

# The Phoenix Nest

## The Wings of the Morning

WE feel pleased by the fact that our readers are apparently right up on their toes! We miscalled Louis Tracy's "The Wings of the Morning," and have received a flood of letters about it. We had no idea there were so many Tracy fans in the country, but Claude M. Fuess, Headmaster of Phillips Andover, recalls to us that Tracy's title was from Psalm 139, that the book was published in 1903, and that it is "no mere romantic antique, but a tale which can still be read with delight." He suggests for our collection of "island tales" the following: "Foul Play," by Charles Reade; "Orphan Island," by Rose Macaulay, and "The Pines of Lory," by J. A. Mitchell (marooned lovers on an island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence). "And reading 'The Pines of Lory' would inevitably lure anybody to Mitchell's other whimsical books, 'Amos Judd' and 'Villa Claudia,' which the literary world has too willingly let die. Ambitious and not too philological Ph.D.'s could find in these volumes a profitable field of research." We entirely agree! Also, how about Mitchell's "The Last American?" We have often discussed with Harrison Cady, who used to draw for Mitchell on the old *Life*, the merits of that great editor.

The celebrated Bernard DeVoto, known to us as "Benny," is also a Tracy fan. He writes, "It's a swell book, but the title is not 'The Wings of a Dove,' etc." Stanley Kidder Wilson also says "The Wings of the Dove" is by Henry James, but that he "glamorously remembers" the Tracy book. William J. Meikle of Radford, Virginia, has the right answer. Albert Philip Cohen of New York tells us that Tracy's story has become "a minor classic for boys (and confidentially for grown-ups too—I read it when I was grown) and has been reprinted in many editions." He gives us the following Tracy biography:

Tracy—a prolific writer—was born in 1863, rode the crest of the Lew Wallace, Rafael Sabatini eras with novels like "The Captain of the Kansas," "The Red Year," "The Pillar of Light," "Wreck of the Chinook,"—all best described by a contemporary jacket blurb as "Love, adventure, and plenty of fighting. Tracy at his best!" Before he died in 1928, he tried his hand at detective and mystery stories which are good for Whodunit readers. "The Gleave Mystery" is the best of this lot. Louis Tracy may be known to some of your readers under the name of "Gordon Holmes," a pseudonym briefly used. It was good to see your reference to the era of Horse Hair romanticism!

Kenneth W. Porter of Vassar College, and Helen Bower of the *Detroit Free Press* sent us postals about Tracy. Porter reminds us that both Tracy's and James's titles are scriptural, Ps. 139:9 and 55:6 respectively; Helen Bower recalls that the heroine's name was Iris Anstruther (*All heroines should be named Iris Anstruther!*) and that she and the hero waited in a little cave on the mountain ledge for the Dyaks to shoot poisoned arrows through their blow-pipes; and how they read the psalm about the terror and the arrow! Mrs. William R. Ridington of Westminster, Maryland, and James N. Gibson of Newport, R. I., were also both "on the ball." Mrs. H. C. MacJilton of Baltimore, Maryland, corrects the title we attributed to Norman Lindsay, as not "The Incomplete Amorist" but "The Cautious Amorist." Miss Marie A. Skinner of Montclair, N. J., writes that, as to islands, Miss Blanchard's "Island Love Story" deserves a place, gives us the correct Louis Tracy title, and says if Mr. E. R. Schlesinger will read Longfellow's "The Day is Done," the lines he seeks are the third and fourth of the first stanza. So says also T. L. Bailey of Cleveland, Ohio, and William J. Meikle. The former adds the following titles to the "island books": Sir Thomas More's "Utopia," Norman Douglas's island in "South Wind," Anatole France's "Penguin Island," Dean Swift's flying island of Laputa in "Gulliver's Travels," "The Island of Dr. Moreau," James Whitcomb Riley's "Flying Islands of the Night" with colored illustrations by Franklin Booth, Walter de la Mare's "Desert Islands" with decorations by Rex Whistler—of books devoted to actual islands: Norman Douglas's "Siren Land" and "Summer Islands," William Beebe's "Galapagos, or World's End," Celia Thaxter's exquisite "Among the Isles of Shoals" (on the foundation of which we ourself wrote a short novel last year!), Melville's "Omoo" and "Typee," and Christopher Morley's Bermuda book. In this connection, William J. Meikle has suggested to us some works by C. S. Forester.

## Those Celts Again

Carl John Bostelman asks to be allowed to disagree with our feeling that Arthur Stringer fails to capture the true Celtic spirit in verse. For proof, he quotes the following Stringer lines called "The Celt Speaks." He says Stringer's various volumes of Irish poems have given him his best sense of things Irish, along with the

personality in the flesh of Oliver St. John Gogarty. Here speaks Stringer:

Throw me, and yet I stand;  
Chained close, I still walk free,  
Since no thrall's link yet spanned  
The elusive soul of me.

Throw me, but to the end  
Some touch of mordant mirth  
Shall with disaster blend  
To lift me from the earth.

When Saxon, Briton, Dane  
Bent me with sword and gyve,  
I sang, above my slain:  
"Break me, but I survive."

Break me, but from the dust  
Some laughter of the soul  
Shall sweeten life's last crust  
And keep my spirit whole.

Michael Odell sends us the following rhyme anent the controversy:

When you intimate Strong is much  
stronger than Stringer

We just can't agree any longer;  
Your Strong may be swell as an Irish-born singer

But I still think our Stringer is  
stronger!

Exit laughing, for after all it's the Irish will have the last word! But also we think that the following reminiscence sent us by the poet, John Gould Fletcher, of Little Rock, Arkansas, will interest you:

I am glad to hear that my old and good friend, L. A. G. Strong's "Selected Poems" have been published in this country. Strong and I spent part of a summer once within seven or eight miles of each other (I think it was in the summer of 1925) living on the fringe of Dartmoor, in Devonshire—a country which Strong knows as well as his own native Ireland, or as the Isle of Skye in the Hebrides—and walking back and forth across the moorland to visit each other. The excellent poem to which you refer, "Talk at the Inn," refers to one conversation we had that summer, a conversation which Strong has put into dialect.

I think if you will look at the dialect used in "Talk at the Inn"—South Devonshire dialect—you will discover it is the same as that used in "Zeke." . . . Another poem you quote, "The Brewer's Man" is in Dublin Irish. . . .

During the summer I lived on the moor with Strong as my nearest literary neighbor, I wrote several poems about that wild moorland country which I have never published. It is a subject which no American could ever handle fairly. Whether one writes of the moors of Yorkshire, of the grim waste of granite and heather that is Dartmoor, or of Egdon Heath in Dorset, one has to be born among the sights and sounds and people of such strange waste places to know them well enough to write effectively about them.

Incidentally, if George M. Harrington, Jr., who wrote us some time ago, will send us his address, we will answer his letter.

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

## THE AMERICAN SPIRIT IN WAR

(Continued from page 4)

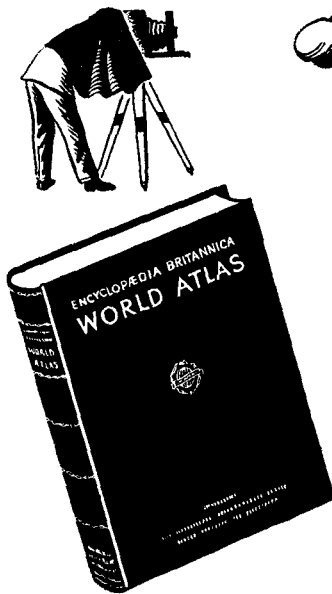
threatening. But Federal agents were skilfully used by Carrington, John P. Sanderson, and other capable Provost Marshals to disrupt the organization; the victories of Grant and Sherman struck it heavy blows; and the collapse of McClellan's candidacy finished it. The fifth column never gained a point of vantage.

Both these books are stirring; both, though in different ways, are encouraging. Mr. Sandburg shows how, when the whole significance of the American experiment was at stake, men and women by millions cheerfully risked all they had—money, homes, loved ones, chances for the future, life itself—for the great cause. Mr. Milton shows that when defeatists and disloyalists tried to betray the republic, they raised forces which blew their foul conspiracies into tatters. Though he does not say so, his book clearly indicates that American soil is barren ground for treasonable schemes. Faith in the destiny of this free republic is too strong to permit sedition to gain any real foothold.

After the Revolution most Americans thought that, secure in their independence and with a continent for expansion, they would never again have to fight a really desperate and exhausting war. After 1865 most Americans thought that, with national unity attained and two wide oceans to protect us, another fearful conflict was impossible. Why should we be less willing than they to give, not merely till it hurts but till the strain and anguish seem almost unbearable, for the triumph—on a world theatre—of our principles and ideals? It would do many Americans good to remind themselves that during the Revolution pitched battles were fought in every State, wide areas were ravaged in every section, and all society was turned topsy-turvy before victory was gained. It would do them good to remember that in the Civil War both sections were drenched in blood, and one was completely devastated, in a contest of ideas and ideals. We have proved in the past that we can offer the last full measure of devotion; books like these help give us confidence that we can and will offer it again. They teach us the spirit expressed in a fine remark of Stanton's which Mr. Sandburg might well have included in his volume. Oliver P. Morton remarked to him that if the cause failed they would be overwhelmed with ruin and disgrace. Stanton replied: "If the Cause fails, I do not care to live."

OCTOBER 31, 1942

The world sits for a portrait!



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## CLIO AND MY AUNT BERTHA

(Continued from page 14)

any soldiers in the neighborhood. The family had moved from Georgia to Marion, Alabama, just before the outbreak of war.

"General Walthall and Captain Kouraysh used to visit father sometimes, and they would talk over things we children weren't allowed to hear."

This sounded amusing—my single-slave, fresco-painting grandsire entertaining a Confederate brass-hat and discussing the higher strategy with him in Weber and Fields English. Obviously the general was just another hoopsnake. But some impulse sent me to the Dictionary of American Biography, and there, in Volume XIX, was a whole page about Edward Cary Walthall, set forth by Professor Charles S. Sydnor of Duke University—like Aunt Bertha, a native Georgian.

My respect for Aunt Bertha as a primary source was now immovably fixed. She had no idea what the meetings with General Walthall and Captain Kouraysh were about, and would not bolster my attempts to impart to the colloquies a glamorous atmosphere—something to do with espionage, or at least some mysterious sort of intelligence work.

Captain Kouraysh would have fit this picture cozily enough. I spell the name as Aunt Bertha pronounces it; the accent is strongly on the last syllable. (She seems never to have seen it in print or writing.) Could it actually have been Captain Courage, uttered with some slight concession to Gallicization? And could "Captain Courage" have been the glittering incognito of some dashing beau sabreur who hid his flambeau under a bushel, some unsung Dixie D'Artagnan?

I am afraid not. In civil life Captain Kouraysh, however he may have spelled himself, operated a distillery. Aunt Bertha is sure of that. It is a calling that does not necessarily unfit one for high emprises, but Captain Kouraysh's distillery was right in Marion (or perhaps Selma), and he himself seems to have lived in the neighborhood all his life, or at least during all of the life that Aunt Bertha lived there. Her most romantic recollection of him (and the bulk of men have slenderer claims to the attribute) is that he could make a whacking rum omelet, whereof my grandfather, a teetotaler, would not partake. Grandfather seems to have allowed the children to sample it, or perhaps Captain Kouraysh sneaked a bit to Aunt Bertha. He would.

Whether these conferences with the

commissioned personnel had anything to do with certain stealthy excavating activities on my grandfather's plantation I do not know, nor does Aunt Bertha. One night she heard the clink of shovels on a hill near the house; investigating, she discovered a cluster of soldiers busily scooping out the earth.

"This is my father's property!" she cried. What an awareness of ownership children have!

A posted sentry, annoyed at having a march stolen on him by a snip in pigtails, brandished a firearm and sent her pelting back into the house. Somehow—she cannot explain—she associates this incident with printing. She is too honest to essay any adventitious link. Were the soldiers constructing a cache for state papers, for currency, for bonds? Were they preparing to tuck a printing-press away in a cave? Or is the association of printing in Aunt Bertha's mind idle and fortuitous, and was some cautious back-area commander of troops simply playing with a reserve trench system?

"I don't know," is Aunt Bertha's answer. "I was just a little girl. Father told me to keep away, and not to ask questions."

Much of her reliability, indeed, inheres in her refusal to improvise. If she cannot answer a question she will say regretfully: "Not that I know

of," or "I can't recall whether he did or not," or "That I don't remember," or "I don't think so, but I might be wrong," or "I don't know—you see I was so young."

Her father was three times called to service, three times invalidated home. The spirit was eager, the flesh pitifully weak. On one return he bore in triumph a can of coffee. I have an idea, independent of Aunt Bertha's recollection, that this event occurred on October 18, 1864, for that was the day on which my father was born, and he has often told me (quoting his mother's testimony, no doubt) that the first thing he ever drank was coffee. My belief is that while the bacchanalia was at its height a woman neighbor who had played midwife, or perhaps Captain Kouraysh (ah, it must have been Captain Kouraysh!), cried: "Let's give the little fellow a drop—he may never taste it again!"

Whence the coffee? Aunt Bertha hasn't the slightest idea. Foraged? Borrowed, in a manner of speaking, from an officers' mess? Captured from the well-quartermastered Yankees? Nor does she recall whether the precious contents of the can were carefully rationed, or consumed in one wild orgy—a single grand *kaffee klatsch*, Southern style.

Anyway, the can was eventually emptied, whether in an hour, or days, or months. But keep your eye on it. It has a part yet to play in the family drama.

The coffee shortage is the only enforced war economy which Aunt Ber-

## The Criminal Record

### The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE CHARRED WITNESS George Harmon Coxe (Knopf: \$2.)	Boston news-photographer, covering story on elusive genius, sticks around to solve murder and spy-plot.	Another acceptable chapter in criminological career of Kent Murdock and his tough sidekick Flanner. Plot has its muddy moments.	Standard brand
SAY YES TO MURDER W. T. Ballard (Putnam: \$2.)	Two Hollywood actors and blackmailing wench perish violently, causing large migraine for Bill Lennox, studio trouble shooter.	Incessant action, peppy talk, good central character—and interesting subsidiaries—put this cut above most Hollywood homicides.	Good tough 'un
LEOPARD CATS CRADLE Jerome Barry (Crime Club: \$2.)	Death of actor in N. Y. drugstore basement and subsequent horrid happenings give medico detective a tricky job.	Not-too-tame cheetah, and some diverting data on aboriginal string-figures (tied up with plot) affect a sometimes confusing story.	Exhilarating
THE MOVING FINGER Agatha Christie (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Venomous epistles of poison-penner agitate English hamlet and cause two deaths. Miss Marple solves it.	Although soft-spoken spinster sleuth appears quite late in book, events preceding her arrival are exciting and denouement deftly contrived.	Satisfactory