



Ballad of a Scarlet Shawl

By MARJORIE ALLEN SEIFFERT

HERE is a basket for your arm,
And a scarlet shawl to keep you warm . . .
Here is the pathway for your feet,
The rest lies with the fate you meet.

When she had gone but a mile or two
She stopped and looked her basket through,
And it held honey, but no bread,
A golden knife and nothing to spread.

A traveler came by who cried:
"Make room, my pretty, for me at your side!
I'll share my food with you, these small
Bright apples, redder than your shawl."

She sank in an apple her sharp white teeth . . .
Bitter, bitter the pulp beneath!
His dark eyes watching, she forbore
Complaint, but ate it, skin and core.

"How will you pay me now, my love?"
He asked. What was he thinking of!
Must she pay bitter food with sweet?
She said: "I've nothing for you to eat!"

"You'll taste my apple all your life,"
He cried, "so take your golden knife,
Make on my breast a tiny scar
Lest I forget how sweet you are!"

She drove it deep and fled. His smile
Mocked her, followed her, mile after mile,
Till frightened and faint, she saw ahead
A dusty traveler carrying bread.

They sat down under a blackthorn tree.
He broke the bread in pieces. She
Wiped her knife on a fallen crust. . . .
The white bread showed a stain like rust.

She spread her honey for them both.
From the green grass, their tablecloth,
He took that crust. She sat apart
And watched him eat it with sinking heart.

He turned from the food with a shuddering sigh,
His lips grew pale, and she guessed why.
She fled and left behind her all
But her golden knife and scarlet shawl.

Away from the road and into the wood
She fared. Wild berries were her food.
The mournful cry of a hidden bird
And the rustle of leaves were all she heard.

She came to a man who sat alone
With a tarnished cup and a jug of stone.
"For pity give me drink," said she,
"For my heart lies cold and dead in me!"

He turned his eyes of icy grey.
His thick lips asked: "How will you pay?
For one lies poisoned, and one lies dead
Who gave you apples, and gave you bread. . . .

"So if you wish me to quench your thirst
Give me your shawl of scarlet first,
Give me too your knife of gold
That I may see if your heart be cold!"

She was too weary to demur
And all things seemed the same to her . . .
He covered her face with the scarlet shawl,
She did not struggle nor cry at all.

Flow away, flow away, crimson stream,
The futile end to an obscure dream,
And may all lovers be comforted
That hungry earth, at least, is fed.



Translations from the Chinese

FALSE ALARM

I SIT here tonight
Fortified in my own particular silence,
Denny, the sheep-dog, lies in the next room,
And sometimes, when he stirs,
The tinkle of his license tag
Seems, for the dreadful tithing of a second,
The preliminary tocsin of a telephone call.

In that bursting schism of the mind
My whole wary garrison leaps furious to defense
And my walls bristle with armored paladins
Ready with reasons why I shouldn't do
Whatever it is
Whoever might want.

THE BEADS

As I dutifully hurried
In a dusk that had been cruel to me
I saw several people on 33rd Street
Hunting along the curb, bending and dodging
among taxis
To pick up some shining scattered molecules.

There was an unhappy woman
Trying to retrieve her broken necklace
Of amber crystal beads.
Friendly passers played Hansel and Gretel,
But many were lost in the dusk.
She was not young or beautiful or wealthy,
And it troubled my heart to hear her say, poor dear,
"Oh, they had so much admiration today
I felt certain that before I got home
Something would happen to them."

And I, too, in the traffic of my wits
Had been trying to gather the scattered crystals
Of a chain of shining thoughts.

CAUTION

Nous prendrons des cocktails, n'est-ce pas?
Said I to the old French waiter.
But he was worried, and said it was impossible
Because we had that too synoptic table
Beside the window and the front door.
Eventually he relented (I knew he would)
And served them in large coffee cups, as usual.
But, surplus of discretion, he brought with them
A tiny jug of cream.
When we showed ourselves disposed to linger
He murmured anxiously:
Il faut boire tout de suite.

SHORT CIRCUIT

The fraudulent electrician
Stuffs a nickel behind the fuse-plug
To prevent fuses from blowing.
It does; but it sometimes causes a fire elsewhere in
the system
That burns down the house.

And the fraudulent metaphysician,
Be he psychoanalyst or theologian,
Does exactly the same thing.

Keep your fuse-box honest
And a short-circuit somewhere in the concealed
wiring
Will be less likely
To yell Rescue Hook and Ladder Number One
Out of bed some glaring midnight.

DIALOGUE

What have you seen today that was beautiful?

Nothing I have seen today more beautiful
Than the red neck of the traffic cop
At the corner of Barclay Street:
A proud neck, strong, honorable, ruddy
In the bitter gust of January.
And the curl, above his nape, of his thick straw-
colored hair;
And his huge gloved fingers
Clumsily waggling some driver to proceed. . . .

But you silly little thing, that's why I love you,
Because you don't waste any small enchantments.

Well, what have you seen beautiful today?

In that first onset of the winter squall
I saw small wreaths and sifting scrolls of snow
Dancing, twirling, floating on the road,
Running ahead like patterns on the way,
Racing down the road that led to you.

SUGGESTION

For Dancing and Dining, said the Old Mandarin,
I like to go to that chophouse
Where the couples, circling merrily,
Continually pass a sign,
Posted beside the dancing floor:
EXQUISITE VEGETABLE DINNER.
It seems, he said,
To make carnal thoughts impossible.

THOUGHTS IN AN ALCOVE

In a famous German restaurant
Which during the War displayed more Allied flags
Than any other place in town
You will still see, hanging in an alcove,
The bright banners of Britain and France—
Ready, I suppose,
For any future emergency.

THOUGHTS IN A GARAGE

Now, said the motorist,
Adjusting the shutter,
I've put on her winter front
To keep her heart warm in the long long nights,
And a little alcohol
In her radiator.

STREGE

There's a liqueur called *Strege*
(Witch, sorceress, the word means in Italian)
Distilled from flowers that grow high in the Alps.

There was an argument once about its color:
One said it had the tint of listerine,
Another, No, it's more like castor oil.
I thought, but did not say, it's just the color
Of windows in great buildings seen at dusk.

Cammeriere! Bring me a glass of *strege*!
I'm going to write a poem like a cordial
Distilled from flowers that grow high in my mind.

DEATH OF A JOURNALIST

Midway of this mortal life, the fellow
Met something he had never known before—
A region, very wide and deep, of Silence.

His notion was, at first, to write a sonnet:
Sonnet in Praise of Silence.

Yes, you smile,
But he smiled first. He didn't finish it:
He only wrote eight lines. Oh well, perhaps
That's the finest tribute I can pay him.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Giants in a Cloud

(Continued from page 525)

dwarfed by those of Britain. Poe, Emerson, Melville, Whitman and Clemens stand forth in the cloud of a stature with the other giants of those days. And to give the range and peculiarity of the book, Lewis Carroll is sandwiched between Christina Rossetti and William Morris. It is hard to remember sometimes that "The Aged, Aged Man" and "Two Red Roses Across the Moon" are of the same general vintage.

"Giants in a Cloud" we have called this brief comment. "Giants under a Cloud" might well apply to some of the great figures of the past here marshalled, viewed by the twentieth century's beady eyes. Yet, having seen some of our best modern minds "get after" the great in this volume, the latter seem to emerge pretty decently on the whole. The fact is that the book is, nationally, packed with superlative writing, by the examinees. When the credentials of the great are truly inspected, as here, they are found to be quite in order. Had we thought otherwise? Well, the book's title "Great Names" is a red rag to much modern criticism.

Can it, after all, be "criticism," however, when even certain revaluations in the present volume only serve to strengthen the position of most of the great writers noticed? For they have been examined without awe and divested of glamour by keen modern minds. And the verdict is that the majority of them were master-workmen. Their writing continues to shine from the page.



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Books of Special Interest

A Beloved Teacher

CYRUS NORTHROP. A Memoir. By OSCAR W. FIRKINS. The University of Minnesota Press. 1926. \$3.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

CYRUS NORTHROP was a native of Connecticut, a graduate of Yale in the class of 1857, a teacher of rhetoric at that institution for twenty years following 1863, and president of the University of Minnesota from 1884 until 1911. He wrote no books and achieved no distinction as a scholar. He did not rank as an educational statesman with McCosh, or Andrew D. White, or Angell, or William Rainey Harper. He left his mark on the State of Minnesota, but it was not such a deep mark as Van Hise left on Wisconsin or Edmund J. James on Illinois. He was an able administrator, a good teacher, an inspiring speaker, a man of solid judgment and sagacity, but in no sense a great man. Yet Dr. Firkins has written a 635-page biography which engrosses the reader's attention and which justifies its length as a study of a remarkable personality, a review of fifty years of certain aspects of university education, and a narrative with some surprisingly poignant elements.

It is the extraordinary honesty of the volume which gives it interest and excellence. Dr. Firkins was one of many subordinates who loved and admired Northrop, and because he esteemed him so deeply he has tried to tell the complete truth about him, to make him relive in these pages in his weaknesses as well as his strength. Northrop had qualities of strong common sense, of geniality, of tact, of democratic heartiness, which admirably fitted him to be head of a fast-growing university in the raw Northwest. He knew how to handle a parsimonious legislature and to wring appropriations out of it. He inspired an affectionate loyalty on the part of the faculty, and the student body was as wax in his kindly, tolerant hands. Looking with his round face, his large bespectacled eyes, and his chubby figure like some cherubic Jupiter, he impressed men with his childlike simplicity; yet on occasion he could be imperious and severe. Dr. Firkins illustrates in detail his good qualities. But he dwells with equal emphasis upon Northrop's invincible indolence, which led him to say frankly that his rule was never to do today what he could postpone till tomorrow; his lack of system; his want of acuteness and penetration; his failure to show innovating energy; and his tolerance which sometimes became weakness.

Upon the more intimate events of his life, too, Dr. Firkins is equally frank. Outwardly a sunny, prosperous career, beneath the surface it was full of personal tragedy. The ordinary formal biographer would have softened or suppressed these unhappy private facts, which give this volume its deepest challenge to the reader's sympathy and understanding. Northrop was fortunate in his calling, for the multifarious activities and constant little dramas of a university president's life appealed to him. He was fortunate in making a host of friends and no enemies, in avoiding most of the storms and controversies which beset academic heads, in his good health, in his firm religious convictions—he was a devout Congregationalist. His marriage was entirely happy, though Dr. Firkins is too honest to pretend that Mrs. Northrop, the daughter of a Connecticut saddler and stove-manufacturer, was intellectually an adequate companion or helpmeet. He was fortunate in his equable, cheerful, philosophic temperament, and his love of human associations of all sorts; he would drop the most interesting book to converse with the least interesting person. Minneapolis, too, was a fortunate place of residence—"the easy, jovial Minneapolis, where he had all sorts and grades of relations with all kinds and conditions of men." But he was tragically unfortunate in his children and his money affairs.

Of his three children, one daughter, Minnie, died at the age of ten, a sorely-felt loss. His only son, Cyrus, was attacked at the age of eight by scarlet fever, and emerged from it a pitiful human wreck; his mind weakened to the point of permanent childishness, his body partly paralyzed and subject to epileptic seizures. The remaining daughter, Elizabeth, was attacked by tuberculosis and was rescued from an untimely death only by thorough medical care followed by exile to a ranch in southern California. She became engaged to a high-spirited and admira-

ble Minneapolis youth, who was rapidly becoming another son to Northrop, and who was on the very eve of his marriage to Elizabeth when he was thrown from his horse and instantly killed. It was a blow from which the whole family had difficulty in rallying. Years later Elizabeth married a young member of the Minnesota faculty, Joseph Warren Beach, and lived with him a life of almost unremitting invalidity, her existence hanging by a thread, until she died in 1918. After that event Northrop was left in a loneliness which he keenly felt.

But the volcanic drama, the intense anxieties and pains that may lurk beneath an outwardly prosperous exterior, are best exemplified in Dr. Firkins's chapter upon "Money." The president of the University of Minnesota should of course never have had any pecuniary worries. His salary was large, for he had stipulated upon an unusually high remuneration when he left Yale; his wife possessed some inherited means; and his household was managed with a New England frugality of which the biographer gives some amusing illustrations. But Northrop had a weakness for erratic and highly risky investments. One was a company which was formed to pick and sell wild cranberries from Wood County, Minnesota; another was the Bradley Timber Company, whose failure left the harassed Dr. Northrop liable for \$16,000; another was the Minnesota Tire Company, in which he seems to have sunk \$6,500. There were still other bubble corporations, while the generous Northrop repeatedly made unwise loans, or even gifts, to needy friends. The money loss in these investments was bad enough; what was still worse was the worry which beset him night and day for long periods in his years of retirement. Dr. Firkins quotes a number of entries from his day-book which show the distress under which he labored. "I telephoned Scott and he said he would be here tomorrow—I asked him if he would bring relief and he said 'I certainly will bring relief.' This helps me, I hope, to sleep tonight"—so runs one jotting in 1918. A little later is another: "I've got to pay it. Total loss today \$555. This is the bottom, I think." Still later, "Prices are awful." And farther on again, "Oh the dragging days—with trouble hanging overhead! Worry—worry—worry!" The spectacle of a man who had served for twenty-seven years as head of the University of Minnesota, and built that institution from a weak college to one of the strongest seats of learning in America, burdened in old age with anxiety because the price of potatoes and beef was "awful," is not pleasant. The university ultimately came to his rescue and helped him finish his lonely days in comparative physical comfort.

It is all a very human narrative. Dr. Firkins has put in countless little touches, from Northrop's boyhood on a Ridgefield farm to his death in 1922, which give it vitality and color. There are the future Mrs. Northrop's letters to her lover in the fifties: "The two things I purpose to do if ever your wife are—to keep your shirts in order and have your meals in readiness at the proper hour." There is Northrop's unsuccessful effort to escape the tobacco habit. There is his admonition, while holding the chair of rhetoric at Yale, to a tall, pale, weedy scholar who mumbled through a wretched essay: "I should advise you to stop writing compositions and go out and take a little exercise."

There was a touch of levity in the man that sometimes ran into license, but that—so whole-souled, so hearty, so genuinely benevolent was his nature—was always winning. Once the Bishop of Georgia discoursed eloquently in chapel upon the achievements of his State. When he ended, the President rose and said in his plump, placid tones, as innocent as dimples: "We are all delighted with the vigorous speech of the Bishop of Georgia, but I warn you young gentlemen and ladies not to take for gospel everything that is told you by these immigration agents."

It is well to have an outline of the work Northrop did in adding college after college to the University, strengthening its faculty, informing its students with love of knowledge and respect for character. Many writers could have given us this. It is much more important to have a picture of the bluff, open, vigorous personality of the man, and very few writers could have presented it so fully, winningly, and expertly as Dr. Firkins. It is regrettable that the University press could not give a better dress to so admirable a biography.

"... so many things that an outline ought to be, but frequently is not. . . ."

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