

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Marie Corelli

SIR:—Have you had enough Corelliana? If not, you may be interested in a few of my recollections of Stratford early in April, 1919, while I was spending a few days at the American Officers' Inn there during the Armistice.

The Inn, a converted private residence presided over by a charming expatriate American named Milliken, was next door to Marie Corelli's home, and when Mr. Milliken found that I and a couple of my companions were interested in "literature" he promptly arranged for a visit. We found Miss Corelli to be a rather fat little old lady, whom we should probably have called dowdy if we had wanted to violate the ethics of hospitality. She was dressed in a rose satin gown, and wore a blue ribbon in her hair and a daffodil on her generous bosom. The daffodil did not quite match her blond hair, which still showed a hint of red. The drawing room in which she received us was large, but seemed oppressive because of the way it was crowded with knickknacks, bric-a-brac, and Victorian furniture, for she had collected trophies from all her travels. The immense white satin sofa on which she sat, we were given to understand, had some sort of association with the Czar of Russia and Catherine the Great. All the clocks on the mantel and shelves—and there were several—were, we found, just an hour behind our watches, for Miss Corelli would have nothing to do with the new-fangled daylight savings time. God's time was good enough for her. "It's so silly, you know," explained her companion. "Why don't they just get up an hour earlier?" Consequently all the clocks in England were out of step except Miss Corelli's. She was serenely superior to the difficulties which her independence should have made for her, since she scarcely ever went outside her own grounds anyhow. She was also, so far as we could detect, totally deficient in a sense of humor.

We talked about the war and the peace, and economics and labor and strikes. She told us all about America and the situation there, and the differences between America and England. We asked her if she had ever visited our country to observe conditions at first hand. "Never!" she said. "And I never shall. There is such a thing as happiness, and I prefer to remain in England even if I have to do so on five shillings a week rather than go to the United States to lecture for £500 a lecture, as I have been asked to do many times." But she was in sympathy with neither capital nor labor, she confessed.

We talked about literature, but mostly about herself and Shakespeare. She was much disturbed by the complete commercialization which



"I didn't suspect him, exactly, but I was watching him like a hawk."

Stratford had undergone. "Her" little town was rapidly being ruined. Even the Memorial Theatre under Frank Benson was not entirely free of the taint. "Tell them the story about you and Shakespeare," her companion urged her. Miss Corelli bridled modestly. "Oh, no," she said. "Besides, I don't believe it's true anyhow." "Oh, yes, it is—every word," insisted the other. So Miss Corelli let herself be persuaded.

It seems that an American was driving past the house—sight-seeing, like all Americans. "Miss Marie Corelli, the famous novelist, lives there," his driver informed him. "Oh, Marie Corelli!" exclaimed the American. "And what is wrong with her—is she lame, or deaf, or blind—?" "Why, nothing, so far as I know, sir. Why, sir?" "Well, why has she never married, then?" demanded the American. "Well, sir, you see, sir," the driver reflected—"you see, sir, Shakespeare's dead."

Miss Corelli smiled deprecatorily. Her companion nodded her head vigorously. "It's true, every word," she reiterated.

The thing that really disgusted us that night, however, was our discovery that the pretty girl in nurse's uniform who had to leave early for hospital duty and whom we did not have courage enough to insist in escorting to her destination was George Meredith's granddaughter.

Incidentally, I also heard Ella

Wheeler Wilcox speak and read from her poems at Saumur, France, late in August, 1918. Although she was more attractive personally than Miss Corelli, she made a very bad impression on the crowd of soldiers she had come to entertain. A more conceited little old lady than she I have never had the bad fortune to meet.

ARTHUR H. NETHERCOT.

Evanston, Ill.

No Expert in Semantics

SIR:—As a *Saturday Review* reader of fifteen years' experience and a not-too-regular member of the Baker Street Irregulars, may I be allowed to point out a slight cardiac arrhythmia in Mr. Collins's Big Moments on page 7 of the August 3rd issue? When The Virginian's pistol came out, the words that came out with it were, "When you call me that, *smile!*" not "When you say that, *smile!*" The Virginian was no expert in semantics, but he knew an overtone when he encountered one.

So petty a critical cock-a-doodle may seem unjustified; but I am doubtless compensating for a conviction, routinely driven home, that I am a literary moron with an I.Q. averaging around forty. Perhaps other and better reviewers have occasionally experienced the same reaction.

HARRISON L. REINKE

Deerfield, Mass.

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“Beautiful Land”

HAWKEYES, A BIOGRAPHY OF THE STATE OF IOWA. By Phil Stong. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1940. 300 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROSE HENDERSON

IN the best of his fiction, Phil Stong has shown a penetrating observation of the farm and small-town life of Iowa, his native state. With swiftly-lucid analysis and expert handling of minor character groups, he has conveyed revealing qualities which make the region basically different from any other, even its next-door neighbors. And he seems the logical writer to present Iowa in an expository volume, the first of a series which eventually will include all of the states. His new “Hawkeyes, A Biography of the State of Iowa,” contains some good writing and a mass of factual details on the historical, social, and economic aspects of this section, which is so essentially Middle West.

The book opens with a characteristic modern Iowa scene, two young men “watching” all night on the lawn of an old town while their friend, the old judge lies dead in the house, and the stars shine above tall trees and the moonlight falls down the hill toward the river. As the watchers lie on the grass or eat a midnight snack at the loaded kitchen table, they do not speak of the judge, but his place in the rural community and in the affections of the young men is deftly indicated.

Then come bucolic centennial celebrations, recalling the past, whether

accurately or not, with native pride and humor. “They all know the Iowa corn song,” says Mr. Stong. “And whenever as many as six of them are gathered together in the name of the state they will sing it, by God, and try to stop them.”

The general store, the storekeeper, the circle of loafers, the informal forums appear briefly. Frontier lawyers and politicians, fights with the railroad over “cow cases,” early laws, and old ledgers are pertinent material of pioneer background, even if a bit tedious at times in their rather colorless cataloguing. The patience, humor, and deep-seated tolerance of the first Iowans are convincingly suggested through the settlers’ treatment of the Indians, the Mormons, and other alien elements as well as in their treatment of one another. The hardships are not overlooked, but neither are the fundamental enjoyments and the gusto of man overcoming the soil.

The vast fecundity of this midland state which the Indians called Beautiful Land seemed to yield to its people a portion of its own earthy depth and inclusiveness. The people in turn fused a new pattern within its borders, in the careless profusion of its lakes, valleys, woodlands, prairies, and cornfields. This mingling of varied and vigorous strains within the more or less isolated state and the resulting ethnic whole of yesterday and today is Mr. Stong’s true story, told illuminatingly and unsentimentally, with flashes of humor and philosophic insight. The general poise

and hard-headedness of the Iowa farmer impress the writer and he argues for them valiantly.

The churches and schools, the *Des Moines Register*, Amelia Jenks Bloomer, and Ida B. Wise Smith have their indigenous parts in the broad, composite picture. Also the Iowa Writers’ Club, the P.E.O., Grant Wood’s authentic paintings, and the futile derivativeness of most of the “corn-fed art.” Native literature has fared better than the graphic arts in Iowa, as shown by Mr. Stong’s chronicle. Agrarian revolution is summarily disposed of. “Any good farmer can make a living in Iowa and enough more to make him value the law and its essentials.”

Mr. Stong does not linger long over Iowa’s geography, its long, cold winters and short, hot summers, its beauty and general topography. His primary concern is, properly enough, with the essentially agricultural character of the state. He treats the cities flipantly and superficially, on the whole, and his understanding presentation of farmers and farm life in the specific community is the book’s most vital contribution.

Law for the Layman

YOU BE THE JUDGE. By Ernest Mortenson. Illustrated by Alain. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1940. 451 pp., with index. \$3.75.

LOOK AT THE LAW. By Percival E. Jackson. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1940. 377 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by JAMES REID PARKER

HERE are two books, entirely different in plan, designed to inform the layman about the law. Mr. Mortenson instructs the reader in the chief aspects of the judicial process, not only with thoroughness but with a spirited good humor that is very pleasant indeed. His volume is almost as frolicsome as “Live Alone and Like It!” Mr. Jackson’s mission is more somber. He explains what’s wrong with the law and points out that if the voters are dissatisfied, they can, and must, take matters into their own hands. “Look at the Law” is clumsily written, however, and its very important material has not been given the readable treatment Mr. Mortenson accords “You Be the Judge.” This by no means alters the fact that the public needs both these books, and others like them.

Perhaps it is just as well that “You Be the Judge” is the more successful. Here is a first-rate primer, the very book for an amateur of the law to begin with. After digesting it carefully, a voter will find himself in a



Stone City, by Grant Wood

Courtesy Jocelyn Memorial