

The BOWLING GREEN

Alice and the Aquitania

II.

WE came up harbor again in the pink light of late afternoon, too wise even to try to match words against that cluster of stalagmites that will never be described by deliberate intention; only, if ever, by accident. Perhaps James Bone came as near it as anyone: "The City of Dreadful Height." It is a much steeper view from the deck of a tug than from the high terraces of a liner. We steered for the deep notch of Broadway, as the big ships do, and rounded the bend of the island. F. A. remembered that the last time we had come up the bay in a tug was the night President Harding died, when some great building in Battery Place had left its lights burning toward sea in the pattern of a huge cross. "I'm afraid they wouldn't do it again for poor old Harding," was someone's comment. Yet no man need be grudging whatever light he can get as he heads down those dark Narrows.

We passed the *American Farmer* at her pier: a merchantman of letters in spite of her bucolic name. The other day she brought over from London the new edition of Sir Thomas Browne; and is it not her commander, good Captain Myddleton, who told us long ago that he always keeps the General Catalogue of the Oxford University Press in the chart-room, for momentary relief during hours of fog or soundings? But our minds were on other matters. The *Aquitania* was now at Quarantine and would be up shortly—a full day late, after a bad voyage. *Alice* was to help dock her.

At Pier 42 is a little rendezvous where the *Moran* family and their friends the *Barretts* wait for the prima donnas to come in. We tarried there in a plain, undemonstrative family group. From the various errands of the day these stout workwomen of the harbor came puffing in. They seemed to wipe their hands on their aprons and sit rocking gently on beamy bottoms to talk things over before the big job. They filled water coolers, the men took a sluice at the fresh-water hose. There was *Joseph H. Moran*, bigger than ourself; and *Helen B. Moran* with a small white dog on board, very alert and eager of eye, much aware of his responsibility as the only dog among so many informal human beings. He stood up with front paws rigid against *Helen B.*'s bulwarks and watched the other kinsmen arrive with critical attention. Oliver (who notices everything) says the small white dog was furiously annoyed when in the middle of his supervisions one of the men sprayed him humorously with a mouthful of drinking water. Certainly it was a liberty, and the more so if it was done by someone on the *Howard C. Moore* or the *Downer X*, who were not *Morans* or *Barretts*. But I did not see this myself, for at that moment F. R. was telling me of his excitement in reading Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* and asking me (so it seemed to my morbid mind) why none of us could write as well as Defoe.

We lay in a knot, haunch to haunch, at the end of Pier 42. *Eugene F. Moran* had followed us faithfully from Brooklyn. *Grace Barrett* was there, and *Richard J. Barrett*, and *R. J. Barrett*. It must be fun to have a big family and a tugboat to name after each of them. *John Nichols*, however, kept a little in the offing. He was too proud to join our little gab, for it is *John Nichols*'s captain who goes aboard the big liner and commands the whole fleet of tugs. The rest of us sociabled our soft noses together, our upward poking bows muzzled with the big fenders that look like a brown bear climbing aboard. Above the soft aroma of the North River was a good smell of cooking. We lay in an eddy of it, for all galleys were busy.

Aquitania loomed up in the haze. Only someone very important could arrive so quietly, so steadily, so sure of herself. We had the oblique profile of her, best for both women and ships. Every slant of her seemed to accept homage. She took it as her due, yet not wholly unconscious of it, for she was still a little sore from discourtesies outside. At sea, alone with gray trigonometry, she is only a little thing. Here she was queen. In that soft light she did not come, she grew. But these were the thoughts of lubbers. The urchin tugs (I am sorry to switch metaphors so often) have no time for awe. They swarm about her skirts and hustle her with sooty grasp.

Our little fleet throbbled into action. It was like letting a pack of well-trained beagles out of a kennel. No one needed to be told anything. The routine has been perfected in every detail. *John Nichols* turned downstream to meet her. *Joseph H.* and *Helen B.* shot up ahead of us with a scurry of froth. *Grace Barrett*, pirouetting on her solid heel, twirled across our bow and took the inside track along the pierheads. Behind this interference *Eugene* and ourself and *Howard Moore* followed upstream. There was a very strong ebb, Captain Huseby had told us. But there was no difficulty of wind, a gentle breeze from S.W. It was pink November dusk at its mildest.

Alice and *Eugene* went outward to join her. She came huge above us, steadily increasing. Now we had no eyes to note the movements of the other tugs, only to study this monstrous nobility of a ship. It must have been a bad voyage, for she looked dingy, rusted and salted from water-line to funnels. High on her sloping stacks were crusts of salt. Her white-work was stained, her boot-topping green with scum. The safety nettings were still stretched along her steerage decks, even high on the promenade we could see them brailed up. Passengers at her rails looked down incuriously as we dropped astern. Just one more landing, they supposed.

We passed the notice board—*Propeller 8 feet beneath surface, Keep Clear*—and with *Eugene* slid in under her magnificent stern. Her bronze fans, turning unseen, slipped her cleanly along; we nosed busily into the very broth of her wake. Almost beneath the overhang we followed, dipping in the great swelling bubbles of her shove. It was like carrying the train of an empress. AQUITANIA, LIVERPOOL! Only the sharks have followed her closer than that. She was drawing 33½ feet at the rudder-post. The smooth taper of her hull, swimming forward ahead of us, made her seem suddenly fishlike. Beneath that skin of metal you could divine the intricate veinings and glands of her life: silvery shafts turning in a perspiration of oil, hot bulbs of light, white honeycombs of corridor, cell-like staterooms suddenly vacated. All the cunning structure of vivid life, and yet like everything living so pitifully frail. Then *Bill Banks* the mate went forward with a boathook. He stood under her colossal tail with his rod poised like a lance. "My God," said Oliver, "he's going to harpoon her." We looked at *Eugene F.* and there, too, stood one with boathook pointed. Like two whaleboats we followed *Moby Dick*.

She swam steadily. A uniformed officer and two sailors looked down at us from the taffrail far above. There was superiority in that look. But *Alice M.* takes condescension from none. "Give us your rope," she cried. They said nothing. We continued to follow. A breath of anxiety seemed to pass over Captain Huseby and *Bill Banks*. For now we were almost abreast of the pier. Perhaps that ebb tide was on their minds. To deal with that ebb was our affair. They repeated the invitation. "Wait till we get word from the bridge," replied the officer calmly. The

devil with the bridge, we could see *Alice* thinking. Her job is to get hold of a line and the sooner the better. At last it came, snaking downward. *Bill Banks* caught it, partly on the boathook and partly on his neck. The big hawser drooped after it, five inches thick of new rope. There was fierce haste to get it looped on the towing bitts astern. It was *Alice* who took *Aquitania*'s first line, from the port quarter. "You've got to be careful taking a rope under way like this," said Captain Huseby spinning his wheel. "These big ships have a powerful suction."

Eugene F. took the second line. The next thing we realized a quick hitch-up had taken place, and we were towing in tandem. *R. J. Barrett* was coupled ahead of *Alice*, *Richard Barrett* was in line with *Eugene*. The quartet headed diagonally upstream. The big hawsers came taut and creaked. *Alice* trembled. Up at *Aquitania*'s port bow were three other tugs pushing downward, side by side. Seven of us altogether on the port side. There must have been half a dozen to starboard, but what was happening there we couldn't see.

Alice shook with life. The churn from *R. J. Barrett* boiled past us. The mass of *Aquitania*'s stern plus the flow of the whole Hudson watershed hung on a few inches of splice hooked over the bitts. The big ship stood unmoved as a cliff, while our quartet strained and quivered. *Morans* and *Barretts* dug their twirly heels into the slippery river and grunted with work. Steam panted with hot enjoyment. *Aquitania* didn't seem to care. She wasn't even looking at us. Her port side was almost deserted. Passengers were all to starboard looking for someone to say hullo to. Lights began to shine from the ports. One was blocked with a wooden deadlight, proof of smashing weather. A single steward looked out calmly from the glory hole. It was all old business to him. For several minutes nothing seemed to happen. In midstream a big *Socony* tanker, almost loaded under with weight of oil, stood by to bring in fuel as soon as she was docked. *John D.* ready for business, we thought. There was no time to lose: she must sail again only 31 hours later. And in this, the very stress of the battle, they asked us, "How about some supper?" *Alice* had hold now. Apparently she could do practically all the rest of it herself. Captain Huseby was surprised when we said we were too excited to eat.

Gradually the big hull swung. The downward sweep of the tide crisped in a smacking surf against her side as she straightened out across the river. Her great profile brightened with lights in the thickening dusk. Now she was straight onto the opening of the pier. She blew once, very short, a deep, mellow rumble. Thanks! We all answered in chorus, with equal brevity. Sure! Our quartet slackened the pull, wheeled off at wider angles to safeguard her stern as she warped in. She had pivoted round the corner and was slowly easing against the camels, those floating rafts that keep her from rubbing. Captain Huseby now did his steering from the wheel at *Alice*'s stern. The rest were at supper.

It was blue dark, 5:10 p.m. New Jersey had vanished except for the bright words LIPTON'S TEA. *Aquitania*'s stern was flush with the outer end of the pier. Her ensign came down. We could hardly believe it was all over.

Bill Paton was a little disappointed we could not stay for supper. But we had seen too much—and eaten too much lunch—to be hungry yet. "Next time let us know a day ahead," he remarked, "and

we can really give you a meal." We tried to compliment the deck-hand on his sure skill with a hawser. He was embarrassed. "I'm glad you were pleased," was his modest reply. They put us ashore at the end of the pier.

Why do people build or buy big steam yachts, we wondered. Surely a tugboat is the perfect craft. They build them on the Great Lakes—Green Bay, I think they said, was where *Alice* came from. You can get one like her for something like \$100,000. A maiden voyage in a tugboat from Green Bay to New York would be a good trip to take.

Aquitania lay there, a blaze of lights, stewards busy carrying off baggage. *Alice* backed off with a curtsying motion, and vanished into the dark. She sleeps in Brooklyn.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

A Diplomat's Memories

MY YESTERDAYS. By LORD FREDERICK HAMILTON. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1931. \$2.50.

THIS is a one-volume reprint, from the original plates, of the three books of reminiscence, "The Vanished Poms of Yesterday," "The Days before Yesterday," and "Here, There and Everywhere." Lord Frederick Hamilton was son of a Duke and brought up in the full tradition of his caste. Family routine sent him to Harrow: this book contains a devoutly Harrovian chapter of old-boy memories. But instead of going up to Cambridge or Oxford he entered the diplomatic service. He was built for a man of the world, not a scholar, and became a shining example of the public school Briton at his best.

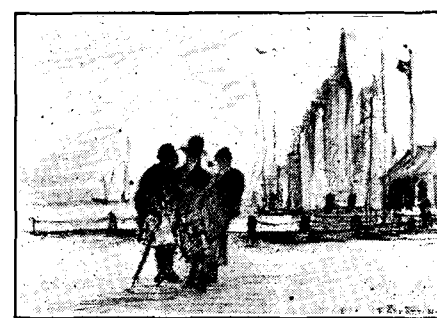
But he is more than a type. With all his easy acceptance of rank, its privileges and responsibilities, he has a private humor and gusto of living that protect him from anything like pretence or snobbery. He likes pomp and circumstance on occasion, and registers with a sigh the passing of the old régime, when in royalty the world possessed at least an ornament above the doorway of the commonplace. But he likes human beings and human nature more.

His birth gave him entry to the English court in boyhood. At twenty he went to Berlin as a full-fledged attaché. He observed with amusement the frugality of the Prussian, his reserve, his secret dislike of England. He watched the great Wagner being cosseted by princesses, heard him play, as well as Liszt, in private: met Bismarck, then master of Europe, a friendly visitor at the British embassy. He tells some entertaining stories of court life and vividly describes the formalities of court feasts and functions. From Berlin he was despatched to Austria, thence to Russia and elsewhere, so that in these pages you may find an extraordinary picture of nineteenth century royalty as a sort of panorama shifting from country to country but always with the same dominating figures in the foreground.

This British diplomat also functioned in his time in Brazil and the Argentine, in Canada and Calcutta. With him he carried always his English aplomb but also his inexhaustible interest in people and his relish for human contacts of all sorts. The third part of this volume, "Here, There, and Everywhere," is a random record of his unofficial travels and adventures in many lands and seas. The chapters on the West Indies and the Spanish Main are particularly readable. There is nothing startling in this book, from first to last, but it is so unassuming, so genial, so well-bred and tolerant, even of those changes which have already made of it a chronicle of dead things—as to rank among the best of modern "memoirs."

Incidentally the book yields quite a body of evidence about the manners and speech of a class and a period which we know chiefly through the more or less fanciful eyes of the novelists. This passage is especially interesting in view of certain alleged "Yankeeisms" and "Southernisms." The aunts in question were noblewomen of the highest rank and breeding:

In the 'seventies some of the curious tricks of pronunciation of the eighteenth century still survived. My aunts, who had been born with or before the nineteenth century, invariably pronounced "yellow" as "yaller," "lilac" and "cucumber" became "laylock" and "cow-cumber," and a gold bracelet was referred to as a "gould brasslet."



DRAWN BY FRANKLIN ABBOTT

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383 Madison Ave. New York

Some Recent Fiction

Sarah Defiant

SARAH DEFIANT. By MARY BORDEN. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by TAYLOR SCOTT HARDIN

LIKE "Three Pilgrims and a Tinker," this latest of Mary Borden's novels has great charm. Again she has a story; again she knows how to tell it. It's about a simple English woman (daughter of a vicar, wife of a lord, mother of two children) who, during the war, while her husband is off on active service, turns nurse, goes to the front, falls in with an attractive British captain, and causes a great to-do by her ensuing love for him. At first she is "good"—even breaks off with the captain when matters get to a point. But when her husband returns and she meets him in Paris, she finds him old and insufferably dull. It won't work; so, against his lordship's stormy protests, she is quick to flee to her gay young captain when word comes that he has just been seriously wounded. She finds him minus a leg. Then comes Armistice. His lordship will not grant his wife a divorce. Defiant, she shocks her high, moral relations by deserting husband and children to go and live with the captain, who soon takes her to Paris.

Half of the story is laid against that gay, carefree effervescence which the French capital was just after the war—diplomats, aristocrats, smart parties, and *femmes fatales*. Here the young lovers move and have their being—until word comes to the heroine that one of her children lies ill at home. Whereupon she returns and for a variety of reasons has to remain about a year. Meantime in Paris the wooden-legged captain thinks (wrongly) that she has deserted him. He is in the midst of an affair with a famous French female when his English lady (after her husband's death) returns. And now the stage is set for a beautiful climax. There is shooting, of course, and all that, but it's a *dénoûment* in the manner of the *comédie française*, so no serious harm is done; and then Paris peters out into dullness, and the lovers return to England, and are joined at last in holy matrimony. All of which is as it should be.

In this book, Mary Borden once again proves that she can write. There's a glibness, a freshness, a delight to her style which is as friendly as it is persuasive. Her thoughts trip along nimbly on top of a rich flow of simple, well-chosen words. There is no one who can do her kind of "light" writing with quite the same grace and good taste; and there is hardly any one who has a better sense of catching portraits and atmospheres with quite the same easy economy. Her phrases, always so simple, are often startling in their happiness—as when she says of her heroine that her face became "foolish with misery." In one full sweep we get Lord Howick. With deftness we get his Palladian house in England, including the children and their faithful old governess, Mathilda Browning. Mary Borden is always superb when she deals with children. But in this book she's even more superb in her handling of the Paris scene, which she does with a delicious familiarity, not only the city, but its smart set as well.

Mary Borden seems to have been born with a sense of narrative sequence, which, like an ear for music, is an innate trait, I think, and not an acquired one. Furthermore, she is an admirable judge of pace. She avoids chronological concatenation whenever it gets in the way of her story, introduces variety just when the reader is ready for it, steps up the tempo when things are happening, slows it down when rest is needed. Her descriptions never seem static. They sneak into the dynamic web, almost unobserved. Her dialogue is excellent—choice spots of it, in just the right places. "Sarah Defiant" is a comedy of manners which reads like a charm. A hundred years from now scholars may conceivably go back to it as they now go back to "Evelina" and Jane Austen.

Eighteen Varieties

MR. FOTHERGILL'S PLOT. By Eighteen Authors. New York: Oxford University Press. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

THE first work of fiction from the Oxford University Press presents both a new idea and an imposing list of authors. The jacket explains, with or without its tongue in its cheek, that Mr. Fothergill is the literary-artist landlord of an old Coaching Inn near Oxford, where English authors are wont to enjoy his hospitality. And when one morning he

jumped from his bed with a plot in his head

he very wisely decided to put it to work. He gave it to eighteen authors, the Conspirators, each of whom wrote a version of it in short story form. The stories were collected and are presented in "Mr. Fothergill's Plot."

The eighteen coöperative authors are: Martin Armstrong, H. R. Barbor, Elizabeth Bowen, Gerald Bullett, Thomas Burke, G. K. Chesterton, A. E. Coppard, E. M. Delafield, L. P. Hartley, Storm Jameson, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Margaret Kennedy, Edward Shanks, Helen Simpson, J. C. Squire, L. A. G. Strong, Frank Swinnerton, and Rebecca West.

The plot as given out read:

A man gets into correspondence with a woman he doesn't know and finds romance in it, until he meets a girl, falls in love with her in the ordinary way, marries her, and drops the mysterious correspondence. But after a period of happiness comes dissatisfaction. He writes again to the unknown woman and finds consolation till by an accident it is discovered that the married couple are writing to one another.

Upon this theme the gamut of variations is run. Sometimes, as in "They That Sit in Darkness," by Rebecca West, it is almost lost sight of in the subtle drawing of a character wherein the distinction between the actual and not-actual is so blurred that an intense sincerity and fraudulent mediumship are possible in the same life-beleaguered individual, or, as in "A Mingled Strain," by Storm Jameson—which, despite its lack of length, reads like a novel—so fully developed is the central character, Jew-artist-lover-businessman. One story begins with the great Low Brow movement at Oxford and ends in suicide. In a "Quartette for Two Voices" the author omits the marriage ceremony in a tight-knit and thoroughly modern version of the story. The reader is not surprised to find that Mr. Swinnerton calls his characteristic sketch "Percy and Pansy," nor that Thomas Burke sets his in Xanadu. Martin Armstrong gives the plot an extra turn, developing the woman's character along lines that fringe the edges of every little art circle today. Some of the authors have approached their subject in the lighter vein, others have indulged in rosy sentimentality, but most of them have crashed head-on into a psychological situation that has as many outcomes and causes as there are authors to view it.

In an interesting and suggestive foreword, called "The Showman's Speech," Mr. R. G. Collingwood points out that the idea behind "Mr. Fothergill's Plot" is the idea that underlay Greek art. The Greek dramatists were content to tell old stories, already familiar to their audience, in new ways. The sculptors, too, told old stories in their marbles. Mr. Collingwood believes that the distinction between classical and romantic art lies just here. "To be interested in a work of art on account of what it says, is to treat it as romantic art; to be interested on account of how it says it, is to treat it as classical."

The conspirators, then, in Mr. Fothergill's plot have approached their work in the classical spirit! But the readers? They are much more likely to take the cash of eighteen remarkably good short stories and let the classical credit go.

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to discover

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