

## IV

I remarked some time ago that the success of Anita Loos' "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," like that of much of the work of Ring Lardner, is due to her vivid characterizations. The practise of ninety-nine out of every one-hundred hopeful American comic writers is to think up a lot of jokes and then fit them as closely as they can into the mouths of more or less appropriate dummies. The result is simply a lot of jokes that are perhaps laughed at but forgotten the moment one finishes the story or book or play. Miss Loos, like Lardner, has gone at things the other way 'round. She has first carefully and seriously devised her comic characters and then, her laughter assured, has unconcernedly thought up the jokes to point those characters the more sharply. The result is that one forgets the jokes, but that the characters linger realistically in mind. As a matter of fact, Miss Loos' jokes are often anything but wows. In her pages we meet many ancient vaudeville friends, as, for example, the one about the deferred bath (given a Folies Bergère setting), the one about the French pronunciation of Robert, the one about Frenchmen kissing each other, the one about spats, etc. But her characters are completely alive, reported with an ear of absolute pitch and caught brilliantly in detail. One laughs not at what they say so much as at what they are. This is not, however, because of their newness, but because no one has fixed

them to paper and ink precisely as Miss Loos has.

As a matter of fact, the characters of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" have been familiar to us, in print and on the stage, for some time. We have had Lorelei's counterpart in miniature in "The Gold Diggers"; we have had the counterpart of Dorothy in "Ladies of the Evening"; we have had Mr. Eisman in Sacha Guitry's "L'Illusionniste," in "The Blue Mouse," in a score of farces and comedies. But in none of these have the characters been plumbed so nicely, despite a deceptive air of superficiality, as in Miss Loos' book. Miss Loos' virtue lies in her sharp reportorial skill. Her Lorelei may, to the casual reader, be merely a little blonde dumb-bell, but every shrewd quirk and ratty turn of the mind in that apparent bone-head has been carefully ferreted out by way of capturing the character in its entirety. And the same in the case of the other central characters. On the surface we have simply a burlesque show, but in the cellar under the stage, hidden from view, we have some cunning analysis of character that serves as that burlesque show's stoutest prop.

The play made from "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" retains much of the humor of the book, although the physical embodiment of the characters, as is so often the case in book dramatizations, leaves something to be desired. The handicap in casting was here a double one, as not only did the producer have to capture Miss Loos' Lorelei, Dorothy, Spoffard, et al., but also Ralph Barton's unusually good likenesses of them. It is hard enough satisfactorily to cast the personages of a dramatized book; the job becomes twice as hard when the personages have been illustrated by an artist in such wise that they become irrevocably stamped in the public consciousness.

Again, the easy humor of the book has been strained a trifle for popular theatrical purposes. But the play remains none the less very jolly stuff.