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BOOKS and REVIEWS

Pieces at Eight
By Walter Kerr. 224 pp. New York: Simon & Schuster. \$2.95.

Reviewed by
DONALD A. YATES

Walter Kerr has published a second book, and this is good news, for he is probably the man most qualified to comment intelligently and entertainingly on the contemporary theater. His earlier "The Play" was a major critical event of 1954.

Now in "Pieces at Eight," Kerr is back at his typewriter, pecking out his little essays on various phases of the contemporary American theater. He writes words that lift themselves off the page and carry their observations disarmingly but quite forcefully to the reader.

His words make sense—perhaps because when he writes about the theater he's reaching back to eleven years of teaching drama in the East, eight years as drama critic of the New York "Herald Tribune," experience as a Broadway director, and as playwrighting collaborator with his wife, Jean "Please Don't Eat the Daisies" Kerr.

KERR opens his book with a scathing chronicle of the tawdry pre-Broadway preparation that goes on behind the scene facade of all plays, whether they turn out to be flops or hits. In his next section, "Great Expectations," he reviews several proposals of "How Not to Write a Play."

In "Opening Night" he gives a careful study to the role of the drama critic—in which he minimizes the importance of the play reviewer's published commentary. He supports his discussion at critical points with impressive statistics—a move that convinces us that he's playing on the level.

In case you missed Kerr's brilliant discussion on "criticism" of the evolution of the physical stage and the havoc it has wrought on modern drama, he repeats it in this book.

UNDER the title of "Nightcap" he considers some of the horrible flops he has witnessed in his years as a critic. He is at least as candid on those pages as his wife at the time. Kerr, clearly, is a man of many talents.

For anyone who wants a fresh look at the American stage through the eyes of a man thoroughly informed on every facet of the "institution" of the theater, this is THE book.

Preacher Mike
By Elaine Rice Chabot. 221 pp. New York: The Citadel Press. \$4.00.

Reviewed by
GAY G. SYKES
Detroit's Metropolitan Methodist

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of the old school, this book merits recommendation.

For those of us who had not the privilege of knowing Dr. Rice personally, Miss Chabot's book is a satisfying substitute.

**Days In the
Yellow Leaf**
By William Hoffman. 254 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc. \$3.95.

Reviewed by
SALLY PARSONS

Trying a marriage from its inception to the tragedy of its demise furnishes rich material for the novelist. With the sharp eye of a psychiatrist probing the inner recesses of the mind, William Hoffman develops in his novel the story of a wealthy bachelor who marries a girl from the wrong side of the street.

Ironically, it is not a difference in social status which eventually causes a gulf between Ted Young and his wife, Grace, for she is attractive and readily accepted by the "right" people. It is, rather, Ted's emotional makeup. He is inherently a pacifist and is continually searching for a way of life which will never hurt anyone.

"He was a bleeder by nature," their child for everything, old woman, dogs . . . He took things so seriously he could bleed over jobs."

COMING to Detroit after nine years in Duluth and several years before that in Kansas and Iowa, Ted Young, with his clean, deep well-spoken of courage, compassion, seemingly indefatigable industry, and vast amounts of money.

Indeed, his children considered him the very soul of wit, and Miss Chabot shares with her readers many instances of family laughter.

Among these memories is the time the family was returning from an evening prayer meeting on a drive from one of his boys "drip" rain, joined in skimming down the sidewalk until an untimely upset unconsciously pin his britches from top to bottom.

There was the time that he forgot to change his hat for a trip downtown after he had spent the morning cleaning out the vacuum and sweeping inside until he positively tripped his hat to an acquaintance, leaving a shower of dust and noise.

DESPITE the initial halting style and somewhat stiff prose of the author, the life and character of Dr. Rice emerges in a remarkably satisfying manner, and as Miss Chabot writes the subject of her father's life and times, the narrative flows more freely.

There is much honest love and affection in this story of a man's life.

There is much basic honesty mixed in with a great devotion to religious conviction that the quality that inspired the vast majority of the Metropolitan Methodist church during his ministry.

However, this is not primarily a treatment of a minister's religious faith and views. As a loving tribute to a dynamic and yet humble father and Christian gentleman

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