

Mr. Moon's Notebook

THANKSGIVING DAY: *Hating One's Friends.*

TO have achieved, however undeservedly, a reputation for mild affability, seems at times like a stigma. I am as observant as the next man. It interests me to peer into faces and to hear ragged ideas emerge from mouths. The odd physical shapes of people often fill me with rich appreciation. My philosophy is: let the individual flourish. I am, therefore, by the way, more nearly an anarchist than a savior of society. People do the most peculiar things. To be able to observe people placidly as variegated natural phenomena is to live, as I conceive it, in a state of grace. At least, it is the blander manner. It is certainly the least tedious; and my inertia is excessive. Yet I greatly fear it is all mere pusillanimity.

My private thoughts are often and often quite the reverse of benign. Someone's casual remark about something will itch in my memory for days; someone's negligible opinion concerning something else savagely fester. I find myself morbidly sensitive to people's manners, to their personal appearances, to their idiosyncrasies. My visage hypocritically beams while I harbor lurid dreams of mayhem and murder. As a poetess of the day has pithily put it, "For what I think I'd be arrested." I smile and smile and am a villain. And so, upon this day of exaltation of the turkey you are going to get some cranberry sauce. I can be thankful, at least—and I suppose you wish me to be thankful for something—that most of my friends suppose me quite other than I am. But here we rend the veil, tear down the curtain, and positively stamp upon the portieres.

I have a few friends. Naturally, they are mostly literary. Frequently I think of them "all in a genial glow"—for a short period. But in the arts one's ego becomes quite as bloated (really!) as in other occupations. It is a mistake to believe, for instance, that literary people are the great-hearted, vastly tolerant, expansive-souled, deeply sympathetic, to-a-fault-generous, high, wide and handsomely spiritual folk you may have imagined them. Or perhaps you didn't. Well, you were right. Neither, I conjecture, though I have hardly ever known a banker (at least to borrow from), are bankers. And I don't suppose firemen are very different; or bakers; or plumbers. I even have my doubts concerning policemen.

I say I have a few friends. But the slate, I suppose, must be sponged clean. For my true inner nature is now going to consider some of them.



Among literary people there are critics. I know some critics. Take the case of my friend Ralph Edgewood. He is a critic. And how often he annoys me! Ralph is scathing; therefore, they call him a good critic. But Ralph is also always "discovering" people. I have laid a like flattering unction to my soul at times. Perhaps that is why he irritates me so. I usually know the work of the people of whom he talks. A year or so ago Edgewood "discovered" Olivia Nash. I listened to nothing but the praises of Olivia Nash every time I met Ralph. It was, "At last we have a novelist!" or "Have you met her? A most astounding person." or "Heavens! Of course she doesn't live in the city. She cares nothing for all this drivel around us. She lives in the mountains. She belongs to literature." or "She walks in beauty like the night—" (No, but he would have said that, I am convinced, if he hadn't been beaten to it.) Well, Olivia Nash could write. Most of Ralph's enthusiasms can really write. But in less than three months he was talking of nothing but Carfroy Howard. My first remark, rather silly, I admit, was that nobody could really have a name like "Carfroy." Ralph glared at me through his glasses. "Oh, bosh! Nonsense! Here at last we have a poet. Naturally, he is not likely to be recognized—but Howard is a poet. He has put the kibosh on all this claptrap. Let me read you—" He read me a bit of the kibosh.

But Howard could write also. It wasn't that. It was that in all the spacious firmament on high there was no star even glinting weakly except the star of Carfroy—for three more months. Then I happened to say something about Carfroy to Edgewood. "Oh, yes," Ralph mumbled absently. "He's gaga. I expected his talent to flicker. But it's completely gone out. Anyway, it's hardly worth one's while to bother with most poetry, old or new. The book

is, of course, Blaxton Sturm's bitter analysis of western civilization, 'Delirium.' Read it? I thought not. That's a book not only for this century but for all time!"

"By the way," I offered, in passing, "I think that this last novel of Olivia Nash's is rather the best thing she's yet done."

"Olivia Nash?" Ralph frowned nearsightedly at me. "Who? What? Good Lord, you don't mean to say you still read Olivia Nash! That glow-worm only glimmered for a day."

Only one more example. A year had passed when after having at last got around to reading "Delirium" I thought I would like to discuss it with Ralph one evening. "My dear boy," he interrupted me, "for God's sake don't bring up Sturm! Really!" There was then what is known as a pregnant silence. Finally Ralph added weightily, "The case of Ethel Carricker is certainly an extraordinary one. Ethel Carricker's essays—know them? There at last is—"

Some day maybe I shall strangle my dear friend Edgewood—slowly, slowly. Or break the darned butterfly on a Ferris wheel!



One knows editors also. In fact I, myself, am an editor. Though sometimes I hardly know myself. Fulton Tweet is supposed to be a good editor. He is always around, talking to authors. He is extremely busy in the office, usually in conference. He bounces to and fro with a crammed brief-case. He dictates a great many letters. Fulton Tweet edits a magazine of large circulation. He lunches a great deal. Perhaps that is all I should say about him, because there is usually very little else to say of an editor. However, I shall go on. Tweet has one trait in common with Edgewood. He is usually rushing out of his inner sanctum with the exclamation, "By George, this is the greatest—" But, in his case, the manuscript concerning which he is rhetorical invariably turns out to be the latest journeywork of one of the plethora and popular writers. Tweet is accustomed to talk in big figures to and of these large fry. "Oh, an amazing piece of work!" he will boom at you over the spotless napery of I-Know-a-Good-Little-Place-on-Forty-eighth-Street. Then he will unsparingly outline the plot. So far as I have been able to observe he is most expansive toward seductions and a lot of shooting. He also likes Big Themes. "Oh, a Big Theme!" he will gasp over his lobster. "I tell you, a Big Theme! This is one of the Biggest Themes a modern writer has ever tackled. I tell you, my boy, this story is full of dynamite." I am to infer that it explodes just about everything.

Yet, when I occasionally, but far more warily of late years, run through the presentation of this Big Theme when the magazine drifts eventually to my desk, I am surprised to find how conventional is the story's pattern, how floridly usual is the "love interest," how stale in its essentials the combination of the "action." Large illustrations are smeared all over the leading pages and the text thence pursues a narrow track through acres of advertisements. It is all "dressed up" to astound the eye, and one instalment of it is like worrying an underdone pork chop. Get Tweet on the past and he harps chiefly upon a single chord. "Ah, yes, then there were giants. Take Dickens! Take Thackeray!" But the trouble is that I have really "taken" them, as well as a few in other eras, and Tweet quite evidently has not, when it comes down to cases. But the few names he knows stood for Reputations in their time. They "got across." They were the Big Figures!

Some day, perhaps—I wonder which Tweet would prefer: arsenic or strychnine. . . .



One knows what we call creative writers. Barker Glaive is acknowledged to be a creative writer. He has written a novel or two, a book or two of poems, a book or two of essays, a play or two. He is two two. His conversation is mostly, "Oh, yes, I know him very well—poor fellow!" This refers to any eminent literatus you may mention. Then Barker goes on. "You know, when I was writing my 'Scales Fallen' I remember Blank saying to me—it was at a luncheon given for me by old Howells—poor fellow!—I remember Blank saying to me, 'Ah, if I had my life to live over again, Glaive! Hew to the line, my dear man; so many of us have

taken the wrong track!' I remember receiving such a shock when I read of the old boy's death several months later. He accomplished so very little, of course, that is,—well, really,—but he was a kindly old soul."

Glaive will always with apparent diffidence show you something he has lately written. If you venture any comment, he will merely smile away at the wall, a smile he strives to make enigmatic. He will take back the fragment from you absently, with some such remark as, "Yes; yes; what a pity it is that any nuance so invariably escapes you, old man." Or—oh something endearing of that kind! Glaive can only work in the small hours of the morning, writing with a quill at an ancient lectern.

An axe would make a good deal of mess. I am sure Glaive would greatly relish the poignant delicacy of a poigniard. . . .

So,—ah, how one loves one's friends! I shan't go on. I do not wish to become maudlin about them. Some of them are energetic and optimists; some of them are sardonic and pessimists; some of them talk idealistically and wax didactic; some of them talk chiefly of other's sentimentalities and then proceed expansively to display their own; some of them see through every one's motives; and some of them croon of magnificent motives that were never there. Some of them—some of them—some of them—but now I am just spluttering.

And what a poltroon I am! I have not really dared to pillory a single actual friend. The above are merely synthetic dummies; even though parts of them somewhat resemble—. Which leads immediately to the disquieting thought that parts of them rather resemble—me. Thus the dark night of the soul completely descends upon me. Yet even at such a juncture, the voice of the late James Thomson (B.V.) is crooning mockingly in my ear:

Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
"O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief."
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
"Vanity, my little man,
"You're nothing of the kind."

. . . So what satisfaction is there!

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

(To be continued)

Finger and His Songbook

FRONTIER BALLADS: Songs from Lawless Lands. By CHARLES J. FINGER. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927. \$3.50.

By CARL SANDBURG

Author of "The American Songbag"

ONCE there was a railroad receiver in Ohio, having high and influential connections with banking and transportation magnates of the Buckeye state. And he was on the way to being a magnate. Then one day while on a strictly business errand down in Arkansas, he came to a valley where he said, "This reminds me of the Berkshires only I like it better—it's cheaper." So he turned his back on Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, spoke the words, "Good by, proud world," put his family of guaranteed black-eyed children on the steam cars, rode to Arkansas, and set up for himself as a cross between a dirt farmer and a country squire.

The name of our hero is Charles J. Finger and he is out now with a statement that he does not choose to run for Governor of Arkansas inasmuch as he would have no platform to run on because he believes nothing is wrong or whatever may be he couldn't do anything about it.

However, instead of a declaration of principles as to where he stands on the issues of the day he offers the American, Mexican, and Australian peoples a songbook which is titled, "Frontier Ballads: Songs from Lawless Lands." The book is a good deal like a long, pleasant, stubborn, bittersweet love letter to the human race at large. He is personal on every page, sets forth a good number of original contributions, and follows a writing style that mixes the blunt manners of the bad man with Addisonian periodic sentences that have the ease of a healthy axman.

The book begins with an introduction, whereupon the author slams home "A Somewhat Discursive Note on Outlaws, Murderers, Pirates, Hard-Cases, Rapscallions, and Similar Radiant Figures." A

chapter on New Mexican Troubadours follows, and instead of Ten Nights there is then "A Night in a Barroom" and "When American is Gringo."

He argues that the ballads of outlaws and hard-cases are not the products of men of emotional instability, are not glorifications of wickedness.

You do not find ballads about lynchings. Nor about pickpockets. Nor about fraudulent bankrupts. Nor about blackmailers. Nor about cardsharps. Nor about defaulters. For true valor is not in them. You may have a ballad about Dick Turpin who robbed with a sort of lightness and humor and courtesy, but you find no ballad about the swindler Lemoine. A modern instance comes to my mind in someone's making a song about a daring fellow, who with splendor of courage tried to escape from Governor's Island; but no one has been moved to sing of the humorous mood in which Master Ponzi robbed his victims.

He notes that pirates and outlaws have gone about their business "with something of the swagger and vivid spirit of youth" while there are available "no fine and moving ballads about land sharks, or forgers, or receivers of stolen goods, or absconding cashiers." Then he gives the modern ballad of the attempt at prison-breaking from Governor's Island on July 4, 1923.

At Devil's River, Texas, Finger meets a man walking to California who said he had started from Cincinnati.

Before that he had lived in Kansas where he knew the James boys; he had seen the Great Eastern steamship when it first arrived in New York; he had participated in all major engagements of the Civil War; he was in Chicago during the great fire, he had been with Barnum and had narrowly missed being with Custer on Little Horn River in Montana, and he was one of the men under General Merritt at Rawlins, Colorado, when the Apaches killed thirty-two of their pursuers.

Finger enjoys some kinds of liars and comments, "He was a genial tale-teller and it did not do to question him too closely." Among other things this traveler was selling song sheets, one about Jesse James, remarking, "Of course, there are other songs about this here Hero, but not authentic."

Among a number of excellent brief sketches of "disseminators of folk songs," we might award the bun to the Armless Wonder.

He was a cripple, the Armless Wonder, and used to travel the range country displaying his skill in box-making, shaving himself publicly, wood-chopping, and writing, doing all with his feet. Once in Sonora, Texas, he went into a gambling house and sat in at a game of poker, then suddenly drew a gun, held up the players, and made off with the stakes. The story sounds improbable, but is nevertheless true. I saw him run into the street, jump into his buggy and make off after the robbery.

Finger carries the tale of the Armless Wonder and his songs at the Silver Dollar saloon for several pages. Notes go with songs telling how to approach the mood of singing them. "Quantrell" requires we should "cultivate a mood of haggard indignation." As to "The Coon-Can Game" remember "in attempting to sing it, be careful to be careless."

The partnership of Finger with Paul Honoré, the illustrator, works well. The Honoré wood cuts here are tough, rough, moody, strong, with a capacity for taking punishment, a style pictorially that travels nicely with Finger's writing manner.

On the basis of this book alone Finger will be remembered longer than any Governor of Arkansas and we are pleased that he does not choose to run.

We especially commend this book to those who are trying to stop crime waves. The cause of crime waves is criminals and hard-cases and Finger understands such of them as sing.

Once one of England's most popular young dramatists, Noel Coward now seems to be the victim of a feud among theatre-goers (says a dispatch to the New York World). They made it evident by their hooting reception of his new play, "Sirocco," when it opened in London recently, that they probably will howl against anything he writes in the near future. The chief grievance appears to be that his more recent works have insufficient plot for full plays.

The turmoil at "Sirocco" was the worst seen in a London theatre in many years. It followed less raucous manifestations of disapproval at the recent first night of his "Home Chat."

There was loud and ironical laughter and applause during strong episodes between the heroine and her lover. When not directing themselves toward the players, persons in the audience exchanged insults among themselves. One man in evening dress repeatedly yelled, "You swine!" at the gallery. The gallery did not fail to answer him.

The Princeton Years

WOODROW WILSON: LIFE AND LETTERS. By RAY STANNARD BAKER. Vol. II. The Princeton Years. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1927.

Reviewed by HENRY NOBLE MACCRACKEN
President, Vassar College

AS compared with the college politician, the real article seems like an amateur," remarked Governor Wilson to his interviewer in 1911. Few men have had his experience in both fields, but no college administrator who has stood on a platform of his own choice before his college constituency would fail to grant an external resemblance, at least, to the great American game. Back of the apparent issues in college administration there lie always other issues, differing only in magnitude, not in kind, from those that determine national elections. Now and then, as in Wilson's case, the real issues rise momentarily to the surface, only to be submerged by the common consent of all parties. "The ship sails faster thus," is the answer given to the idle questioner. Let the college leader address himself to a burning question such as birth control, to starting a dispassionate forum for international politics, let him express an interest in the Soviet point of view, or defend a searching study of the emotions, and almost instantly the fire starts, to be smothered with equal speed by those powers that are highly resolved that, whatever happens, there shall be no deficit.

It was the tragedy of Wilson's Princeton conflict that there was a deficit. He wrote to a trustee in 1907, "We shall really not be free to do what we deem best at Princeton until we are relieved from the dictation of the men who subscribe to the Committee of Fifty Fund and who can withhold our living from us if we displease them." For a moment the curtain is lifted on the actual issue, and then shuts down.

For Wilson's surrender in 1910 was an admission that he could not defeat the deficit. He was fighting for a graduate school of his own making, and its site had come to be the focal point of controversy. It seems strange that Princeton should have let the battle rage over the question whether a hundred men, resident students, were to live on the golf links or a little nearer the library, yet that was the case, as Mr. Baker makes clear. National politics are decided on issues equally trivial, because behind them and around them, stark and dread, are the real issues of which every one is conscious, but which no one would call forth. It was a teapot tempest, but the same force stirring as blows off volcano cones.

An aged man, dying dramatically at the height of the controversy, filled by bequest the budget of Wilson's opponent, and the game was up, for the moment. Wilson was ejected from Princeton, and on issues handed to him by Roosevelt was presented with a Governor's chair over night.

This, in brief, is the story skilfully told by Wilson's biographer in the second volume of the officially documented narrative of the great president's career. The intensity of the struggle at Princeton from 1902 to 1910, which fills practically the whole book, must amaze the European scholar who reads it. Is this the cloistered academic life? "His election to the presidency fell like a thunderbolt. Not a single professor had had an inkling of it in advance." "No one occupied a neutral position with respect to Woodrow Wilson," said a scientist colleague to the biographer. A scientist, and a partisan? The thing seems a contradiction in terms; and no one not actually in the midst of this American hurlyburly, this fight for life of the higher world of mind against the great principalities and powers, can possibly understand it. And so the stones of Princeton's graduate school were cemented with bitterness, belying the calm of its loveliness today.

The reviewer recalls a conversation of the time with a member of the New York Princeton Club. "Wilson must go, he wants the graduate school on the golf links." Next day this was challenged. The truth was just the opposite, it appeared. It was West who wanted the links. "It makes no difference; Wilson must go."

And the conflict was, after all, a matter of personality. Not that in every outstanding college of this generation there have not been just such struggles. There was nothing peculiar about the Princeton affair, except that it came to light. But there

was in Wilson a certain spiritual energy, a blowing as of a strong fan upon the fire, that threatened a conflagration. Wilson will be remembered for many things; not least for this, that there never was his friend or foe that could keep his temper.

Into the forging of this fierce nature there went a Scots ancestry, a Calvinistic faith, a nature sensitive beyond belief to the subtleties of social attitudes, a southern upbringing, and a sense of high mission not surpassed in history. Is it any wonder that where Wilson passed the lid blew off? Add to this an increasing debate between the body and the soul of the protagonist, and what would you? Emotions that burned up the frail organism, and were only pacified by pretended "vacation" (for this was before the days of nutrition and mental hygiene), were the real victors in the strife.

The "quad" dispute, preceding and paralleling that of the golf links, was less striking and less important, but no less a symbol of the issues making towards expression in the American university. And as in the larger debate, discussion centered about buildings and where they should go. Curious, how when Americans start up a talk on ideas, the conversation soon settles down to something solid, like a stone wall or a concrete foundation. Wilson wanted to put the clubs, Princeton's substitute for "frats," into college quads. This has since been done at several western colleges. In women's colleges, thanks to residence, they never were started. But at no one of the older foundations has any real headway been made in this direction. The Yale News brought up the problem a few days ago. But for good or ill, the fraternity is as much a part of the American university as ever the "nation" was in its medieval predecessor, and the genius of the future will build his university upon them. Wilson knew this, but allowed himself to be outgeneraled by politicians on the pretext that he was endangering property rights. Baker quotes an "Ivy" man as classing Wilson with Roosevelt in his rash assaults on property.

Wilson intended no assault on property. He did not desire the abolition of the clubs. He had, however, embarked on a crusade for education. This was the stark reality behind the issues of quads and golf links. Did the alumni of the "1900's" want education at Princeton? They did not; not, at least, at the strenuous pace Wilson had set. "He drives too fast."

A "comradeship of letters" for teacher and pupil was his ideal, an ideal found at Oxford. A curriculum of organized groups of studies was his reform of the elective system; a plan that was not unlike Gilman's at Johns Hopkins. The quad program was English in its first suggestion. None of his schemes was, in short, original; this is true of nearly every genius. What was his own in his cause was the intensity with which he espoused it; the zeal, the fiery eloquence that poured out over the fields of learning. Wilson's Phi Beta Kappa speech at Yale left his hearers at its close drawing a deep breath as if an electric storm had freshened the air.

Of the details of education he was, as always, impatient. He was the lecturer rather than the teacher. He cared little for the measurements, then beginning, of mental qualities. The whole new content of learning, of physics, physiology, anthropology, sociology, archaeology, and the rest, that have given us a new method with a new curriculum, came for the most part after his day, and were not of great interest to him as they came. He suspected science. Even in his own field he was the acute rather than the accurate scholar. Yet he drew to Princeton a famous faculty, and set its heart afire with scholarship.

He was, it seems, primarily, the orator. In an age of phrasemongers, he said his say. He will stand with Demosthenes. He made certain things clear. The instruments he fought to establish, the institutions he pledged allegiance to, may be so modified in time that his work will no longer be recognized as his. But if men think as much in words and out of words as some people say they do, the student's mind will follow the path he blazed for many a long day.

Complete runs of that short-lived American periodical, *The Seven Arts*, which contained the first appearance of Theodore Dreiser's "Life, Art and America," as well as contributions by Sherwood Anderson, Amy Lowell, etc., are in the catalogue list of George A. Van Nosedall.