

and that was that. It remains an entirely readable story and by far the most plausible of its school except, perhaps, Weir Mitchell's "Hugh Wynn." Twenty-six years later comes Mr. Benét's "Spanish Bayonet," a romance of the same period.

The tonal difference is considerable. Mr. Benét's chief figure is a dreamy young loon named Andrew Beard, son of a self-made man in New York, who is sent to Florida for purely commercial reasons. He is shy, something of a snob and plainly his maker sets no more value on chastity for Andrew than the young gentleman of Fielding's and Smollett's novels set on that same dubious commodity for themselves. Having landed at St. Augustine he falls into the smooth hands of Dr. Gentian, master of the colony at New Sparta in which Minorcans, Greeks, and Italians sweat over indigo and sugar making. Andrew is wholly taken in by the lacquered charms of Gentian and then drops into the dazzling net spread for him by Sparta Gentian, the doctor's daughter, who can sing "Beauty Retire," and can play upon the pianoforte with consummate execution. Just here Mr. Benét gives the ghost of Richard Carvel a vicious kick in the jaw and mounts his horse for a rake's progress. The historical novel becomes suddenly the novel of the past. No John Jaul Jones, no George Washington, no minute men facing the scarlet coats at Lexington? No, these things ripple into young Andrew's mind occasionally, but the interest lies elsewhere. All that historical machinery is playing up north. You remain to be entertained, in the steam of a plantation below St. Augustine, by Andrew's dealings with Dr. Gentian, whose lacquers cover sadism touched with megalomania, a little lechery, and an interest in the civilized juju of the eighteenth century. Miss Gentian is a wily bitch whose heart, as one says, is already given to her father's loutish overseer but who is willing to clamp young Andrew to herself, for the family's benefit, by waving a white flower into his bedroom at an indiscreet hour and leaving him to follow the inference. Gentian and his daughter are struggling privately against each other for control of the colony. The moneyed Andrew is the gull of the proceedings and the stolid, imported Minorcans are with him victims of Gentian's swindling skill. The delusions crash, one night. It is an admirable, disillusioned tale of youth, told with consistent force and with long passages of extraordinary grace. But I don't expect to hear that the authorities of Andover have substituted it for "Ben Hur." The mere language of pages 208 and 209 forbids any such notion, and a general air of profane carnality hangs heavy on the Gentian household. No, it won't replace the historical novel of the '90s in academic use.

Mr. Benét makes occasional small errors. "Spanish Bayonet" is certainly his most original and forceful work in prose but, having allowed Andrew to see his Sparta in the embraces of her overseer, Andrew's maker comments thus: "That his pain might well have seemed unnecessarily acute to any dispassionate observer would hardly have consoled him, had he known it. . . . The cold brain of heaven, whose thought is a falling star between illusion and illusion, might properly regard his adolescent strugglings with befitting contempt but that task of scorn may, perhaps, be left to it." I admit to a vehement dislike of that invoked dispassionate observer. His shape has not elsewhere defaced the story and needn't have done so just then. He has always been a bore, even when Henry James invoked him, between 1887 and 1900. The paragraph has the effect of a sudden withdrawal from the natural narrative mood and so, too, have some casual sentences in which the warm imagery of the boy's mind as he gazes at his mistress becomes deliberately literary. Mr. Benét, drops, now and then, into the highly cultivated man of letters and the stricken Andrew drops with his father. But, fortunately for the high points of the tale, its author has generally had no trouble with his profound literary education.

"Spanish Bayonet," then, represents an episode of conditioned importance. The novel of the American past begins, here, to escape from the ordinary settings as, with Mr. Hergesheimer, it escaped from the ordinary inflections of the elder historical novel. How far can the thing go on? Are we to have nonpatriotic and unflattering tales of early Alabama, early Missouri, and perhaps, at last, of Puritan New England? Mr. Benét's resolute and impenitent appearance in this field rouses a hope that he may look for more material and so do as well again.

## Hill Life

HILL-BILLY. By ROSE WILDER LANE. New York: Harper & Bros. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by T. S. STRIBLING

Author of "Teftallow"

SOUTHERN pore whites are gaining their place in the sun nowadays among American fiction writers and play makers. "Sun-Up" and "Ruint" have recently entertained the New York theatre goers, a number of novels have been written, but among them all nothing more veracious and soaked with truth has been done than Rose Wilder Lane's "Hill-Billy."

It is a novel of the Ozarks, but the dialect, which Miss Lane often converts into pure poetry, the folk ways, the hill philosophy and religiosity, apply equally well to any hill community in the South.

To pick a very tiny flaw in the texture of the book, the hill folk do have a habit of eliding the articles in their talk. For instance, take this example from a random page of "Hill-Billy": "Jolly's nary snake in the grass, he would never use poison on enemy of his." These elided articles are very effective in the dialect, but very often the author adopts it in her own descriptions and comments, and the result is her English moves forward like a four-cylinder car, fast enough but with some jarring.

But that's trivial. Her book itself is a miracle of verisimilitude. It is packed full of incident, murders, seduction, fights, dances, chicanery, and yet through it all, it preserves the somnolent, half-awake atmosphere of the hills. The characters drawl, although Miss Lane never once uses that overworked word, still the very sentence structure drags with the mental slowness of her *dramatis personae*. They drawl, they stretch, they yawn, they look slowly at each other, but with immense shrewdness. The murders in "Hill-Billy," of which there are three or four, are served to the reader sometimes in the form of mysteries, sometimes as conundrums as to how it is possible for the hero, Abimelech Baird, a village lawyer, to save his client from the gallows. But Abimelech always does.

There is a virtuosity about Abimelech's legal procedure cries out to the reader that the gist of this narrative is fact, not fiction.

No American novelist could sit in his study and invent the peculiar knotty problems that come before Abimelech and the equally peculiar methods he uses in their solution. But the most ordinary scribbler could find similar examples in any rural court. Whether that ordinary scribbler could dip his findings in poetry and serve it up in cantos as Miss Lane did is something else again.

Running through the whole book is the split between the village and the hills; the hatred mixed with admiration of the rustic for the townsman, and the contempt of the townsman for the rustic. In this ancient quarrel Miss Lane clearly espouses the cause of her hill billies although her faithful delineation of the lives of both rather betrays her special pleader.

Abimelech Baird, her hero, was an uncommonly solid virtuous youth; he is only twenty-one when the book finishes with him; his attitude toward his first sweetheart, Bessie, is as emotional as an oak. She can hang on to one of his arms or not, just as it suits her, he doesn't mind. In the course of their courtship he finds that she has been seduced and is to become a mother. He doesn't turn a hair. He is going right ahead and marry her anyway because he feels that is the honorable thing to do. Then, right in the shadow, one might say, of the marriage scaffold, Bessie suddenly deserts Abimelech, and elopes with and marries her seducer, Little Georgie, the man she has always loved. This goes to Bessie's account as the sheerest unfaithfulness, but if one steps outside the author's condemnation and looks the matter over, is it?

It is a parlous thing to draw real life, and then have the hardihood to deduce a moral from it.

The actual story ends on page 279, and then in an afterword printed in italics, the author tells how prosperous Abimelech became in after years; how he owned most of the property in Millersville, how energetic his children were, and how weak and feeble were the children of Bessie and Little Georgie, and how Abimelech was such a power for good in the community that he went to the legislature—such a good man.

No reader can doubt any of these virtues, nor fail to have a pretty fair idea what Abimelech did

when he reached the legislature, but one question constantly obtrudes itself on this idyllic setting, did Abimelech, as a professional suborner, trickster, and perjurer, go to the legislature to concoct laws more amenable to trickery and chicanery, or did he go there to make tougher and more intractable statutes in order to keep down competition?

"Hill-Billy" is an almost perfect exposition of hill life and hill morality.

## An Elizabethan Romance

THE FOURTH QUEEN. By ISABEL PATERSON. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1926.

Reviewed by EDWARD DAVISON

BY the Fourth Queen we are to comprehend Venus in her ancient literary capacity as the *deus ex machina* of historical romance. *Omnia vincit amor!* Mrs. Paterson's courageous book follows the most familiar lines of Scott, Dumas, Harrison Ainsworth, and Stanley Weyman. In all save the actual setting it is commonplace. Its variations from type, however, are definitely the result of an honest and not unsuccessful attempt to make the plot subsidiary to the characters of the chief people. Mrs. Paterson takes the traditional eccentricities of Queen Elizabeth during several years before the Essex conspiracy and traces their moulding influence on the affairs of "Fighting Jack" (his full name is given as John Philip Sidney Montagu) and his sweetheart, one of the queen's maids-of-honor.

The book plunges straight away into a rather confused account of the fight with the Spanish armada. Our hero covers himself with familiar glory and returns to take up a position in the Queen's guard at Whitehall palace and to pursue his ultra-romantic love affairs in the face of the Queen's displeasure. In the end, after a period of exile and privateering on the Spanish main, he returns to England, home, and beauty. The tale is marred by the indulgence of one of those impossible coincidences so peculiarly the property of the historical romance and by an excessively sentimental concluding chapter wherein the baby son of Jack and his lady is taught to plead for the Queen's pardon.

For all that Mrs. Paterson has written a stirring tale of love and blood and thunder. It is not easy to forgive the mixed and frothy brew of her prose style. Historical romance naturally requires some kind of realistic dialogue and Mrs. Paterson does not fail her reader in this respect. Indeed she lays it on with a trowel. It is fair to say that she makes her characters think like Elizabethans even when they are talking like parodies of themselves. Even Marlowe's language in his plays is not more atmospherically Elizabethan than hers. But let the dialogue pass for what it is, the work of an author intoxicated with enthusiasm and saturated in the glossaries of the epoch. It is different with the narrative portions of the book. Here the pseudo-Elizabethan prose of the dialogue is allowed to leak through the quotation marks with frequently ridiculous effects. And even apart from this the book is marred with such monstrous sentences as "Now was he oriented, having seen again the lodestar of his constant heart." A little while later the author is referring to the "Fabian tactics" of Lord Burghley. It is enough to hint lightly at the curious quality of the prose mixture. One need not object to a few anachronisms but Mrs. Paterson should know that it is not possible to see "the twilight glimmer of Avon" from the windows of Windsor Castle. The Thames has not yet been exchanged with Stratford.

However those whose literary sensitiveness is not wounded by the defects already mentioned will discover a long evening's entertainment in this racy book, especially in the gratuitous episodic chapter wherein the defenseless hero and his newly married wife are set upon in their marriage bed by their jealous brother and his band of bailiffs. And there is another obscure and would-be ghastly episode in the hall adjoining the bedchamber of the Virgin Queen which may mean nothing or anything according to the reader's opinion as to how far Queen Bess merited her title of Good. But for one thing the author deserves really high praise, that is her extraordinarily vivid and penetrating characterization of Essex and the Queen. She owes more to Strickland than to the truer histories. But she has reanimated part of their dust and that is no small feat.



## In the Vernacular

### THE LOVE NEST AND OTHER STORIES.

By Ring W. Lardner. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1926. \$1.75.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

"HE was forever blowing bubbles. It amounted to a whim." Thus Miss Sarah E. Spooldrigger, of the late Mr. Lardner, in her introduction to his last book of short stories. I am sorry Mr. Lardner is dead because he was a good guy when he had it.

To try and be serious, even in the face of the introduction to "The Love Nest," I know you'll laugh, but the fact is that Mr. Lardner is still alive. I read something by him in last Sunday's *World*. Of course,—but there are other proofs.

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Let us discuss the stories. The title story and the story called "Haircut" are perfect and terrible. I didn't say perfectly terrible. They are two of the most satisfactory short stories I have read for a long time. They bite like acid. And they display Mr. Lardner's marvelous command of vernacular. So does "Zone of Quiet." Things like this:

(The Great Man speaking): She certainly was! And she is yet! I mean she's even prettier, but of course she ain't a kid, though she looks it. I mean she was only seventeen in that picture and that was ten years ago. I mean she's twenty-seven years old now. But I never met a girl with as much zip as she had in those days. It's remarkable how marriage changes them. I mean nobody would ever thought Celia Sayles would turn out to be a sit-by-the-fire. I mean she still likes a good time, but her home and kiddies come first. I mean her home and kiddies come first.

(The Barber speaking): Well, they asked him if he was in earnest and he said he was and nobody could think of nothin' to say till Jim finally broke the ice himself. He says, "I been sellin' canned goods and now I'm canned goods myself."

You see, the concern he'd been workin' for was a factory that made canned goods. Over in Carterville. And now Jim said he was canned himself. He was certainly a card!

(Miss Lyons speaking): I haven't read it yet. I've been busy making this thing for my sister's birthday. She'll be twenty-nine. It's a bridge table cover. When you get that old, about all there is left is bridge or cross-word puzzles. Are you a puzzle fan? I did them religiously for a while, but I got sick of them. They put in such crazy words. Like one day they had a word with only three letters and it said "A e-longated fish" and the first letter had to be an e. And only three letters. That couldn't be right! So I said if they put things wrong like that, what's the use? Life's too short. And we only live once. When you're dead, you stay a long time dead.

That's what a B. F. of mine used to say. He was a caution! But he was crazy about me. I might of married him only for a G. F. telling him lies about me. And called herself my friend! Charley Pierce.

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Such are the bubbles blown by Mr. Lardner. It may look easy. The amazing locutions ripple along so naturally. You can hear voices. Some writers have what has been called the "photographic mind." People, and scenes leave an indelible visual memory,—all the small details that others never see. They can reproduce everything in precise description, at will. Mr. Lardner has, on the other hand, a remarkable ear for ordinary speech. No *nuance* escapes him. His aural memory is perfect. He could never possibly tag a character with the wrong "line."

It is, of course, all in the American language; there is no other form of English like it. But it is not a literary "stunt." Mr. Lardner is not doing dialect. Nor is he concocting fiction. He is remembering voices, playing by ear. The stories one can overhear, if one knows how to listen!

In the true humorist is always implicit the tragic ironist. Mr. Lardner is labelled and put away in all the editors' pigeonholes as "Humorist." He is "as funny as a crutch." The discerning know that this may often be taken literally. A crutch is funny, in a way,—of course, anyone falling down and breaking their leg (or their heart) is awfully funny. Awfully funny is substantially correct. Mr. Lardner knows that. He is acquainted with the Parcae and the Eumenides, and with a lot of other people from those small Middle-Western towns. Beside Conrad Greens and ball-players and song-writers and trained nurses and city folk.

But then he's an awful kiddier. The nine stories in this book aren't going to turn your hair white.

You'll have many a merry laugh. Don't let me put you off. The irony may have entered his soul, but he is also just too nonsensical. He's really terribly comic.

## War as It Is

TOWARD THE FLAME. By HERVEY ALLEN. New York: George H. Doran Co. 1926.

Reviewed by THOMAS BOYD

Author of "Through the Wheat"

AN account of The World War that would satisfy every soldier who took part in it, will probably never be written. More than one officer is asked whether his men ever felt any nervous tremors in making an attack would say sternly and rebukingly, "My soldiers were never afraid!" Another eyewitness would have you believe that the wit and humor of the average dough-boy was always on tap, that he could say something laughable and spicing even if he stood knee-deep in blood and corpses. Opposed to this optimist is the former soldier who saw nothing but bickering, hate, and iron-heeled militarism from the moment he put on a uniform until he finally removed it for once and, to be hoped, for all.

It is notable that Hervey Allen had experiences worth the telling. There is one place in his book, near the end, where he describes in flashingly vivid prose one of the most sensational adventures in war that could ever have happened to anybody. The kind of scene which burns itself in the memory, that holds the essence of the stupidity, chicanery, and futility of war, it is made finer still by the challenge to mortality which is in it. This all takes place on the banks of the Vesle between Fismes and Fismettes. Hervey Allen, a lieutenant in the Twenty-Eighth National Guard Division, is ordered with his platoon to make an attack from Fismes. The story of this, which has its explanation in the Memoirs of General Bullard, makes one of the ghastliest chapters of the war.

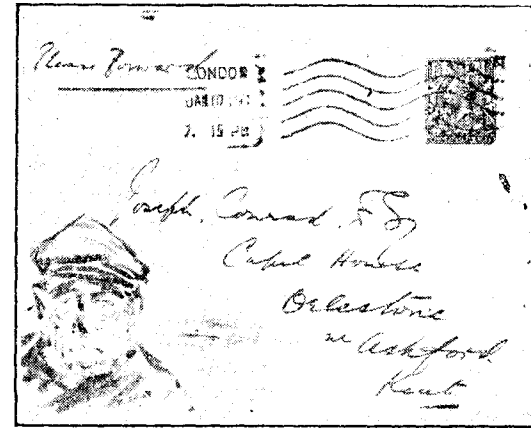
"Toward the Flame" is written in admirable and simple prose throughout, though the tempo and quality of the second part of the narrative are very different from what they are in the first part. This is easily accounted for in that Mr. Allen wrote the first part five months after he had been sent to the hospital from the attack at Fismettes in which his company assaulted a German division, and that the second part was written several years afterward. While the beginning of the narrative is smooth and agreeable enough, it shows that the author was still a little under the influence of wartime mental taboos, and that he had not fully realized what had happened. The second half is more mature, deliberate, and impassioned. The whole constitutes an important record of a type of American which is scarcer than it should be.



## Conrad's Skill as an Artist

THIS little sketch was made by Joseph Conrad and was his own conception of his character, old Peyrol. Few of his friends were aware of his habit, or even ability to portray with a few strokes of his pen or pencil, the image of some being conceived in his own mind. I think it must have been because of this that he objected so intensely to his work being illustrated. I mean with very, very few exceptions. I came upon him one day towards the end of his work on the "Rover" sitting quietly back in his favorite big-armchair, and with a tender smile on his face, a smile I had grown accustomed to know portended some thought or inspiration he had captured to his entire satisfaction. Sometimes that capture would be too fleeting for him to give expression to in words and I would not venture to obtrude my interest, by a word or even a look. This time he looked up quickly and then pushed towards me an old envelope, in the corner of which appeared a small sketch in ink, not yet dry. Only a face, the face of an old "shell-back" as he would fondly have called it, weather

beaten and rugged. I took it in my hands and said quickly, "Old Peyrol." My husband was delighted. "Yes! Jess, but I hope they will not want illustrations. I wonder what they would make of it if they do? Some dam' smooth faced landlubber I suppose!"



Another sketch, made over thirty years ago and discovered by me in the first few weeks of our married life. How well I recall that blustery evening on Ile Grande in the little peasant's house where we began our lives together. That afternoon when we returned from one of our little cruises round the island, somewhat earlier than was our wont, we found standing patiently before the front door, M. Bacadoua, a friendly neighbour—this man owned the greater part of the big stone quarries round the island and was considered by the other inhabitants as well to do. From pure friendliness he would always insist on carrying our baggage to and from the little landing stage when we made one of our frequent little jaunts to the mainland. He would never accept a gratuity but always solemnly shook hands with us. This evening he stood by our door patiently supporting a metal explorer's trunk which had been sent from England. I could see that his interest was aroused by the unusual nature of the box and his eyes became very round when my husband explained to him that it was fire-proof. This box contained besides a very tall oil lamp on a massive pedestal, some discarded duck trousers, a pair of binoculars attached to an old leather boot lace, a police whistle, two discolored cotton pillow cases and a bundle of papers. My gaze fastened itself on the latter but I said nothing. J. C. rummaged among the contents and rose to his feet holding the glasses and dangling the whistle by its string. "This whistle, Jess," he said holding it out toward me, "saved my life on the Congo!" With a shudder I recalled the incident of which he had spoken more than once.

He had sent his boys ashore to cut wood one evening after he had tied up to the bank. After a time he heard shots and sounds of quarreling. Seizing his rifle—and his whistle, which he hung round his neck, he started to look for them. Almost before he had gone ten yards from the bank his feet sank into a deep bog, he fired all his cartridges without attracting any attention from the two men left on board the steamer, and sank steadily deeper and deeper. He was already as deep as his armpits, when he bethought himself of the whistle. At the third shrill note he saw two men running towards him with boughs and he swooned. His next recollection was finding himself strapped to a chair on the bridge and the steamer already underway. This was undoubtedly the main cause of his terrible illness, and his subsequent malaria.

The bundle of papers lay for two days on the top of the miscellaneous collection in the half-open trunk. I had suggested more than once that I should finish unpacking it—and also that he should examine the pile of papers. The next thing I knew was the thud of the heavy roll falling close to the fire-place and I guessed rather than understood his direction to the maid to light the fire with "that perass" a favorite word of his. That evening when he was deep in a book I slipped from the room and rescued the roll. This I carried to the big loft over the top of the house to await my next free moments. In this loft I spent many hours watching the waves washing high all round the coast line. It was here I retired when the need of some outlet for my spirits grew too strong to be resisted. I was one of a family of nine, not very old when I was married and at times desperately in need of my kind. I used to feel sometimes the strain of being circumspect and dignified—as became the wife of Joseph Conrad. Several days passed before I was able to carry out