

# The BOWLING GREEN by Christopher Morley

## The Folder

### Honorable Age

U NGIRDLED and a little warm  
with wine  
The Mandarin beneath his famous  
Tree  
Of Paradise would his soft flesh recline  
In the deep shade where drones one  
golden bee,  
Until across the valley from among  
Plebeian groves  
Staggers like smoke a half-heard song  
Of early loves:  
Then sudden, winter-struck, his grot  
Echoes with emptiness, philosophy forgot.

It lasts an eye-wink only while his sleeve  
Dries in its roses the appropriate tear,  
Then with a deftness you would scarce  
believe

He plies a brush experienced and clear  
To paint the poem of that sunny breast,  
Those tiny feet,  
Moon-face, cloud-hair, and all the rest  
That made youth sweet.  
He's clever, yet do you count wise  
Who makes but verses of such memories?

HUGH WESTERN.

### A Grotto

The Bibliodisiacs, a sodality of young booksellers in Chicago, meet in the cellar of a bookstore on Madison Street for crackers and cheese and poetry reading. As a matter of fact (so Jackson Selsor, keeper of their minutes, explained to me) it is a whiskey-and-sodality; the literary association of the names on the *Cutty Sark* label has caused them to adopt that brand as official emollient.

Their favorite reading seems to be of the 18th century, and they have recorded that they think Dr. Johnson's description of Pope's grotto (in the *Lives of the Poets*) one of the most delightful passages in literature—

"He adorned it with fossile bodies, and dignified it with the title of a grotto; a place of silence and retreat, from which he endeavoured to persuade his friends and himself that cares and passions could be excluded.

"A grotto is not often the wish or pleasure of an Englishman, who has more frequent need to solicit than exclude the sun; but Pope's excavation was requisite as an entrance to his garden. . . . Vanity produced a grotto where necessity enforced a passage."

The Bibliodisiacs have named their cellarage *The Grotto* in memory of A. P.

Their enthusiasm started me rereading the *Lives of the Poets* (which is easiest obtainable in the World's Classics series). In Dr. Johnson's biography of Milton I found a faintly hodiernal echo.

He was speaking of Milton's brother Christopher, who became a Judge—but "retired before any disreputable compliances became necessary."

The Manchester *Guardian*, in its sly way, is one of the world's most unobtrusively humorous papers. Instance its current series of characterizations of famous London clubs, an assortment of terse spoofs or anecdotes probably collected by Mr. James Bone, a living Bartlett. Here are two examples:—

### THE CALEDONIAN CLUB

He flung himself into a taxi-cab. "Drive me to the Caledonian Club," he said.

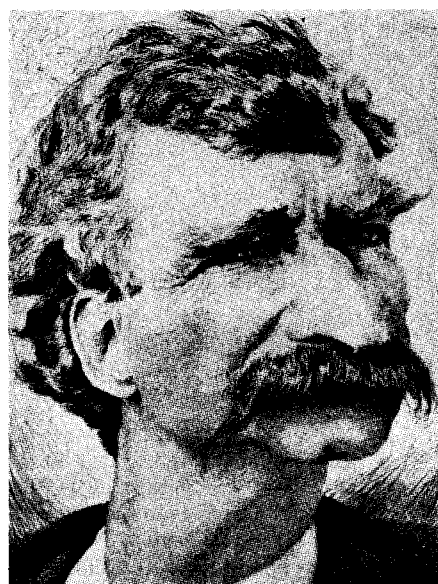
The taxi-man's face fell.

### EAST INDIA UNITED SERVICE CLUB

"Kipling, no. Must have been after my time."

### George Ade on Mark Twain

George Hiram Brownell of Chicago has reprinted in a pamphlet three magazine



MARK TWAIN

Reproduced in "Revived Remarks on Mark Twain," from a drawing in *Life* (1898) by an unknown artist.

tributes to Mark Twain written by George Ade when Twain died in 1910 and foremost a sparkling piece (*American Review of Reviews*, June 1910) of "Mark Twain and the Old-Time Subscription Book." Mr. Ade admits that he had completely forgotten writing it, but on rereading it he finds nothing to alter. He says:—

"Time, Geologists tell us, levels all things. But Time, the same authorities report, has reduced Mark Twain's stature by less than .0000001 of an inch since his death. At this rate of loss per year, he will be going strong when those, now doubting the permanence of his fame, will have

long since been levelled to a position approximately 6.000000 feet below the earth's surface."

### Beyond the Missouri

I wonder if the Burlington Railroad (of which we were speaking recently) knows that one of the most charming things ever written about it is Willa Cather's poem *Going Home*. It begins with a line I often think of—

How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri—

and can be found in the 1933 edition of *April Twilights* (Knopf.)

### "Popeye's Injunction"

I suppose *Editor and Publisher* had its tongue in its cheek, or up its sleeve, or wherever it would be most useful, when it printed (Feb. 13) William Randolph Hearst's Journalistic Creed. It appears that Mr. Hearst wrote it for "the celebration in Atlanta of the *Atlanta Georgian's* silver anniversary as a Hearst paper."

One of Mr. Hearst's sons is on the staff, and to him Mr. Hearst directed his profession of faith. I quote briefly in honor of the Duke of La Rochefoucauld:—

"Well, son, a healthy, husky paper coming of age can be of help, around the house and home in which it lives, in many ways, but the most important are these:

"It must give reliable information.

"It must give wholesome entertainment.

"And it must give useful service.

"A decent paper goes into good American homes as a guide, philosopher and friend.

"Good people have confidence in it, and it must be worthy of that confidence.

"It must be careful to relate nothing but what it believes to be the truth; and it must bear the responsibility of making sure that the news it collects from every quarter of the globe and delivers to its readers is as accurate and trustworthy as human agencies can make it.

"Young people like to laugh, and many a useful lesson can be inculcated in a sugar-coated dose of humor.

"Popeye's injunction to 'eat your spinach' has aided the dietitian and boosted the vegetable market."

Et cetera.—But why, I hear you asking, bring in La Rochefoucauld? It was he who said, Hypocrisy is the homage that vice renders to virtue.

A correspondent (Kalamazoo) writes that she has a great hankering for Vincent Starrett's *Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (Macmillan, 1933). She can't afford to buy it but is willing to make an exchange. She sends a surprising list of some favorites of her own, any one of

which she says she would trade in for the Holmes book.—I myself think she's too generous, but here's her list and I can forward correspondence:—

1. *The Innkeeper of Abbeville* (2-act melodrama by Edward Ball), printed for John Lowndes, London, 1826. Frontispiece, colored. I. R. Cruikshank.
2. *Letters to Various Persons*. Henry D. Thoreau. Ticknor & Fields, 1865.
3. *Charles Dickens*, 6 vol. Globe edition, illus. Darley & Gilbert, 1867.
4. *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*. Samuel Johnson, L.L.D., N. Y. Wm. Dwell, 1811. 3 vol.
5. *The Golden Legend*, by H. W. Longfellow. Ticknor & Fields, 1851.
6. *Works of Capt. Marryatt* (complete one vol.). Leavitt & Allen, N. Y. 1859.
7. *Memoirs of Count Grammont*, by Anthony Hamilton (notes by Sir Walter Scott). McKay Pub. Co. 1894.
8. *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*. By Sir Isaac Newton, London. Darby & Browne. MDCCXXXIII.
9. *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*. 3 vol. Edmond Malone, Esq. London. 1809.
10. *Aftermath*. By Henry W. Longfellow. Osgood & Co., Boston. 1873.

### Cobbett on Long Island

Jesse Merritt of Farmingdale, L. I., arch-archivist of Nassau County, reminds me that when the Oyster Bay train takes me through New Hyde Park (L. I., and not to be confused with F. D. R.'s Hyde Park) we pass the neighborhood where William Cobbett lived 1817-1820 and where he wrote his *American Journal*.

Jesse clips from the *Nassau Daily Review* a quote from Marjorie Bowen's *Peter Porcupine*, a biography of Cobbett (Longmans, Green). Cobbett's impressions of Long Island's ragged edges are still to some extent true: I wonder what he would think of that vast dump of abandoned automobiles near New Hyde Park today. He wrote:—

The dwellings and gardens and little outhouses of labourers, which form so striking a feature of beauty in England, and especially in Kent, Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire, and which constitute a sort of fairyland, when compared with those of the labourers of France, are what I, for my part, most feel the want of seeing upon Long Island. Instead of the neat and warm little cottage, the yard, cow-stable, pigsty, hen-house, all in miniature, and the garden, nicely laid out, and the paths bordered with flowers, while the cottage door is crowned with a garland of roses or honeysuckle; instead of these we here see the labourer content with a shell of boards, while all around him is as barren as the sea beach; though the natural earth would send melons, and the finest in the world, creeping round his door, and though there is no English shrub nor flower which will not grow and flourish here. This want of attention in such cases is hereditary from the first settlers.

# The Test of Time

## The Schoolteachers' Novel

SILAS MARNER: THE WEAVER OF RAVELOE. By George Eliot. 1861.

GEORGE ELIOT'S worst novel is her most important. An official document of the United States government testifies that "Silas Marner" is beyond a doubt the one book most frequently read by American high school children. In any large number of years to come it will have more readers than either "Anthony Adverse" or "Gone with the Wind" or both of them. One part melodrama and one part Sunday School moralizing, wound together with a style bare of charm or discipline or any real eloquence, here is our schoolteachers' idea of the best-seller of the ages.

Why? Any working teacher can tell you. "Silas" utters no dirty words. No character—like Hetty Sorrel, for example, in "Adam Bede," a better novel—gets pregnant. Nothing in all its pages could shock the Epworth League or the Chamber of Commerce or the W. C. T. U. or the Legion or anyone else—excepting, of course, a lover of good literature. . . . You have a son. You want him to form what the pedagogues, for lack of a classier phrase, have to call the reading habit. Then you'd introduce him to good books, like "Huckleberry Finn," or the "Odyssey" or a hundred others you could name. You wouldn't make him read this unacceptable scenario for a second-rate Shirley Temple movie—this "Silas Marner"—after assuring him that here, certainly, is a great book. Unless you wanted to turn him away forever from "great books" to detective stories and Kathleen Norris, you wouldn't do that.

The schoolteachers do. In a monograph (No. 20, "Instruction in English"), published by the Department of the Interior, Office of Education, as a part of the National Survey of Secondary Education, Dora V. Smith recites the tragic fact. Of "the thirty classics in most frequent use in junior, senior, and four-year high schools . . . 'Silas Marner' ranks first": a classic being any book a lot of people read. If you remember that the only purpose is to interest (in professional circles read "motivate") children in reading, you may see other peculiarities in Dr. Smith's statistical cross-section. Excluding three anthologies, not one of the thirty titles belongs on this side of 1900; only seven are American; five are Shakespearean dramas.

And "Silas Marner" leads them all. That is the importance of this book today. It is a symbol of a good many of our failures—of our failure, for example, to prevent the teaching of public school English from becoming an almost exclusively female occupation. Of our failure to repeal the ordinances which in a thou-

sand cities and towns compel these females to be old maids forever. Of our failure to insist that administrators spend more time in finding out what their teachers are teaching, and less time on those triple demons—publicity, politics, and promotion. Of our failure, finally, to elect anyone but politicians and insurance men to our school committees. These are the evils which must be eradicated. Let all good men and true, all who would redeem the faith our ancestors so bounteously placed in free schools, rally to the cause. Let "Silas Marner" be their battle cry.

J. H.

## Writing in the Rockies

(Continued from page 4)

but their development has been arrested at a rudimentary plane. They are supernatural in the sense that they tend toward caricature only dimly related to human life. They are clearly creatures of landscape commingled with ancestor worship, the apotheosis of the glorified pioneer. Moreover, they possess another god-attribute, timelessness; they are immune to anachronism.

Note some of the foregoing points in the ritual of the pulp paper magazines. *Thrilling Ranch Stories* wants material in which "the background of the Old West is used—no radios, automobiles, etc.,—but make the characters modern in spirit." Observe that satisfying landscape gives the illusion of reality: "Colorful terrain and a clear working knowledge of the vegetation and countryside bring a quality of reality," advises the editor of *Thrilling Western*, but as for life itself "we prefer the flavor of the Old West with the impression that the happenings are of today. If the setting is in the West today [again the setting dictates the play] it must be idealized. The people must be modern in spirit with boundless courage and endless endurance. Western dialect must be used and the slang of today should not be allowed to creep in." Being naive, the pulp formula may be more significant than other evidence bearing on our literary folkways.

One further observation on fiction of different quality: the case of Hamlin Garland. He wrote well on the prairie, badiy in the mountains, and well on the prairie again. Possibly he illustrates my earlier point: that the inspiration of scenery works at cross-purposes with the inspiration which produces literature. If anyone ever repudiated extravagant pioneer romance, it was the Garland who wrote "Main-Travelled Roads" in 1891. This was followed by other works conceived with such savage integrity that even Howells, who admired him, felt obliged to apologize for such unconventional realism. Then Garland came to the high-