

way: Bill had stopped with food for an old lady when Dave McCandles and his gang of border ruffians rode down the road dragging a dead preacher on the end of a rope. They saw Bill's horse, and, realizing they finally had him cornered, charged the house. But Bill hung tough. He got McCandles with a rifle, six more of the gang with his pistol, and the three who remained with a bowie knife. Anyhow, that's how it used to be, before the publication of a book named "Wild Bill Hickok," by Richard O'Connor.

According to O'Connor, at that time Bill, aged twenty-four, was a general roustabout in a stage station, a stock tender. He was in fact a hulking farm boy with a long protruding lip, which had won him the name "Duck Bill."

"Come out and fight fair," cried the O'Connor McCandles, all alone—his three companions, one a twelve-year-old boy, down at the barn. But Bill didn't come out. Cowering behind a curtain, Bill bushwhacked him. Two McCandles men, running up from the barn, maybe even unarmed, were wounded by the panicky Bill. Only one left was the boy. Didn't shoot him. Too busy watching his friends pursue the wounded men, one of whom was finished off by a shotgun, the other hacked to death with a hoe.

And that, fellow citizens, is what has happened to our Wild Bill. It looked in chapter one as if O'Connor was another Jack McCall, the fellow who shot poor Bill in the back while he held aces and eights, the "dead man's hand," at Nuttal & Mann's No. 10 Saloon, Deadwood, in the Dreary Black Hills. But wait! All is not lost. For after chapter one, and an "Introduction to a Gunfighter," and after the passage of several more chapters, things get interesting.

Bill (Wild Bill, not Duck Bill; he has grown a moustache) turns up as sheriff at Hays City, Kansas, and as, with frightening authenticity, O'Connor recounts each killing it became Bill's duty, and perhaps pleasure, to perform, the reader keeps score with a sort of grisly fascination. Then things get even better. Bill becomes marshal of Abilene, and now there is not only a new Bill, there is a new Richard O'Connor. For, after long maundering through the wastelands of amorphous rhetoric, the author commences to write in a tight, spring-vibrant style that fills the reader with joy. The wild towns come alive in a bonanza of barbaric color and incident. All the gunfighters, gamblers, cowboys and fancy women are there, just the way they ought to be, and in the midst of all is our Wild Bill, the one we know and love. We don't believe O'Connor put any stock in Duck Bill nohow.

PADLOCKS AND STRAITJACKETS: Erich Weiss (1874-1926) was undoubtedly one of the world's great showmen. According to William Lindsay Gresham's account in "Houdini: The Man Who Walked Through Walls" (Holt, \$4.50), he called himself Houdini after his early idol, the French magician, Jean Eugène Robert Houdin. Somebody had told him that the added "i" would make his name mean "like Houdin."

Houdini knew all the magic, but he lacked the grace and charm and finesse that made Thurston's shows an esthetic delight which still live gratefully in the memory of all who witnessed them. Houdini's was the blockbuster type of personality. So he became primarily a stunt man. He found his way out of padlocks and straitjackets, and if he could be buried alive or submerged in water or hung by his feet from the cornice of a building while he was doing it, that was all to the good.

Houdini himself admitted, even proclaimed, that he used only "natural" means. He always had to control the conditions of the test. Once, when some fellow-magicians mischievously locked him into a pay toilet, he could only sputter in helpless rage; he couldn't get out!

Yet, for all his ability, he had a heart-breaking time getting started. He began as "Eric the Great" in the cheapest beer halls. If, as he claimed, he really worked on the Midway during the World's Columbian Exposition he created no sensation. He made Tony Pastor's in 1895 and San Francisco's Orpheum in 1899 but even these bookings did not turn the tide. It turned in 1900 at the Alhambra in London, which was promptly followed by his sensational conquest of Germany.

Houdini was one of the most moral of men, a sincere and high-minded exponent of clean living. He was kind and appallingly generous. His greatest fault was that he believed his own publicity. He was less an autocrat than a man possessed. In "exposing" mediums he seems to have used some of the same tricks for which he reproached them. It seems very likely that when he investigated "Margery" he himself "planted" one of the properties he accused her of "planting." By this time he was apparently incapable of distinguishing between fact and desire.

Houdini's war with the mediums was not motivated by materialistic tendencies. He tried desperately to reach his mother after her death. When he failed he turned in rage against those who had failed him. There is no indication that he knew that "psychic" phenomena often occur

spontaneously and that they need to be explained. I doubt that he would have understood the kind of work now being done by Dr. J. B. Rhine or the Parapsychology Foundation.

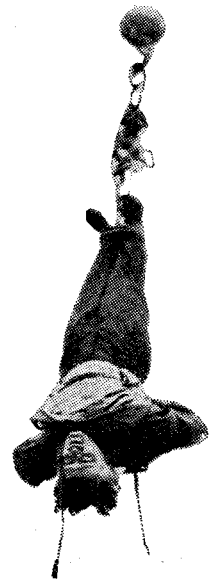
Mr. Gresham's book is journalistic rather than scholarly in tone, but he has worked conscientiously at clearing up as many mysteries about Houdini as can still be elucidated, and painting the fullest picture of him that can now be produced. The results may be guaranteed to enthrall all devotees of "show biz."

—EDWARD WAGENKNECHT.

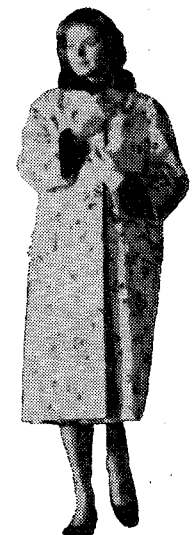
AMATORY ESCAPE: Ingrid Bergman's desertion of her husband and daughter in favor of Italian movie director Roberto Rossellini received such an airing in the press that Stromboli virtually became a household word. Nonetheless, in "Ingrid Bergman: An Intimate Portrait" (McKay, \$3.95), Henry Steele, the Swedish film star's erstwhile publicity director and one of her close friends, rehashes her matrimonial debacle, lacing it with personal reflections expressed in correspondence with the author during those dark Italian days.

Mr. Steele and Miss Bergman seem to be saying that the latter's trouble stemmed from a childlike naïveté engendered by the fact that, until she hit Hollywood, she had always been dominated and sheltered. Reared by an elderly, religious uncle named Otto, Ingrid was sensitive and shy; so much so that she retreated into herself and a world of make-believe, where, she says, "I could submerge all my inhibitions and play-act at being the things I was not."

Be that as it may, in due course the budding actress came under the wing of Dr. Peter Lindstrom, who, to test his muscles, put bricks



Houdini at work



Ingrid Bergman

in his knapsack when they went picnicking together. While the underlying reasons for the breakup of their marriage—which lasted twelve years—are but hinted at, Steele reports that Miss Bergman asked Lindstrom for a divorce three years before she fled, in March, 1949, to Rossellini. At that time she wrote, "I see in [Roberto] a reflection of my true self. . . . I feel as if I had found what I have been inarticulately searching for for a long time." His jealousy over her resuming her career independently of him (one is encouraged to assume) led to their divorce some eight years later. No longer cowed and submissive and trying to please, as in former years, but by that time "sharp and positive and unafraid," Miss Bergman then married Lars Schmidt, a Swedish theatrical producer.

In what is basically a tritely conceived book, Steele, knowingly or not, makes some telling points which go a long way towards relieving the tedium of his psychological striptease. One of these concerns the ordeal endured by Miss Bergman at the hands of Cholly Knickerbocker, Louella Parsons, *et al.* And, finally, there is the actress's eldest daughter making a declaration of filial forgiveness and love, which, by its mechanical wording, has a faintly brainwashed air. Sidelights such as these may make Mr. Steele's not very revealing revelation worth-while fare for those who are still concerned with Miss Bergman's amatory escapade.

—IOLA HAVERSTICK.

TOIL AND TROUBLE: Public Personalities are devoted to the principle of giving the public what it wants—otherwise they wouldn't be Public Personalities—and their books, generally, are either documentations of past miseries and failure, with an up-beat ending, or pretentiously good-natured reminiscences.



June Havoc

June Havoc, fortunately, has not written a standard Public Personality Book. It was not "told to" a career collaborator, and except for an occasional fanciness and a feminine addiction to adverbs, "Early Havoc" (Simon & Schuster, \$3.95) is well written.

Miss Havoc, it is true, had plenty of trouble during her early years, but—too bad for her sales—it was not Big Trouble (dope, likker, nymphomania). And though the jacket copy describes "Early Havoc" as "racy, spirited, candid . . ." I found it to be rather bitter. Miss Havoc has not tried to make the grotesque seem amusingly eccentric or to sentimentalize the characters and episodes of her early life. For instance:

Miss Guinan's famous girls were a mess. They had lumpy figures and looked dirty. Even the ladies of the evening, who behaved so wildly at the ringside in the early hours, I thought more attractive than these women.

The book's continuity is based on Miss Havoc's participation in a dance marathon, a terrible and sadistic spectacle that flourished during the depression years. In alternate chapters she tells of her life in vaudeville as "Baby June, the Pocket-Sized Pavlova," her marriage at the age of thirteen, and her subsequent unemployment when vaudeville collapsed. In these pages Miss Havoc presents a memorable and bloodcurdling picture of a stage mother (hers).

Mother always cried when she was angry. It was a peculiar sort of weeping—wild, not sad. Little flecks appeared at the corners of her mouth, her lips curled. Her voice became gritty. I've never seen anyone else accomplish such furious weeping.

Although I had an important nine o'clock appointment I sat up until five A.M. finishing this book. What more can I say? —ROGER PRICE.

FROM POINTS TO TV: Fred Astaire's autobiography, "Steps in Time" (Harper, \$4.95), should have "the sparkle of the best champagne" (to quote the jacket blurb), for his past performances have always been of the rarest vintage. But what we are served here is decidedly tepid and flat. It is a particular disappointment to find his book is almost totally lacking in the debonair dash, wit, and sophistication usually associated with Astaire.

Astaire wastes no time in shattering the public image of himself: "At the risk of disillusionment, I must admit that I don't like top hats, white ties and tails." Then he proceeds with a breezy, informal account of his life

that skims across highlights, lingers over a few mildly amusing anecdotes, and seldom attempts more than a one-dimensional self-portrait. Though words fail him, the twenty-four pages of wonderful photographs do convey much of the quality of his genius.

Fred Astaire's fabulous career began shortly after the turn of the century, when he and his sister, Adele, made their debut in a kiddie show. (Despite having been on his toes at the age of four, Fred can't recall any particular interest in dancing.) Since then, he has triumphed in vaudeville, Broadway musical comedy, motion pictures, and television.

Fred lost his first partner when Adele retired to marry Lord Charles Cavendish. Undaunted, he went on to conquer Hollywood in a series of nine spectacularly successful films with Ginger Rogers, but this partnership, too, was eventually dissolved. Though Astaire's description of these two professional crises may be candid, it hardly goes beneath the surface to explore the relationships involved.

The question that has tantalized Astaire fans for years remains unanswered. Refusing to single out any favorite, Fred has kind words for all his dancing partners. In fact, though he characterizes himself as "bad-tempered, impatient, hard to please, critical," one searches in vain for evidence of any such qualities in his book. The modest, unassuming, likable hooper who emerges in these pages is not easily reconciled with the incomparable artist of "Top Hat" and "Funny Face."

Fred Astaire has this to say about "the dance": "I have no desire to prove anything by it. I have never used it as an outlet or as a means of expressing myself. I just dance." Whatever it is that propels those feet, may he keep on "just dancing."

—ARNOLD DOLIN.

Picture credits for pages 14 and 15
Houdini: From "Houdini"; Ingrid Bergman: Warner Bros.; Fred Astaire: From "Steps in Time"; June Havoc: Arthur Murray



Fred Astaire