

The Bard of Radio Row

MORE BY CORWIN, 16 *Radio Dramas*.
By Norman Corwin. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1944. 412 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HARRIET VAN HORNE

IF one agrees with the English critic, Herbert Read, that the dividing line between prose and poetry is found not in the form employed but in the quality of the experience conveyed, then Norman Corwin, radio's master craftsman, is a poet of commendable stature even when he abandons the verse form.

Primarily, young Mr. Corwin writes for the ear. His verse is precise, measured, often witty. His prose is polyphonic in the finest sense of the term, with *les mos justes* falling into place as naturally as the notes in a familiar symphony. And the experiences conveyed are lofty, intense, and wonderfully various. In his new collection, these range from white-hot indignation over fascist methods, to the sheerest, gossamer-spun whimsy.

In the latter category falls "Mary and the Fairy," a play about a good girl who took to heart everything she read in the ads and heard on the radio. All her waking hours went into brooding over "what four out of five have, and coffee nerves, and pink toothbrush, and telltale signs, and she was afraid of offending, and of what might happen if she didn't insist on the name."

So gullible was Mary that she bought twenty-five loaves of bread, composed a fifty-word letter on one of the wrappers, and won the Crinkly-Crunkly Good Fairy contest, granting her five wishes. The Good Fairy from the baking company called on Mary in person, carrying her wand in a smart zipper case, and a sheaf of papers (quit-claims and such) to be signed in proper order. Practical pixies, Mr. Corwin's fairies.

One of gentle Mary's wishes was to "speak better," so the Good Fairy arranged for her to babble in verse—and hilarious nonsense it is, too—for a good portion of the play.

How wondrous are the possibilities of radio as a medium for popular education may be seen in the play most critics consider Corwin's masterpiece. "We Hold These Truths," he calls it. And in it you will find the strength and simplicity, the poetry and passionate faith to an ideal that too few of our scientific historians seem to grasp.

Corwin does not deal in handsome historical generalities. He tells the story of the Bill of Rights and how it has grown through the years. Tells

it by the comparative method, as when adding up the years the document has endured: "One hundred and fifty years is a weekend to a redwood tree, but to a man it's two full lifetimes. One hundred and fifty years is a twinkle to a star, but to a man it's enough to teach six generations what the meaning is of liberty, how to use it, when to fight for it."

That Mr. Corwin has many strings to his bow is seen in "Cromer," the story of an English seacoast town and how it met the blitz. In "A Man with a Platform," he offers an opera bouffe about a chap who thinks "things should be done about things." He starts with the crib, where too many infants are lulled into ennui by the baby-talk of their elders. As a substitute for this bosh, "Man with a Platform" composes a lullaby, which murmurs softly, "Now, little Junior, don't you cry. You'll be a monster by and by." In "The Master Plan," Corwin lashes out against the complete moral bankruptcy of the Nazis. In "A Moment of the Nation's Time" and "To the Young," he writes a poetic equation for the things we are fighting for.



Norman Corwin

Upon closing this book, one wishes for the courage to ignore radio completely, except on Tuesday nights at 10 when Columbia Presents Corwin. By comparison, the rest of radio is a crickets' chirp beside a lute. If there is any hope at all of radio one day ascending to its proper place in our culture, it is Mr. Corwin, who writes with a wise and mature pen for a medium as yet barely out of the larva stage, who will light the way.

Your Literary I. Q.

By Howard Collins

TWICE-MARRIED MEN

This week's quiz is the suggestion of Cpl. Samuel Sheplow, of the Army Air Corps. Briefly described below are ten heroes of fiction who were married twice. How many of them can you identify? Allowing 5 points for each one you remember, and another 5 for the story and author, a score of 60 is par, 70 is very good, and 80 or better is excellent. Answers are on page 33.

1. After his first wife divorced him, he married the girl he had first encountered behind a perfume counter at Saks'.
2. This doctor's first wife was a student nurse, his second a wealthy society-woman who married him because of his growing fame.
3. As a young law clerk, he married the boss's daughter; in later years he married a childhood friend, also a lawyer's daughter.
4. After an unfortunate alliance with a dissolute dipsomaniac, he found happiness by marrying his ward's governess.
5. His first marriage was with an English widow whom he had known as a child; his second was with a Spanish widow whom he had courted as a young man.
6. After his first wife eloped with an unprincipled adventurer and was later reported dead, this wealthy landowner married the daughter of the neighborhood justice.
7. Tricked into a marriage with a barmaid in a nearby town, this eldest son of the village squire was relieved when her sudden death enabled him to marry the daughter of a neighboring farmer.
8. This stuffy business man was surprised when his first wife left him to make her own living as a typist, but he soon married another, more amenable woman.
9. Following his first wife's death, he married a young woman with a checkered past, in the futile hope that his name would give her a secure social standing.
10. When his first wife fell in love with the architect who was building their house and left him, this man of property got a divorce twelve years later in order to marry a young French girl.

AMERICA'S "SECURITY SITUATION"

(Continued from page 10)

the last war. Spykman's suggestions seem to me outright dangerous because the power combinations and means he advocates in his grand strategy may pave the way for what could spell doom to this country, a coalition of the U. S. S. R. and China against the Anglo-American Powers. Germany and Japan might then, for a change, decide to join the winning side!

One cannot do full justice to this book in a brief review. Spykman's geographic surgery is skilful and brilliant, but we doubt whether, under his knife, the patient mankind would survive the operation. His balance of power concept seems to me basically wrong. Wrong is also the over-generalization in his "rimland" thesis because it neglects entirely the rise to power of continental inland regions in the present phase of the industrial revolution. That Spykman's use of a modified Mercator projection (Miller's) is partly responsible for the exaggerations in his claims, can be but mentioned here.

Take, for instance, Spykman's recommendation that we should acquire additional bases in the Pacific to control the destinies of China. He does not pay attention to the growing importance of the immense land frontier between China and the U. S. S. R. The age in which China was penetrated from its coastal ports toward the center is now coming to an end. A new age is dawning in Asia in which the decisive activity will generate in the center and radiate toward the fringes on the Pacific coastline. No balance of power combination can stop this trend which

will bring to a halt the drive of Western colonial imperialism in Asia.'

Any discussion on geopolitics is apt to be controversial. The untimely death of one of the earliest and most gifted converts to geopolitics in this country has deprived us of the chance to see him defend his building against the attacks which he no doubt expected. But since his field was nothing less than the future of mankind, his death does not permit us to accept his message in silence. Nicholas Spykman was a fighter and those of us who are convinced that he was fighting for the wrong cause must stand up against his challenge. I have found nothing in "The Geography of the Peace" which does refute the kind of political ethics which permeates his main work. In spite of its proud realism, it is an ethics of disillusion and despair.

"The statesman," wrote Spykman in 1942, "who conducts foreign policy can concern himself with values of justice, fairness, and tolerance only to the extent that they contribute to or do not interfere with the power objective. They can be used instrumentally as moral justification for the power quest, but they must be discarded the moment their application brings weakness. The search for power is not made for the achievement of moral values; moral values are used to facilitate the attainment of power." This is the voice of destruction and nihilism.

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