

# Books for Bonds

## *Authors Are Outdoing Movie Stars in the Bond Drive*

MARK VAN DOREN

ON February 24 of this year the manuscripts of three American authors were sold at auction in Allentown, Pennsylvania, for \$800,000. The people who bought them, citizens of the town, got war bonds for their money, but the transaction was in the name of books and authors; and the occasion had meaning both for the war and for the prestige of literature in the United States.

Allentown was an experiment, a trial rally conducted by the Books-for-Bonds Committee which Julian Street, Jr., of the War Savings Staff in New York, had inspired to organize itself. The question had been whether the writers of the country could demonstrate their solidarity in wartime—and specifically whether their presence in American cities could promote the sale of as many war bonds as the presence of movie stars, for instance, had promoted. The three authors who went to Allentown—Pearl Buck, Mildred Jordan, and Robert Lawson—ended up by steering twice as much Allentown money into the Treasury as James Cagney and other notables of Hollywood had done a few months before. This surprised everybody. But subsequent experiments have yielded even more surprising results.

At New Britain, Connecticut, towards the end of May, three other authors—Edna Ferber, Otto Tolischus, and the writer of this article—sat in a high school auditorium and heard their manuscripts knocked down by a local auctioneer for something over a million dollars. At New Bedford, Massachusetts, a few evenings later, Ilka Chase, Carlos P. Romulo, and Cecil Roberts brought in two million dollars; at Springfield, Massachusetts, on June 1, Amea Willoughby, Ben Ames Williams, and again the writer of this article (but he will not appear a third time) collected \$1,300,000; and on June 8, at Reading, Pennsylvania, Agnes Sligh Turnbull, Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Kurtz, and Carl Van Doren saw their offerings go for \$1,009,269.

These were exciting times, and the procedure has now become typical enough to be described in terms of an outline which will henceforth be followed in many American cities including San Francisco, Chicago, and New York; for the experimental stage is over; the authors of America are in

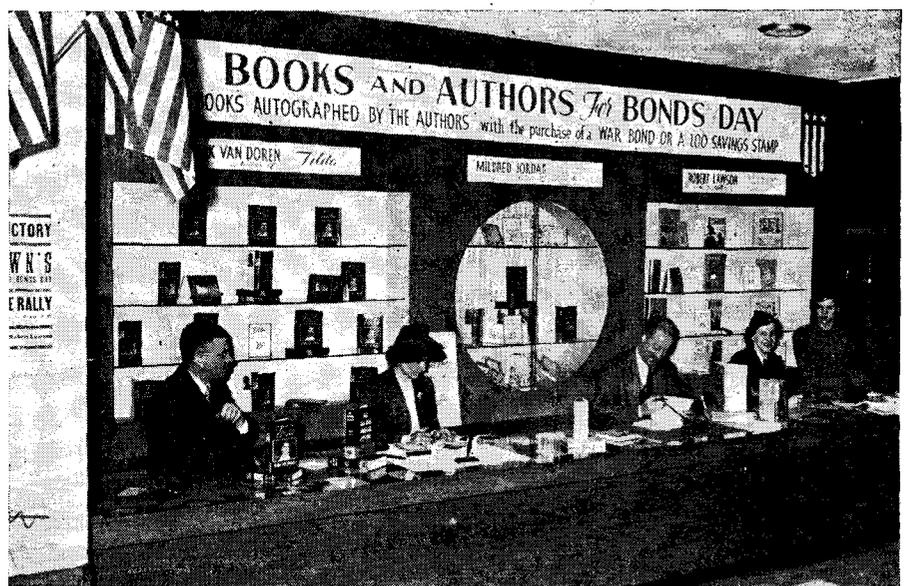
the war bond business until peace returns them to their desks. On the day which has been set, and incidentally prepared for on the ground by Martha Huddleston, representing the committee, and by a local host of librarians, club executives, business men, and War Savings experts, three authors appear in a city and go to work. It is strenuous work, but so far every author has liked it. He has been picked either by the committee, at the request of those in town who have their favorites, or by the Writer's War Board, that indispensable clearing-house.

At any rate, here they come, their expenses paid by their publishers—who as a body are underwriting the entire enterprise, since the United States Treasury does not pay to have its bonds sold by authors any more than it pays to have them sold by actors or baseball players—here they come, early in the day, and begin a round of the high schools, where they speak a minute or two apiece and listen to the students sing. During the afternoon there are other jobs: appearances at bookstores for autographs, unrehearsed broadcasts over one or more local stations to inform the citizens of the evening rally, a reception before dinner at the hotel or the country club, and indeed anything else that has been arranged. Then dinner, and at eight the big

event, the rally itself. This usually takes place in the largest high school auditorium available, and it lasts two hours or more. The audience, which is always large, has paid to get in by the purchase of war bonds—the bigger the bond the better the seat, and I might remark here that the figures given above were gross figures, incorporating the proceeds from these admissions.

The platform is decorated with the persons not only of the authors but of a dozen or so other indispensables of the occasion: the chief librarian of the city, the auctioneer, the mayor if he is available, representatives of the Treasury, soldiers, sailors, or marines who happen to be home on furlough and who are not afraid to be stared at by their neighbors, and of course the master of ceremonies. There is also an individual, sent by the Treasury, accomplished in conducting song—for the audience will participate in this way—and from time to time still others appear from the floor, as for example Legionnaires who march up to post the colors.

THE master of ceremonies is usually of local origin, but at Springfield he was professional. He was Clifton Fadiman, and it goes without saying that he was effective, both on the high school stage and in the broadcasts during the afternoon. But the local emcee has in every case been a discovery too; and my conviction, based on attendance at three of the rallies, is that every city has at least one genius for the job. At Allentown this was Judge Henninger, a wit if I ever saw one; at New Britain it was Dr. Frederick Ferry, once president of Hamilton College, and I have never listened to more graceful or perfect introduc-



Mark Van Doren, Mildred Jordan, and Robert Lawson autographing books for purchasers in the book department of Hess Bros., Allentown, Pa.

tions than those he had so scrupulously prepared; at Springfield, where to be sure Clifton Fadiman ruled with a firm hand, William Taylor, president of one of the banks, filled the parallel position of auctioneer with such high spirits as to give the impression that he had once been a partner in "Information, Please," or some day might be one. He was, in fact, a classmate of Mr. Fadiman at Columbia.

One very interesting feature of every rally I have attended has been its gaiety. The occasion is certainly serious, and nobody has obscured the fact; nor have the speeches of the authors been anything but brilliantly serious, at any rate after a light start. But the atmosphere of no meeting has been so solemn in the wrong sense. Wit has not been absent; high spirits have been the expression of courage and strength. This in itself is something that authors are immediately understood by the audiences as "meaning." They do not have to pull long faces in order to show that for them the war is a momentous thing. Their characteristic activity is mental, their medium is the imagination; and so they aerate their theme.

Edna Ferber was the life of the party at New Britain, and this notwithstanding a passionate address which no member of the audience will forget. During the afternoon she had not only been witty but she had stimulated wit in others. So at the rally, where Mayor Quigley, himself a figure of the greatest charm, amazed and amused everybody by concluding his speech of welcome to the authors with the presentation to Miss Ferber, in the name of the citizens of New Britain, of a large paper bag containing a peck of potatoes. It seems that at dinner Miss Ferber had retailed the scandalous story of having recently been asked by a merchant twenty-five cents for a single potato. Mayor Quigley sent out for a peck of the precious article, and here he was turning to her and dumping the cargo in her lap. The rest of the evening she spent in pretending that the potatoes slowly disappeared. The bag, she whispered, was not as full as it had been; the Mayor, she thought, was sneaking them back. There was more background to all this than any outsider knew. Potatoes are important in the past of Mayor Quigley, and no campaign—he has been elected seven times—goes by without their being brought up for or against him. But that is local history, not pertinent here.

The wit of the authors is said to be the thing that makes their ideas remembered. A citizen of I have forgotten what town remarked as much

when he was comparing books-for-bonds rallies with similar ones conducted by movie stars. The movie stars—Hedy Lamar, for instance—create a delightful disturbance in the factories they visit, and of course they sell bonds, and far be it from an author to deny their potency; but this citizen's point was that the authors, never of course so beautiful or so slim, nevertheless always said something that could be remembered, quoted, and used in further thought or conversation. It is wit that accomplishes this—the play of the mind. If an author has no mind he has nothing; and the discovery of this seems to be edifying.

So does the discovery that they have kept the manuscripts of their books—and, what is more impressive, that they are willing to give them up now. These documents, sent in advance and exhibited in a bookstore or the public library, are always of manifest interest to the people of the town; and their purchase, by the way, is in no case for individual benefit. They are presented after the auction—the climax of the rally—to the librarian who sits on the stage, and who accepts them for the town. They are often the most precious possessions of the authors on display. Robert Lawson, illustrator of "Ferdinand," sent to Allentown a number of his designs, as well as the complete manuscript, text, and pictures of a recent children's book. Pearl Buck gave over the original draft of her address at Allentown, and Mildred Jordan let go

the manuscript of an unpublished novel. At New Britain, Otto Tolischus was represented by the typescript of his "Tokyo Record," and Edna Ferber contributed not only the manuscript of "American Beauty" but a heap of notes she had made for it—so wrong in some of their mathematical calculations, for example of the characters' ages, that the auctioneer had public fun with her about this. At New Bedford, Carlos Romulo permitted to be sold the script of one of his broadcasts from the tunnels of Bataan, with a letter about it from General MacArthur. Clifton Fadiman, who had no manuscript, insisting he was not an author, had his fountain pen snatched by William Taylor and sold at Chinese auction—every bid a sale—for something over \$7,000. At Reading Agnes Sligh Turnbull gave a chapter of a novel, Carl Van Doren the manuscript of his "Swift," and Lieutenant-Colonel Kurtz his annotated corrections of W. L. White's manuscript of "Queens Die Proudly."

The total sum so far realized in war bonds, six millions plus, may seem slight compared with the "sale" the other day of one baseball player, Dixie Walker of the Dodgers, for \$11,250,000. That is good too, and all the baseball players who brought \$128,850,000 at a luncheon in New York are worth that staggering sum. But the interesting thing is that authors too have turned out to be valuable; that they can demonstrate their practical relations to total war; and that they are delightfully willing to do so.

## Your Literary I. Q

By Howard Collins

### A PATCHWORK POEM

The following effusion, technically known as a canto, consists of 20 lines from well-known poems. Can you name the author and the poem from which each line was taken? Allowing 5 points for each correct answer, 60 is par, 70 is very good, 80 or better is excellent. The answers are on page 11.

I wandered lonely as a cloud .....	1
Where danced the moon on Monan's rill; .....	2
It was many and many a year ago; .....	3
The night birds all that hour were still. ....	4
When first she gleamed upon my sight .....	5
(A perfect woman, nobly planned!) .....	6
Her hair was long, her foot was light; .....	7
She had three lilies in her hand, .....	8
A nest of robins in her hair, .....	9
A general flavor of mild decay; .....	10
She was as good as she was fair— .....	11
She was more fair than words can say. ....	12
That brave vibration each way free .....	13
Seemed to have known a better day .....	14
When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd. ....	15
(O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!) .....	16
'Tis better to have loved and lost, .....	17
But this alone I know full well: .....	18
She's all my fancy painted her, .....	19
A sight to dream of, not to tell! .....	20