

Among the Slicks

(Continued from first page)

Mr. Whit Burnett's *Story*), "All Mothers Dread," "The Old Plantation's Secret," "Chicken Pie, Family Style" (title for Edna Ferber!), "Mr. Goof is Tamed," "Waterlilies" (title for Zona Gale!), "Hy Gene!" (a story of boyhood friendship), and so on. Subtitles too: "News of Folks Back Home," "Of the Gay Young Group that Dictates what's 'Done' in New York," "Before You Know It You'll Be Feeling On Top of the World—as a Proud New Father *Should* Feel," "The Young Davises Had Been Married Only a Year, but Jack Had Started to Stay in Town with the Boys on Saturday Nights." (That last, by the way, initiates a snappy narrative dedicated to Brer Rabbit Molasses!) Also I found "Three Minute Relief," which might be a good title for a gangster and police story, "Roxxy and His Gang," a boy-story, "Mother!" (and another one on the same maternal subject, "Mum"), "Hotel Hostess," and "Don't Wait For the Postman" (a sequel, obviously, to "The Postman Always Rings Twice").

Then came the reverse-English. I didn't see why the subtitle of a story in the body of the magazine, "Sheila Made Passes at the Stranger But He didn't Respond," shouldn't have done for Life Buoy Soap, or "And Many Were the Heads Bashed Because Kathleen Married a Traveller," might not have come in handy for Prudential Insurance! "A Man Almost Forgets His Wife and Children" could have served its turn either for insurance, again, or a Memory Course; and "The Story of a Girl Who Didn't Belong" was a "natural" for a Pvorrhoea ad.

That's what happens to you if you plunge too suddenly into *Pictorial*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *The Ladies' Home Journal*—or into *Liberty*, *Redbook*, *Collier's*, for that matter.

All of which really leads up to something. The large advertisers support the smooth-paper magazines. They are why the smooth-paper magazines are full of advertisements. They are why the smooth-paper magazines are full of advertisements. (believe me, color printing costs!), and why another can feature an article by Grace Coolidge. Havoline and the New-Value Dodge, Ramco and Kelvinator, Veedol and the new Ford V-8, Philco and RCA and the National Casket Company, are why any young writer who manages to break into *The Saturday Evening Post* with a short story gets a fatter check for it than if he had sold it to *Harper's*. Big advertisers string along with big audiences, and big audiences—?

They mean that the "slicks" have certain major requirements in the realm of the short story, just as the big advertisers mean that there must be no trading on certain toes. All this dictates certain short story patterns and definite limitations as to what the magazine can use.

But at this point I refuse to cry "Formula!" after the fashion of the perhaps more advanced; because, if you take a course (exacerbating as it may be to the nerves!) in our contemporary big-circulation magazines, and really start reading the stories in them, you may be agreeably surprised concerning the leeway, under the circumstances, that they give their writers nowadays, and the skill of the writing. Nevertheless, certain things in general hold true.

Social criticism is pretty generally out,

save for a glancing blow. Certain words are still taboo. In this latter respect, Mr. Balmer of *Redbook* allows his writers more freedom than most. But then he's a writer himself. And even then! When you're selling your magazine to a million people or something like it, you apparently become rather old-maidish concerning realistic detail. Then there are the favorite themes. I asked a magazine writer of short stories about this, and he replied, "Oh yes, there is of course Cinderella, first and foremost; and then there is Jack the Giant-Killer (only they have to be the right kind of giants!); and then there is Goldilocks and the Three Bears, who are all varieties of the wicked Manhattan male—theatre managers and such. And eternally there is the story in which the downtrodden reader can identify himself with the hero, who has had a mortally tough break at the start, but comes out with colors flying at the end. And then there is the Eat-your-cake-and-have-it-too story in which the splendors of affluence are described in a way to make your mouth water, but it is firmly pointed out that the good old solid domestic virtues—and probably life on a farm—are vastly superior. Those are just a few of the sure-fires. People can have their fling, of course, in magazine stories. Young men in love can be incredibly fast workers or positive industrial geniuses; men and women can travel the globe, penetrate into all sorts of out-of-the-way kingdoms and countries, indulge in wrestling matches with Bengal tigers or with lamas in Thibet; become, even, beachcombers on tropical isles. But in the end they must serve to illustrate conventional virtue, or be instrumental in its victory over the forces—well, the forces—oh, anyway, the Forces! And the American Girl must usually triumph. There has never been anything in history like the 'Triumph of the American Girl!' "

All this is true. But when the more intellectual writers of fiction begin to gird at the writers who appear steadily in the large circulation magazines, they are off the track. The writers of the large magazines give their readers and spaces. They are good craftsmen. They are not allowed, perhaps, to write stories like Mr. Caldwell (though a story of Mr. Caldwell's has just graced the pages of a more or less conventional magazine, and Thomas Wolfe appears pretty regularly in *Scribner's*), or like Mr. Faulkner (though one of the best of his stories appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*), or ramble like Mr. Saroyan (though the *Redbook* has just printed one of Mr. Saroyan's stories), or choose for their themes rape, homosexuality, incest, or the examination of latrines—interesting as are these themes. Often the content of their stories is quite superficial in its observation of life, or highly romanticized, or stereotyped in its treatment of human emotions; but it is also often exceedingly well-informed as to the *milieu* presented, the technique of a particular profession or business, the actual daily life of the people with whom it deals. Usually there is something cheerful or heroic or optimistic about it. Young love is almost always triumphant, signing off just before the real fun (if you call it fun) of marriage starts. Or, if there is an unhappy marriage, there is a way out, and the two main lovers of the story come through beautifully, even though some near relative has to be killed in the process. Sometimes the issue is begged scandalously. Some of our best



AT THE GATEWAY TO THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
*Newsstand at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. Photographed for The Saturday Review
 by Robert Disraeli.*

novelists occasionally deteriorate into writing mere pot-boilers for the popular magazines. But usually the chief trouble with the stories is a dead level of innocuousness. There have, however, been, and there continue to be, good yarns, in spite of all this, in the "slicks." They may not delve as deep into psychological processes as do certain ones in the "quality group" magazines. Nor do they satisfy, I am sure, the proletarians. They deal largely with what the proletarians dismiss as the bourgeoisie—a large percentage, after all, of our American population. (And where did most of them come from? From the proletariat.) And I know that a Hemingway comes along and is first published in Paris. And when a Saroyan emerges he is

You use the snaffle and the curb all right,
But where's the bloody horse?

The writers of advanced short stories seek often merely to capture a mood or a nuance, and to leave most of their story out. Or they simply lead up to a good, rich, satisfying rape. The writer of the proletarian short story is sometimes so busy showing how the workers are exploited by bloated capitalists that he warps his real story out of shape just as much as do some *Saturday Evening Post* writers who try to prove that that's all a lot of boloney. There are no particular rules for the short story, but, by Heaven! there is such a thing as a *real* story; which is not achieved by too delicate a pastel of the night-breeze wafting over the garbage on the old back-stoop, or through the mere soliloquy of Truda Helsingfors, the Wisconsin hired help, as she stumbles by moonlight along the cornfield, to be assaulted by Nels Swenson.

Of course, we all know that there is a difference between the concocted story and the story that honestly develops out of a writer's consciousness, and is allowed to take its own shape and grow in its own organic fashion. With this in mind, a good many of the "slick" stories would come under the head of concoctions, though some of them are clever ones. But I think this is also due to the fact that only a few people, like Kipling, are born with instinctive "story sense." Others, however hard they plot and build, cannot acquire it. The magic ingredient just isn't there. I feel, in spite of this, that there is latent major talent in the ranks of the story-writers who have been shaping-up things for *The Saturday Evening Post* and the women's magazines. I don't say they are altogether hampered by their media. Some of them

write perfectly honestly of the things they know, within bounds they cannot transgress. I merely say that if they felt the editors weren't watching them so closely, they might do more significant work.

This month in a certain literary bulletin on the craft of writing, *The Blue Pencil*, edited by Thomas H. Uzzell, there is the continuation of a "practical talk" by Camellia Waite, in which she analyzes "drama in the big circulation magazines." She tells us that *Collier's* is "conspicuously a magazine devoted to the world of sport, amusement, and adventure," that the *Ladies' Home Journal* affects "stories of sentimental, romantic, or comic love, and stories of domestic problems," that "you can quickly recognize the sex emphasis" in a *Liberty* "story of a girl's life," and that the *Saturday*

rules. But "the one thing which is always present," she says, "is drama." There is always the conflict, the barrier to be surmounted, the "box" to be got out of. "In the literary magazines you can get by with a box which is contained within the man's own personality . . . in the big circulation magazine it is a box made up of visible, tangible, external barriers . . . in the pulps it is a visible external box, from which the man must escape or die." This seems to me a good analysis.

In closing, as I rise from the sea of American magazines in which I have immersed myself, the competition in the field of the short story in America seems to me unusually strong and lusty. I have not even touched on the contents of the "pulp," and they can boast their hundreds—probably thousands—of writers of stories of unalleviated action. There seem to be plenty of markets.

I was asked originally to endeavor to outline a story according to the differing formulæ of different magazines. I have found it impossible to do so, because of the variety of their stories. There are a few predilections I discern, just as there used to be in the past; but that is all. There was a time, about a quarter of a century ago, when most of the stories in *Harper's*, for instance, seemed to be laid in houses with hook rugs on the floor. At least, the illustrators of the old Howard Pyle school used to draw and paint a lot of hook rugs and rural interiors! And then there are tides of what is hyphenatedly called "reader-interest" in a particular type of fiction. Lately it has lain very much with the hard-boiled variety. The author of "Brain Guy" now does such stories, with tough patter, for the *Redbook*. I think, however, that hard-boiled fiction as a steady diet has about run its course; though after so many mere love stories in the magazines, involving nice but commonplace people, it has had a stimulating influence. I do not know what the next tide may bring in, but I believe that to-day, even the magazine fiction writer is facing reality with less desire to hide behind the skirts of romance.

From Above

By ISABEL FISKE CONANT

SEE how, when mortals love, there streams a light
That gives a glowing wing-plume to each shoulder,
Pulsating like a flame and burning bright,
Deepening its radiance as they grow bolder,
While music rises from their mingled breath
Until the listener plunges down to share
In this repeated conquest over death,
Though of his presence they are unaware.

They have released up to the higher spheres
 Their quivering ecstasy into a chord,
 Not for the pleasuring of their own ears
 But for the oratorio of the Lord
 Of Saturn's rings, Aldebaran and Mars,
 The Pleiades and all the singing stars.

The Darker Side of Maritime History

SHIPS AND HOW THEY SAILED THE SEVEN SEAS. By Hendrik Willem van Loon. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by WILLIAM DOERFLINGER

"THERE are three sorts of people," wrote the philosopher Anacharsis of Scythia, "those who are alive, those who are dead, and those who are at sea."

This epigram, unearthed by Mr. van Loon, might serve as a text for this argu- eyed book of ships and the poor mortals who have been set apart by fate for the business of manning them. Surveying maritime life as it has manifested itself on the otherwise pure waters of our planet from the early morning of history to the beginning of the twentieth century, and finding it full of hardship, filth, and need- less cruelty, Mr. van Loon sums up all seafaring by pointing out that "life aboard ship was simply unfit for human beings, originally created after the image of God." In developing the theme, Mr. van Loon has again been able to give us a book which is completely new though its sub- ject is very old, and entirely original even though countless authors have handled, part by part, the same material which in- terests Mr. van Loon as one fascinating chapter in the annals of mankind.

On the whole it is a dark chapter, though a stirring one. Now that it has come to a close—for the modern steamer is scarcely a ship in the historical sense of the word—one can look back at the history of navigation and realize how negligible was man's progress in develop- ing his ships from century to century, and how half-hearted his efforts to improve conditions of life aboard them.

Glancing at other ages, Mr. van Loon is confronted with odoriferous galleys, flog- ging convict ships, keel-hauling men-of- war, murderous Western Ocean immi- grant packets, and many other deadly fleets. From such evidence, the same in every century, he can only conclude that sea life in the good old days was "nothing but one unending record of misery and pain and hunger and thirst and bodily abuse, a plain slice of hell-on-earth."

Now, some readers will be very much upset by this discovery. They will think of many other authors who have told of the hardships of the sea, and it may seem to them that Mr. van Loon's just indictment of life afloat is lugubriously chorused by the sea writers of all time—Masefield in "Dauber," Conrad in "Youth," and by the Hon. Michael Scott in "Tom Cringle's Log," and in such personal reminiscences of years under sail as Captain Bone's "Brassbounder" and Rex Clement's "Gyp- sy of the Horn." For hardships, one can- not turn to better books than those.

Yet of course that is not really the case at all, for these writings go beyond, into the story of the impact of sea life on the individual soul, while Mr. van Loon looks at ships differently. He sees them not as splendid creatures of oak, hemp, iron, and canvas, but rather as sociological phe- nomena which partake largely of the eternal problems of wage-slavery, dis- ease, and bad housing conditions.

Thus he can write about the American

clipper ships, but because the officers of those ships, intent on furthering man's mastery over sea, space, and time, some- times had to deal roughly with incompe- tent and soldierers, he can say (now that the clippers have done their work), "A curse upon their memory!" Which is highly stimulating and really makes one think about the clipper ships. Clearly, their decks were not beds of roses; but if their memories are not cursed and simply can't be made so, it has been for certain reasons which stem from the less bodily and more exalted attributes of man.

On the reverse of the double-folded dust jacket in which his book is wrapped, Mr. van Loon gives us a splendid map of explorations, done in a strange projection all his own. His drawing and his writing are very similar. In the map's colored circle, he includes most of the spherical world. In "Ships," Mr. Van Loon exerts his immediate control over the sea, but again he gives his readers a story of mankind and man's whole planet.

The Best Yet

A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR. By C. R. M. F. Cruttwell. New York: Ox- ford University Press. 1935. \$5.50.

Reviewed by FRANK H. SIMONDS

FOR more than ten years I have been looking for a straightforward, con- cise history of the World War which was, on the one hand, fortified by the necessary evidence which the post-war years have supplied and, on the other, was free from the prejudices inevitable in the contemporaneous reports. The present volume seems to me to satisfy every pos- sible requirement in both respects.

Lacking as the book does the personal brilliance of Winston's Churchill's nar- rative it is also without the limitations which attach to any piece of special plead- ing of one of the conspicuous participants. In the same fashion, while its author does not pretend to the technical competence of Captain Liddell Hart, he thereby es- capes controversies more interesting to the professional soldier than the ordinary reader. Finally, the present account is written much later than the monumental work of John Buchan and therefore, nec- cessarily, with far more complete knowl- edge of the essential facts.

Enthusiasm on the part of the reviewer, I am aware, is something hardly to be en- couraged and yet, in all fairness, I must say I read this book with a constantly growing enthusiasm and, at the end, laid it down with the conviction that it was far and away the best general account of the military operations of the World War that I had yet come across.

The author, C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, now principal of Hertford College, Oxford, England, served first in the trenches and then as an Intelligence Officer at the War Office. As a result he saw the conflict both at close range and in perspective. His book, however, is the work of a trained historian, who has brought to his task a scholar's judgment fortunately reinforced by a soldier's experience. It is, therefore, astonishingly fair; impressively docu- mented not merely on the British side but also on the French, German, and Ameri- can as well, and not the least attractive detail is the disclosure of equally great capacity to comprehend and to compress.

Royal Buccaneer

LEOPOLD THE UNLOVED. By Ludwig Bauer. Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1935. \$3.50.

Reviewed by DAVID OWEN

IN Leopold II of Belgium all the in- gredients of popular biography stand ready for the hand of the mixer. From his private life, where he was the unro- mantic but thoroughgoing libertine, to his exploits in the Congo no element of sen- sationalism is lacking. There is, perhaps, little to admire in him save his energy and his undoubted political genius. But these were of such dimensions as to mark him as no common man. Few nineteenth- century monarchs enjoyed such a gener- ous measure of political and financial ability as his, and few, if any, used their talents with as little regard for principle.

Belgium was too small a field for the talents of its king, who was an ambitious Coburger. But where to turn? Other na- tions had already gobbled up the most tempting of overseas lands. The interior



LEOPOLD II AND PRINCESS CLEMENTINE

of Africa, however, still remained, a piece of territory large enough for even Leo- pold's greedy desires. The steps by which he obtained control of the Congo, virtu- ally as a personal empire, form one of the most brilliant (and sordid) chapters in the history of imperialist maneuvering. In 1876, well camouflaged by philanthropy and humanitarianism, the Association In- ternationale Africaine was organized un- der the sponsorship of Leopold. Two years later he created the *Comité d'Etudes du Haut Congo*, an inspired title for the joint-stock company that was secretly to finance the carving out of an empire. H. M. Stanley, the unsuspecting agent of the royal buccaneer, established stations and made treaties with the natives—the sort of treaties that are perennially made with natives.

Two problems still faced the king. First of all, he must secure his title by gaining recognition from the other nations. This he accomplished by a series of intrigues shrewdly conceived and subtly executed. At the Berlin Conference of 1885, his Congo Free State, still flying the banner of international humanitarianism, ob- tained the approval of the powers. Sec- ondly, Leopold discovered that the fruits of imperialism were not to be harvested merely for the asking. The Congo seemed insatiable in its demands for capital. A lottery, loans, and a thinly disguised hold- up of the Belgian government staved off bankruptcy for a time. And then, with both Leopold and his Free State near the breaking point, salvation arrived in the form of the Congo armada, laden with rubber and ivory to be sold in a rising market.

Behind the Congo fleet lay a record of exploitation without parallel in the an- nals of modern imperialism. From a gov- ernment at once irresponsible and profit- hungry little else was to be expected. Yet as rumors began to trickle back to Eu- rope of floggings and maimings—and even mass murders—and when these were cor- roborated by the White Book of Roger

Casement, the voice of protest became ir- resistible. Leopold temporized and even attempted a counter-offensive. In the end he had to surrender by deeding his col- ony to the Belgian state, with immense profit to himself.

As a public figure, Leopold was de- testable, but there was something of the titan about him. In private life, he was merely contemptible, though not without personal charm. From his childhood he had neither felt nor given affection. Bit- terly disappointed at having no heir, he treated both his queen and his daughters with unfeeling brutality. Cynically he paraded a succession of mistresses be- fore his subjects. It was only ironic jus- tice when the old *roué* fell genuinely in love with a shrewish street-walker who nagged him incessantly.

The dramatic possibilities of Leopold's career have lost nothing at the hands of Ludwig Bauer. Recorded in the soberest of language, the story would still be sen- sational. Herr Bauer has chosen rather to heighten his effects, and his style, though sometimes ponderously Germanic despite the general excellence of the translation, is well suited to his purpose. As a result, he has written a book that makes absorb- ing reading but one that can hardly be accepted as a definitive life of Leopold. It is perhaps over-academic to notice the fact that no attempt at documentation is made, although much of the material is controversial, and that no list of authori- ties is included. "Leopold the Unloved," in short, succeeds as popular biography. Beyond that point I should not care to press its claims. The way is still open for a more scholarly approach.

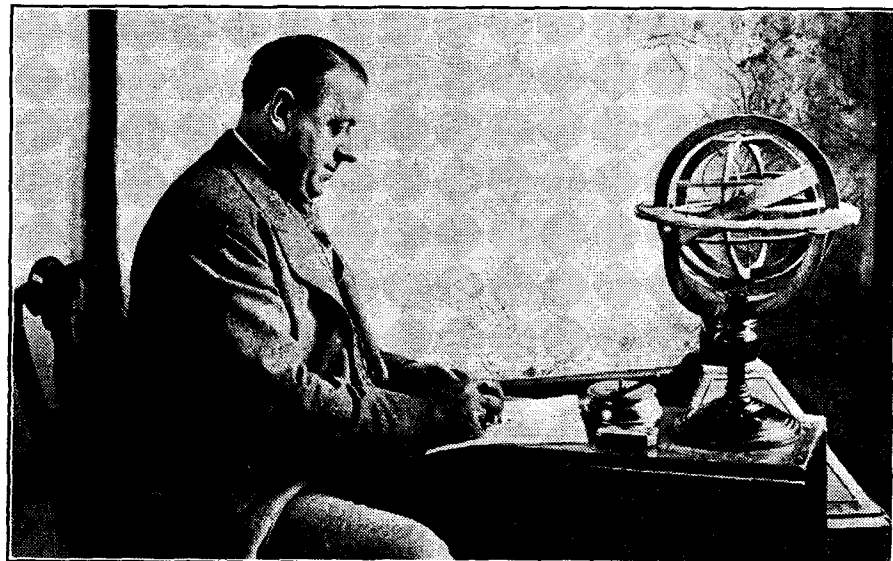
Riches of the North

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produce. Here are descriptions of the process of paper-making. Here, too, is some account of what lies back of the mills: the timber-cruising, the land-grab- bing, the tree-felling, the logging-camps, the railways that thread the forests, an adventurous and ruthless world. We see the north country in detail, shrouded in winter ice and snow, but with troops of men busy reaping its harvest. Nor does Miss Ferber put less of vivid detail into her picture of the home of a Swedish workingman in the north country: its sturdiness, its neatness, its taste where- ever it is really Swedish, its lack of taste wherever it is American, its rich, heavy food, the gusty, full-blooded ways of its inmates, their essential discipline and re- straint in matters of morals.

All this is good; and excellent also, at least in the first two hundred pages, is the study of Barney Glasgow, the lumber and paper magnate whose family came to the region early enough, as the woman in "The Hoosier Schoolmaster" said, to "git a-plenty while they was a-gittin'," and which believed in taking plenty. An ag- gressive, two-fisted, hard-headed multi- millionaire, who has a life of hard work behind him, Glasgow is socially as likable as economically he is hard and grasping. He is kind to his men, a good husband to the plain-faced woman he married for her wealth, honest with himself. His economic philosophy is briefly expressed: "Gover- ment my foot! I'm the goverment when it comes to my own business." Glasgow has a magnificent residence, a private car, a hunting-camp in the woods of the peninsula, wealthy friends in Chicago. He knows how to drive his many enterprises fast and far. We follow him with liking even when, past fifty, he falls in love— apparently for the first time—with a daz- zling, semi-illiterate beauty who has sud- denly sprung up in the home of one of the Scandinavian workmen whom he has always regarded as a crony.

But after that the novel rapidly goes to pieces. It even breaks in two; for Glas- gow dies, and his son and the Swedish- American beauty take, in a rather unreal way, the foreground of the picture which he had occupied so vigorously. The tale wanders on and on, in a limp fashion, through London, Paris, and New York, and down to 1929 and after. In the read- er's memory there will remain only the well-drawn background of Wisconsin wil- derness and industrialism, and the sturdy figure of Barney Glasgow.



HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON