

## So. American Junket

*SALUD! A SOUTH AMERICAN JOURNAL.* By Margaret Cushman Banning. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1941. 372 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by KATHERINE RODELL

MRS. BANNING and her daughter made a six-week trip to South America in January and February of this year, and Mrs. Banning has written a diary of their journey. They went down the West coast and up the East, stopping at most of the capital cities, meeting most of the U. S. Ambassadors, most of the heads of big American businesses, and a handful of South Americans. Mrs. Banning states the purpose of her trip thus: "I wanted to find out what I could about political conditions, and . . . to find out something of the status of women."

Mrs. Banning scoffs at the idea that "in so short a time you can't really learn anything or have anything true to report." She is right, of course. She knows now what travel over the important routes in South America is like; what kind of accommodations you get in the best hotels in the various capitals; what kind of people stroll along the Calle Florida in Buenos Aires.

She knows, too, what the people she met think about South American and international politics. That these people were largely members of the U. S. diplomatic, naval, and military missions gives their observations a far more limited value than Mrs. Banning indicates. Thus, when she says of such a group in Peru: "These people are all pro-Ally," it is hardly news, for the members of the U. S. foreign service must of course support the Administration's foreign policy. But in noting this fact, Mrs. Banning gives the impression that *everyone* in Peru is solidly behind President Roosevelt. I hope they are; but I doubt that Mrs. Banning is qualified to say so.

It is not so much that Mrs. Banning's comments on politics, economics, and social conditions are false as that they are incomplete; the picture she paints lacks both depth and perspective. For example, in her chapter on the Catholic Church, she does not once point out that in most South American countries, Church and State are not separated. She does not seem to see the connection between the Church's hold over education and the appalling amount of illiteracy; she does not appear to realize what the Church's support of Hitler's Spanish puppet, Francisco Franco, means in terms of Nazi propaganda and politi-



*Variety's "Sime"*

cal penetration. Mrs. Banning seems unaware that there is a land problem in South America, and that the question of infant mortality is inextricably tied up with the fact that three-fourths of the people on the South American continent are mere agricultural serfs. And while she romanticizes the "sense of not quite belonging" which characterizes the various colonies of U. S. citizens in the South American capitals, she does not appreciate that such unwillingness or inability to enter into South American life gives the lie to our State Department's rhetoric about American cultural unity.

There are a few real howlers, which more time and study—or even more travel—might have saved Mrs. Banning. She didn't go to Bolivia or Paraguay or Uruguay—which may explain why she twice speaks of the war between Bolivia and Uruguay when she means the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay. And Haya de la Torre, the Peruvian of Spanish descent who heads the Apra political party, is spoken of as "the radical Indian of Chile." Suppose a South American, writing of the United States, had referred to John L. Lewis as a Texan Negro!

I sincerely hope that Mrs. Banning's book may inspire some of her readers to visit South America themselves—which would be all to the good. But I cannot help hoping too that, for the sake of better inter-American understanding, those readers will leave her book both physically and mentally behind, and perhaps stay a little longer and dig a little deeper than did Mrs. Banning in the course of her six-week junket.

## "Sime" Biog So-So

*LORD BROADWAY: Variety's "Sime" —The Man Who Made The Gay White Way Gayer.* By Dayton Stoddart. New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc. 385 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by LOUIS GREENFIELD

THE lads and lassies in and around the Broadway jungle and the sun-kissed macadam at Hollywood and Vine, are going to cough up many a laugh, jerk a tear, here and there, over Dayton Stoddart's so-so biog. of "Sime," *Variety's* founder, adviser, and father-confessor to the big and little Hams that cluttered up the entertainment arena when Cecil B. DeMille thought a bathtub was something an honest guy would use on Saturday night.

The opening act of the tome gives out with Sime sewing buttons in *Pere* Silverman's factory in Syracuse and the migration of the family to New York where the old gent caromed into the money-lending biz with son Sime handling the ledgers and taking in the variety shows and the honky-tonks on his off time. It's a pretty, homey picture of wholesome family life. When Sime grew up and married the red-head from Syracuse, Hattie Freeman, he propositioned *Pere* Silverman to take him in as a partner or else. Sime got the "or else" signal and with a two and one-half Grand stake, borrowed from Hattie's alderman father, the first issue of *Variety* blew into the wintry dawn of Broadway on Dec. 16, 1905.

From there on comes *beaucoup* fun. The battle for the actors, the terrific catch-as-catch can with the potent Albee interests. Elusive Sime eluding the sheriff. But the rag came out each week and what is more began to grip the imagination of the boys and girls in the show biz.

When success and big dough crowned the efforts of the founder, Stoddart gives you a rollicking picture of Sime with a fistful of lettuce, making the rounds of bistros and always insisting on lifting the tab. For Sime was a powerful liver. He drank and ate heavily. He was a strong, vigorous gent. He was kind and faithful. The typewriter pounders who got the sheet out for him revered and loved him. For he was their kind of "right" guy.

There's lots of Broadway and theatrical history between the adventures and exploits of Sime that makes the tome, as a whole, a fairly amusing job. The Mazda and Kleig light folks should go for it.

And what is more say a little prayer for the guy who helped make the heavy sugar and their top billing possible.

# Ophelia Against Her Critics

JOHN CORBIN

IT was once the privilege of a young researcher to take tea in the British Museum with that tireless and devoted if somewhat explosive Shakespearean, F. J. Furnivall. "Why couldn't the man edit his own works," he broke out, "instead of saddling us with this infinite labor of groping in the dark! There are times when one itches to back him into a corner and punch his bald head from him!" In later years, a question has arisen whether Shakespeare, if he could see the havoc wrought upon stage productions by the editors' text, would be so easily backed about.

The chief difficulty has sprung from those specifications of locality which they insert at the head of each scene: "The Palace" and "Another Room in the Palace"; "The Forest" and "Another Part of the Forest." In the entire range of Quartos and Folios, there is not one such specification. Nor do they in the least suggest the actual intent of Shakespeare's stagecraft or the nature of his imaginative conception. Until well within modern memory, the attempt of producers to present those localities to the eye resulted in a cutting of the text and a transposition of scenes, a mangling and distortion of the dramatic structure, which is inconceivable to those who have not witnessed it. Since the disastrous production of "Anthony and Cleopatra" at The New Theatre in 1910 and the almost equally disastrous Warfield-Belasco production of "The Merchant of Venice" in 1922 there has been a fortunate abatement of the rage for scene painting and stage carpentry. It would be too much to say that modern producers have quite solved the problem of scenic productions. Certain plays, notably "The Tempest" and "Macbeth," present insuperable problems; nor can the longer plays be "scenically" produced without severe cutting. But in the shorter plays a moderate and simple use of scenery detracts little or nothing from the effect. Maurice Evans's "Richard II" and his "Twelfth Night," with Helen Hayes, deeply delighted thousands who would doubtless have shunned them if given on a bare stage.

A curious fact remains and of late has taken on extraordinary importance. Though the specifications of locality have largely ceased to mislead producers, they continue to distract and befuddle the editors themselves, leading to errors seemingly as remote from the textual criticism as a hero's

chastity and a hero's faith in his beloved.

For three hundred years, both within and without the theatre, the world accepted Ophelia as a rather amiable and sympathetic young person, quite worthy of Hamlet's love. Critics of the first order—Coleridge, Goethe, Thomas Campbell, Hazlitt, Mrs. Jameson—were eloquent in her praise. But of late the most scandalous charges have been urged against her. The admirable Dowden began it, declaring in effect that she was a little liar. Now Shakespeare's heroines were not of the scientific habit in verbal accuracy, as witness Desdemona and her handkerchief. But this time the sin must be laid upon the editors.

JUST before the great soliloquy, it will be remembered, the King and Polonius have plotted an encounter between Hamlet and Ophelia, themselves being hidden behind the arras—"lawful espials." The purpose is to discover the cause of the Prince's madness. Only the King suspects that it is feigned. The Queen-mother affectionately hopes to cure it—that Ophelia's "virtues

Will bring him to his wonted way again.  
It goes without saying that Ophelia

hopes so too. To her the little plot is innocent, beneficent. Moreover, she owes a duty of obedience to her father and to her King. At the end of the soliloquy Hamlet sees her enter, carrying the book of "devotion" which Polonius has laid in her hand; and he says:

Soft you now!

The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remember'd.

They are lovely lines, a continuation of his mood in the soliloquy. But presently he becomes aware that someone is eavesdropping, probably sees the wiseacre face of Polonius peering from behind the arras. To protect himself he turns to rallying Ophelia in his vein of pretended madness. In full verbal career he breaks off and asks, "Where's your father?" She answers "At home, my lord"—as Dowden puts it, "coming out with her docile little lie."

Now just where was Polonius's home? In each of the two preceding acts where there is a scene which, as editors have always assured us, takes place in "A Room in the House of Polonius." Thus Polonius lives at some distance from the present scene of "A Room in the Castle." It is this liberality in giving him a house that, in the eyes of modern Shakespeareans, has



When Hollywood set the stage for Mr. Shakespeare: Leslie Howard, John Barrymore, and Reginald Denny in the screen version of "Romeo and Juliet."