

# The PHOENIX NEST

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

## TALE OF A PIGTAIL

IT was along in the Spring that *Jane Terrill* of Longmans, Green sent me a copy of a letter addressed to the eminent novelist and silhouettist, *John Bennett*. The letter was signed Bon Wong and began:

Dear Mr. Bennett:

There is no other purpose and connection in sending you this letter, but I merely want to let you know that the unfavorable parts of the story of "The Pigtail of Ah Lee Ben Loo" are extremely unsuitable to the Chinese people. As I am one of the four hundred and fifty millions of Chinese population, I have a right to ask you a few questions, etc. etc.

The book referred to is a book of some twenty-four stories in verse by Mr. Bennett, illustrated by his inimitable silhouettes. His use of Chinese characters in the illustrations was naturally puzzling to Mr. Wong. Also Mr. Wong had never known or heard of anyone with a wonderful queue fifteen feet long! So he remarked, "Mr. Bennett, do you realize the story of 'The Pigtail of Ah Lee Ben Loo' is very weak in intelligence, especially the illustrations?"

A little while afterward, Mr. Bennett wrote me that he had replied to Mr. Wong, who resides in Rochester, N. Y., and sent me a copy of his own letter. He answered "with greatest respect for your country, whose arts I adore and whose wisdom I revere." He admitted that he had borrowed his Chinese characters "from a primary phrase-book prepared for use in mission schools in large American cities." His letter pleaded, however, that in making his silhouettes he was perfectly aware that the Chinese were not actually human silhouettes—as he had tried to explain to the head of a Chinese laundry to whom he originally showed the drawings and who indignantly remarked, "All damn American lies! China boy not all black like that!"

I have not room here for all of Mr. Bennett's explanatory letter to Mr. Wong, which covered more than three typewritten pages; but I have his permission to quote from it regarding his delightful book, the contents of which greatly charmed my own youth. "Recall," he says to Mr. Wong, "the lines of Omar, the tent-maker of Naishapur, quatrain LXVIII, fourth edition, Fitzgerald:

"We are not other than a moving row  
Of moving shadow-shapes that come  
and go  
Around the sun-illuminated  
held  
In midnight by the Master of the Show."

You must perceive for yourself how this adds deep poetical significance to such universal rendering of humanity. Of course, I realize, as well as you, sir, that humanity is not, anywhere on earth, nor ever was, saving during the late World War, as black as I have painted it; no, not even in Ethiopia. If this misrepresentation offend humanity, I shall beg humanity's pardon.

That I made some mistakes in my usage of these Chinese ideographs should, however, not surprise you, knowing, as you must, their difficult nuances, sometimes perplexing even to the Chinese student. Similar difficulty of translation and miscomprehension often occurs among our Western nations, whose literation is simple and common to all. For example, sir: in translating Fenimore Cooper's famous story of "The Spy" into French, the translator, unfamiliar with American silviculture and entomology, meeting the unfamiliar word "locust," sought its meaning in his dictionary, and found it there defined as "an orthopterous saltatorial insect, of the family Acridiidae, genus *Locusta*, popularly known as grass-hoppers." Not knowing that there is also in America a tree, *Robinia Pseudacacia*, familiarly known as the "locust tree," the translator felt called upon to explain to his astonished readers that in America the grass-hoppers grow to such extraordinary dimensions as to enable them to be employed to hold horses at the doors of gentlemen's homes in the country. Americans, of course, are familiar with the use of the locust-tree as a hitching-post.

It is possible again that through just some such misunderstanding of national statistics I attributed a length of fifteen feet to the young laundryman's queue. But, sir, I assure you this was without intention to offend; just as, according to the vulgar custom of our country, without the slightest implication of offense

or intention of offending, I denominated the young man's queue a "pig-tail" . . . as I would have referred to the plaited braid of the loveliest lady of my acquaintance, familiarly, and without offense. I think we must relegate the phenomenal fifteen-foot queue to the limbo of the horse-holding grass-hopper.

I am quite ignorant of correct Chinese. It may be unnecessary to tell you this. It is therefore, however, not surprising that you cannot analyze my sentences in the Chinese, nor understand their meaning. Again I must beg you to understand that this is a habit of Western literature, a custom of the country. If you will be so kind as to consult the recent writings of Miss Gertrude Stein and Mr. James Joyce, author of "Ulysses," you will immediately comprehend that even in our own language we cannot analyze one another's sentences, nor understand their meanings.

## C. B. FERNALD ONCE MORE

Speaking of things Chinese, my late remarks on *Chester Bailey Fernald* and his masterly story of "The Cat and the Cherub" drew many letters. *The Golden Book* told me that they have already used several of his immortal tales; *The Scholastic*,

that they addressed him at 4 Marlborough Road, St. John's Wood, London, and had their letter returned with the notation, "House destroyed." R. H. Lyman of the *New York World-Telegram* reported that the latest "Who's Who in the Theatre" gives Fernald's address as 67 Carlton Hill, London, N.W., 8; M. I. J. of Dana Hall, Wellesley, Mass., says Fernald often visited his parents in the maternal, ancestral home in Eliot, Maine, and that his cousin Mr. William Fernald, Landscape Architect, still resides there. Another cousin was the late Dr. Walter Fernald, the noted educator and authority on the treatment of abnormal children, who, for many years, was the head of the State of Massachusetts School, now known as the Walter Fernald School. Mary Austin writes me from Santa Fé that, after his first success, Fernald moved to London, desiring the opportunity to write for the stage. He began to get a hold in New York with his plays "and then a year or two later (than 1910) the next time the Herbert Hoovers came over—Mrs. Hoover told me that he had died." Frederick H. Strong, of Portland, Oregon, says he spent several days with Fernald in Portland "a good many years ago"; Miss Hortense Keables, of Washington, D. C., asks me if I remember the incident in "The Cat and the Cherub" where the little China boy doused the kitten in water, crooning, "Are you wash—are you wash?" (You bet I do!) Agnes Thompson of Lawrence, Kansas, quotes again "Infinitesimal James"; Evelyn S.

Lease, Librarian of the Kellogg-Hubbard Library of Montpelier, Vermont, says she'll be glad to lend me a copy of "The Cat and the Cherub." (Only I'm afraid something would happen to it!) She hasn't got "Under the Jackstaff," but reminds me of the titles of the stories that came out in the old *Century* (and one in *Harper's*) viz: "A Hard Road to Andy Coggins," (My father's favorite!) "Lannigan's System with the Girls," "Lights of Sitka," "The Proving of Lannigan," "Transit Gloria Mundy," "The Yellow Burgee," and "Clarence's Mind."

So shines a good writer in a naughty world!

## AND NOW—I GOT A MOTTER

We endeavor never to trench on the *Bowling Green's* prerogative for punning, but sometimes we get a suggestion from a correspondent that involves a pun for which we refuse to be responsible.

"By the way," writes George P. Bissell, of Wilmington, Delaware, "why don't you have a *Nest* about the Talkies—and call it the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *Nest*? You needn't fear a rival." This sounds to me slightly ambiguous! But at last I have a motto for the department, a strange device to go over the door of my office (which, as I told you before, is Nor' Nor'west of the larger office of Dr. Canby). *George Frisbee* of San Francisco has plucked me this out of the pages of *Hamlet*—"I am mad but North North-West!" I like it—and I hope I can tell a hawk from a handsaw!

## Not within recent years has there been a book which has so revived the true meaning of the beauty of life, the fineness of human destiny as ALL MEN ARE ENEMIES by Richard Aldington

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miss this book...



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# The New Books

## Belles Lettres

**FIFTH AVENUE BUS.** *An Excursion among the Books of Christopher Morley.* Doubleday, Doran. 1933. \$2.

Discriminating readers will feel that this Morley omnibus is worth the price of admission merely by virtue of the inclusion of "Thunder on the Left." There are other items, however, to fit any taste—"Parnassus on Wheels," "White House Interior," several one-act plays, "Inward Ho," and a good many of the translations from the Chinese. As there are several types of Fifth Avenue buses, it may be said that the prevalent tone of this one is a cheerful green rather than the lugubrious brown which disfigures all too many of those vehicles; and the top is wide open, so that you can fill your lungs with salt air from the Hudson.

## Fiction

**SEVEN BY SEVEN.** By Hans Duffy. Morrow. 1933. \$2.

Not to be outdone by this diverting book, the publishers added a diversion of their own in omitting sixteen pages from our review copy, just to show that it made no difference. It's that kind of a book. Hans Duffy, which is either the name or the pseudonym of a young woman, writes an amusing story of one of those mad but engaging English county families. Where her wit misses fire, which is about half the time, she still writes with an agreeable good humor; and just when this quality is becoming so persistent as to be trying, she introduces an episode which strikes so sour a note as to leave the reader defenseless.

Miss Duffy's title is provided by the verse, "The animals came in seven by seven," and refers to the Sexton family, consisting of Lady Cadmium of Cras-hams, her three sons, and her three daughters. Some of their irrelevant misadventures are spontaneously funny, others are made amusing by their informal, not to say slapdash, presentation; still others, which are not funny at all, in fact quite the contrary, are served up with a sort of schoolgirlish glee which is fascinating in itself. Because nobody else ever wrote like Hans Duffy (though Daisy Ashford might have at nineteen) one gets the impression that she may be a

coming author—an impression mitigated by the feeling that all her effects, good and bad, are alike in being accidentally achieved. Coming author or not, "Seven by Seven" is recommended to the reader of roving humor. You'll probably like enough of it to be quite well satisfied.

## Miscellaneous

**JOHN BARLEYCORN: His Life and Letters.** By Daniel A. Poling. Illustrated by Jack Gallagher. Winston. 1933. \$1.50.

The Rev. Dr. Poling has been accounted one of the more rational of prohibitionists; and a statement of the rational arguments of the dries would be useful now that the wets are on the verge of a triumph which might be disastrous if carried to excess. Unfortunately, this is not that sort of book. Dr. Poling has attempted a satire, but the rich humor noted in the "review" on the jacket will be apparent only to those whose ideal of tragic drama is "Ten Nights in a Barroom." Mr. Barleycorn, a stout, genial person and good Elk, goes around the country making speeches which are always refuted (to the dry taste) by some one in the audience. When Dr. Poling is making fun of the extreme wet claims as to what can be accomplished by taxes on liquor he scores legitimately, but in the main his contentions are merely the hysterical commonplaces of dry fanaticism. It is his apparent conviction that every man who takes a drink proceeds inevitably to a drunkard's grave; but not before he has lost his job, sold the old homestead to buy booze, and left his wife and children starving in the gutter. The last chapter suggests that terrible consequences will follow the legalization of 3.2 beer; what beer has actually accomplished, for temperance and for the encouragement of the public, was evidently as incomprehensible to Dr. Poling as his state of mind is happily becoming incomprehensible to the majority of the people.

**GAL REPORTER.** By Joan Lowell, Farrar and Rinehart. 1933. \$2.50.

Harry Thurston Peck used to tell a story about Theodore Roosevelt. "In writing one of his earlier books," said Peck, "he used the word 'I' so frequently that his publishers were compelled to order from a type-foundry a fresh supply of that particular letter." Joan Lowell likes

herself, too. "There's just something about me that always gets them!" Thus (on page 49) Joan Lowell explains her success in this breath-taking (via suffocation) series of scoops undertaken for the greater glory of *The Boston Record*. She was so successful that on page 164 she is able to proclaim: "There was something bigger than the Law. A tabloid paper!" For every scoop—and she scoops them up with a steam-shovel—Joan had to risk the worse-than-death; but every time, just as she had given up hope, along came the Canadian Mounted Police. An original variation occurs when Joan turns the tables on the Mounties, and saves them from the worse-than-death. So Mac said—Mac was one of the Rover Boys—"We got to scoop this story, Joan. Gosh, our paper is the best sheet ever printed!" (Page 141). One can understand how Joan, after all the excitement she'd been through, made a mistake and addressed the manuscript of this laborious human document to Farrar and Rinehart instead of Bernarr MacFadden. But it is not clear why Farrar and Rinehart felt they had to go ahead and publish it. "I wasn't writing fiction," says the author (page 5), "and the insinuation that I had faked incidents to fill my column brought me up on the defensive." Now here's an idea for some enterprising publisher: why don't you get her to do a novel? For ourselves, "Gal Reporter" is as dull as it is self-important.



Joan Lowell, the Gal Reporter, interviews herself and scoops the boys on the rival tabloid.

Miss Lowell's heart beats for humanity—when the spotlight is on it. We wonder what our old friend "Red" Dolan of the *New York Daily News* would have to say about Joan's reporting?

## Politics

**ON THE TRAIL OF THE FORGOTTEN MAN.** *A Journal of the Roosevelt Presidential Campaign.* By James H. Guille. With an Introduction by Robert E. Rogers. Boston: Peabody Master Printers. 1933. \$2.

The Forgotten Man in this case is Mayor Curley of Boston, whose friends feel that his services to the Roosevelt candidacy were very inadequately recognized by the offer of the Warsaw Embassy, which he rejected. The material of the book was originally a series of articles in the *Worcester Sunday Telegram*; and while it loosely covers the Roosevelt campaign, both pre- and post-convention, with a final chapter on early accomplishments of the administration, it deals chiefly with the factional fights in the Massachusetts Democratic organization in which Mr. Curley was beaten by the Smith forces, only to help his candidate to triumph at the convention by making the contact with Hearst which swung the McAdoo-Garner forces to Roosevelt. For residents of Massachusetts interested in the actual government of their commonwealth it will have considerable interest.

**WHERE EAST IS WEST.** *Life in Bulgaria.* By Henrietta Leslie. Houghton Mifflin. 1933. \$4.50.

Everybody who knows the Balkans well has his pet state or people. Before the war, Bulgaria was petted by many Englishmen and Americans, the former following the lead of that grand old Bulgarophile, James Bouchier, of the *Times*, the latter drawing their enthusiasm partly from the fact that so many Bulgar girls and boys went to the American colleges in Constantinople, where they showed themselves serious students and hard workers. Americans generally found Bulgars more sympathetic and like themselves than the comparatively light-minded Rumanians, for instance. The qualities which sometimes gave the Bulgars the name of the "Yankees of the Balkans" are doubtless just as characteristic as they were before the late unpleasantness, and the veteran correspondent, Mr. Henry Nevins, who supplies a foreword to Mrs. Leslie's book, remarks that he "has been saying for the last forty years that in the end the Bul-

gars will come out on top in the Balkans."

Mrs. Leslie is evidently one of those who like Bulgaria and its people, and in the three hundred pages of her book she gives all sorts of impressions of the country and its inhabitants. She is not greatly concerned with politics, as such, but is interested in everybody from the King to sheep-herders, and from mutton roasted on a spit to the perfume of the famous Valley of Roses. Hers is a travel-book in what might be called the old-fashioned style—detailed, leisurely, friendly.

## Religion

**THE OXFORD GROUP MOVEMENT.** By Herbert Hensley Henson. Oxford University Press. 1933. \$1.

Americans became acquainted with the brilliant Bishop of Durham upon the occasion of his first visit to this country in 1909, when he delivered at Yale a series of lectures on "The Liberty of Prophesying." Throughout the intervening years a growing esteem for his keen mind and well-balanced judgment has made anything he has written eagerly read. So his little brochure, which consists of last year's "Visitation Charge," acquires an importance out of all proportion to its modest size and original purpose. In spite of its brevity, it covers the essentials of the whole subject with unusual thoroughness, and presents to the reader the mature conclusions of one of England's ablest bishops with convincing clarity and semi-official authority.

Bishop Henson, being an Oxford Fellow, seems to resent the fact that a religious movement so characteristically American, sectarian, and anti-intellectual, should be trying to palm itself off as a child of Oxford University. When the name "Buchmanism" fits so perfectly its origin and leadership it is difficult to understand why it is so violently repudiated by the Group. Out of deference to this feeling he refrains from using it, but he cannot bring himself to associate the word Oxford with its title. So he refers to it as "Groupism" or "The Groupists."

With his masterly command of historical knowledge he marshals in startling array all similar religious movements which have appeared through the centuries, and recounting their fate, lays bare the three major defects in the religious nature of this movement. And then he announces this conclusion: "I do not think the Groupist movement can be brought into working harmony with the Church of England." But he does not leave the subject at this point. With characteristic frankness and fair-mindedness he makes this confession:

Three things are, as I see the situation, gravely lacking in us, and these the Groupists are in their own way providing. If we are humble enough, and penitent enough, and wise enough to learn from them, they may assist us to gain these very things.

## Latest Books Received

### BELLES LETTRES

*Shakespeare and Hawaii.* C. Morley. Doubleday. \$1.25. *The Colophon Book.* Collector's Quarterly. Part Fourteen. New York. 1933. *The Bromide and Other Theories.* G. Burgess. Viking. \$1.

### BIOGRAPHY

*Baudelaire.* E. Starkie. Putnam. \$3.75.

### DRAMA

*Orphée.* J. Cocteau. Tr. C. Wildman. London: Oxford Univ. Pr. \$2.50.

### FICTION

*Death Out of the Night.* A. Wynne. Lippincott. \$2. *The Captain's Curio.* E. Philpotts. Macmill. \$2. *When Adam Wept.* A. R. Craig. Doubleday. \$2. *The Complete Novels and Plays of Saki.* (H. H. Munro.) Viking. \$3. *Slave Wives of Nehalem.* C. W. Churchill. Portland, Ore.: Metropolitan Press. *The Traipsin' Woman.* J. Thomas. Dutton. \$2.50. *Fräulein M. De Andrade.* Macaulay. \$2. *Bank President.* L. Graham. Macaulay. \$2. *The Golden Ripple.* A. Waugh. Farr. & Rinehart. \$2. *An American Hero.* F. W. Bronson. Farr. & Rinehart. \$2. *Daughter to Philip.* B. K. Seymour. Knopf. \$2.50.

### FOREIGN

*Gedanken eines Arztes Ueber Seele, Natur und Gott.* Dr. F. P. Weber. Stuttgart: F. E. Verlag.

### INTERNATIONAL

*World Prosperity.* W. McClure. Macmill. \$4.

### MISCELLANEOUS

*The Barbary Coast.* H. Asbury. Knopf. \$3. *Externals and Essentials.* Sir J. Adamson. Longmans. \$1.35. *The Symphony of Life.* Letters L. V. Beethoven. Tr. U. L. Stein-dorf. Perpetual Peace. I. Kant; The Greatest Thing in the World, H. Drummond; The Smiling Pioneer. J. P. Beckworth; Little Flowers of St. Francis. Ed. John Stevens McGroarty; The Story of the United States by Those Who Made It. E. E. C. Moore; Builders of the Universe. A. Einstein; American Literature an Introduction. C. Van Doren. Los Angeles, Cal.: U. S. Library Assoc. Inc. at Westwood Vill. 25 cents each. *Eastern Philosophy for Western Minds.* H. McLaurin. Boston: Stratford. \$2.50.

### TRAVEL

*Old Italy and New Mussoliniland.* J. Gibbons. Dutton. \$2. *The Land of Feast and Famine.* H. Ingstad. Knopf. \$3.50.

## MACMILLAN

### Two Novels of Distinction

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by Francis Stuart

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### A Work of Importance

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by Wallace McClure

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