

# HOOSIER IN MANHATTAN

By JANE ALLISON

Why is it, people so often ask, that Indiana sends such colorful individuals out into the great wide golden world to perform and be remembered? A recent example of what they mean, of course, was James Dean, the movie star. This Fairmount idol, for all his indisputable acting talent, is still remembered here by colleagues and television producers, as one of the craziest of them all. You can interpret crazy here, to mean the most unexpectedly bewitched boy to carry the thespian banner aloft. And that's saying a lot, because thespians are notable for being individualists, or teapots of tempest and temperament, whenever encountered.

And now comes Jean Shepherd, of Hammond, a just-fired disk-jockey recently referred to in this column as the fictitious author of a mythical book for which he created a great demand, "I, Libertine."

At the time we reported on this, we didn't know Mr. Shepherd's colorful personality was in any way connected with Indiana. Indeed, had we been pressed to name his origin, we would probably have thought of a moon crater. Or possibly the drawing board of a Walt Disney artist.

For as you will shortly see, there's something cerebral, pixie and Cecil B. DeMillian about this character. And the word along the grapevine now is: "Watch this boy. He will go far. He will outdo Arthur Godfrey and his red head, and Baron Munchhausen and his tall tale spinning."

The subject of these glorified predictions is at present an unfrocked radio announcer, for whom ads are now appearing in the newspapers reading: "Jean Shepherd, please come home. All is forgiven." And the outfit footing the bill for these highly expensive bits of newspaper space is the same old Father WOR-Mutual radio station which just got through slapping Mr. Shepherd in his contract with a meat-axe.

But as it now develops, the former defensive back on the Hammond High School football team needn't have worried, if he did.



For such is the fanatical nature of his following, that (a) a new sponsor is imploring Mutual to get him back so he can advertise for them. (Mutual had fired the sardonic, professorial appearing Hoosier for being "unable to sell soap.") (b) The minute the stocky, blue-eyed young man from Indiana announced to his night-time audience that he was to be fired the end of the week, some 500 of his followers gathered the following night at the burnt-out ruin of the Wanamaker Building to protest his dismissal.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shepherd, who had proved his point that people were snobs by talking so long about "Frederick R. Ewing's book, I, Libertine" that even professors in college were acting as though they had read it. Finally, Mr. Shepherd was asked to write the classic. And it's this stunt, possibly, that caused the WOR people to get mad at him originally. Especially, when he reported on the reactions of people to his non-existent book. Some of the oddest of these came from the book-sellers themselves.

"One dignified bookseller," Shepherd says, "told a person clamoring for 'I, Libertine' that

he'd just sold out, but would have a new batch in stock shortly. He also tossed in the observation that he admired 'Frederick R. Ewing,' the phantom author of my phantom book! All the book-sellers went pawing frantically through their confounded lists too, for 'I, Libertine,' proving again how people are slaves of lists."

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There's lots more to tell about Jean Shepherd. How he started on a Hammond morning high school sports show. How he went to Cincinnati and became the darling of Midwestern nighttime listeners. And how in his mild, off-beat, underplaying way, he hates phonies and snobs and the

endless mediocrity of radio and television formula prepared shows.

Since he is prepared to spend a lifetime fighting formulas wherever encountered, and at his present rate of speed he's rather well ahead in the crossed lance division, expect to hear more of this colorful Hoosier in the future. Anyone who says his enemy is "creeping meatballism" is bound to be heard from.