

# "New Day" Is Selling Well

NOTES IN NEW YORK

By Leslie Gibson

AFTER a year's absence from New York City one returns with a fresh vision. Nothing is different, just more sharply defined. The well known descriptive verbs and adjectives seem, not platitudinous, but strikingly true. Buildings scrape the sky, crowds bustle, traffic shrieks as if one were seeing and feeling and hearing such things for the first time.

Eventually, Spring gentles these realities. In the park, where everything is now soft and green, people lie on the grass, or move in a leisurely fashion, aimless. Children roam and explore and call to each other but without excitement. It is still chilly. The children are bundled. One does not sit on the grass for long. Warmth and repose are still a promise.

On Fifth avenue and 8th street there is a twelve by ten foot plot in front of a stone house where there are daffodils, crocuses, and hyacinths. Flowers growing in pots and bordering cement stop a number of people in their stride. On July 17, when churches let out, admirers make a snag in the flow of pedestrian traffic up and down the avenue.

ON the same street, between Fifth and Sixth avenues, is the Washington Square Bookshop where Victor Reid's novel, "New Day," is in the window. The saleswoman told me their present stock is supplied from their fifth order, and that the book is selling well. She explained that each of her orders for issues of the book has been larger than the preceding order.

Every week a "New York Times" newspaper reporter telephones for a list of the best selling books in the store. "New Day" is on her list this week, the saleswoman said. And, if enough book stores turn in a similar report, "New Day" will appear in the national best seller's list.

## High Praise

It is certainly on the critics' list and has received high praise. "The New Yorker" magazine, which is not known for indiscriminate tossing of bouquets, has given an approving nod and says of "New Day": "The book describes principally the struggle of Jamaicans for some sort of self-government, and mentions a couple of the more unsavoury British attempts to thwart the movement. Together with a review of these events the narrator, a Jamaican of mixed coloured and white ancestry, includes an account of his own family and its part in the island's affairs. The combination adds up to something appealingly unlike most such fictional family documents."

The flower plot and bookshop are

in that famous part of New York which is Greenwich Village. With its low buildings and narrow streets, Greenwich Village is utterly dissimilar in appearance to the rest of the city, and its habitues—to distinguish them from its permanent residents—have taken on, or given to this section the kind of local colouring which marks them as a type and it as a community.

The typical villager is apt to be informal in dress and manner, artistic in bent, or aspiration, radical in politics. He is always young. And there is a more traditionally-minded group comprised of members of old Greenwich Village families and like-thinking persons whose interest is to preserve polite customs of behaviour, their economic system, and, culturally, the character of historic neighbourhoods.

## New For The Old

Lately university encroachments threaten the old, brick houses in Washington Square, and these citizens together with all who care for the beauty of the place, have combined to form the Washington Square Greenwich Village Preservation and Planning Committee. New York University are lessees from Sailors' Snug Harbour, institutional property owners in the district, and it is known that NYU has long had its eye on the buildings near the park and that it hopes to turn the park into a campus.

So it is feared that the old houses—only two in the NE Washington Square row are owned by their occupants—await the possible fate of demolition to make way for the cold edifices of learning. It would indeed be a paradox if we should study the past on the spot where we have destroyed its symbols.

Metropolitan Life Insurance housing project, a village in itself, offers a contrast to Greenwich Village in styles of living and of architecture. Commendably, it provides partial relief to the need for low-rent apartments. It has been fair in limiting its tenants to those whose incomes are not in excess of ability to pay.

But Greenwich Village has an amorphous citizenry, while the owners of Stuyvesant Town impose segregation. This action has been upheld in the courts, Metropolitan Life having hedged against the most obvious objection by building a like project, Riverton Houses, in Harlem.

The buildings in Stuyvesant Town are gigantic, uniform, and monotonous to the eye. They have the effect of what French critics, to describe mass production, call taylorization. In appearance they are unbeautiful not because of their plain, modern facades—though these are plain enough—but because, like suits on a rack, they all look the same. The interiors are supposed to be very fine

with large kitchens, equipped for the ease and pleasure of a housewife's soul. Outside there are playgrounds for children.

## Any Recession?

Talk of a brand new shiny war continues, but that seismograph, the New York stock market, remains steady. Nosing out this topic is another of more immediate interest to the American pocketbook: whether or not there will be a recession. There are signs and portents.

For one thing, there are more people on relief. The Welfare Commission, Raymond M. Hilliard, explains this by the fact that unemployment insurances for the current year have been exhausted and people are drawing on relief to tide them over until the next benefit year begins in June. Also, what he calls "marginal workers," old persons and women with small children, who found it easy to get employment during the war and post war boom, are being forced out of work by young workers. There are not less jobs, he explains, but more people.

And Walter Lippman, columnist for the Republican newspaper, "The New York Herald Tribune," says bluntly, that "the business cycle is again entering a phase which comports with the political interests of the Democratic party." In other words, industry is contracting, there is deflation instead of inflation, there is some unemployment, and the beginning of a recession.

These are, according to Lippman, economic conditions under which the Democratic party flourishes. The new deal and fair deal philosophy calls for the "use of public money in the form of loans, subsidies, grants-in-aid, and federal expenditures." Never theless, Truman was elected when the very opposite conditions prevailed. A depression was prophesied at the end of the war in 1945. We had a boom. But now it does look as if our economy were on the slow, down swing—in one way, an indication that the war cloud on the horizon has diminished to the size of a man's hand.

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## Art Exhibitions

In the art world there are some fine exhibitions right now. Braque and Degas are the two biggest shows. Other well knowns: Gris, Leger, Miro. Seurat can be seen at various galleries on 57th street. The opportunity of seeing these painters' work is not to be neglected, but one could wish that art to dealers is not merely the business risk it apparently is, and unknown painters could exhibit on merit.

Of course, with luck, they do occasionally: sometimes with crippling effects. 57th street is often called the red light district of the art world by young artists who can't get a showing there. The painter has to be well off, well-known, or he has to have connections with those who can help him, mixing hopefully with the right people as assiduously as any social climber. If he does get a show, and if he sells his work, he is often pressured by the gallery which has accepted him and which gets a nice cut on the sales into turning out the same sort of saleable stuff ad infinitum.

On the brighter side, a tangible benefit, especially to artists and artisans, is the GI Bill of Rights. An ex-soldier (or woman if she was in the armed services) can acquire at government expense whatever knowledge or proficiency, his heart or mind seeks. He can go to college, or dancing school; learn a trade, or profession; go abroad, if he wishes (but he must dig up his own fare). Once there, he can study for his vocation and he will get 50 dollars a month, or, if he is married, 90 dollars from the U.S. government for living expenses, and his tutelage free.

## Not So Good

On the other hand, this vast government expense has been criticised on the grounds that it is so vast and that it benefits only a small, special group. The average ex-GI is not seeking an education. He wants to make money in the quickest way he can, usually by returning to the sort of work he did before his army career. The government grants for living expenses a month is less than a laborer earns a week.

The ex-soldier is no longer a youth. He has fought a war and it has taken many precious, wage-earning years from him. Very likely he has a family to support. What he wants is to make up for lost time, and to save up for a television set. He certainly doesn't want to go to school again.

But for the individual whose circumstances will not ordinarily allow him to develop his talents the GI bill is an invaluable opportunity. Many who have been able to get there by their own means have gone to foreign countries to study. Living abroad under the GI bill means subsistence living. The necessary frugality of these students forces upon them more than a mere acquaintance with their surroundings. They have to understand the people with whom they must get along in order to live with them. They must learn how to live in a strange land in order to survive in it.

Tourist bureaus are not for the attraction of visitors with such a meagre allotment of dollars to spend. The big hotels, places to see, things to do, gaily advertised in bright folders, are for the well equipped. But, since life does not hold itself out to be looked at, though it may put on a show if it gets paid, only the cruise tourist is unlikely to know the difference.