



They're beating the big drums for SHOW BOAT

"Show Boat" is gorgeously romantic... a spirited, full-breasted tireless story... a glorification of the American scene that once existed—Louis Kronenberger in the *N. Y. Times*.

"Show Boat" is much better than "So Big," and it is built around one of the most gloriously romantic themes that ever dropped into the lap of a novelist. Those of us who carry about with us gorgeous memories of the Mississippi River country will find it hard to be rational while reading "Show Boat."—Harry Hansen in the *N. Y. World*.

Gorgeous, colorful, and gaudy, and brass bandy, and thrilling. I think "Show Boat" is the most alluring book Edna Ferber has ever written.—Fanny Butcher in the *Chicago Tribune*.

Hers is the Americanism of Walt Whitman and Mark Twain... good-natured, tolerant, open-eyed, self-assured, and inclusive. A great American novel.—Edwin Bjorkman.

"Show Boat" is magnificent.—*The Bookman*.

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SHOW BOAT

BY EDNA FERBER
Author of "So Big"
\$2.00

Doubleday, Page & Co.

The Phoenix Nest

WE have chanced upon a passage in one of the letters included in "The Letters of Maurice Hewlett," edited by Laurence Binyon (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company). This particular letter was written in 1917 to Professor Lewis Chase, and in it the late master of high romance makes a statement that we think should be extraordinarily interesting to any student of his work: He had written poetry seriously for four years before he published his first book in prose, "Earthwork Out of Tuscany." He goes on to say, anent poetry:

However, prose came easily when it did come, and having hit the public taste with "The Forest Lovers," I went on with romance, treating it much as one behaves with verse. All my real romances would, I believe, be better if they were versified; and more than once I have thought of doing it. "Richard Yea-and-Nay" was actually based on a *chanson de geste*, and "The Queen's Quair" is really a symphony of sounds, very artfully done and never yet discovered by any critic. After "The Queen's Quair," in my own judgment, the vein was worked out, and I began to do things more like novels—though they were still treated poetically, that is, *a priori*. I am not a novelist, who is an observer, but always begin with an idea or a person and weave the tale round about that.

After speaking of his individual books of poems, Hewlett comes to "The Song of the Plow;" and, as this noble and insurgent long poem of his has always seemed to us one of the finest of modern poems and astoundingly little known in this country, it is interesting to have his own opinion of it:

Lastly, in 1916, I published "The Song of the Plow" which cost me ten years' preparation and three years' actual writing. I doubt I shall never better that; and I believe that it will last when I am dead and gone. Most of the England that I know and love is in it, and I like the Prelude best, myself; but the opening of Book I is very good too. It is a long poem and difficult in parts, because it is so packed. It demands a good deal of its reader—but so does all really good poetry.

We like the way Hewlett spoke out, though in the contemporary secrecy of a letter, concerning what he felt about his best poetry. Poets are ordinarily far better critics of their own work than the casual reader may suspect. A seasoned poet can go back over what he has written in the past and usually select from it with far more skill and taste than the professional critic. And we recommend all interested in the poetry of this century to read "The Song of the Plow." It has elements of greatness. It reveals Hewlett not only as an artist in language, but also as a man of extraordinarily penetrating sociological insight. It is an epic of the English people, the true English people, who, in the words of a line in one of Mr. Chesterton's poems, "have not spoken yet". . .

In last week's *Nest* we were speaking of railroad ballads, and mentioned "Casey Jones," and just on the heels of that comes a letter from Summer Rest, Greenwood, Virginia, written by J. C. Olmsted:

If you are interested in the Southern Mountaineer, perhaps the enclosed ballad will appeal to you. I took it down last spring from one of the school children over in the mountains, that I overheard chanting it lugubriously. The very next day, I saw in the Charlottesville paper that this same Sidney Allen or Sidna as the paper called it, had been pardoned for good behavior after some years in prison, and had gone to a neighboring state to begin life over again. In spite of Fords and Victrolas life in these mountains still seems very far away from the modern world.

The ballad itself is a most peculiar and close imitation of the famous "Casey Jones," except that the application is all to local history:

SIDNEY ALLEN

Come all you people, if you want to hear
The story about a cruel mountaineer
Sidney Allen was a fearless man
At Hilder (?) Court-House he won his name.

The Court called the jurymen at half past nine
Sidney Allen was the prisoner, and he was on time.
He mounted to the bar, with his pistol in his hand
And he sent Judge Massie to the promised land.

Then just a moment later, the place was in a roar,
The dead and the dying were lying on the floor.
With a thirty-eight Special and a thirty-eight Colt
Sidney backed the sheriff up against the wall.

The sheriff saw he was in a mighty tight place
The mountaineer was daring him, right in the face.
He turned to the window and then he said
Just a moment more, and we will all be dead.

He mounted to his pony and away he did ride,
His friends and his nephew riding by his side.

They all shook hands, and swore they would hang
Before they would give up to the Balteru (?) Gang.

Then Sidney wandered and he travelled all around,
Until he was captured in a western town.
He was taken to the station with the ball and chain.
And they put poor Sidney on the eastbound train.

They arrived at Sidney's home about eleven forty-one
He met his wife and daughter and his little son.
They all shook hands and they knelt down to pray—
And they said, "Oh Lord! don't take Popper away."

Then the people they all gathered from the far and near
Just to see poor Sidney to the electric cheer;
But to their great surprise the Judge he said
"He is going to the penitentiary instead!" . . .

First novels we can heartily recommend are as follows: first and foremost, "The Time of Man" by Elizabeth Madox Roberts (Viking Press), the most distinguished first novel of a writer who has already given us poetry of distinction. This is a remarkable piece of work and a discovery for the judicious; it is the initial effort of a prose artist who may achieve greatness. . . .

Leonard Nason's "Chevrons" (Doran) deserves a place with Dos Passos's "Three Soldiers," Thomas Boyd's "Through the Wheat," and the work of Captain Thomason (not to mention E. E. Cummings's "The Enormous Room" and Hervey Allen's "Toward the Flame," which are directly autobiographical) as one of the vital novels that have come out of the War. . . .

Another first novel by a poet, which is notable for its artistic integrity and actuality of scene and portraiture, is Henry Bellamann's "Petenera's Daughter" (Harcourt). And Dorothy Van Doren's "Strangers," (Doran), Denny G. Stokes's "The Way of the Panther" (Stokes), and Winifred Duke's "Heir to Kings" (Stokes) should also be mentioned as fiction above the average. We have recently read about fourteen novels, so we should really know! . . .

We have not been able to procure enough in print of Frances Newman's "The Hard-Boiled Virgin" from Boni & Liveright to really pass upon it. But the opening, which we have read, is of great promise. This firm is also issuing in "Sweepings," by Lester Cohen, a first novel of much power and range, a book that may forecast a new David Graham Phillips in the making. . . .

The John Day Company is to be congratulated upon its "an informal note about 'blurbs,'" on the last page of its current "First List of Books to be published in the Fall." Thank heaven that some publisher has at last had the frankness to come out and talk sense about "blurbings" and to refrain from superlatives about the books they publish. . . .

They are not to beguile their readers by ardent expressions of their own, as they neatly put it. They will merely indicate by fact and precise description the scope and character of each book they publish. Otherwise they simply state, "We see particular merit and have strong faith in each book we publish, else we should not have accepted it for publication". . . .

Speaking of John Day, a distinguished member of that Company, recently whispered into our ear the following literary fragment that came to him in a vision. It is really too good to keep to ourselves, and so,—thus it goes:

Let rainbows expiate their sins
In sombre tints arrayed;
I'd rather be Where the Blue Begins
Than where the Mauve Decade.

We hope many people still recall a fine novel of some years back, "A Big Horse to Ride," by E. B. Dewing. Her "My Son John," which is about to be published by Minton, Balch & Company, will mark an innovation in novel writing methods. Miss Dewing feels that no one, not even an author, can see all around a human being and that two quite opposite views of a person or a situation might—paradoxically—be equally sound. To a man's friend he appears all white, to his enemy all black. And who is to judge which is the truer estimate? . . .

To carry out her theory, Miss Dewing has written the story of John Lord in the form of a biography, thereby giving the opportunity—through the introduction of letters and quotations—of presenting the characters' opinions of one another. And so, tra-la. THE PHOENICIAN.

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