

Footnotes to Romans à Clef

BY EARLE WALBRIDGE

Mackenzie, Compton. *Vestal Fire*.

This satire on the island of Capri and the strange fish that inhabit it contains numerous portraits from life. Several are identified in Norman Douglas's book, twice quoted here. Count Marsac is Baron J. A. Fersen, a possible descendant from Marie Antoinette's lover. Scudamore is one Jerome, the American Consular Agent. Burlingham is Godfrey H. "Townley," as Douglas calls him.

McCloud, David. *Dance Out the Answer*.

The scene is Hamilton College, and most of the faculty are portrayed. Other easily recognizable characters are Elihu Root, a trustee; Alexander Woollcott, an alumnus; and Carl Sandburg, a visiting poet.

Meadows, Catherine. *Dr. Moon*.

Based on the Crippen case, and so written as to make Crippen's murder of his wife seem inevitable. "Belle died natural, but always expressed a desire to be buried in the cellar."

Millin, Sarah Gertrude. *Three Men Die*.

Based on the South African murders by Daisy de Melker.

Mordaunt, Elinor. ("A. Riposte," pseud.) *Gin and Bitters*.

A reply to Somerset Maugham's "Cakes and Ale." "Its satire is so directly and bluntly aimed at Maugham, the book never does get away from that propagandist purpose and into the more diverting field of entertainment—no, that statement must be modified, for there are a number of incidents in the book, such as the visit of the middle-aged writer, presumably Hardy, to one of Maugham's pre-tentious parties, and the warm mellowness of Maugham's life at Tahiti, and the cooled, immaculately attired, luxurious routine of Singapore, all of which are brightly written and pleasurable.—William Soskin in the *New York Evening Post*, March 31, 1931.

Nesbit, E., pseud. (Mrs. Hubert Bland). *The New Treasure Seekers*.

One of the most lovable of E. Nesbit's traits was her habit of occasionally introducing herself into her own books (in "The Treasure Seekers" she makes herself agreeable to the Bastable children, and their father later identifies her as a lady who "wrote better poetry than any other lady alive now!" E. Nesbit took a great deal of naïve satisfaction in what she thought were her great poetical gifts). The Red House in "The New Treasure Seekers" was her beloved Kent home, Well Hall. She appears as Mrs. Bax, who had short hair and wore gold spectacles, smoked cigarettes surreptitiously, and was fearfully oppressed by the company

manners of the Bastable children, who were determined to be on their best behavior with her.

Norris, Frank. *A Lost Story*.

Trevor, according to Franklin Walker's "Frank Norris; a Biography," is a portrait of William Dean Howells.

—Blix.

Blix is Jeannette Black, whom he married, and Condy Rivers is Norris himself.

Paterson, Isabel. *The Golden Vanity*.

There seems to be some mysterious affinity between the Jake van Buren of this book and the Will Cuppy of real life.

Pollard, Joseph. *Percival. The Imitator*. (Walter Neale, 1901.)

Arthur Wantage is drawn from Richard Mansfield.

Reeve, Arthur B. *Craig Kennedy*.

The late Dr. Otto H. Schultze, medical adviser to the District Attorney of New York and actual prototype of Craig Kennedy himself.—*New York Post*, January 5, 1935.

Richardson, Dorothy. *Pilgrimage*.

Doris Langley Moore directly and H. G. Wells indirectly inform me that Miriam is Miss Richardson herself; the literary critic Hypo is H. G. Wells and his wife, Alma, Jane Wells. The Lycurgians represent the Fabian Society, in which Wells, Shaw, and the Hubert Blands were prominent.

Sayre, Joel. *Rackety-Rax*.

Owen Victor Madden. Known to his friends as Owney, a Liverpool cockney with an eagle-like profile, steely blue eyes, chalky complexion, fine clothes and open purse. He has attained the distinction of inspiring a book, being the lively original of Knucks McGloin of "Rackety-Rax."—Joseph Driscoll, "Men of Action," in the *New Outlook*, November 1933.

Sitwell, Osbert. *Dumb-Animal, and Other Stories*.

This book was withdrawn from publication in England when Mrs. A. Courtenay Welch, whose husband conducts the military college at Aldershot, claimed that one of the stories in the book, "Happy Endings," contained a caricature of herself and of her son who was killed in the war. She sued the author and publisher and won damages of \$1,250. The British libel laws are no joke.

Van Raalte, Joseph. *The Walls are High*.

Arnold Chadwick is Reynolds Forsbrey, released from Sing Sing Prison by President Roosevelt when the latter was Governor of New York State. The results were not the happiest. Margaret Ryan,

Forsbrey's faithful woman friend, appears in the book as Margaret Lyons.

Vandercook, John S. *Forty Stay On*.

The author has a foreword to the effect that all the characters are purely fictional, but anyone knowing Monrovia has difficulty in finding one character not very closely resembling some well-known person there. This makes it good reading for those who escaped portrayal.—From a communication to the *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 4, 1933.

Walpole, Hugh. *Fortitude*.

Mrs. Launce is a thorough, detailed, and affectionate portrait of Marie Belloc-Lowndes and her little house behind Westminster Abbey.

Philadelphia Antiques

THE BLUE BOOK OF PHILADELPHIA FURNITURE. By William Macpherson Hornor, Jr. Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Hornor. 1935. \$12.

Reviewed by JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

IT is a fortunate thing for William M. Hornor junior that, added to a painstaking and exact mind, he has a spirit impassioned with an early Philadelphia of sounder design than now. His particular interest is the furniture, the local cabinetmakers, reaching from before the style of Queen Anne to the late classic form—the "colonial" period of American letters—of a federal era. Mr. Hornor is fortunate because only his combination of especial virtues could, today, lend his subject either a general or fundamental importance. The times—lately obliterating so much—largely swept away an almost universal American concern with antique furniture and furnishings. This, however, an uncritical attachment, is far from Mr. Hornor's informed purpose and devotion. The tides of public taste are, very admirably, beneath his notice. He is one among a small body of amateurs who, out of enthusiasm and knowledge, has written a book impossible to the less handsome talents and motives of what, myself included, I am obliged to describe as the trade.

It would be useless to attempt any detailed account of the work in question, "Philadelphia Furniture": its scope is at once too full and minute, the details too endless, for a short examination. In every case where my own limited experience warrants an opinion the details are correct; the scope is firmly set on a wide, historical reading and understanding. The relation of furniture to current manners of life and thought, the whole reality and color of a period and a city, a people, are exactly drawn; the simultaneous transition of spirit and form is never lost sight of. Mr. Hornor's book, briefly, is at once an account of Philadelphia and a catalogue of its chairs, highboys, and Pembroke tables; an incredibly complete list

of names,—Savery, Tufft, Joseph Armitt, and Hercules Courtney, the tavern keeper formerly carver and gilder. There are exhaustive lists of tools familiar and unfamiliar, hollows, Rounds, bolexious, etc.

All this has the defect of its excellencies: there are so many small facts, so many materials, forms, and itemized accounts that a continuous reading or pleasure in "Philadelphia Furniture" would require an enthusiasm equal to Mr. Hornor's own. It is a special work for the specially and deeply engaged. That is a difficulty almost never solved—the balance between any detailed examination and a comprehensive, a large, exposition of underlying motive and harmony. Here, as I have indicated, this is not altogether unfortunate; there is a sufficient validity, enough incidental interest and even beauty, in "Philadelphia Furniture" to make it a solid and desirable addition to the store of Americana.

I am forced, however, to dissent from all the implications of a sentence in the preface. "This book has been written primarily for the benefit of the owners of the pieces pictured." I had hoped "Philadelphia Furniture" was written for Mr. Hornor's benefit and for those, like himself, moved by the fine traditions of an art and a land. I am, it may be perversely, indifferent to an eminence gained by the possession of a chair, cold to the patron, or even inheritor, of a settee. Such signs of impotent vanity, the thin substitute for a departed reality, ought to meet with firm discouragement. The late general regard for colonial furniture was fatally damaged by the pretensions, the commercialism, and snobbery, that attended its rise to favor. A chair without a pedigree, a simple modern table, quickly became sources of relief.

Joseph Hergesheimer, widely known as a novelist, is also an antiquarian and a writer on furniture and old houses. He is the author of "The Philadelphia Cabinet Maker's Assistant."

The Light that Is on Sea

LIGHTHOUSES OF THE MAINE COAST AND THE MEN WHO KEEP THEM. By Robert Thayer Sterling. Brattleboro, Vermont: Stephen Daye Press. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by ARCHIE BINNS

WHEN news of the *Titanic* disaster broke, a newspaper reporter went to the wireless station at Cape Elizabeth Light, south of Portland, Maine, for reports. He became interested in lighthouses. So interested it could almost be said he never went back to the newspaper office. The ex-reporter, Robert Thayer Sterling, is now one of the oldest keepers in the Lighthouse Service. The result of his long research is "Lighthouses of the Maine Coast," the history, stories, and legends of the Maine lighthouses, lighthouse ships, and lightships, past and present, their keepers and captains.

"Lighthouses of the Maine Coast" is a rich and noble book. With the increase of human knowledge there are increasingly few callings which have proved to be of unalloyed benefit to humanity. Statesmen, soldiers, explorers, and inventors have left their trail of woe for later generations to discover to their cost. Perhaps the only occupation above disillusionment is that of men who light others on their way.

A monotonous occupation, mostly. And then again the lighthouse keeper who has given up almost everything we choose to call living will have life come to him, stark and dramatic, and mysterious. Consider the keeper who found the sole, dazed survivor of a wrecked ship—only to have him go mad and die without ever being able to divulge his name or the name of the ship. The mystery of the dog which came out of the sea to Great Duck during a gale on a winter night, as unable as the poor madman to tell what ship he had come from or

what her fate had been. Consider seventeen-year-old Abbey Burgess who tended Matinicus Rock Light four weeks while her father was storm-bound on shore. The keeper who had been asked by the sheriff to report the ship *Annie C. Maguire*—and presently reported her piled upon the rocks at the base of his lighthouse.

The story of Ram Island Light alone would be material for a less generous book: The first, unofficial light—a lantern supplied and tended by a fisherman who had barely escaped destruction on the reef. The little beacon passing from hand to hand. Changed and improved by men whose only recompense was the satisfaction of giving light to others. The beacon becoming a lightship—a fisherman's dory with a lantern on the mast. One unofficial keeper of the light, with his own boat swept away in a storm, swam out to the reef with a rope about his waist and rescued the entire crew of a schooner.

This same island is the center of many of the supernatural stories of the lighthouse service. The ship saved by a sailor's vision of a woman in white, holding aloft a lighted torch. The warning of a deep-toned whistle where none existed. The fisherman saved by a phantom ship, burning on Ram Island. The ship saved at the last second by the one, isolated flash of lightning on a black night. The reader can make what he chooses of these stories. When they were placed before the United States Government they resulted in the establishment of an official lighthouse on Ram Island. Mr. Thayer is reticent as to whether a jinx is still attached to the eerie spot. He does supply the information that the first official keeper had fifteen children born there and that the second and his wife had almost as many before they got away.

Like every good book, "Lighthouses of the Maine Coast" has humor. There is both humor and wisdom in the story of the keeper of a lonely light (not Ram Island) who discovered how to keep his wife contented. One of the most richly humorous stories in nautical history is the story of the Portland lightship going adrift in a fog mull and bringing up at an unknown anchorage. When the fog lifted, fishermen in the fleet at Cashes discovered themselves close aboard the Portland lightship! The subsequent antics of their captains verify the fact that a navigator often thinks he knows where he is, but is never certain.

"Lighthouses of the Maine Coast" is a sturdy, honest book, some of it told in the words of the keepers themselves. It has no gold-plating. Neither is it pure gold. But it is a long time since I have read a factual work assaying so much precious stuff to the page.

Archie Binns is the author of a novel entitled "Lightship" which has met with much favor.



WRECK OF THE ANNIE C. MAGUIRE IN 1886
From "Lighthouses of the Maine Coast"