

The BOOKMAN

ROMANCE: EARLY AMERICAN STYLE

By Edmund Pearson

EIGHTY years ago, if a girl smuggled a book into her bedroom to read in the silence of the night to the throbbing of her own excited heart, or if a moon-struck young man carried a book with him to some solitary spot, it was fairly certain to be a copy of "Alonzo and Melissa; or, The Unfeeling Father".

Three or four generations of Americans palpitated over this story. For fifty or sixty years its pages were literally sprinkled with the tears of youths and maidens; its passages of ghostly horror chilled the blood of young boys and girls; while its pompous moralizings and supposed devotion to fact caused it to be accepted by the elderly and pious. It was a *true tale*, its author rigorously insisted, and not a wicked, made-up novel; it could therefore be read without the moral ruin which followed the perusal of a fictitious story.

Today, if you ask for it at a book-shop, you will be told by nine dealers out of ten that they have never heard of it nor its author. About fifty years ago it went out of favor and became known as a plug—an unsalable book. But for the sixty years before that it enjoyed a popularity and long life which few American novels have ever known. It is safe to predict that not one of the best-selling novels of this year will last one-half so long nor be reprinted half so many times.

From 1811, the year of its first appearance, it was printed and reprinted, issued and re-issued, pirated by this publisher and that, north, south and west. There were periods when a new edition of it seemed to come out every year, each time in a different city.

Its place of first appearance and its author are both disputed. The year is agreed upon by everybody. In 1811 there was published at Poughkeepsie a two-volume novel called "The Asylum; or, Alonzo and Melissa, An American Tale, Founded on Fact", by Isaac Mitchell. In the same year, at Plattsburg, N. Y., appeared "A Short Account of the Courtship of Alonzo & Melissa", by Daniel Jackson, Jun.

It has been satisfactorily shown, so it seems to me, that "The Asylum" is the original work, and that the Plattsburg book is a briefer, pirated version. "The Asylum" is long and maundering; it contains two stories. Somebody—presumably Daniel Jackson, Jun.—saw his chance; he took the germ of the book—the story of two lovers—and sent that down the ages, in one volume, with his name on the title-page. That is the one which everybody read, and its story is described here.

The author in a brief preface somewhat unnecessarily expresses the belief that the story "is not unfriendly to religion and to virtue" and that it contains "no indecorous

stimulants". He says that it inculcates "a firm reliance on Providence"; that it is not "filled with unmeaning and inexplicated incidents . . . imperceptible to the understanding". "When anxieties have been excited by involved and doubtful events," he says, "they are afterwards elucidated by the consequences."

So they are, and so also, by this preface, is the reader prepared to learn that the author placed a firm reliance, not only on Providence, but on the majestic sound of polysyllables.

Hoping that his descriptions of nature "will not fail to interest the refined sensibilities of the reader", the author begins his tale with admirable directness.

At the time of the American Revolution there were two young gentlemen of Connecticut, friends and recent graduates of Yale College. Their names were Edgar and Alonzo. Edgar was the son of a respectable farmer; Alonzo of an eminent merchant. Edgar "was designed for the desk"—we should say the ministry—"Alonzo for the bar". They were allowed to amuse themselves during the summer following graduation, and did so "in travelling through some parts of the United States".

On one occasion Alonzo went so far afield as New London, where he met Edgar's sister, Melissa, who was then about sixteen.

"She was not what is esteemed a striking beauty, but her appearance was pleasingly interesting. Her figure was elegant; her aspect was attenuated with a pensive mildness, which in her cheerful moments would light up into sprightliness and vivacity . . . Her mind was adorned with those delicate graces which are the first ornaments of female excellence."

The hero and heroine met at a ball; someone presented Alonzo to Melissa, and the lady, so the author is careful to say, "received him with politeness".

"She was dressed in white, embroidered and spangled with rich silver lace; a silk girdle, enwrought and tasseled with gold, surrounded her waist; her hair was unadorned except by a wreath of artificial flowers, studded by a single diamond."

Alonzo was then about twenty-one. "His

appearance was manly, open and free. His eye indicated a nobleness of soul; although his aspect was tinged with melancholy, yet he was naturally cheerful. His disposition was of the romantic cast."

He is probably the first Yale man to appear in fiction, and it is remarkable, as Professor Reed has noted, that he is about the only one of them who is not a great athlete.

There was another person at the ball, however—Melissa's "partner"; the son of a gentleman of independent fortune in New London.

"He was a gay young man, aged about twenty-five. His address was easy, his manners rather voluptuous than refined; confident, but not ungraceful. He led the *ton* in fashionable circles; gave taste its zest, and was quite a favorite with the ladies generally. His name was Beauman."

We are not told from which college Beauman came. As he is plainly destined to be the rival of Alonzo of Yale, we might have suspected him to be a Harvard graduate. Nothing is said about this, however, and the reference to Beauman's voluptuous manners makes it practically certain that he was a Princeton man.

Nothing in particular happened at the ball, but a few days later, Alonzo, by a series of lucky chances, was able to take Melissa out alone for an evening walk. In the regrettable language of today, they ditched Melissa's cousin and "his lady", and proceeded by themselves. It gave the author the first of his many occasions for scenic description.

"It was one of those beautiful evenings in the month of June, when nature in those parts of America is arrayed in her richest dress. They left the town and walked through fields adjoining the harbour,—the moon shone in full lustre, her white beams trembling upon the glassy main, where skiffs and sails of various descriptions were passing and repassing. The shores of Long-Island and the other islands in the harbour, appeared dimly to float among the waves. The air was adorned with the fragrance of surrounding flowers; the sound of instrumental music wafted from the town, rendered sweeter by distance, while the whippoorwill's

sprightly song echoed along the adjacent groves."

This is the first appearance of the whippoorwill. This curious creature, which comparatively few people have heard, and still fewer have even seen, does not really have a song especially adapted to moments of tender sentiment. It is nervous and fidgety rather than soothing. Still, it is to the credit of the author of "Alonzo and Melissa" that he did employ native birds, rather than follow the custom of some of our early writers, who ruthlessly imported English skylarks and Italian nightingales in defiance of all probability. (If it were possible to interview the rival claimants to "Alonzo and Melissa", Daniel Jackson and Isaac Mitchell, it would be easy to find out which was the author. Simply introduce the subject of whippoorwills, and observe the result. The author of the work was hipped about them.)

Here is the rest of the scene as it presented itself to the young people:

"Far in the eastern horizon hung a pile of brazen clouds, which had passed from the north, over which, the crinkling red lightning momentarily darted, and at times, long peals of thunder were faintly heard. They walked to a point of the beach, where stood a large rock whose base was washed by every tide. On this rock they seated themselves, and enjoyed a while the splendours of the scene—the drapery of nature.

"To this place," said Melissa, "have I taken many a solitary walk, on such an evening as this, and seated on this rock, have I experienced more pleasing sensations than I ever received in the most splendid ball-room."

The author adds: "The idea impressed the mind of Alonzo; it was congenial with the feeling of his soul".

Evidently it impressed him so profoundly with its wisdom and beauty that it rendered him absolutely speechless.

It was clear to Melissa that she had said something so good that all further conversation was totally unnecessary and that she had better be content with the amazing success of her first remark. And so, although it is recorded that "they returned at a late hour",

they maintained a complete silence for the rest of the evening.

If anybody thinks that this is intended to indicate that their lips were otherwise engaged, or that any such familiarities as kissing and holding of hands took place, then he knows little of the behavior of the youthful heroes and heroines of the novels of this period. Doubtless Alonzo proffered his arm to Melissa as they walked home together, but it is otherwise certain that as they sat on the rock together a distance of not less than two and a half feet intervened between them, and that there was nothing in their conversation and conduct, even so much as the fluttering of an eyelid, to suggest a flirtation.

On the next day they all went home. Beauman was there; he "handed Melissa into the carriage", and with some others travelled part of the way with them. But Alonzo and Melissa finished the journey alone. There was a brief visit with the father of Edgar and Melissa—a "plain Connecticut farmer", who was rich, "destitute of literature" and a "rigid presbyterian". Then Edgar departed for New York to begin his studies of divinity, and Alonzo, in his native village, about twenty miles from Melissa's home, "entered the office of an eminent attorney".

He was much worried, however, about his inability to keep Beauman from dazzling Melissa with his attractions. One day, late in the summer, "he ordered his horse, and was in a short time at the seat of Melissa's father".

The young lady was sitting by the window when he entered the hall. She rose and received him with a smile.

"I have just been thinking of an evening's walk," said she, "but had no one to attend me, and you have come just in time to perform that office. I will order tea immediately, while you rest from the fatigues of your journey." By the time they were ready to set out there was some really remarkable weather, which has to be mentioned. As in the story of the fisherman and the enchanted flounder, where the weather became more and more portentous each time the fisherman returned to the sea-shore, so, as Alonzo and Melissa's passion became

warmer, the weather adapted itself to the situation.

On this afternoon: "A soft and silent shower had descended; a thousand transitory gems trembled upon the foliage glittering in the western ray. A bright rainbow sat upon a southern cloud; the light gales whispered among the branches, agitated the young harvest to billowy motion, or waved the tops of the distant deep green forest with majestic grandeur. Flocks, herds, and cottages were scattered over the variegated landscape".

This time the scenery provoked a more passionate conversation, and the author puts it into a form of dramatic dialogue. Melissa refers to the rock on the beach at New London, and says:

"I know not how it happened; but you are the only person who ever attended me there.

Alonzo: That is a little surprising.

Melissa: Why surprising?

Alonzo: Where was Beauman?

Melissa: Perhaps he was not fond of solitude. Besides he was not always my Beauman.

Alonzo: Sometimes.

Melissa: Yes, sometimes.

Alonzo: And now always.

Melissa: Not this evening.

Alonzo: He formally addresses you.

Melissa: Well.

Alonzo: And will soon claim the exclusive privilege so to do.

Melisso: That does not follow of course.

Alonzo: Of course, if his intentions are sincere, and the wishes of another should accord therewith.

Melisso: Who am I to understand by another?

Alonzo: Melissa. A pause ensued.

Melissa: See that ship, Alonzo, coming up the sound; how she ploughs through the white foam, while the breezes flutter among the sails, varying with the beams of the sun.

Alonzo: Yes, it is almost down.

Melissa: What is almost down?

Alonzo: The sun. Was not you speaking of the sun, madam?

Melissa: Your mind is absent, Alonzo; I was speaking of yonder ship.

Alonzo: I beg pardon, madam. O yes—the ship—it—it bounds with rapid motion over the waves.

A pause ensued. They walked leisurely around the hill, and moved toward home."

Their torrid courtship continues for a few weeks, until at last Alonzo "taking her hand with anxiety" begs Melissa to deal with him candidly, and remarks that he will bow to her decision, as "Beauman or Alonzo must relinquish their pretensions".

Melissa, "her cheeks suffused with a varying glow, her lips pale, her voice tremulous, her eyes still cast down", then utters this decorous speech: "My parents have informed me that it is improper to receive the particular addresses of more than one. I am conscious of my inadvertency, and that the reproof is just. One therefore must be dismissed. But ——"

She hesitated, and "a considerable pause ensued".

Yet everything hung fire, and Alonzo still addressed the lady as "Madam". A few days later, Melissa's father, the rigid presbyterian, announced to Alonzo and Beauman that on the morrow he would inform the two young men which was the lucky one in his daughter's choice. The whole face of nature, upon the evening of this fateful day, is dark with portent.

"The breeze's rustling wing was in the tree. The 'slitty sound' of the low murmuring brook, and the far-off water-fall, were faintly heard. The twinkling fire-fly arose from the surrounding verdure and illuminated the air with a thousand transient gleams. The mingling discordance of curs and watch-dogs echoed in the distant village, from whence the frequent lights darted their palely lustre thro' the gloom."

The whippoorwills, by this time, are treated practically like hired musicians: they "stationed themselves along the woody glens, the groves and rocky pastures, and sung a requiem to departed summer. A dark cloud was rising in the west, across whose gloomy front the vivid lightning bent its forked spires".

Next day, Melissa's father requested Alonzo and Beauman to withdraw with him to a private room, and as soon as they were

all seated, the old gentleman "addressed them" in a speech one page in length. He maintained the suspense to the end and then announced: "I now inform you that she has decided in favor of—Alonzo".

Beauman was more or less broken up at this, but no trouble developed between the suitors. Indeed, every precaution against an outbreak had been taken by Melissa's father, since one of the provisions of his speech had been that instantly upon its conclusion both of them should depart and absent themselves for at least two weeks "as it would be improper for my daughter to see either of you at present".

As if Alonzo had not had delay and vexation enough, America and England took this inconvenient occasion to go to war: the battle of Lexington was followed by the battle of Bunker Hill, and a "panic and general bustle took place in America". These things "were not calculated to impress the mind of Melissa with the most pleasing sensations". The eminent attorney with whom Alonzo was studying received a commission in the American army, and marched to the lines near Boston.

Alonzo thought that it might soon be his duty to "take the field", and he talked the matter over with Melissa. They "agreed to form the mystic union previous to any wide separation", and even picked out a village in which they might live after the troubles were past. It was a place chiefly inhabited by farmers, who were "mild, sociable, moral and diligent". This village, which they called "The Asylum", a word with pleasanter associations than it has today, gave its name to Mitchell's novel.

"Here," said Alonzo, describing the prospect to his affianced wife, "will we pass our days in all that felicity of mind which the chequered scenes of life admit. In the spring we will rove among the flowers. In summer, we will gather strawberries in yonder fields, or whortleberries from the adjacent shrubbery. The breezes of fragrant morning and the sighs of the evening gale, will be mingled with the songs of the thousand various birds, which frequent the surrounding groves."

He did not particularize as to the birds,

but we can be pretty sure which ones he had in mind.

Alonzo received a commission in a militia regiment, but was not yet ordered away. Besides, his father's affairs were causing anxiety. One evening the eminent merchant asked Alonzo "if it were not possible that his marriage with Melissa could be consummated within a few days".

"Alonzo, startled at so unexpected a question, replied, that such a proposal would be considered extraordinary perhaps improper: besides, when Melissa had fixed the day, she mentioned that she had an uncle who lived near Charleston, in South Carolina, whose daughter was expected to pass the summer with Melissa, and was to arrive before the appointed day. It would, he said, be a delicate point for him to request her to anticipate the nuptials, unless he could give some urgent reasons for so doing."

Next morning, at breakfast, the agitated merchant addressed his family in a speech of two pages, in which he reviewed his financial career and condition, informing them that five of his ships had been seized in English harbors as lawful prizes, and that, in point of fact, he was bankrupt.

At this moment, the sheriff and his officers came in, and dragged the old gentleman off to prison. This event had the most unfavorable effect upon Melissa's parent—the rigid presbyterian, who now begins to emerge as the unfeeling father of the sub-title. The lovers had a gloomy interview and as Melissa prepared to return from it "a whippoorwill tuned its nightly song at a little distance". But the sound, "late so cheerful and sprightly, now passed heavily over their hearts"; the situation was becoming too serious for whippoorwills to be of any use.

Melissa's father now received his daughter's lover "with a distant and retiring bow", and introduced to him a new member of the family: an unpleasant, comedy character in the person of a maiden aunt, who had "doubled her teens". This, as I understand it, meant that she was a haggard old crone of at least twenty-six.

The unfeeling father, in a speech of about a page and a half, told Alonzo that he must now relinquish "all pretensions to the hand

of Melissa"—and immediately left the room.

The situation became worse and worse. Beauman, who had just come into a splendid fortune, once more appeared as a rival. Alonzo could only visit his love secretly by night, and converse with her from the garden while she leaned out the window. Her father and the comic aunt had locked her in her room.

After one of these nocturnal interviews, Alonzo met Beauman, who was standing just outside the garden wall. Beauman, awake to the requirements of the situation, immediately adopted the language of high romance.

"'What, my chevalier,' said he, 'such an adept in the amorous science already? Hast thou then eluded the watchful eyes of Argus, and the vigilance of the dragon?'"

But Alonzo quickly showed him that he had learned something equally good at New Haven. Princeton had the ball, but it was not yet in Yale's territory.

"'Unfeeling and impertinent intruder!' he retorted, seizing hold of him, 'is it not enough that an innocent daughter must endure a merciless parent's persecuting hand, but thou must add to her misery by thy disgusting interference!'"

"'Quit thy hold, tarquin,' said Beauman; 'art thou determined, after storming the fortress, to murder the garrison?'"

"'Go,' said Alonzo, quitting him; 'go sir, you are unworthy of my anger. Pursue thy grovelling schemes.'"

Beauman then abandoned the manner of formal speech, and returned to the customary conversational style in a speech of two pages, ending with the information that he was now going back to New London. And that was all that happened that night.

Melissa is taken from home by the comic aunt, and immured in a Gothic castle or dungeon, with a high wall and moat. It is rather surprising to find this structure in Colonial Connecticut, but the aunt's explanation is that it was built by Melissa's great-grandfather, as a fortress against the Indians.

The fact is, of course, that the novelist writing shortly after 1800, and under the influence of "The Mysteries of Udolpho" and

the Gothic romance generally, was quite helpless in the matter. He could no more avoid putting his heroine into a haunted castle and subjecting her to horrid groans and ghastly visions than the novelist of the present decade can escape from Freudian terminology and dreams of sexual symbolism.

Soon Melissa is having a terrible time. There are foot-steps and there are mysterious whisperings. An icy hand grasps her arm when she is trying to go to sleep. Voices call to her, and warn her to depart—which, by this time, she would jolly well like to do. An exceedingly unpleasant figure at last stands at her bedside.

"Its appearance was tall and robust, wrapped in a tattered white robe, spotted with blood. The hair of its head was matted with clotted gore. A deep wound appeared to have pierced its breast, from which fresh blood flowed down its garment. Its pale face was gashed and gory! its eyes fixed, glazed, and glaring:—its lips open, its teeth set, and in its hand was a bloody dagger."

Over twenty years ago a discussion of "Alonzo and Melissa" was revived in the literary reviews, and from all parts of the country elderly men and women wrote in recalling with a glow of enthusiasm the old attic in some farmhouse in Connecticut, or New Hampshire, or New York, where, fifty or sixty years earlier, they had undergone delightful chillings of the blood as they read this incident. For many of these youthful readers it was their first experience with a fictitious story; to them a full-blown novel was hitherto unknown. Many households had certain devotional books; perhaps Baxter's "Saints' Everlasting Rest" or Foxe's "Book of Martyrs". But fiction, romance, tender sentiment and ghostly adventure were represented for the first time by this story, and by it alone. Probably this accounts for the enormous success of the book, and for the new editions which followed each other for seventy years.

Today I could find only two copies in a city which has millions of books, and the one through which I gained my first knowledge of the tale had been so worn that pages were missing. The book was rebound in such confusion that it was almost impossi-

ble to discern what Melissa did or how she was rescued from her peril.

One fact was plain, however: Melissa was not easily stampeded. The horrendous figure vanished, leaving the room "involved in pitchy blackness". A "horrid hoarse voice" called: "Begone! begone from this house!" The bed on which she lay then seemed to be agitated, "and directly she perceived some person crawling on its foot".

She sprang up, found the candle, lighted it, searched the room, and took the reasonable precaution of looking under the bed. But there was no explanation of the dreadful spectre, or the other annoyances.

Next day Alonzo got into the castle. He crossed the moat by a tree that fell during the storm which raged in the night when the hauntings were at their worst. He rescued Melissa; but soon afterwards lost her once more. Every time he turned his back, some malign influence snatched her away.

Alonzo returned to New London, where he fell ill of a fever, and had various other trying experiences, until one day, he was finally crushed to the ground by reading in a paper this notice: "Died, of a consumption, on the 26th ult. at the seat of her uncle, Col. W. D. —, near Charleston, South Carolina, whither she had repaired for her health, Miss Melissa D —, the amiable daughter of J — D —, Esq. of * * *, Connecticut, in the eighteenth year of her age."

"The paper fell from the palsied hand—a sudden faintness came upon him—the room grew dark—he staggered, and fell senseless upon the floor."

There follow several pages describing Alonzo's delirium and ravings, his partial recovery, his grief and progress, his solitary and melancholy days, and his final resolve to take part in the war. He offered himself to the captain of a war-ship at New London, and this officer, "pleased with his appearance" promptly made him commander of the marines. The hero's ill fortune was persistent. In the first engagement with an enemy ship each vessel disabled the other, and while they were lying helpless a large English frigate appeared, took captive the Americans and carried them to London.

Here he spends a gloomy time in prison. Beauman turns up there, sick and miserable, and, after some affecting speeches, passes away. The author cannot contrive enough woes to lavish upon Alonzo, so he introduces, for an hour or two, a wretched young Englishman, who is in sorry plight in the same prison. He obligingly tells the story of his life, and the point of it is that his sister had dressed up in man's clothes and pretended to be a rival for her brother's sweetheart. As a result of this prank he has murdered both the girls, and is himself to be hanged next week.

After a bit, Alonzo escapes from prison by making a rope out of his clothes. He lands on the streets of London at three in the morning, and stark naked. He is more than a little dejected, and quite chilly, since it is a very raw day. His first piece of luck, however, meets him in the person of an English sailor, a midshipman on the *Severn*, named Jack Brown. Alonzo confides in him, making his whole situation known, and the noble British tar takes pity upon his enemy in distress. He clothes him, takes him home, and finally ships him to France, with ten golden guineas in his pocket. This lavish generosity is probably accounted for by the fact that Jack is married, with four children, and naturally has to have a great deal of money.

In Paris, Alonzo repairs instantly to the American Embassy, and thus we are admitted to the venerable presence of Dr. Benjamin Franklin. He listens to Alonzo's story, and with due regard for his own reputation as sage and philosopher, sits in complete silence for fifteen minutes. As a result of this deep thought he gets Alonzo a job as clerk in a book-shop.

A few months later, Dr. Franklin calls Alonzo once more to his house and tells him of his own acquaintance with and indebtedness to Alonzo's father. He then addresses an eloquent and sonorous oration on life, death and love, on the vanity of human wishes, on patriotism, duty, the character of the late Melissa, and Alonzo's obligation to return and help the struggling colonies. He ships Alonzo back to America, and a few months later the young man is standing in

the church-yard at Charleston, South Carolina, before a stone with this inscription:

Sacred
To the Memory of inestimable departed
Worth;
To unrivalled Excellence and Virtue.
Miss Melissa D —
Whose remains are deposited here, and
whose ethereal parts became a seraph
October 26, 1776
in the 18th year of her age.

Alonzo's grief leads him to frantic demonstrations in the grave-yard, and about the only consolation he can find is that a night-ingale is singing nearby. Nightingales, the author explains in a foot-note, are permissible in South Carolina. There is also a whippoorwill—"Melissa's favorite bird"—whistling near the portico of the church. (Some deception had been practised on this whippoorwill, as will presently appear.)

At a tavern, in Charleston, Alonzo becomes acquainted with a young officer, who gives him many hints about a mysterious young lady who wishes to meet him. There is much backing and filling, and great hesitation by Alonzo, before he will so much as look on any "female". At last however, he calls upon her.

"She was dressed in sky-blue silk, embroidered with spangled lace; a gemmed tiara gathered her hair, from which was suspended a green veil, according to the mode . . . a silken girdle, with diamond clasp surrounded her waist."

After a little preliminary banter, the green veil was lifted by the young lady, disclosing the beauteous features of—Melissa!

In a moment—and for the first time in the book—she was in his arms. But the author had to make extended apologies for this lapse, and try to disarm those readers who might be horrified or annoyed. "Sneer not, ye callous hearted insensibles, ye fastidious prudes, if we inform you that their tears fell in one intermingling shower, that their sighs wafted in one blended breeze."

The explanation of it all was that the deception had been necessary to foil the unfeeling father, the rigid presbyterian, and

keep him from marrying her to Beauman. The Melissa D — whose death had been reported, the lady who was actually buried in the church-yard, was another Melissa D —, a cousin of our heroine. And near her grave, the whippoorwill—led astray by false pretences, like the reader of the book—was now whistling.

They go back to Connecticut; the tyrannical father is mollified—all the easier, since, about this time, Alonzo's father's ships come in, and he is once more restored to wealth. The "nuptials" are prepared.

"And now, reader of sensibility, indulge the pleasing sensation of thy bosom—for Alonzo and Melissa are MARRIED."

Accompanied by twenty men, with muskets and swords, they investigate the Gothic castle, and find that it is infested by "illicit traders", men who are carrying on a contraband business with the enemy troops in New York City. It was these miscreants who originated all the elaborate and expensive hocus-pocus to scare one girl out of the house.

By an odd coincidence, about the time of Alonzo's wedding, some English prisoners of war—sailors—are brought into port, and Alonzo finds his old benefactor, Jack Brown, deeply distressed and in manacles.

In a short time, Jack has been exchanged, his wounds healed, and he is sent home with a draft on London for £500. He returns to his wife and four children, and sets up a public house at the sign of *The Grateful American*.

Alonzo and Melissa are now in complete felicity, except that the bridegroom is called out now and then on militia duty until the end of the war. They return to the village, which they had chosen for their original home. Here they build their cottage, prepared to enjoy the charms of nature, which the author is ready to describe at the least provocation. All of those charms are present, and a new one—the strawberry bird—is introduced in the last paragraph. He comes in, however, as an addition, and not in substitution for their faithful companions, the whippoorwills.

THE STRANGE CASE OF JAMES JOYCE

By Rebecca West

I SHUT the bookshop door behind me and walked slowly down the street that leads from the Odéon to the Boulevard St. Germain in the best of all cities, reading in the little volume which had there been sold to me not exactly pretentiously indeed with a matter-of-fact briskness, yet with a sense of there being something on hand different from an ordinary commercial transaction: as they sell pious whatnots in a cathedral porch. Presently I stopped. I said "Ah!" and smiled up into the clean French light. My eye lit on a dove that was bridging the tall houses by its flight, and I felt that interior agreement with its grace, that delighted participation in its experience, which is only possible when one is in a state of pleasure.

I was pleased by a poem that I had just read; the following poem:

ALONE

The moon's grey-golden meshes make
All night a veil,
The shore lamps on the sleeping lake
Laburnum tendrils trail.

The shy reeds whisper to the night
A name — her name —
And all my soul is a delight,
A swoon of shame.

It may seem inconceivable that this poem should bring pleasure to any living creature, for, as art is in part at least a matter of the communication to the audience of an emotion felt by an artist, this is plainly an exceedingly bad poem. "And all my soul is a delight, A swoon of shame" are words as blank as the back of a spoon. Nevertheless this poem gave me great pleasure, because I had considered it in the light of its authorship. For it is not the words to a song; it is not by Mr. Fred E. Weatherley. It is not by Miss Helen Wills, whose sole poetical production

(published, I think, in *Vanity Fair*) it very closely resembles. It is, on the contrary, as one might say, by Mr. James Joyce. It is one of the poems, and not noticeably the worst, included in the collection he has called "Pomes Penyeach". And because he had written it I was pleased, though not at all as the mean are when they find that the mighty have fallen, for had he written three hundred poems as bad as this his prose works would still prove him beyond argument a writer of majestic genius. Indeed, the pleasure I was feeling was not at all dependent on what my conception of Mr. James Joyce is: it was derived from the fact that, very much more definitely than five minutes before, I had a conception of Mr. James Joyce. Suspicions had been confirmed. What was cloudy was now solid. In those eight lines he had ceased to belong to that vast army of our enemies, the facts we do not comprehend; he had passed over and become one of our friends, one of those who have yielded up an account of their nature, who do not keep back a secret which one day may act like a bomb on each theory of the universe that we have built for our defense.

For really, I reflected, as I went on my way down the Street of the Seine, this makes it quite plain that Mr. James Joyce is a great man who is entirely without taste. So much is proved by the preservation of this poem against considerable odds; for it was written at Zürich in 1916, and there was the removal to Paris, there were eleven years, there was space and there was time, in which to lose it. And lack of taste, when one comes to turn over the handicaps he has laid on his genius, is the source of nearly all of them. It explains, for example, the gross sentimentality which is his most fundamental error. What do I mean by sentimentality? I had to think. There appeared before my eyes another part of France, the Provençal village where I spend my summers, the crook in the