a problem; his wife needs specialist treatment and he has to take her to the registered doctor in the village, the former student of his college days.

Sidney Fairway pens a graphic story of the wiles of the "quacks." It is a story well-worth reading.—W.F.I.

"Quack's Paradise." Sidney Fairway. Stanley Paul and Co., Ltd., London. Our copy from the publishers.



AMONG THE IMMORTALS.—Stage and film star Leslie Howard is given deathless ranking in "Adventures Among Immortals," reviewed on the "Record's" book page today.

When Bombers Came Winging Over England

Grim Warnings From Two Novelists

WITH the world still trembling from the after-effects of Democracy's Black Munich, it is perhaps natural that the times should be reflected in the literature of the day.

I have just received two books from London dealing with a probable, and not-too-distant, international eruption.

Bodies, according to surgeons, are often improved by cutting. Similarly with books, as many editors will agree. "Chaos" is a case in point. A blue pencil would have been good for it. There are too many unnecessary inclusions, too many loose ends, imparting an unevenness in continuity.

This is without doubt an ungracious attitude for a reviewer who was grimly fascinated by Shaw Desmond's 474 pages of "Chaos."

Desmond goes to considerable trouble to establish his characters, only to dwarf them with the immenseness of his canvas until they become an annoying intrusion.

He depicts a gigantic torchlight procession in the Unter der Linden. His Excellency the German Chancellor, flanked by the Ministers of War and Propaganda, is marching at the head of a grey host of jack-booted Heil-men.

A rifle-shot cracks out. Der Reich-Fuehrer falls dead—shot through the eye.

That is the overture to an officially undeclared war. Chaos versus Civilisation, with everybody on the side of Chaos no matter what side they took. An international dog-fight, in which no one quite knows why they're fighting, or for and against whom.

Against this demoniac backdrop Desmond places his characters, dear stolid English amateurs, safe in their belief that, after all, God is an Englishman and that no nation would disobey their rules.

The first air raid on London, soon to be followed with relentless monotony, by many more, shakes this belief.

World-wide civil war and revolution is the death rattle of civilisation and Desmond leaves us with the consoling thought that civilisation makes a beautiful corpse.

Despite the brutal realism of this book, one has the feeling that it is all a macabre nightmare and that soon one shall wake up and find it so.

In Like Mood

RELATED in mood to "Chaos," John Connell's book, "To-morrow We Shall Be Free," attacks the subject of the coming mass annihilation in a more sympathetic manner.

His language is easy, crisp and vivid; his descriptions sensitive and his construction smooth. His characters are the ordinary, everyday people that you and I know.

The great show human flashes of meanness—the mean reveal unexpected moments of greatness; and yet you will probably be shocked.

The scene opens in peaceful, rural England on a week-end of tremendous moment—Europe has reached a crisis and war is imminent.

At the Big House, the guests are assembling for one of Lady Ruydens' famous house parties.

Against the impending doom of war we see the guests up at the Big House and the entire community carrying on the "Business as usual" tradition.

On Sunday—morning church, the conventional lunch and in the peace of the evening the bombers come.

No words of mine can describe the compelling sincerity of this book—the polished style and the forceful message.

And the finale: As he spoke, there sounded far away, the first thin hum of engines, steadily and slowly insistent as drums beating. Then the searchlights came, the long, beams flashing and whirling, so bright that they seemed, in the eyes of those who watched, to dim the remote glory of the stars.

Is this our heritage?
Is this to be our destiny?

—JUSTIN POWER, Junr.

["Chaos." Shaw Desmond. Hutchinson, London. Our copy from the publishers.]

["To-morrow We Shall Be Free." John Connell. Cassell, London. Our copy from the publishers.]

Sensitive Youth Can Suffer In A Callous World

Delicate Handling Of An Old Story

A NEW novel worth attention is "The Death of the Heart," by Elizabeth Bowen. The theme is not new; sensitive youth is once more painfully made aware of a callous adult world; but in its thoughtful characterisation and smooth writing this is a noteworthy piece of work.

Miss Bowen's 16-year-old heroine is transplanted from a rather shady and shoddy background of cheap continental hotels and out-of-season watering places, where her sole companion has been a doting but dithering little widowed mother, to the soulless elegance of her sister-in-law's London house.

Nobody in the world wanted Portia Quayne. Anna, the sister-in-law, found a reproach to her own shallow, disappointed life; Thomas, the brother, was embarrassed by a half-sister so much younger than himself, afraid, too, that she might secretly be pitying him his lonely existence amid all the shiny perfection.

There was a pitiful love-affair with a neurotic young man, beautifully handled by Miss Bowen; a visit to the sea-

side to contact with some hearty young vulgarians who misinterpreted her every child-like remark; a clever cameo of an iron-bosomed elderly housemaid who bestowed a grudging affection on Portia, as long as the child cared only for her; an honest, decent Major Bouitt, who sent her jigsaw puzzles, thought her a "jolly little kid," and was ridiculed by the Quaynes as a woolly sentimentalist.

It was to this solid person that Portia turned when her gallery of friends and relations set her little world upside down with their insincerities; and with dogged commonsense, the Major sent her back home. Youth exploited and let down once again!

Miss Bowen's characters are clear-cut and convincing, her Portia being a masterly piece of sympathetic writing.

"The Death of the Heart" is the worthy choice of the Book Society for October.—A.R.M.

["The Death of the Heart." Elizabeth Bowen. Victor Gollancz, London. Our copy from the publishers.]