

The BOWLING GREEN

Anna Faure and the Parrot

EDMUND PEARSON begins his excellent new book "Five Murders" (one of the first publications of the Crime Club) with the case of Frederick Small, "The Man Who Was Too Clever." The too-cleverness of Mr. Small consisted in an attempt to cash a \$20,000 insurance policy by making it seem that his wife (his third wife, to be exact) had perished in a fire that destroyed their cottage on Lake Ossipee in September 1916. The truth, as Mr. Pearson narrates in his own caustic way, was that Mr. Small, in spite of his carefully fabricated alibi at room 113 in Young's Hotel, Boston, had assassinated Mrs. Small before he left home that afternoon, and contrived to start the fire some hours later by a time clock and an ingenious arrangement of dry batteries. Mr. Small paid the penalty for his crime more than ten years ago, but I felt a queer sort of intimacy when I saw that the drawing of him in the courtroom, reprinted by Mr. Pearson, was done by my old friend Haydon Jones, once cartoonist of the *Evening Post*. For Mr. Jones used to amuse himself in his spare time by making etchings of even so unmurderous people as his colleagues on that ancient newspaper.

But any rousing crime story always takes me back to my favorite Bataille: *Causes Criminelles et Mondaines*. Alas that most of Bataille is certainly of too strong a flavor for the public stomach of the Crime Club. But there is one little story in Bataille, also an insurance fraud, of which I was immediately reminded. It also deals with a \$20,000 policy and an idyllic rural retreat; it has not the ingenious phases of the Small case; but there are aspects of it that seem to me picturesque. M. Bataille calls it the story of the Young Girl and the Parrot, and we may as well stick to his title.

We spoke, some weeks ago, about Mademoiselle de Sombreuil and her trip to Marseilles. When she was in that city she may well have ridden in a trolley car; and it is even possible that if so, the conductor of the trolley car may have been a certain Etienne Cournou. I'm sorry that he was only the conductor, not the "wattman," which always seems to me such a delicious French term for the motor-man. But at any rate he was rather a shady person, had held various kinds of jobs, and was so little trusted by those who knew him best that when his wife lay dying she would accept no medicine from his hands, fearing to be poisoned. His conduct at the time of his wife's funeral was not marked by delicacy: he and a high-spirited female whom we know only as "la femme Clémencet" walked together in the procession with so cheery a mien that it caused some scandal. The Clémencet person had the hardihood (so at any rate the prosecution construed it) to lay a wreath on the poor woman's coffin; and the ceremony was interrupted by the undertaker's insistence on being paid; which was done by taking up a collection among those present. Yet it appears that this ruffian Cournou had his own notions of propriety, for the day after the funeral he ejected his mother-in-law from his premises. "Je ne voulais pas être accusé d'être son amant, en vivant seul avec elle."

The Clémencet person was now Cournou's mistress. I suspect her of having been a creature of schemes and ambitions. She had a friend, some say rather more than a friend, M. Ardisson, a grain dealer, who seems to have been a simpleton with available cash. The days of trolley-conducting were now over, Cournou and Clémencet concocted more grandiose plans. Cournou was a plausible scoundrel, and managed to wangle money out of Ardisson with arguments whose purport will appear later. In the month of March, 1891, we find him visiting an employment agency anxious to hire a servant. His requirements deserve scrutiny. He must have "a young girl from 22 to 25 years of age, of attractive physique, well raised, discreet, gentle and mannerly, and knowing no one in Marseilles." Nor would he leave his name and address at the office. Madame Négré, the head of the employment bureau, was evidently not over scrupulous. Several likely young women were rejected by Cournou because they had friends in the city. They were lucky.

Enters then our heroine, the unfortunate Anna Faure. She had just come down from the country to find a job; by some evil chance she enrolled with Madame Négré. Cournou saw her and was delighted. She accepted a job at 35 francs a month.

She must have been heartily astounded at her first experience as a domestic in the big city. Cournou and Clémencet installed her in their apartment, and instead of having any work to do she found herself put through a sort of beauty course. She was given a blue silk kimono (or perhaps even two kimonos, for it is referred to in the testimony sometimes as blue and sometimes as pink). Her hair was rearranged in the urban mode; Clémencet, an expert in all such matters, taught her to pencil her eyebrows and even to take a bath. Anna's buxom country rondures were slenderized by gymnastics and special diet, and the kind of underwear they gave her might well have caused her delicious pangs of apprehension. But the purpose of all this (done at Ardisson's expense) was not at all what you might have supposed.

There are many reasons why I should like to visit Marseilles; and if I ever get there I want to explore a suburban region called the Valley of Oriol. While his mistress was drilling and perfuming the astounded Anna, Cournou was house-hunting in the suburbs. Well provided with the grain dealer's money, he found no difficulty in renting the picturesque Villa Rosa. It is not hard to imagine it as it may have been in those sirupy airs of Mediterranean April. A modest plaster or stucco cottage, I suppose, and behind it a walled garden of flowers and shrubbery. There were pebble walks in that cheerful garden, and a shallow stone pool surrounded by rose bushes. What the simple-minded Anna may have thought about such luxury we can only conjecture, for there is no testimony remaining on this earth, I suppose, as to any of her ideas. Already sufficiently astonished by the easy life she found herself leading, the Villa Rosa was only one more miracle. Shortly before they moved to the villa, a gentleman had called to see her at the apartment of her benefactors; Clémencet had seen to it that the girl was looking her best; the rose-colored peignoir and the other toilet accessories had been in requisition; Anna was carefully coached in deportment. She was introduced as a young kinswoman of the house of Cournou, and there were documents involved. Whether Anna had to sign them herself I don't know; if so, she probably had little notion what they were all about. Perhaps, as a reader of such feuilletons as were available for French country girls in 1891, she may even have imagined a romance and a betrothal contract.

At any rate, on the 15th of April they occupied the Villa Rosa. In so small a household—only Monsieur, Madame, and Madame's little girl—the domestic tasks were light. Madame and Anna shared them together, but Anna's status was that of a member of the family. The neighbors took it for granted that she was Monsieur's mistress, and Clémencet a duenna of sorts. There was plenty of time for strolling in the garden, for playing with the child, for thinking how superior all this was to the life of a village in the Drôme, her native department. And if the burly Cournou, with his upward curled moustaches and his rather savage air, seemed a trifle ominous after some of his excursions to town on business, the bright air of Oriole Valley soon restored him. Tramway conducting was never alluded to: Cournou was now the suburban gentleman. He wore grey check trousers and a white waistcoat, he drank his wine sitting comfortably in shirtsleeves on the pebbled terrace, and was observed to be specially pleased with the ornamental pool and the rose bushes.

There was another member of the ménage whom I have forgotten to mention, who was also much pleased with the garden. This was M. Cournou's parrot, who was so exhilarated by the move to the country that when her cage was cleaned (she is explicitly alluded to as a female parrot) she several times flitted out into the shrubbery and had to be recaptured. Perhaps the parrot was the most important of the whole household: if it had not been for her perhaps neither M. Bataille nor ourselves would ever have heard of the Villa Rosa.

On the morning of the 6th of May M. Chabrol, an officer of the Marseilles police, was hastily summoned to the Villa Rosa. There M. Cournou, in great agitation, explained the tragic thing that had

happened. Madame had left the house about half-past eight to take her child to school. He himself had gone out for a stroll—to taste the morning air, one supposes. Returning, so he said, about nine, he had found the door locked, rang the bell without result; finally borrowed a ladder from a neighbor and scaled the garden wall. There a sad sight greeted him. Anna Faure was lying dead in the little pool, and beside her floated the draggled corpse of the pet parrot. The tragedy, according to Cournou, was not hard to reconstruct. Anna had been cleaning the bird-cage. The parrot had flown out and got into the rose-bushes. Chasing it, Anna must have clutched the bird, stumbled on the edge of the basin, and fallen in. There was only eighteen inches of water in the pool, but apparently, in falling, the girl had struck her head against the stone coping and stunned herself. There was indeed, as Chabrol immediately saw, a gruesome contusion at the back of her head. But the doctor, who was immediately called, saw no reason to disbelieve the facts as stated, and certified the death by accidental drowning.

M. Chabrol, for whom one conceives an immediate admiration, was not quite easy in his mind. The rim of the pool was perfectly flat and offered no occasion of stumbling. He noticed too a scratch on Cournou's right hand. He consulted another doctor, and had a second autopsy performed. Again the professional opinion was that the death was an accident. But still Chabrol was not satisfied. If he could not get convincing testimony from the body of poor Anna, there was still another corpse available, and one less hedged about by legal sanctities. He returned to Oriole Valley and took charge of the body of the parrot. With this he went to the Medical College and had an examination made. The authorities stated flatly that the bird had not died of drowning. It had been strangled first and then thrown into the water. Anna Faure's body was post mortem'd yet again, and this time the decision was reversed. The highest medical authority in Marseilles testified that death was due to the blow on the back of the head. Cournou was arrested on the charge of murder; and immediately the agent of the *La France* insurance company came forward. Cournou had insured the girl's life, only a few weeks previously, for the sum of 100,000 francs; and M. Ardisson was the beneficiary of the policy.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

(To be continued)

The Musketeers Revived

THE YEARS BETWEEN. By PAUL FEVAL AND M. LASSEZ. Translated by Cleveland B. Chase. 2 vols. New York: Longmans, Green, 1928. \$5.

Reviewed by JOHN GERARD

DUMAS leaves a gap of twenty years between "The Three Musketeers" and its sequels, "The Vicomte De Bragelonne," "Twenty Years After," etc. Were d'Artagnan, his three gallant friends, Athos, Porthos and Aramis, and all the rest of that brave crew that throng the pages of Dumas' immortal work inactive during those twenty years? "Surely not!" is the answer of Feval and Lassez, and the two volumes of this book, "The Mysterious Cavalier" and "Martyr to the Queen," are a very commendable effort to bridge that gap.

The authors at once disarm one by a genial reference to Dumas' preface in their own. Dumas, it will be remembered, professes merely to be giving us the transcription of a manuscript entitled "Memories of the Comte De La Fere" which he has taken—he informs us modestly—the occasional liberty of altering though never without improving on it. Feval and Lassez enter delightfully into the spirit of the game, attributing their manuscript to a lucky chance which enables them to find it in the possession of one Grimaud, a direct descendant of the quiet servant of Athos.

With the turning of the first page we are in the midst of the colourful life of seventeenth century Paris, where the great Cardinal Richelieu wove his delicate webs of intrigue, and picturesque, swash-buckling soldiers of fortune occasionally succeeded in cutting them! D'Artagnan, Cyrano de Bergerac, the musketeers, the mysterious Cavalier Tancrede, in love with a charming maid of honour of the Queen, are among the many figures in the swiftly moving drama of events that succeed one another with an almost breath-taking rapidity. . . . But it would be unfair to do more than hint at the gorgeous adventures with which these two volumes are packed!



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Books of Special Interest

An Ebony Sovereign

BLACK MAJESTY. By JOHN W. VANDERCOOK. New York: Harper & Bros. 1928.

Reviewed by GERTRUDE MATHEWS SHELBY

STYLES in sentimentality change from generation to generation. First we put a halo over one thing, now another. Of late the negro race has come in for its suffering share. Ask negroes what they desire, they generally ask only for truth and justice, not favor or false illusion.

Serious books about blacks which fall into the error of sentimental emotion often react against negroes generally rather than their authors. "Black Majesty" is pleasing, effectively arranged, and written with a fiction technique of no mean order; had John W. Vandercook avoided calling it a "life of Henry Christophe," and dubbed it romance, one must have relished the book not a little; attractive illustrations, handsome format, literary performance, and content.

Unfortunately, while "not intended as a work of reference," its author advances the claim that this account of the third negro ruler of Haiti is historically sound. "I have added nothing to the sparse records of old books, and the fading memories that linger in the minds of men of his country. Nor have I left out anything, except a few foolish yet extraordinarily common legends that I found have no historical basis whatever." In all seriousness he states, "There were two men of transcendent genius then, Napoleon of France, and the King of Haiti, the only man alive who had defeated him in war." Comment is unnecessary, but among others, Washington was then alive.

It appears that Vandercook does not avoid exaggeration and special pleading. Did Christophe beat the French? While Toussaint l'Ouverture, Jean Jacques, Christophe, Pétion, and other black Abolitionists warred hard in the cause of negro liberty, the French had captured and deported Toussaint, and reduced the rest practically to brigand chieftains long before Haiti fell. Not the negroes' own prowess, but two factors for which they were not responsible changed the result. The British sent a squadron to the West Indies to frustrate Napoleon. When it arrived, four-fifths of the French army had been wiped out by yellow fever. The blacks rallied, of course, yet not to them, but to the British did Rochambeau tender his sword. He departed captive, with his officers, under the Union Jack. Mainly because in that time of Continental wars neither the English nor the French could spare men or money to hold the island, it was left to the negroes to enjoy the fruits of a victory by no means all their own.

With Jean Jacques in command, and no rubber stamp either, with Pétion among other leaders regarded as important as Christophe in military strategy, Christophe's title to a defeat of Napoleon, even by absent treatment is, to say the least, insecure. Of this and other matters Mr. Vandercook sometimes says first too much and then explains too little. Expatiating on the cruelty of whites to blacks, he fails to mention that Jean Jacques, having assured the whites safety after he came to rule, massacred them. This is not legend, according to Lothrop Stoddard, who gives his source.

True, Haitian history is heavy with tradition, larded here and there by the fat of facts. Yet it often appears that Vandercook cherishes certain "fading memories" while excluding others not in line with the real theme of the book, which is a dramatization of the mighty capacities and occult powers of the negro. To extol Christophe is an agreeable task. Capacities in the man, recognized by all, were, however, realized only in a few instances; to wit, the great Citadel he compelled his population to build on a mountain top, recently seen from the air by Lindbergh. The ex-slave, turned slave-driver of an alleged free population did, it is true, make Haiti productive—sufficiently so that he managed to collect six million dollars worth of gold (according to Vandercook) and sent it to England for the use of his black Queen Marie Louise. He did it by imposing hours of labor on the entire population he ruled that showed dim appreciation of the concepts of liberty.

The occult powers of the negro in this book, as in "Tom Tom," are rather overdone. To exploit magic, black or white, may sell books. Labelled romance, its successful handling requires genius. Labelled history, the easy reading it offers the senti-

mental does not affect its character as bunk. Primitive yellow, black, and white races, as well as the civilized, have observed and used many devices they could not explain, but the scientific ethnologist knows better than to class them as magic or to confuse superstition with occultism.

Mr. Vandercook's talent is really too good to be hampered by the seriousness demanded of the historical crusader determined to exalt the blacks. Were the limits of fact lifted, King Christophe, surrounded by his unspeakably fantastic court and used as hero in a novel, might be a superb creature, grotesque, cruel, but really great. It is recorded that he was waited upon by fifteen Grand Chamberlains, as many more Grand Marshals, Grand Masters of Palaces, Grand Masters of Castles, Grand Cupbearers, seven Grand Huntsmen, the two dukes of Limonade and Marmelade (the French so named two towns, the negroes made duchies of them), and an equally distinguished military entourage. All these ebony knights and their sovereign, got up in bright blue French uniforms and other grandeur, behaving with rigid solemnity, offer a trim parody of King Arthur and Round Table chivalry. This fearful court, obsessed by the question, "What will you do when the French come?" would be a picture to conjure with.

"Black Majesty" has a certain vivid grace. If read as a fluent tale with a biographical basis, but not as history, it will be enjoyed.

All Star Cast

SEAPORTS IN THE MOON. By VINCENT STARRETT. New York. Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1928. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HULBERT FOOTNER.

MR. STARRETT has undertaken to tell a story with Francis Villon, Christopher Columbus, Ponce de Leon, Don Quixote, Ferdinand and Isabella, François Rabelais, D'Artagnan, Cyrano de Bergerac, Alexander Pope, Lady Mary Montagu, Long John Silver, Major André, Edgar Allan Poe, and others for his principal characters. A phial containing the miraculous waters of Bimini serves as a string upon which to thread these pearls. It is all spoofing of course, as the author expressly tells you in his preface, and uncommon ingenious, but one wonders why Mr. Starrett handicapped himself in this manner. He can tell a good story, that is evident; why smother it under an all-star cast? As in all such shows, there cannot be any real teamwork, especially when two stars are brought on the stage together. Picture Cyrano as a mere feeder to D'Artagnan! Those who are acquainted with these old worthies will certainly resent Mr. Starrett's extremely cavalier treatment of their favorites, while those who don't know them may well wonder what it is all about. In short, it is a gargantuan task and inevitably it does not quite come off.

Some of the characters such as Long John, the jocose scoundrel, are pleasantly reconstructed, and many of the scenes are highly diverting. There is that moment in Long John's stable where a rather unpleasant recumbent man is being described, and the author remarks as by an afterthought: "He was dead." This is worthy of the author of "The Wrong Box." But to illustrate the handicap that Mr. Starrett has given himself take the scene between Cyrano and D'Artagnan. If they were called something else it would be the liveliest of scenes and a delicious parody of all that sort of thing. When they are named Cyrano and D'Artagnan it becomes something else again. This reviewer never cared much for Cyrano (Rostand's Cyrano) who seemed to him rather a bloodless and cerebral figment, and he doesn't mind what Mr. Starrett does to him; but a lover of D'Artagnan is outraged in his tenderest feelings when he finds his hero represented as eating with a loud noise, and wiping his mouth on his sleeve. Very likely he did, but Dumas does not suggest it; to his original creator he was the gentleman of fallen fortunes.

The golden phial comes to rest at last in a second-hand bookshop of to-day, and the story ends in a blaze of jocular philosophizing. A booklover is introduced who is unique in fiction inasmuch as he prefers new books to old books. Certain opinions of actual masterpieces are offered which sound a clarion challenge in the ears of a reviewer, but this one with immense self-restraint declines to pick up the gage. Let the reader find out for himself what are Mr. Starrett's chosen few.

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