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# The Saturday Review

## of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY



VOLUME XI

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1934

NUMBER 8



BARON CORVO AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF HIS CAREER

Left, Fr. Rolfe, during his period of training at the Scots College; right, the outcast Baron, about 1908.

### Two Kinds of Magic

**BLACK GOD: A Story of the Congo.** By D. Manners-Sutton. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EMILY HAHN

THIS book has a quality which cannot be collected into a word, nor even into a phrase to grace the publisher's jacket in a neat paragraph. Starting off with deceptive simplicity it leads the reader into a tangle of mysticism and realism. In plainer words, magic and common-sense reportorial writing take their turns until one is in the state of mind expressed by M. Lafontaine . . . "I feel that my skin is turning black," he said."

Chembi is a town in the Belgian Congo near the Lualaba River. It has grown with the suddenness of most African towns: the square houses of the white men have appeared within the memory both of the old priest who heads the Marist Mission on the hill and of M'Kato, who sits all day on the banks of the Little River, waiting for the revenge promised him by his magic. Father Dominique himself is only one of the idle world as it passes before M'Kato, who long ago lost his hands by order of a white man. Ever since he has waited there, practising throwing an assegai with his foot against the day he is so confident will come, when his enemy will arrive at the opposite bank of the Little River.

Actually the book is more than it seems at first, a series of short stories linked by a common background containing the patient, terrible figure of M'Kato. There is struggle in it, formless at the beginning, growing in intensity until the explosion in the story of the Black Master. African magic fights European magic. The witch-doctor works his spells over crossed bones burning in the fire, and ignores the missionaries on the other side of the river. The Baptist and his wife struggle in their severely clean house to gather converts; occasionally there are sharp encounters with the Catholics. The Marist Brothers work out their own destinies. The Sisters at the hospital toil bravely and blindly and bovinely, as though they were carrying on their good work in Brussels instead of in Chembi. Then two black Resurrection Women visit Chembi and go away with

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### Tracking Down a Literary Mystery

**THE QUEST FOR CORVO.** An experiment in biography. By A. J. A. Symons. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SHANE LESLIE

AT last a book has appeared which a select few have been awaiting as a feat in literary impossibility for many years. Who was Corvo? the Baron Corvo—as he wished to be termed by the immortals whereas mortal men knew him as Frederick Rolfe, one of the mysteries of the nineties, who in his life and letters out-Oscared Oscar but fell amiss of fame and craving fiercely for renown and beauty died in misery, squalor, and penury as a gondolier at Venice in 1913? Of the sadness of his morality and the despairs into which he fell his biographer writes unflinchingly, but it is in literature, not psychology, that Corvo is unique. In two senses the style of Baron Corvo haunts his period. Was he a Baron? Was he a writer? He made his bid for the literary laurels in the *Yellow Book* but fell therefrom into a more sulphurous plane. The strange thing was that he remained so utterly unknown, although to many men and varied he was always remembered as the most weird, the most unpleasant, the most interesting, or the most fascinating man each had ever met; such men were Harry Pirie-Gordon, Mr. Champion, the socialist leader; Father De Vere Beauclerk, the veteran Jesuit; Professor Dawkins, Monsignor Hugh Benson, Grant Richards, the publisher; Dr. Hardy, late Principal of Jesus College, Oxford, and Dr. G. G. Coulton, the medievalist.

Mr. A. J. A. Symons has flitted feverishly between the survivors of those who knew Corvo in the flesh and the scattered papers of those who have since joined him in the Purgatory which he inflicted on his best friends on earth. Take his astounding relations with Monsignor Benson, to whom he directed a vitriolic post card daily, or his outrageous outburst of enmity with Grant Richards, and his unflinching ability to nail the hand that fed him.

In the first decade of this century few

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### Books of Escape\*

BY H. M. TOMLINSON

ON a desk probably similar to Lamb's barren mahogany, and very near to the scene of his long servitude to the East India Company in Leadenhall Street, I myself used to attend to indents and make out bills of lading. In Lamb's day, and in mine, as it is now, that street was occupied by shipping companies. Its emblem could be the Red Ensign. (How many voyagers who make holiday in luxury liners, because of a curiously late delight in ships and the sea, would know an indent or a bill of lading if they saw one?) Anyhow, the opportunity came to me quite early in life to learn the names of many ships, and to know that the lure of some fabulous places, such as Pentan and Zipangu, was in the office atlas. The ships had good names, and it was fun to inscribe them boldly in the document, so it is now easy to remember them: *Thyatira*, *Blackadder*, *Euterpe*, *Charlotte Padbury*, *Brier Holme*, *Loch Garry*, *Duchalburn*, *Dharwar*—but this had better stop. Those names appear no longer in *Lloyd's List*, so this is folly. It means nothing except the past.

I can only plead that they were more than fine names to me. They were veritable ships. I saw them at their moorings. Frequently I had to go to the docks to learn why a mate's receipt for cargo was delayed, or to make sure that a consignment had arrived. During the years of these visits to the quays and jetties I became acquainted with Nannie the witch, the figurehead of the *Cutty Sark*. Her face was a ghastly white—but then, so were the faces of all the fetiches at the prows of deep-water ships; cheeks should be rosy only with the guardian effigies of coasting craft. There was Nannie, and there were very many other attractive idols. You were bound to speculate whether the tutelary image at the bows of the *Harriet McGregor*, for example, was at all like the real Harriet. And who was she? The image of *Helen Denny* interested this boy, who stayed the urgency of his errand, under a bowsprit, to wonder.

I recall that remarkable character, Captain Simpson, master of the *Samuel Plimssoll*, who was with James Anthony Froude in *Oceana*; and there were many more such men, admirable to a lad, for they were solidly masculine and assured of their strength and reconde art. And there was much else. There were the East, West and South West India Docks, all so full of sailing craft that you might have to walk past nearly a mile of bowsprits, dodging cases, crates, and barrels on the move, looking at each ship's bows till you found the name you wanted. If you saw one there today you would be lucky. I knew the *Torrens* when Joseph Conrad was one of her officers, but he did not distinguish her then. She was more remarkable because she had been completely dismantled when outward bound on the previous voyage. And there perhaps is the mystery of all experience. What is of first importance, among the great and small things that impress you on the day when you are busy among them, is usually unnoticed; or maybe you do give it a

second puzzled glance, on instinct. Only time will bring it out.

But I do not return to that old mahogany desk to look over it for what I missed to see then in the right way, while it was my desk. I am thinking now of a periodical, quarto size, with orange covers, which was renewed upon it weekly, and reported the name of every ship then loading in the Thames, the port to which she was bound, her tonnage, her class in *Lloyd's Register*, her captain, her loading brokers, and the date of her departure. I gave that periodical attention as close—and for no better reason—as I gave to Ballantyne's "Ungava" and "The Young Fur Traders." I used to choose my voyage every week. That took time—the firm's time. There was a wide selection of ships and ports; though I am sure it would be thought a list meagre today by those who hesitate because of the variety and attractions of holiday cruises. There was no holiday cruising then. Voyaging was a serious affair. There was no wireless. There was steam, it is true, but that about exhausted all the facilities which then were modern. The port you desired might not be served by a steamer. Steamers were in the list, but they did not go everywhere, as they do this week.

Events, changes in common opinion, inventions, revolutions, make the differences for us; time is nothing. Men were using flint implements for about fifty thousand years. The war blew us straight into another era; and here we are, rather dishevelled and surprised, with decks and gear and lots of other conditions which would dumbfound not only Drake's men; they are more than a little puzzling to us.

For that very reason, though I have never made a voyage for pleasure, I think the modern desire to go to sea for fun must be all to the common good. The world has to be explored anew. Perhaps Columbus had an easier task in adding a continent to the earth than we have in discovering quickening ideas for all the

### This Week

SIR RICHARD STEELE

By WILLARD CONNELLY

Reviewed by Charles David Abbott

THE TRANCE

By GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

THESE HURRYING YEARS

By GERALD HEARD

Reviewed by Frank H. Simonds

ROME FOR SALE

By JACK LINDSAY

Reviewed by Elmer Davis

PAPA PASQUIER

By GEORGES DUHAMEL

Reviewed by William Rose Ben't

CHEAPJACK

By PHILIP ALLINGHAM

Reviewed by Arthur Ruhl

"ME VOY AL SUR"

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

MARY AUSTIN

By ELIZABETH SIMPLEY SERGEANT

### Next Week or Later

FREEDOM VERSUS ORGANIZATION

By BERTRAND RUSSELL

Reviewed by Elmer Davis



continents. I believe that if the whole population of some industrial cities, down on their luck, could be shipped out for a sight of The Narrows, beyond Para, or were taken one sunrise between the volcanoes, peaks lost in the clouds, which guard the narrow channel leading from the Java Sea to the Indian Ocean, Bali to starboard, Lombok to port, they might bring back a recollection of the light they saw, of the glory of the earth, which would help to dissolve the dark problems of home; our difficulties would become the less dark, and our mills not so satanic; opinions would be levitated, become less sad and congested. Yet so large an enterprise, for the revelation of the possibilities latent about us, is past praying for, as well as paying for.

Those of us who are in the habit of exploring literature—some long voyages out of soundings may be made that way—know that intellectual critics will describe some excellent reading-stuff, and with hauteur which dismisses it from further notice, as "books of escape." They mean, I suppose, that those books are a form of cowardice; attempts to get away from reality to the Isle of No-Land. On that plea, those critics made an attempt to push Stevenson out of our sight. But, if their charge is just, away too goes "The Pilgrim's Progress." Is not that a book of escape? It looks as though much depends on what is meant by reality.

A worthy definition of Reality, honestly attempted, would keep an intellectual critic so long brooding with a wet towel that we might despair of getting so much as a mumbled and indistinct reply from him. For all novels, at least, are means by which we can escape from the insistent present, perhaps only to meet worse trouble. If those novels truly are books, and give the mind a sense of precipitancy and danger, then they must have been done by poets who had freed themselves from whatever has us in bond; books, not so much of escape, as of release. When Melville went to sea in a whaler, to get marooned in the South Seas, he did that, and gave the mind a sense of precipitancy and danger, then they must have been done by poets who had freed themselves from whatever has us in bond; books, not so much of escape, as of release. When Melville went to sea in a whaler, to get marooned in the South Seas, he did that,

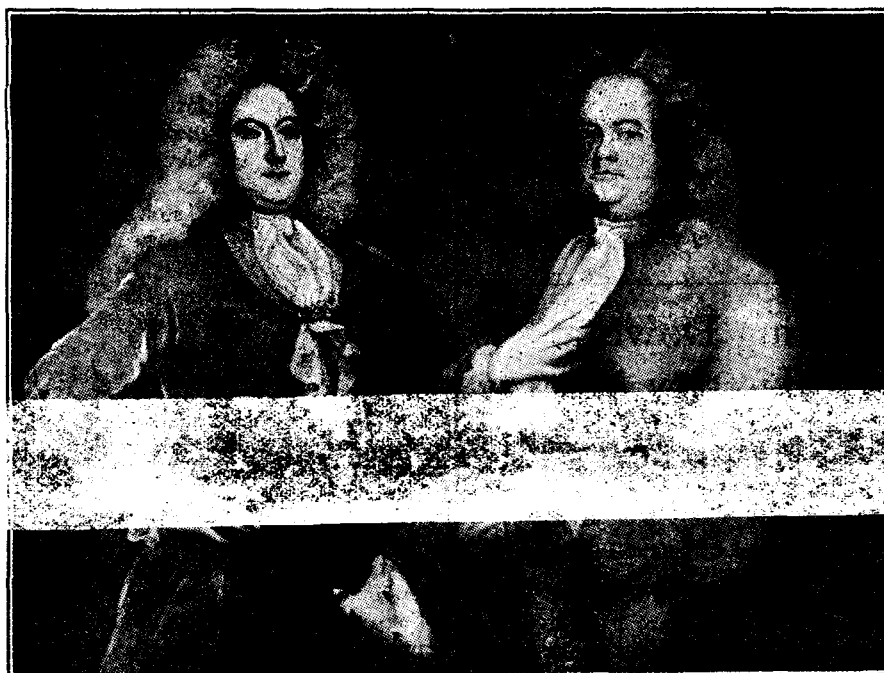
its possibilities may be divined by an imaginative man who is confined all his days to a banker's desk or a farmer's fields, but for most of us the release of the thoughts from whatever immures them—the narrowness of our task, the oppression of memory, misfortune, or anxiety—comes more readily through going up a ship's gangway. That certainly gives the illusion of severance, even when you have become used to it.

And more, the smell of a ship, the unfamiliar camber of the foothold, the strange sounds you hear even before she is under way outside in the wind and light, the quiet and seclusion of the cabin, your introduction to the steward, a stranger who knows so well what you do not that he guesses what you want before you are aware of it, no more than little things of that sort, in memory afterwards, are enough to draw you to sea again. For once, you are surprised by your own identity. You hear from yourself again after having supposed you were quite lost in the confusion of the multitude; you have a chance to measure the values of things in relation to your own integrity, which was vague and negative amid the distractions and restlessness of affairs in the city. Even books, in a ship, either gain in value or lose. It has to be a good book which can maintain its value beside the lamp of a ship's berth at midnight—the best time and place in all the world for reading, for me—for the mind is apart and at rest, and there is no sound but a murmuring which might be that of the destined universe. You feel for once that if the truth of things did actually show on the printed page, you would know it instantly. I once forgot the heat of the Red Sea in a ship's berth, and in the middle watch, with a volume I should not have looked at ashore, the Admiralty Directions for Pilots in those very waters; somehow I felt not only like Sindbad with the wonders about me, but that I was being shown the proper way to relate them.

There is something about a voyage you are barely aware of while you are making it. The light you get at sea never fades. It is not only revealing; it has a suggestion of imperishable origin. You bring a reflection of it ashore with you, without knowing it. You never packed it, but you have it. It is absurd to suppose that voyages for discovery are over. We have not to begin where James Cook and Robert Scott ended.

There are regrets that the pioneers have left nothing for us to do; all the islands are found, the poles have been reached, and the summit of Everest has heard the roar of an aero engine adding to the voice of its eternal wind. But all that is only the beginning. Now we have peeped into every corner of the globe, to see what is there, we have to learn what is best to do with it, and that needs as much selfless enterprise, and probably a greater effort of the imagination, than planning a flight over the Himalayas and persuading an engine to the task.

We are not likely to learn so much on one pleasure cruise, it is true, but what the world wants now, as much as anything, is to calm down a little. At the very time when its excitability is even morbid it has awkward problems to solve that are not likely to untangle except to minds at ease. Some of us, when the tangle of affairs, if not insoluble, at least compels a groan, have been in the habit of dropping it, and idling down to the quays,



ADDISON AND STEELE ABOUT 1712

From an unpublished painting, reproduced in "Sir Richard Steele" by courtesy of the Governors of Chetham's Hospital and Library, Manchester.

looking for a ship. Matters will be different when viewed in a sea light. They will ease away. They will lessen; the perspective is changed there. Melville, in the first chapter of his great romance, describes all that in humor extravagantly sad. Yet there is truth in his wild fun; even so, we had better not do as he did, and ascend the ladder of a whaler. That would be over-doing it. It would be foolish to add the awful problem of the White Whale to our normal difficulties. The pursuit of that monster leads to a voyage without end; and we want one rather shorter than that. The usual gangway for us, to be met by a friendly quartermaster, and no shipmate such as Ahab!

And experience tells us that, however short the voyage, we never lose all the shine of it. We get something for which we did not pay. There was that wild sunset in the Western Ocean, with something of fear in the overfall of big waters, and yet briefly, after the sun had gone, we thought we saw the assuring glow of our own living planet. Or the approach, stealthily, with the engines slowed, to the still apparition of a strange city at dawn; or the bearing of seamen, ordinary fellows, when there was a sudden call on nerves and skill; or the surprise of a tropical landfall, so fragile and filamentous that it was hardly believable till the master cried "Let go," and the cable shook reality solidly about us. A reflection from such a scene is never lost; nor is it only the memory of a pleasing experience. Its virtue is that it helps us afterwards to see the day's affairs in a long view.

## Incomparable Dick

SIR RICHARD STEELE. By Willard Connely. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1934. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CHARLES DAVID ABBOTT

NO lover of the eighteenth century could fail to appreciate this book. It is long and solid, so rich in detail as to be, at times, almost heavy, and yet so compact of humor and enthusiasm that only the most anaemic of esthetes could call it dull. It is now forty-five years since Aitken, "that major-general of research," as Mr. Connely calls him, provided the world of letters with a compendious life of Sir Richard Steele. His was a full and authoritative work, to which this new biography gratefully pays homage. It is, however, no sin of supererogation for Mr. Connely, in his own vein of gusty but learned liveliness, to reinterpret Aitken's solemn array of facts and to add whatever details more recent delving has unearthed. Of these new findings, few are of more than minor significance, but among them are many that serve to increase the general air of hilarity that ought, by right, to surround a man of the Tatler's stamp.

Dick Steele was the most human and natural of the great Augustan writers. The others were each somehow abnormal

Ach and should be glad you would come to me in good humour, which would always banish any uneasiness of temper from, Dear Prue, your Fond Fool of a Husband.

He was extravagant and wasteful, not only of Prue's substance but also of his own talents and energies. He gave all that he had to each of his enthusiasms—to his friendship with Addison, which began in schooldays and outlasted even Addison's frigidity and greater worldly success; to the Whigs, whether in or out of power, for whom he suffered expulsion from the House of Commons, and from whom he received nothing like his just deserts; to the theater of Drury Lane where his own plays were acted, of which he was a manager, and which he served constantly with his knowledge and his influence; to the whole long series of his journalistic ventures, of which *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were the most noteworthy and most long-lived; even to the promotion of his company for constructing fish-pools whereby live codfish could be supplied to London housewives at a reasonable price. He frequently failed, but no failure could leave him pessimistic. His vigor carried him through, dauntless and still jovial. Unflinchingly loyal, hearty, and honest, he blustered his way through life, making up with sheer courage whatever he lacked of finesse. He is a prime example of that rugged, full-bodied, eminently sane Englishman that John Bull is supposed to represent.

The great merit of Mr. Connely's book is that it presents Steele both as a public figure and as a private man, without for a moment losing sight of the essentials that made the important henchman of Lord Halifax and the agitated author of "The Crisis" identical with the seducer of Tonson's daughter and Prue's wastrel of a husband. Mr. Connely sought, he says, for five years "to know Steele as a human being."

Charles David Abbott, until recently on the faculty of the University of Colorado, has just accepted an appointment to the University of Buffalo. He is an authority on the literature and history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and has done special work on Napoleon.

## The Trance

By GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

IN middle life, that time of highest light,  
When under every object clings its  
shade,  
I fell into an apathy of sight  
From looking at the pattern overlaid

Across the earth, the dazzling bright and  
dark  
Complexity, the strange elaborate braid,  
The tattoo, good and evil, heavy mark  
Like that long twist the Snake in Eden  
made

When he through pure pale leaves ran  
mazy lines.

The diamond back of evil in all things  
Copies that mark, its multiple designs  
And still he falls along our earth in rings.

Such webby tangle in all earth's array!  
My apathy like any shadow clings  
To all the happy objects of high day.  
Before the snake the bird shuts down its  
wings.

Only declining sun or hazy eye  
Can help indelible lines to shift or fade.  
Then can the rigid bird come to and fly  
Into the wave of the oncoming shade.

Himself, he has no shadow—belly tight  
He skims our land and under him no  
shade.

It is the sun, the very bliss of light  
That gives the shadow out of dazzle made.

His coils are melancholy. Heavy snake  
Crawl off a little way a little while!  
When shall I from this reptile slumber  
wake,  
Move, salute the sun and smile.