

## Crime and Vengeance

A NEW YORK TEMPEST. By MANUEL KOMROFF. New York: Coward-McCann. 1932. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

IN the spring of 1836 the little city of New York was shocked by the murder of a young girl named Helen Jewett, the inmate of a disorderly house, by a clerk named Robinson. Several circumstances combined to make the crime and the subsequent trial subjects of an intense popular interest. The beauty of the girl; the respectable position of Robinson, who had passed for a gentleman and had wealthy connections in the city; the lack of any adequate motive; the brutality of the murder, for the girl had been deliberately strangled and her bed set on fire; the scandalous character of the resort—all this made the affair sensational. James Gordon Bennett's *Herald*, founded the previous year, exploited it to the utmost. Of Robinson's guilt there has never been the slightest real doubt. But he was aided by the *Herald*, which sought circulation by developing the hypothesis that some other person had gained access to the girl's room that night; by the feeling among some of the unco guid that the girl had met a deserved fate, and that the testimony of her friends in the brothel was questionable; by unscrupulous counsel; and by the stupidity of the jury. Robinson was acquitted. He prudently took flight, and what became of him is unknown. But somewhere there has been published an account of his return to the city long afterwards from Texas, where he had prospered; his call at the office of his former attorney; and the attorney's angry ejection of the scoundrel from his door.

This long-remembered crime Mr. Komroff has made the basis for a careful narrative of more than four hundred pages, which possesses several distinct kinds of interest. Quite properly, he treats the actual history of Helen Jewett and her murderer with great freedom. His book is essentially fiction; he follows the facts far less closely than Poe followed those of the murder of Mary Rogers in his "Mystery of Marie Roget." Many of the characters and many of the most telling incidents are invented entire. Elsewhere names are changed, and characters and events altered. The result is to give the book all the unity and sweep of a novel. The murderer, here called Oliver Benson, is represented as a villain of the deepest turpitude, who plots to fasten the guilt, if necessary, on his best friend. Mr. Komroff relates how, when Benson is thrown into jail, his attorneys obtain the help of a politician who bears a grudge against the district attorney, and who hopes to succeed to that office himself. He brings into the story a weak-minded grocer who, tired of obscurity and routine, is ready to tell a plausible tale to the jury in order to find some excitement and see his name in print. It is this story which saves Benson. He heightens the drama of the trial; a trial affected by the implacable hostility between the Bowery toughs and the respectable clerks, between the virtuous wives of the town and the keepers and inmates of the disorderly houses. He shows how the prejudices of the judge himself are subtly worked upon. After Benson's acquittal, the story is given an entirely new dénouement. The murderer remains in the city, or at least on its outskirts, till retribution shortly overtakes him—retribution in its most horrible form.

Part of the book's interest lies merely in this story of crime and vengeance, a story sometimes repellent and at the end terrible, but almost always gripping. Another kind of interest lies in the picture of old New York which Mr. Komroff furnishes as his background. This picture is neither elaborate nor subtle; it lacks the expert touches which Edith Wharton, for example, gave her fictions of old New York, the nuances of Henry James's "Washington Square." It is a sketch instead of a careful painting, yet an accurate and spirited sketch so far as it goes. The opening scene is of that great fire in December, 1835, which found the hydrants frozen and whose glow was seen in Philadelphia and New Haven; the closing scene takes place in the ratpit of the Old Brew-

ery which was the wickedest spot in the wicked Five Points district. In between we have glimpses of New York journalism, jurisprudence, fire-fighting, theatres, prisons, slums, and what not. Mr. Komroff succeeds particularly well in suggesting the strong class divisions and antipathies of the city. The reformers of the city, whose denunciations of vice bring country girls in to join the brothels; the respectable men of property; the riffraff of the slums, who pillage stores and riot at the theatres; the "leather hats" who police the town; the young blades sowing their wild oats in Bleeker and Perry Streets, are struck off in bold strokes.

But Mr. Komroff is not interested in crime as a thrilling story, nor is he greatly interested in old New York. If it depended on these elements alone the book would be too clearly lacking in distinction to deserve much notice. What interests the author most is psychology, and he has chosen this rather sensational subject because it gives him an opportunity to explore human emotions and motives. How could such a murder come about? How could such an acquittal take place? In answering these questions he places



Courtesy of Old Print Shop.  
THE GREAT FIRE IN NEW YORK IN 1835 ON WHICH "A NEW YORK TEMPEST" OPENS.  
From a contemporary print.

half a dozen persons under his lens. The murdered girl is not one of them. She disappears in the early pages. But the murderer is. So is the sharp lawyer-politician who gets him off; Hopkinson, with Kent's Commentaries and Bourrienne's "Napoleon" on his work-table. So is the vacuous grocer who achieves the front-page with his fable exculpating the murderer. So is a sturdy girl who has befriended the unfortunate Helen, and who follows the murderer with unrelenting enmity; and so is a crackwitted clergyman, who has lost his church and gone to preach to the Five Points gangsters, and who plays a considerable part in some chapters. It is as an extended study in psychology and human destiny that the book is to be judged. The author's most distinct failure is with the crucial character of the murderer himself. We are not clearly shown just what combination of evil motives and impulses brought Benson to the point of committing murder, nor are we given a real understanding of the remorse which finally destroys him. The pages in which he despairingly apostrophizes God, man, and the devil have a melodramatic and unreal quality. But some of the other characters are admirably done. They are real and their actions before, during, and after the trial are thoroughly understandable. It is they who make the book worth reading.

"On the record of these new letters alone," says a writer in the *Manchester Guardian*, of the volume of hitherto unpublished letters of Coleridge which has recently appeared, "one might well assent in the Victorian verdict on Coleridge and wonder where Mill found the 'seminal' mind. Few of them treat of literature or philosophy, though among the brilliant exceptions is a letter which shows that Coleridge's system of thought was almost complete by 1806."

## Their Bonded Fates

PACIFIC. By ROBERT CARSE. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1932. \$2.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

ONE is tempted to tell first what "Pacific" is not. The jacket is emblazoned with the announcement that it is "The Story of a Hard-Boiled Ship's Crew and One Woman among Them," but while the statement is literally true, of course, it overlooks entirely the points that make the book distinctive. This is no novel, catch-as-catch-can, for the possession of a woman by undifferentiated sailors. It is a very carefully and subtly constructed novel that throws into high relief the lives of a group of seamen who are not shipped on merely for the course of the story, as has been the case in several sea tales lately, but are men whose various pasts have shaped them into the characters we meet. We see them at a tense period for them, thirty-two days at sea, with one woman, a stow-away, among them; and the violent eruptions of action as well as the secret broodings and hesitations during the long, threatening voyage grow as surely out of

means trouble: arranging for where she may stay, seeing that the men do not molest her, reporting so unpleasant a happening to the company. For the men it means keeping their clothes on during the long days of heat.

The captain is conscious of the woman's presence, although he seldom sees her. She reminds him a little of his first wife. How unyielding she had always been, how she had always escaped him really. The present wife? Was that any different? A different woman surely, this second wife, with her white skin and black hair and love of luxury; she seemed soft in her beauty, but under that was she not more secret and impenetrable than the first? The woman stowaway was the same. She accepted nothing from him, shut him out, seemed unconscious of him even when he stood in her room. That was woman for the captain, undiscoverable, self-sufficient, deaf to his need for their needing him.

Gates, the radio operator, is conscious of the woman. It brings to him more bitterly than ever the secret that he hides from others by his stories of his conquests ashore, his library of erotica, his seasoned advice to the timid on dissipation bent. But these protective walls thrown up about him only shut him in with his own inadequacy. Nerves worn thin with such constant warfare against unpleasant realization must snap under strain.

The chief engineer is conscious of the woman. She makes restless his Persian cat who sleeps at his feet at night and laps up her cream "with a delicate kind of fury" from a saucer by his plate. Now the engineer must sit up at night and massage the cat, nervous because there is "one of her own kind" aboard.

Rann, the assistant engineer, is conscious of the woman. Through her he feels shame for the first time in his unreflective life. He has never spoken to her, never touched her, perhaps never even seen her, but his talk about her at table drives one man to madness and Rann almost guesses why.

The seamen are conscious of the woman. Greek, Chinese, American—the mixed and colored lot of them. Their talk, heavy and covetous, spreads over the ship like a fog. Broken bones and slit skins are not the only ugly results of it.

And three other men are conscious of the woman. Here kindness and understanding save her from the horror of days and nights shut up in an airless little cabin where all the life on the ship ceases. Three men stand by this woman who comes from no one ever knows where and goes where they can only guess.

In all his crew Mr. Carse has not shipped one stock figure. His captain, who is wise enough not to discipline one man because of a nervous outbreak with nothing less than murder as its goal, and then capable of venting his accumulated anger and self-disgust on petty brawlers,—who makes what he feels are "subtle" judgments of his shipmates and then is driven so desperately to the airless little cabin one night despite his dignity,—this captain is man first and officer only secondarily. It is so with the others. The style of the novel, simple, straightforward, without a suggestion of embellishment, holds these individuals closely to their bonded fates.

"Another little piece of London with interesting literary associations is to come under the auctioneer's hammer this month, when, among other property at Clapham, the house in which Macaulay spent his early years, the school which he attended, and the school where Tom Hood was a pupil for some time, are to be sold," says *John o' London's Weekly*. "At the age of two, Macaulay was taken by his family to live near the Plough Tavern, Clapham, in a house which has since been converted into a shop. Here he was often visited by Hannah Moore. He was sent to Mr. Greave's school, at 16, North Side, and his precocious genius speedily showed itself. At eight years old he had begun a compendium of universal history, written a treatise to convert the natives of Malabar to Christianity, and committed to memory the whole of Scott's 'Lay' and 'Marmion.'"



# The BOWLING GREEN

## Human Beings

XXX. THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WHAT a grand thing it is for anyone to have some particular epoch to look back on, believing that that was really high tide. Just one period, no matter how brief it actually was, of which he may say Those Were the Days. Some poet has remarked, He who has once been happy is for aye Out of destruction's reach. It is well that poets are so little read, for it is always disconcerting to find that they have said everything already.

Minnie is no sentimental praiser of the past, but she quite honestly thinks that the first years of Richard Roe Inc. justify her as a human being—and justify life as what happens to such. The year 1919 and thereabouts, for instance. Trying for Hubbard's benefit to recall the feeling of that time, Minnie says that with the whole subsequent perspective in view she would not change with any other person at any time or place. No, not with Queen Elizabeth or Anna Held—especially not with Queen Elizabeth, she added, for she had read Lytton Strachey. To Hubbard, who was timid and needed frequent reassurance, her supple and knowing vitality was beef, iron and wine. She never worried, never pitied herself, or anyone else.

"It was a great time," she said. "Every few days Fifth Avenue won the war all over again with a parade. It got so that I had to keep the telephone directories hidden to prevent the girls tearing them up and throwing them out of the windows every time someone who had won the war went past the Flatiron. They built a Court of Victory in Madison Square, appropriately ornamented with gas-balloons. Old Mr. Gall used to get so excited by those parades that once he tore up all the papers on his desk including a whole year's income tax figures. When I heard a parade coming I used to rush round the office and put all the important papers in the safe. I kept old copies of the *Sunday American* in a cupboard so if the children had to tear up something they would be handy."

Hubbard distrusted historians' generalizations about the End of an Era and all attempts to put locks and dams across the swift stream of living. Wiseacres come to the end of a sheet of paper and call it the close of an epoch. But life never makes a final balance, and the ticker always lags behind the trading.

Yet in some ways 1919 really was the end, for a while, of a certain sort of Good Old Times. They will return; are returning already; humanity needs its Good Times so much that when they don't exist it invents them. Men of affairs now pursue the phantom of Better Business like the jolly horsemen of England chasing the fox across the shires and through other people's cabbages. They cry *Yoicks!* and *Gone Away!* (or whatever the catchwords are) and the whole hunt, led by some lively publicist in a red coat, goes careering over fences. You think the parallel too fanciful? I asked Hubbard. Why only the other day I overheard a party of icebox salesmen singing one of their pep-tunes. It had the very accent of a foxhunting madrigal, each chorus ended "And merrily we'll whoop and we'll holla!"

In 1919 there was a peculiarly subtle ratio between what was permitted and what was forbidden. This lent zest to the latter. Women did not smoke in restaurants, they still wore long hair, and stockings in bathing. A great deal of public attention was focussed on these minutiae. It is desirable always to keep as large a proportion as possible of the public mind upon irrelevant trifles. It kicks up a dust, in which a few cheerful souls can go ahead, as they always have, and do what amuses them. Public smoking is relatively

little fun for women now, but it was an adventure then. Minnie remembers the look of mischief she got from Jenny Hoerl one day in the Fifth Avenue Restaurant. Jenny was being taken to lunch by an important customer from up State. (This was good business for the firm; Peggy Whaley had to stand by the telephone on these occasions.) Jenny described him as an old fossil, and Minnie, just for mischief, came into the same restaurant for lunch to see how Jenny managed him. Minnie was enjoying a cigarette, but the buyer from Buffalo, who did not know Miss Hutzler by sight, was horrified. He called the maitre d'hôtel. "Please, tell that woman to stop smoking," he said. "Tell her I'm here with a lady."—When the girls took a tiny cottage at Long Beach for the summer Minnie was thought to be a Bad Woman because she bathed without stockings. She used to smile to herself to think how much worse than that she really was.

These were small matters: there were profounder reasons for the special ecstasy of that time. In the back of most people's minds was the delicious belief that the war had been Won. This was particularly comfortable and evident on Fifth Avenue, which had long been an almost continuous vista of flags and parades. It would be impossible not to feel an uplift of assurance along that great road of Display. It was to take a dozen years for people to learn that wars like that are not really won by anyone. "I saw a pamphlet not long ago," Hubbard remarks, "with a title that hit me hard. It was called *Who Won the San Francisco Earthquake?*"

But that satisfied feeling was very real at the time. Fifth Avenue was then still dominated architecturally by millionaires and churches, in both of whom We Trusted. Neither were as conspicuous twelve years later. In 1919 one could feel the first trembling thrill of that glorious decade of Going Up when vast buildings sprang in clear lattice against space. "How high your window-sills are," said Little Red Riding-Hood. "The better to jump from, my dear," said the Wolf. Little Red Riding-Hood laughed heartily and thought it a good joke.

"Would you have missed all that, just for the satisfaction of being wise and farsighted?" Hubbard asks. "I wouldn't. It was wonderful. If anyone uttered words of warning they shouted him down. They were having a grand time. Do you remember that fine story in the Bible, when the business interests of Ephesus seemed to be threatened by St. Paul's preaching? He was telling them that Diana wasn't a real god, only an idol; but the silversmiths' Chamber of Commerce, who did a big traffic in images, were pretty sore about it. 'All with one voice about the space of two hours cried out Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' There's a lot of Ephesianism in the human animal. Why not?"

Diana brings us back to the Roe office. They weren't worrying themselves over the cosmic aspect of affairs; they had plenty of their own excitement to think about. If we could have eavesdropped from the Reception Room an average forenoon we would have heard a lively mixture of business and social communication, interspersed with the purr of the switchboard annunciators and fragments of voice breaking in from various quarters of the suite. Running through this medley of sounds would be Jenny's matter-of-fact reiteration *Richard Roe* in answer to each incoming call:—

"Hold the line, please . . . Mr. Kaskel for Miss Hutzler . . . Just a minute. Irving did you take that package up to Ovington's? . . . Richard Roe . . . For you, Peggy . . . I'm awfully sorry, Bill, I'm all balled up on my dates this week; I'll give you a call in the morning . . . Caledonia

soandso? Mr. Furness calling Mr. Sonnenborn . . . Richard Roe . . . He's busy talking, will you hold on? . . . Who put this thing on my desk from the First National Bank? . . . Sorry, the wire's still busy . . . He's not here right now, is there any message? . . . Yes Mr. Roe . . . Miss Whaley please get out the Joseph Horne file for Mr. Furness . . . Replying yours of 28th, goods were shipped direct from the factory as per instructions . . . Well you certainly got a nerve . . . pale green, it was a knockout . . . Richard Roe . . . Sure, the Brevoort at 12.45 . . ."

Mingle this with click of typewriters, murmur of dictation, rattle of papers, ringing bells, Mr. Gall's habit of sneezing and the smell of Richard's cigar. The Metropolitan chime rolls across the square, a deep confident voice; or perhaps the all-hearing ear would catch a fainter sound, the protest of Irving the pale office-boy. They could not understand why even the nearest errand took Irving so long. He was reproached, and promised to do better. But finally he came to Minnie. "Miss Hutzler, I think I'll have to give up this job," he said sadly. "Up and down fourteen flights of stairs is too much for me." "What on earth do you mean?" asked Minnie. He explained that his mother had made him promise not to ride in elevators, which she did not think were safe. "Well," said Minnie, "then you'd better get a job with the street-cleaning department."

Richard, bred in the free and easy ways of the theatre and the publishing business, did not insist on rigid office discipline. If they sometimes stayed out longer than the conventional hour at lunch, they more than made up for it by remaining late in the afternoon. Richard himself lunched most often at Mouquin's on Sixth Avenue, where he met old cronies of the book trade. The level-headed Miss Mac sometimes joined him there and listened attentively to his reports on the progress of the business. She never alluded to the fact that she was a stockholder, but it was always in the back of Richard's mind; he was enormously proud when he could celebrate the first anniversary of the company by handling her a small dividend check.

But it was Minnie who was in many ways the motive center of the enterprise. There is no human activity more satisfying than that of a small busy office, small enough to preserve the humors of intimacy, busy enough to give the sense of achievement. Happiness depends on the delicate balance between forgetting and remembering one's self. The best hours of the day speed exquisitely fast in brisk companionship and continual absorption in detail which keeps the mind alert without wearying it. Minnie, in the prime of her intuitions and with the intoxicating freedom of full independence, exulted in a refreshed sense of power. Perhaps she abused it a little, as women usually does. She had that rare virtuous grasp of business as an intricate fascinating game in which the skilful player foresees the moves a long way ahead. Once when old Jake Hack was in town he invited her up to his room at the Waldorf to discuss business plans. He was their principal backer and had shown surprising confidence. Minnie described the Roe campaign in detail and showed him proofs of the advertising she had been writing—*What the Well-Dressed Desk Will Wear*. "Your stuff has made a real hit with us," he said. "I don't know why we ever let you get away from Hack Brothers. If I was twenty years younger I'd make you an offer to go back into business with me. I mean personally."

Minnie was both amused and touched: the overture was so thoroughly in keeping with the plushy and slightly faded furnishings of the Waldorf. "Never mind about the twenty years," she said. "If I went into business with you it would be just that, business."

He recognized the skilful negative. A shrewd merchant knows well enough when the goods he offers are not adequate for a deal. Jake continued to have for her the affectionate respect one sharp bargainer has for another; extended the notes of Richard Roe Inc. without hesitation, and gave her good counsel about too hasty expansion. "There's talk nowadays about a freeze-up of credit," he said. "Don't let

it scare you; it's nothing. This is only a sprinkle of frost. The momentum of the War will carry us on quite a ways yet. The real Cold Wave will come later. Look out for it."

He pondered in a deep armchair, pulling on his cigar, drawing downward his thick pads of grizzled eyebrow. He was in the mood of candor that comes upon a business man away from his own shop.

"I shouldn't wonder we'll feel it first of all in Detroit," he said. "If I hear any wolves howl I'll tip you off."

"We'll keep an eye on the stock market," Minnie ventured.

"Don't fool yourself. Wall Street ain't climate; it's only thermometer. You can set your thermostat at seventy, what good does that do you if there's not enough steam in the boiler.—You keep your eye on the cash department stores. They play mighty close to the customers."

They had a whiskey and soda together, and Jake reflected that it had been an ideal restful evening: intelligent talk about sensible matters. She gave him a friendly kiss when she left, for she saw it would be good for his morale. Indeed who can say that the gesture did not have its own bearing on increased car-loadings in the Wolverine City the next few weeks. Even Minnie herself, riding back toward Washington Square on a bus, was not unaware of elation. "Little Minnie Hutzler," she said to herself, "been kissed by the biggest retail merchant in Detroit."

Minnie was a spirited taskmaster in the office; she did not even hesitate to ring up Richard at Mouquin's if she thought he was tarrying too long over lunch; she stood out for prices and contracts where he himself would have weakened. When the salesmen came to the office, looking forward to resting their feet and a little flirtation with Jenny and Peggy, she already had lists of new agenda for them. One of her tactical triumphs was hiring Lou Kaskel, which she did for its moral effect on Jenny. Jenny was always susceptible to what might roughly be described as glamor. While Mr. Kaskel appeared as a bold ravisher from outside, with dark hair slicked into a solid balsam paste, pointed cordovan shoes, and a dashing roadster available for week-ends, he was a possible menace to Jenny's peace of mind. Seen in the routine of every day, he lost much of his allure. But he was a good salesman. "Always have at least one kike on the sales force," said Minnie. "He sets a pace for the others. I ought to know."

The various complications of Jenny and Peggy provided Minnie with as much comedy relief as she could absorb. It's a pity, Hubbard reflected after some of her anecdotes, that the story can't be written only for women to read. What a literature could be created if one were quite sure that men, with their rigid preconceptions, would never read it.

Herman Schmaltz happened to go down to the Brevoort for lunch one day. He saw Minnie and the two girls sitting with a bottle of wine and great hilarity. As a matter of fact they were enjoying some harmless jape about sending a cold drumstick of chicken by mail to Mr. Gall's pet cat. But Herman's experience with the Y. M. C. A. and some phases of mortal frolic he had seen in France had made him dubious about mirth. He did not think it altogether seemly that his brother-in-law's stenographers should be laughing so hard in business hours. He even said so to Hazel, who hastened to repeat the idea where it would do the most harm.

(To be continued)

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

"Books for the holidays are not necessarily what are commonly thought of as holiday books," says the *London Times*, "the latter defy classification. What one person would pack into his luggage would be regarded by another as spoil-joy fare. Fiction, for instance, good or bad, does not appeal to every taste. It is a widespread habit with people of little leisure to make a mental note of certain books that have attracted attention on publication, promising themselves to read them when the holidays come."