

# The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

## The Folder

### To Be Practical

IF I had faith in God and were to pray,  
Not as I last did, in devout despair,  
Nor with a gambler's passes in the air,  
But in my foolish forebears' childish

way—  
Believing the first fool of Christendom—  
I would not pray for love nor charity  
Nor any week-kneed virtue, nor to be  
Crowned as His servant in a world to

come.  
Vices I'd pray for!—to be blessed with  
greed,  
To want more and yet more in cashable  
gain,

And have the tiger strength and coyote  
brain

To steal it lawfully. I would not need  
To pray again, nor bow my head again,  
Ever, to any gods or any men.

LEROY MACLEOD.

The brightest candle placed on the cake for William Dean Howells's hundredth birthday was a piece written by William Allen White in the *Emporia Gazette*, bless his heart. It's characteristic of Bill White to come along, every once in so often (as he always has), with the absolute best of whatever needs to be said. I haven't got the clipping handy, so I can't quote verbatim (the whole piece deserves reprinting), but it's the story of the first bang-up company dinner in the White household when Mr. and Mrs. White were a young married couple. The guest of honor was Mr. Howells, then lecturing in Emporia. In the friendly Kansas way all the neighbors were interested in this important affair, and anxious to help. One sent a present of a dozen quail; but a green country cook, already flustered by the intensive preparations, collapsed into jitters when the birds were ready for the oven. The dinner was already under way, but another neighbor, looking in to see that all was well, sized up the situation. Calmly she took charge in the kitchen, cooked the quails to a turn, and (with a reassuring exchange of looks with the young hostess and a glare at Bill to warn him to silence) deftly served them herself. Mr. White tells us in his delightful reminiscences that no one enjoyed the episode more than Howells himself when after dinner their neighbor doffed the apron and was persuaded to tell what had happened.

From Bill White one can always count on the essential gravity of any human situation. Only recently did I become properly conscious of the work of a Kan-

sas poet who wrote under the name of "Ironquill." This first came about by the accident of finding a piece of his adjoining a little squib of my own in an anthology. His name was Eugene Fitch Ware (1841-1911), and I was so pleased by what I found of his verses that, learning he came from Kansas, I wrote to Mr. White. Bill White replied by return of mail with a delightful brief biography, as follows:—

"Ironquill was a soldier of the Civil War who was a harness maker. He fell in love with a Vassar graduate who married him and took him in hand. He studied law, was admitted to the bar and she practically educated him and developed him. He had unusual talent for rhyme and for lovely imagery and was a



"IRONQUILL"

Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society.

he-man at that, a great big six-footer, who could whip his weight in wildcats. He and I were dear friends. I was young and he was a man in his fifties when I first knew him. He died in Topeka after having been United States pension commissioner and before that State senator, and in the end was one of the half dozen leading Kansas lawyers, a corporation attorney of great erudition.

"Here is a portrait of him. In spite of the walrus mustache of the period, he was a fine fellow—one of those self-educated men whose information was accurate and he always knew where to put his hand on what he wanted. He was a merry soul and one of the dearest men I ever met. Theodore Roosevelt was immensely fond of him. If I can help you in any other way, let me know."

That, I submit, is as charming a sketch of Bill White himself as it is of Ironquill.

### All Tombs Are Ming

My Mind has wandered down the old  
parades

Whose grassy haunts  
Record the footfall of the shades  
That passed by lions and carved elephants  
To follow rest,  
When, as is best,  
The brasses and the woodwinds cease  
And give, even to emperors, their peace.

Yet more my Heart is errant, for I wonder  
If they were far,  
Although deep buried and down under  
Full half the world, or other than we are  
Who every day  
Pass dragons they  
Once met. I think each puzzled mind  
Had fingers too that kisses threw behind.

HUGH WESTERN.

Speaking of the provenance of some recent titles, Harry Patterson (Grand Island, Neb.) writes one of his welcome letters. He says:—

"I worried acutely where *Eyeless in Gaza* came from—I spotted the playboy of the Israelites, but it took me months before the exact Miltonic phrase turned up, and then only because my sacred cow, Arthur Machen, keeps raving about *Lycidas* and this led me on to other Miltonic arcana. And only the other night, reading de la Mare's essay *Some Women Novelists of the 70's*, did I chance upon the final lovely joint peroration (I guess you might call it that) of the poet and Walter Savage Landor, and emitted a war-whoop when I tumbled to where Rosamond Lehmann cribbed *A Note in Music*. But I am still uninformed as to where de la Mare picked up his last title, *The Wind Blows Over*—is it Yeats' lyric from *The Land of Heart's Desire*, those lines—

The wind blows out of the gates of the  
day,  
The wind blows over the lonely of  
heart . . . ?

"Have you had time to read and enjoy the splendid stories in this collection? I'll swear to gosh he is the greatest living poet, or writer en générale, not even excepting Yeats or Belloc. I was mildly griped, though, when I bought an English trade first of this *Wind Blows Over* and found that one of its best stories, 'Strangers and Pilgrims,' which is in the American edition, is omitted.

"Some time ago you brought up Geo. Kibbe Turner's strange and too little known novel, *Hagar's Hoard*. It is excellent, but it is my mature and considered conviction that Turner's other novel, *The Last Christian*, is by far the better tale. I read it serially in the old McClure's years

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## Writer in Hollywood

(Continued from page 4)

even a Rogers-Gaynor opus. I understand that "Cavalcade" had the second largest gross of its year, an elaborate musical affair being first. Such instances are beginning to make producers believe that a calculated and spontaneous dramatic effort—spontaneous as to materials, calculated as to treatment—is quite as likely to produce a film as successful even commercially as the ordinarily competent machine made scenario, built up for some "lead" or to fit some current fad.

There must have been a time when Hollywood writers were privileged to be raffish and irresponsible, since the fact has occasionally been noted in literature, but it was before I reached the place in 1932. At Fox, Julien Josephson and I talked plot over our second breakfast at nine o'clock, usually lunched with Henry King, our director, and often with Will Rogers, our lead, and frequently kept up the argument after one of Mrs. Josephson's superb dinners well toward midnight. At the instigation of the devil and Louis Weitzenkorn I lost eight dollars on the dog races one evening, and another evening a companion and I had the pleasure of shouting "encore" when an unpleasant, hairy wrestler was tossed from the stadium ring into the laps of Corey Ford and James Warner Bellah, who didn't want him. It turned out that they were doing a picture about college wrestling and had been sent to the Legion stadium by the studio. They spoke to us pleasantly but firmly about the "encores."

Such excesses were curbed on my second voyage—to MGM—by the presence of my wife, her cousin, and her mother, and by the fact that I frequently worked from daybreak till one or two o'clock in the morning. Daylight is precious on location shots and if night shots are scheduled in addition there is no rest for the wicked. The work was cool, rational, and incessant, for Vidor knows when he has his "shot." I treasure, from this period, a Leica picture of Miriam Hopkins warming her lovely arms at a floodlight one bitter cold morning in the canyon at Chino and a museum piece of Stu Erwin, frosty and dejected, taken a night or two later. It's hard to catch Stu dejected.

A third picture which was not produced, fortunately, was adapted from a Scotch novel by A. J. Cronin. This had to be reset in Iowa and virtually rewritten in five weeks. By using nights and Sundays I managed it in four weeks and three days.

There may be such a gaudy and sybaritic life for writers in Hollywood as one finds in novels and plays, but the texture of average conversation is "I've got a swell twist to break into the running action," "I can't get a good dissolve off the scene of the murder," and "Now this is the way I've handled the love scene." What is known as "the story" is never

absent from any working writer's mind. Injunctions to stop worrying and eat your oatmeal will bring out a moody, "I wonder if I could open the bank failure sequence on that line."

The question of what Hollywood does to writers is quite as interesting as, but more speculative than, what writers are doing to Hollywood. There is no doubt that the neon city has made some serious depredations on the stage and the publishers' offices and there is equally little doubt that in many instances this has been of advantage to the literate public. One cannot mention with propriety the names of a number of people, who, skillful enough as artisans in more conventional fields, have shown genius in picture narration.

There is even less propriety in mentioning the names of people who definitely need scolding by someone more authoritative than I. They are people who do not take the motion picture with any real seriousness, I am sure, and their own great capacities in other fields even less seriously. There are two young humorists, one of whom I feel certain would sooner or later—or even sooner—have filled a vast emptiness in contemporary writing left by the late Ring Lardner. There is an aging, kindly gentleman, a novelist, who was time and again on the very edge of a masterpiece, whose latest novel in many years is broadly stamped "Made in Hollywood." There are two dramatists whose successes on the stage should have made them content to mind their cabbages. There are not many, but too many, others whose achievements or promised achievements should never have allowed them to remain in a medium for which they feel only cynicism and, perhaps, a mild curiosity.

Motion pictures are seductive. The lure, after two years of sterility, is enough money to write novels all the rest of one's life with no worry about their sales or popularity. The two years usually stretch out; it is terribly difficult to refuse as salary a weekly sum which would be paid in advances for two or three or even four or five novels.

After two years or even less of dissolves, cuts, fades, irises, montage, tempo, pact, rhythm, zooms, sterilized dialogue and situations, wipes, trucks, sound, scenery, and all the rest, a novelist's style and approaches are almost certain to be impaired and probably ruined. Few, if any, respectable novels have ever come out of Hollywood or from people who had spent much time there. It is probably altogether different with playwrights who are closer to the accustomed brevity and swift action of their usual work, but it seems ruinous for a novelist to condition himself to expression which must be either visible or audible, in which a forty-word speech is garrulous, in which the taboos on words and situations are established by the vehement old-maidery of the country and by the social and

national prejudices of half a dozen countries, in which the whole intellectual and dramatic content of a long novel must be sped to consume one hundred and twenty minutes or so, in which opportunities for original characterization or anecdote may be perverted to fit the formula of Standard Gag No. 2047 which has wowed them for years, in which vital dramatic concessions must be made not only to the actors' personalities but to their importance.

There may be temperaments which can survive such discipline for long periods without scars; they must be rare. My three brief visits, twenty-three weeks in all over almost five years, gave me wretched troubles with a bad habit of over-visualization for weeks. If anyone can survive 104 weeks out of 104, I give him the dog, with a diamond-studded collar.

Phil Stong is the author of several novels, including "State Fair" and "The Farmer in the Dell" (a Hollywood story); his latest is "Buckskin Breeches."

## The Bowling Green

(Continued from preceding page)

ago and thought, by the gods, Horatio, here is something. . . . It comes perilously near to being literature."

### Have You Anything to Declare?

Nothing ever gives an editor so much pleasure as printing something that was written with no thought of publication. Going through the confidential readers' reports of a certain literary committee we found the following. Because it describes one of the most genuinely readable of this season's books we got B. D.'s permission to print his private cry of excitement:—

*Have You Anything to Declare?* By Maurice Baring. This is one of the most delightful of commonplace-books, in which Baring declares his mental luggage collected from the world's literature. The order is roughly chronological; first his favorite passages from the Greek poets, beginning with Homer; then the Latins; then Dante; and so on. Most of the selections are jewels five lines long, but some run to a page or more. Nearly always he includes some comment, telling why he so loves the extract, and often offering parallels from other literatures. The selections include much Latin, Greek, and French, a good deal of Dante and Goethe, and Heine, and a little Spanish and Russian, the foreign pieces translated. . . .

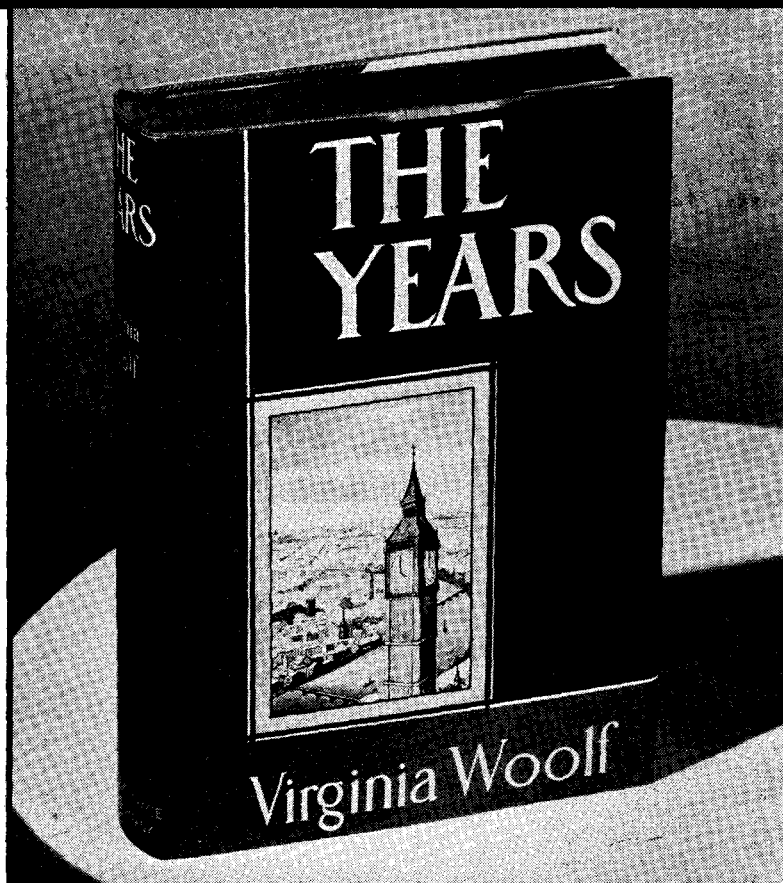
Altogether, this is a book which (I am happy to say) quite spoiled a half-day's work for me; I could do nothing for a couple of hours but pace my office reading Greek and French half-aloud; and it is a book which makes one feel "Why don't we all spend more time with the masterpieces? Why do I ever let a day go by without reading in Homer?" which is a good thing to have done for the mind.

BASIL DAVENPORT.

# VIRGINIA WOOLF

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# The PHOENIX NEST

CONTEMPORARY POETRY: BY WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

IT seems to me only meet and right this week to take a paragraph or so away from the reviewing of books of poetry and devote them to comment on the recent annual dinner of the Poetry Society of America held in honor, this year, of Robert Frost. It proved the most interesting I have ever attended. Though this was due mainly to the presence and speaking and reading of Mr. Frost, the other speakers were well chosen and read excellent poetry. They were Robert P. Tristram Coffin, John Hall Wheelock, Genevieve Taggard, and John Holmes. In the case of Mr. Coffin it was the state of Maine paying sturdy tribute to New Hampshire and Vermont. Mr. Wheelock is a poet less widely acclaimed at the moment than he will be fifty years from now. I was impressed by his grave and sonorous reading of "Unison," a poem in terza rima where the interlocking rhymes are never obtrusive. But the technical virtues of this poem are not the point. In it a most ancient form becomes the perfect mould for profound poetic intuition. Genevieve Taggard has as beautiful a woman's voice for reading as Mr. Wheelock's is resonantly sincere in a man. She read exultantly and lyrically. John Holmes, one of our younger poets, acquitted himself well.

Robert Frost explored for us a series of "pairs" or "opposites" in words that he is accustomed to write on the wall of his room. He told us that the opposite of justice is not injustice but mercy. He pointed out that the government of mankind has wavered throughout the ages between the opposites of divine right and consent of the governed. It seemed to me that what he was saying was really a paraphrase of his poem "To a Thinker" in "A Further Range." It is quite plain that Frost will never be a Stalinist. His mistrust is instinctive of cut-and-dried theories for saving the world. The radicals take a very half-baked view of him, and he strikes back shrewdly. There is a great deal of life in the old dog yet! He remarked that he would like to meet the man who had called him a counter-revolutionary so that he could call him, in turn, a "bargain-counter revolutionary." Today the Left has small time for anything except saving the world; and the world will never in the world be "saved" by such means. Dogmatists and bigots flourish under the new dispensation; and I think Frost struck at the root of the attitude rampant today when he said we could no longer believe in *anybody* being disinterested. If you mentioned what Congressman This or Senator That or Stalin or Roosevelt or anybody else had done or said recently, the inevitable reply was, "He would!" The world, in other words, is infected with a deep distrust of human motives. Everything is a racket. This reminded me of Carl Sandburg telling of the newspaper man who leaned upon his desk and drawled, "Well, Carl, how's the poetry racket today?"

Frost said many wise words on April

first. He is that greatest of April Foolers, a Sage. We haven't many sages in this country. But this one knows his onions!

Henry Goddard Leach, the toastmaster, introduced Frost by referring to the late Edwin Arlington Robinson as the Dean of American poetry and then saying, "The Dean is dead, (turning to Frost) long live the Dean!" Which leads me to mention that the Macmillan Company is publishing on April 20th at three dollars a new one-volume edition of Robinson's collected poems which includes all his later work, ending with "King Jasper."

I am irked by lack of space in this department, since so many interesting books of poetry, or about poetry, are arriving at my desk in the spring season. However, I should like to say to those attractive but not altogether guileless ladies who either write or ask me to mention their new books of poems, "because it would mean so much," that I am by nature rather susceptible and also not entirely hard-hearted—but that they really are not playing cricket!

I can heartily recommend, as a modern book about poetry, Margery Mansfield's "Workers in Fire" (Longmans. \$3). It ought to be used for teaching wherever poetry is taught. It is intelligent, written by a good verse-practitioner, the fruit of large experience, eminently practical and sane, and gets right down to cases wherever possible. Everybody interested enough to read this column should get it at once. No, I neither know Miss Mansfield—save that she is Secretary of the Poetry Society of America, to which I do not belong—nor do I get any percentage out of this! But I have tried to teach the writing of verse, and I know a good, helpful volume when I see one. Miss Mansfield, you might say, heckles herself throughout the book, thereby offering lively argument as well as dicta.

When I was teaching last summer at Mills College, California, I heard of certain work Helen Burwell Chapin was doing, and last fall her "The Round of the Year," poems translated from the Chinese, were brought out with prologue, epilogue, and calligraphy by the translator, and a preface by Laurence Binyon (The Eucalyptus Press: Mills College, Oakland, California. \$3). The translator is both a Chinese scholar and poetically gifted. She modestly says that her essays in translation are presented because of "her desire to background her calligraphy, of which she is both proud and ashamed." Admirers of the work of Arthur Waley, Mrs. Ayscough, and Witter Bynner in this field will be glad to add Miss Chapin's book to their shelf.

"Verses I Like," selected by Major Bowes, comes from the Garden City publishing Company, with a foreword by Theodore Roosevelt, he whose father once admired the poetry of Edwin Arlington Robinson . . . Oh Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto Thee!