

# Here Are Humorists, Half a Dozen

Matters That Do Not Matter Discussed by Corey Ford, Don Herold, Elsie Janis, A. A. Milne, Anita Loos and Others

**GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES.** By Anita Loos. Illustrated by Ralph Barton. New York: Boni & Liveright. \$1.75.

**THE HOLIDAY ROUND.** By A. A. Milne. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.75.

**BIGGER AND BETTER.** By Don Herold. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$2.

**THREE ROUSING CHEERS FOR THE ROLLO BOYS!** By Corey Ford. Illustrated by Guyas Williams. New York: George H. Doran Company. \$2.

**THE FAMILY ALBUM.** By Arthur ("Bugs") Baer. Illustrated by Herb Roth. New York: Albert & Charles Boni. \$1.50.

**IF I KNOW WHAT I MEAN.** By Elsie Janis. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

By **HERMAN J. MANKIEWICZ**

FOR the purposes of examination six books by six different authors have been here gathered together, as was perhaps shrewdly noticed by those who read the names printed immediately above. The fairness of the procedure, at least to the authors, is certainly a matter of doubt, though all objections can and certainly will be swept aside with the sweeping gesture of custom. Nevertheless, it does seem a bit improbable that Mr. Milne, in his cloistered English tavern, if that is where he works, and Mr. Baer, in the tavern devoted to his compositions, were aware or in any way desirous that their works would reach one and the same reader. And yet the bookstands of the country will groan under their weight in the section casually marked "Humor," and the holiday shopper will probably buy "If I Know What I Mean" should it develop that no copy of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is available.

To the books, then, here under consideration, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" seems to at least one reader—who by a coincidence is also writing this piece—a gorgeously smart and intelligent piece of work. Miss Loos's book is "the intimate diary of a professional lady," and the leading character of her creation belongs clearly in the select group of genuine Americans headed by Ring Lardner's Jack Keefe. Because a

gentlemen friend suggested it, she keeps a diary, but it begins only in the middle of March, inasmuch as an even more important gentleman

who is known practically all over Chicago as Gus Eisman the Button King. And he is the gentleman who is interested in educating me, so of course he is always com-

friend, Mr. Eisman, was in town practically all of January and February.

"Mr. Eisman," it seems, "is in the wholesale button profession in Chicago and he is the gentleman

ing down to New York to see how my brains have improved since the last time. But when Mr. Eisman is in New York we always seem to do the same thing; and if I wrote down one day in my diary,

all I would have to do would be to put quotation marks for all the other days.

The young woman, through the kind offices of Mr. Eisman, is enabled to make the grande tour of the Ritz Hotels of Europe. In London, for instance:

Well, Dorothy and I are really at London. I mean we got to London on the train yesterday, as the boat does not come clear up to London, but it stops on the beach and you have to take a train. So yesterday Dorothy and I went down to luncheon at the Ritz and we saw a quite cute little blonde girl at the next table, and I said, "That is quite a cute little girl, so she must be an American girl." And sure enough, she called the headwaiter with quite an American accent, and she was quite angry, and she said to him, "I have been coming to this hotel for 35 years and this is the first time I have been kept waiting. So I recognized her voice because it was really Fanny Ward.

But Miss Ward was unable to join her for tea because she had to go to her music lesson.

Miss Loos's book, then, is one of the most delightful of recent publications. It is civilized, human, ironic and never crude in its effects.

"The Holiday Round" is a collection of reprints from Punch. There

have been incautious reviewers who have written thousands of words and found at the end that they have said less than is contained in the words "a collection of reprints from Punch." Less will not be said here. "The Holiday Round," one repeats, is a collection of reprints from Punch. And whatever that may mean to this reader or that, there is no doubt that the set of parodies on the stock plays of the theatre that Mr. Milne offers is highly enjoyable, hilarious reading.

One regrets to have to report reasonably unfavorably on the offerings of Corey Ford and Don Herold—"Three Rousing Cheers for the Rolly Boys" and "Bigger and Better" they are respectively, let it be added for the benefit of those who are unwilling to make the effort required to glance back to the beginning of this article. Mr. Ford and Mr. Herold are both genuine humorists, with an energetic fancy and a fluent pen (apiece, of course). In their present offerings, however, they seem to have labored too diligently. Mr. Ford, thus, has attempted to make a full-length book out of what is, after all, merely a clever parody notion for an article or two. The present length of the work would be justified only by an ingenuity of treatment. Instead, there has been almost complete reliance upon the treacherous strength of the idea. Mr. Herold, on the other hand, unduly worries slender ideas. The result, most of the time, is the creation of a great illusion of strain, which is not the comic mood's most invaluable hand-maiden.

And so to Mr. "Bugs" Baer. His book must be a severe disappointment to even his most enthusiastic admirers, which would prominently include the present writer. In small doses, Mr. Baer is one of the most enjoyable of humorists. Here, in the relentless fullness of his method and his material, he becomes boring and at times even annoying, what with the lengths to which he goes for his comic effects. For example:

Uncle Winsor [Mr. Baer writes] was an expert in the manly art of selfish defense. He had a heart like last month's biscuits. And he wouldn't give those away either. If a tramp came to his house and asked for food, Uncle would kill a turkey and give him the wishbone.

He used to borrow everything from the neighbors and return nothing. He even tied strings on the lump sugar so he could dip it into two cups of coffee. If a neighbor wanted to cut his own lawn, he'd have to wait for a snowfall so Uncle would give him his mower back.

There may have been deep drinkers in our family, but Uncle was a shallow drinker out of his saucer. When he started in to go phloop, phloop, phloop, with his coffee when they had visitors, Aunt Dot was so ashamed of his illegitimate table manners that she used to hold her own saucer over her eyes so she couldn't see him.

Miss Janis, in "If I Know What I Mean," has written a book that has its amusing moments. She writes naturally, gracefully and fluently of things that she has known and places that she has seen. The unfortunate circumstance that much of what she has here collected was obviously written for the Chautauqua trade, with what is there known as a healthy Americanism evident throughout, supplies a semi-moral note that gets seriously in the way of her comic moments.