

PARTNERS LOST BY BERNARD GEIS

5 Said to Have Withdrawn
—Editorial Views Blamed
by Cowles and Esquire

DISTRIBUTOR BARS BOOK

Cerf Declares He Wouldn't
Touch 'The Exhibitionist'
'With a 40-Foot Pole'

By HARRY GILROY

Five of the 13 partners of Bernard Geis Associates are reported to have surrendered their interests in the publishing venture because they do not like its editorial policy. Mr. Geis has recently concentrated on sexy novels in which the characters resemble actual celebrities.

Executives of Cowles Communications, Inc., Esquire, Inc., and Goodson-Todman Productions, New York television producers, said yesterday that their companies had withdrawn from the partnership. Art Linkletter and Groucho Marx, the television personalities, were said to have taken similar action. Neither could be reached for comment.

Mr. Geis, asked about the withdrawals, would not name those who were leaving. He expressed gratitude to six partners for staying in. He mentioned Ralph Edwards and John Guedel, television producers, Alfred Bloomingdale, president of the Diners Club, Jacques Leslie, a lawyer, and Mrs. Beth Lindley, all of Los Angeles, and Mrs. Ralph Schneider, widow of the former chairman of the Diners Club.

Bloomingdale Dissatisfied

Mr. Bloomingdale said by telephone, "I would sure like to get out." He indicated that there were legal problems in withdrawing from the partnership. Robert C. Temple, speaking for Queen For A Day, Inc., a Hollywood television producer, said his company was still in Geis Associates, although Mr. Geis did not include it in his list of continuing partners.

Reports have circulated for

some time that some of the Geis Associates were distressed about books the partnership had issued. This week a Geis Fall list advertisement appeared without the list of partners, which has usually been stressed.

The advertisement also contained a clue to another development. Random House was listed as distributor of four forthcoming Geis books, but not of a fifth, "The Exhibitionist," a novel by a pseudonymous author, Henry Sutton. Crown Publishers, Inc., will distribute the book next month.

Bennett Cerf, chairman of Random House, when asked why the novel was not being distributed by his concern, said Monday:

"I read the manuscript and I would not touch that book with a 40-foot pole."

Random House, which has distributed Geis books in the past, will stop handling them in January.

Random House refused early this year to distribute "The

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King," by Morton Cooper. A principal character in the novel is a popular entertainer whom readers have found to resemble Frank Sinatra.

"The Exhibitionist," which is advertised in Publisher's Weekly with the figure of a naked girl decorated with playing card symbols, is described as being about the daughter of an actor who becomes a star actress and "finds a man who takes her to new depths of degradation."

Bernard Geis Associates was formed in 1959. Each partner invested the same amount, said by one of them to have been \$10,000. Mr. Bloomingdale and the late Mr. Schneider split a share, putting in \$5,000 each. Mr. Leslie set up the company as a limited partnership in California and New York, with Mr. Geis the only general partner.

Mr. Linkletter was a moving spirit in getting the partnership together. Mr. Geis, a magazine and book editor, had suggested to the television figure that he do a book based on children's letters, and it proved to be a success. Mr. Linkletter discovered that sales were helped by mention of his book on television, and other TV people agreed there were com-

mercial possibilities in this.

It became a TV joke that Mr. Linkletter and Mr. Marx were mentioning their Geis books in their programs. Geis Associates soon began pushing their books through television promotion and through flamboyant publicity.

All Disown Choosing

All the Geis partners who could be reached by telephone emphasized their status as limited partners, and said they had never had anything to do with the choice of books. Some comments were:

Marvin C. Whatmore, president of Cowles: "We are definitely out of the partnership. There has been difficulty as to editorial policy."

Myron Davis, secretary of Esquire, Inc.: "Bernard Geis used to work for us as an Esquire editor and we have always had the friendliest relationship. We don't want to go along with what he plans to do."

Mark Goodson, partner in Goodson-Todman Productions: "We have surrendered our interest. We didn't like our names being used in advertising." He added that what was involved was not a matter of censorship but of literary taste.

Mr. Guedel, partner in television productions with Mr. Linkletter: "I like the company. I am not in the public eye. It doesn't hurt my image that some people criticize some of the books. The company has put out some good books, like Harry S. Truman's 'Mr. Citizen.'"

He added that "Valley of the Dolls," by Jacqueline Susann, which Geis Associates published, was "no great literature, but it seems to have been what the public wants."

The novel has had sales of 350,000 copies in the hardcover Geis edition. Bantam Book has reported sales in paperback of 5 million copies. Geis Associates got \$200,000 for the paperback rights.

Mr. Geis had this to say: "I don't blame those who left the company for not want-

ing to be involved in our newest set of problems. But by the same token I am all the more grateful to Ralph Edwards, John Guedel, Alfred Bloomingdale, Judge Jacques Leslie, Mrs. Ralph Schneider and Mrs. Beth Lindley, who have chosen to stay with the company and help me fight our rapidly approaching battle for freedom of expression."

Asked to expand the reference to an approaching battle, he said: "I think that with the publication of 'The Exhibitionist' and a group of other books scheduled for late 1967 and early 1968 there may very well be a quite a storm."

Geis Associates, he said, has never distributed any profits. He said that any money that had been made—he would not say what the profits had been—had been reinvested in the business. "A publisher makes money on one book and loses it on others," he added.