



# As I Like It

By WILLIAM LYON PHELPS



**A**t this moment there is not a single professional theatre in the State of Connecticut.

It does not take long to read that sentence of fifteen words; but it takes some time to realize its significance. I suppose there never was any period in history when there was more interest in the drama, in the theatre, and in the art of acting than now. Every college and university has courses in modern drama, and many of them have their own fully equipped theatres; in every public and private school there are dramatic clubs or organizations exclusively devoted to the production of plays, ranging from Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" to something written by the school-children. There are Little Theatres, Repertory Theatres, Community Theatres all over the United States; and never before have so many plays in the English language been on sale in the book-shops.

With this intense and universal interest in the subject, with (literally) millions of Americans writing plays and millions of amateur actors, it is noteworthy that there is practically no opportunity to go to the professional legitimate theatre outside of New York City. The old road companies, either with or without a star, are obsolescent; the large and grandiose theatre buildings, which used to be conspicuous in every town of moderate size, are either dark or are motion-picture houses.

A few months ago, the one remaining theatre in Hartford was closed; and a few weeks after that, came the decision of the Shuberts to close their handsome, spacious, and comfortable theatre in

New Haven. One cannot blame the owners, if the thing is run at a loss. But when we remember what a part in education, culture, and diversion the theatre has taken in all lands and for so many centuries, and when we remember the intense interest in theatrical art to-day, the closing of theatres seems and is a calamity.

The motion-pictures, whether they be silent or vocal, cannot be regarded as a worthy or complete substitute. They have two advantages over the legitimate: there can be abundance and infinite variety of scenery, and all the people of America can see the same play (George Arliss in "Disraeli") at the same time. But just as a radio sermon is not like being in church, so a talking picture is not so impressive or so enjoyable as the living presence.

It is one more tragic illustration of a great vice of this age—the substitution of quantity for quality. Surely it is better to have "talkies" than to have nothing; surely it is better to have the radio than never to hear an orchestra. But to have a distribution of the second-rate so universal that it eliminates the first-rate cannot be regarded as wholly beneficent.

In the city of New York the theatrical season has been financially disastrous; during most of the autumn and winter months only thirty-five of the seventy-five regular theatres were open. Furthermore, many of the new plays ran less than a week, so that the immense outlay of money and preparation necessarily expended before the first night was a total loss. Many of the producers feel that the newspaper dramatic critics have been unnecessarily severe; they com-

plain that while in every other business the newspapers and prominent persons interviewed have done their best to be as optimistic and as encouraging as possible, so that wherever there was even a faint sign of business revival, it might be assisted by tender treatment, any flickering flame in the theatre was extinguished by the icy breath of irony. Indeed one producer, on the eve of departure for Europe, remarked that nearly every new play was swooped on by the critics with hawklike fierceness, as if they had determined in advance to rend it in savage glee.

Two things may be said in reply to this plea for encouragement. Perhaps never have so many new plays been produced that were hopelessly bad; so bad, it seems incredible that even their authors could have believed in them. Again, in conversing on this very attitude—encouragement or the reverse—with one of the best of the dramatic critics, he told me he felt the worst thing that could happen to the theatre would be to give encouragement to a play that did not fully deserve it.

As it is now, the average theatregoer must choose between two courses. Either he must attempt to see one of the few plays that are so successful that it is both a physical and financial problem to enter the building, or he must attend a performance that apparently nobody wants to see, and that after two weeks nobody will see.

The average theatregoer will not choose a play because its subject or presentation has an especial appeal to his own particular taste. He wants to follow the crowd.

Now between the "smashing hits" and the utter failures, there are a considerable number of plays assuredly worth seeing. But under the present condition of fearfully high rents and fearfully high producing expenses, unless a play can

fill the theatre, it is taken off. This is particularly unfortunate at this particular time.

I do not know anything about the financial conditions determining production; but I should think it would pay to have less expenses and more plays, with the beneficial result of keeping more actors in employment, and giving more theatregoers an opportunity to see performances; in other words, less profit and more production. An excellent illustration of a good play that failed is the late William Bolitho's "Overture." This did not have a sufficiently general appeal for a long run or a continuously crowded house; but there were many intelligent people who enjoyed it, and were sorry to have it withdrawn.

And now, having been obliged to write pessimistically on many aspects of the modern theatre in America, it is a pleasure to make some observations of a more favorable nature. The quality of production in New York has improved so vastly in the last twenty years, that excellence in presentation is now the rule rather than the exception. Even a worthless play is in general well acted and well produced.

There are now at least a dozen plays on the New York stage where the team-acting, scenery, and general effects are equal to what is given in the best theatres of Europe, and far superior to the average.

Furthermore, there have been a number of new plays given in New York during this financially tragic season that would adorn the stage of any city in the world. Here is a partial list:

"The Barretts of Wimpole Street."  
 "Grand Hotel."  
 "Once in a Lifetime."  
 "Mrs. Moonlight."  
 "Green Pastures."  
 "That's Gratitude."

"The Admirable Crichton" (revival).  
 "To-morrow and To-morrow."  
 "Philip Goes Forth."  
 "Elizabeth the Queen."  
 "Five Star Final."

Old and new plays at the Civic Repertory Theatre, with revivals of Bernard Shaw at the Theatre Guild.

In addition to these important plays, there are charming comedies like "Petticoat Influence," beautifully acted by Helen Hayes with a competent English cast; "On the Spot" and "Doctor X," excellent melodramas.

Of all the new plays, I give first prize to "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," by Rudolph Besier. Mr. Besier is an Englishman, writing another play about once in ten years. In 1909, when he was thirty years old, he wrote a comedy called "Don" which in America was magnificently acted at the New Theatre, under the direction of Winthrop Ames; I shall never forget the superb artistry shown in an impersonation by Louis Calvert.

Katharine Cornell, one of our most distinguished actresses, has had for the last few years such disastrous fortune in the leading rôles assigned to her, that in 1930 she decided to produce plays herself, going back to the effective actor-manager system. She read in manuscript "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" while on the ocean, and immediately accepted it. It was produced at the Malvern Hills Theatre in the summer of 1930 in England and later made a success in London. She assembled an admirable cast, and presented the play at the Empire Theatre in New York in February; it is a tremendous success and deserves to be.

It is the story of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, the greatest love story in the world, more thrilling than Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, Eloisa and Abelard, Paul and Virginia,

Aucassin and Nicolette, Paolo and Francesca, or any other you can think of; and it differs from most of the others in having a happy ending for the lovers.

When I first heard of the dramatization of this story, I was prepared for a disappointment; for it is difficult to put a well-known historical character on the stage and convince the audience. I suppose I have seen Napoleon forty times in the theatre, but I never saw a good one.

In "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," Katharine Cornell *is* Elizabeth Barrett; Brian Ahearne *is* Robert Browning; Charles Waldron *is* Mr. Barrett. For forty years I have studied the personality and poetry of Browning more closely than any other poet; and when the maid Wilson opened the door and said "Mr. Robert Browning!" I was prepared for a shock. Yet with the unimportant difference that Mr. Ahearne is taller than Browning, I was in the presence of Browning himself. That is exactly the way he looked, that is the way he talked, and exactly so was his inspiring influence on Elizabeth. Katharine Cornell *is* Elizabeth; that really is the way Elizabeth spoke to her father, to her brothers and sisters, to her maid Wilson, to her dog Flush, and that is the way she recovered her health—by the inspiration of a personality so tremendous that it makes it easier to believe in the miracles of the New Testament.

Many young people to-day think Mr. Barrett is an impossible monster; but with the exception of the hint at an unnatural passion for Elizabeth—both unnecessary and untrue to life—that *is* exactly the way Mr. Barrett treated his children and their potential lovers. He had an insane jealousy toward them all. How easy it would have been to make him ridiculous! But thanks to the playwright and to the splendid acting of Mr. Waldron, he is both formidable and terrifying.

I hope that out of the thousands and thousands of Americans who have seen the play this season, hundreds and hundreds will go to 50 Wimpole Street in London this summer and do homage.

Nor is it only those who have read Browning and are familiar with the original love story who are affected by this drama. Directly behind me sat a man and his wife who were overwhelmed; and when Robert told Elizabeth that she would see Italy sooner than she planned, because she would have to marry him, the man whispered to his companion: "She'll never do it!"

I have not seen on the stage a more affecting love story; it makes the ordinary love-making seem like the play of marionettes. For this is to be said of the Victorians. They had terrific passions; they knew how to love and how to hate. The fact that they assumed that marriage was to follow love, gave love an importance undreamed of by many people in these trivial times. Now that divorces are frequent, adultery even more frequent, and "love-affairs" casual and ephemeral—the love between men and women has in a great many instances lost its vitality. It doesn't mean anything. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot successfully pretend a thing is important when you know it isn't. But those Victorians! They had an emotional power that in comparison with these easy-going days gave to Love the depth and sweep and force of the ocean as compared to the qualities of a mud puddle.

If you want to discover what love used to mean, go and see Katharine Cornell and Brian Ahearne in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street." Then, after beholding those eagles of poetry, consider the insects of our modern novels.

"Philip Goes Forth," by George Kelly, is an original and powerful play which

sags badly in certain scenes, and which has more than one actor miscast, but despite its flaws, it has some of the best dramatic moments that Mr. Kelly has ever created, and the whole play will be remembered by spectators longer than many other plays that have been technically more finished.

"Grand Hotel," a German importation, is an original and highly interesting play, splendidly mounted and acted. It appeared simultaneously with Arnold Bennett's "Imperial Palace," and the two productions accurately illustrate the difference between the art of the drama and the art of the novel. Mr. Bennett's enormous book, filling about eight hundred pages, tells us all that we want to know, and a great deal that we don't, about the management of a modern London hotel, which might be the Savoy. Vicki Baum's play, in two hours and a half, gives us a series of thrilling pictures of the interior of a German hotel, which might be the Adlon.

The play, although we have a lively picture of the "office," with the various employees—a scene that reminds me strikingly of a somewhat similar one in Schnitzler's "Das weite Land"—concerns itself mainly with the men and women euphemistically described as "guests." The hero of Mr. Bennett's leviathan is the hotel manager; and more space and attention are given to the employees than to the visitors. The whole book is prepared in the manner of first-class journalism; I should think it might easily be accepted as a thesis for the Ph.D. degree, given in almost any business college. It is voluminous, thorough, painstaking, accurate—it has everything except copious foot-notes, an index, and a complete bibliography. One merely asks the question that sometimes one asks concerning a doctor's thesis—was it worth doing? Why all this ex-



pense of energy? The characters have little significance. I had hoped that the marvellously beautiful young American girl, whose favorite reading is the Psalms, might turn out to be an interesting personality; but she is after all just one more slut.

The play, "Grand Hotel," gives us sharply outlined and impressive portraits of the various men and women who eat and sleep in such caravanseries. All kinds of people frequent this hotel, except "good" people. I remember many years ago, when one-half of the Park Central Hotel in Hartford fell down in the night, the scandals exposed by the disaster, and the subsequent excited town gossip. But there were respectable people who were killed along with the others. In "Grand Hotel" there are only undesirable citizens; and it is interesting to see what one of them decides to do when his physician informs him that his death is at hand. He goes in blindly for what he regards as a good time.

As many writers have observed, Life is short. It is instructive to compare this hotel guest's programme with the philosophy of Hotspur:

O gentlemen, the time of life is short!  
To spend that shortness basely were too long,  
If life did ride upon a dial's point,  
Still ending at the arrival of an hour.

"Once in a Lifetime" is hilariously funny; a gorgeous satire on the morons of Hollywood. Seldom have I seen a play so thoroughly enjoyed by the audience. The spectators are shaken by continuous and spontaneous mirth; and I am informed that the satire, so far from being overdrawn, is rather conservative.

"Elizabeth the Queen" is the *kind* of play that I particularly dislike; I mean the historical-costume-drama, with a "Gramercy" dialogue. But the interpretation of the Virgin Queen by Lynn Fontanne is so extraordinary that no

theatregoer should miss seeing it. It is a stunning virtuoso performance.

"Mrs. Moonlight" is a comedy that charms a sensitive and appreciative mind, and irritates those whose chronic attitude toward life is ironical. In fact, it is an excellent trial horse, for I think if you knew any person either through intimate friendship or through his writings, you could predict with certitude his mental and emotional response. This is not at all a subject for debate; one knows exactly why certain men and women are attracted by this play, and why certain others are repelled. The acting of Miss Barrett, of Sir Guy Standing, of Miss Haidee Wright is admirable.

Philip Barry, in "To-morrow and To-morrow," has succeeded for the first time in combining a serious and thoughtful play with box-office appeal. "In a Garden," "White Wings," "Hotel Universe" were ambitious dramas which failed financially; "Paris Bound" and "Holiday" were financial successes of not very much artistic importance. But "To-morrow and To-morrow" has the best dialogue he has written, the most excellent presentation of character, and is enjoying a "click" that can be heard all over the sidewalks of New York. It is, like "Green Pastures," taken from the Bible; the difference being one of maturity. The prophet Elisha stayed at the house of a fashionable and intellectual woman who had acquired the habit of entertaining distinguished lecturers. In this instance, she had a room built especially for his use, where, with a table, a chair, a lamp, and a bed, he must have been very comfortable. I hope Mr. Barry does not hint at a cynical interpretation of the Bible story.

Once more let me call attention to the new and limited edition of the works of Tolstoy in English—the only complete translation—now in process of publica-

tion. This is an opportunity not to be missed. And I am glad to see that the Editor-in-Chief, Mr. Aylmer Maude, has just published a small volume of about seventy-five pages, "Leo Tolstoy and His Works," an excellent biography, showing remarkable skill in condensation. I like everything in it except the quotation from Dryden, which is used to describe Tolstoy:

A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.

The reader cannot help thinking of the very next line:

Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong.

This tiny volume is not only admirable for the immense amount of valuable information it gives both on Tolstoy's life and character, but for its bibliography, and its references to the "World's Classics" series, containing most of his best novels in English translation, at two shillings the volume!

One day, when I was a graduate student at Harvard, I remember Dean Briggs remarking in the classroom that the dates of two men of letters were easy to remember, because they came exactly one century apart:

John Dryden, born 1631, died 1700.

William Cowper, born 1731, died 1800.

Another great anniversary this year is that of Joan of Arc, who, outside of the Bible, is probably the most famous woman in history. She was burned at Rouen, May, 1431.

Cowper (pronounced Kooper, double o as in loop) has already had his birthday celebrated by one of the best biographies that have appeared in our age of biography—"The Stricken Deer," by Lord Cecil. This book has received two prizes in Great Britain, and deserves three. The subject might so easily have

been treated ironically, but Lord Cecil is too wise, too sensible, too learned, too brilliant to stoop to such an obvious method. His biography is sympathetic. It is written in a noble and elevated style, and is a contribution to the study of social life in the eighteenth century. It is curious, when one remembers that England is practically the same size as the State of Michigan or the State of North Carolina, that we do not think it remarkable if an Englishman never leaves it. If an American man of letters were born in Michigan and never penetrated beyond its borders? But England and Michigan?

I am glad to see that Eckermann's "Conversations with Goethe," English translation, has just appeared in Everyman's Library. Every man should certainly buy and own this book. In the list-of-books-you-would-choose-to-be-shipwrecked-on-a-desert-island-with, these Conversations could not be omitted. Then wilderness would be paradise enow! Lord Haldane, who must have known, called Goethe the greatest mind since Aristotle; now, for less than a dollar, one may live intimately with Goethe.

Speaking of Lord Haldane, his sister, Miss Elizabeth Haldane, has published a life of Mrs. Gaskell, a thoroughly good book, in which we learn much about those three terrifying Graces, Charlotte, Emily, Anne Brontë. Those who imagine that Mr. Barrett was a monster, are right; he was. Those who imagine he was unique, are wrong; he wasn't. Although the three Brontë sisters lived with their father, the Reverend Mr. Brontë, in one of the loneliest places in England, he never ate his meals with them. He always had his meals sent into his own private room. In no slang sense, but literally, he was a Holy Terror.

Every evening, for an hour or so before

bedtime, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne would walk around and around the centre-table of their sitting-room, talking and talking as they revolved, about all their plans and thoughts and dreams. After Emily's death, Anne and Charlotte walked, and then, after Anne died, Charlotte walked alone around that same accursed table for hours every night. She must have felt behind her their ghostly footfalls.

The Princess Pierre Troubetzkoy (Amélie Rives) writes me the following highly interesting letter concerning my comment on Shakespeare in the February SCRIBNER'S. The letter comes from her home, Castle Hill, Cobham, Albemarle County, Va. The suggestion (first made by Pope) quoted from Mr. Cust is known to scholars, but should not, I think, be given much credit.

When I came to your remarks on the account of Falstaff's death in "King Henry V," and the Folio reading, "A Table of Greene Fields," for which Theobald suggested the emendation "a' babbled of green fields,"—I thought that you might be interested in a remarkable statement made to me in 1914 by Mr. Henry Cust.

Mr. Cust was said to be the next best read man in England after Lord Balfour.

It happened in this way. My husband and I were stopping for Whitsuntide with Lord Curzon at his country seat, Hackwood. Among the guests were Lord Balfour (then Mr. Arthur Balfour), his brother Gerald and Mr. Cust.

One evening those three and I were talking together, and this very question of the Folio reading of what has now been accepted as "a' babbled of green fields," came up. I was really listening rather than talking, but I must have ventured some remark just then, for Mr. Cust turned to me and said:

"Don't you know the real origin of that famous sentence?" I humbly said "No." Whereupon he explained: "That was a direction on the prompt copy of Henry V. The stage manager's name was Greenfelds and the stage direction evidently ran, 'A table by Greenfelds.'"—

The others seemed to accept this as a mat-

ter of course and I merely murmured that "Accident seemed sometimes to be a great poet."

Of course I have no idea whether Mr. Cust was jesting or not, as I am no Shakespearian scholar, but somehow I do not think he was.

I am deeply grateful to the Princess not only for this valuable letter, but because she contributes a new anecdote to the life history of one of the most brilliant men of modern history, "Harry" Cust. A complete and well-documented biography of that extraordinary person would be both stimulating and diverting. Mrs. Cust, not very long after her husband's death, published a slender volume of his poems, of which a certain number were exported to America. As showing the practical effect of book reviews on sales, I will say that I reviewed this book in a Sunday issue of the *New York Times*. Before eleven o'clock on Monday morning, every copy in New York was sold. It is high time that more of his "Golden Remains" were published; and a good biography as well. What a man!

Most of my readers are interested in words, and the others ought to be. Mr. L. C. Oakley, one of my pupils in the Class of 1896, Yale, writes:

Here are three verbs you want to know—and probably do know: (I didn't).

Outen—to extinguish.

"Mister, he outened the first fire with a shovel, and Missus, she outened the other'n' with a broom." (Penna.)

Belong—to be compelled.

"Do you fully understand what signing this option means?"

"I sholy do;—ef'n I sign it, I belong to deed you my land when you say." (No. Carolina.)

Confidence—to trust fully.

"Bill, kin I confidence you?"

"E'f'n yo' 'steem me that high, yo sholy kin." (No. Carolina.)

A letter from New London points out the "misuse" of a word by two of the most carefully correct writers now living.

One is the misuse of the word "since," as in "since I have been living in this house" instead of "while I have been living in this house" or "since I moved into this house."

The other is the confusion of mind as to the antecedent of the relative pronoun and the consequent form of its verb in cases of this type: "Georgia was one of those women who was educated when she was born."—Stark Young in "Heaven Trees," p. 19.

It is surprising how common this is among intelligent and experienced persons. Recently I even found it in so careful a writer as Sir George Otto Trevelyan. He says: "for he was one of those who was not afraid to follow where his conscience led him."—"George the Third and Charles Fox," Vol. I, p. 206.

Another cryptic newspaper head-line is sent me by George Elias Wisewell, of Memphis, Tenn.:

STOP HOUSE SALLY ON POWER  
BOARD

which appeared in the New York Times, January 28, 1931.

Anne Washington Wilson, of Georgetown, D. C., is enrolled in the F. Q. Club,

"provided there is no rigid examination!" Inasmuch as her own name contains the name of one Queen of England and of two Presidents of the United States, she receives an abundant entrance into the aristocracy of intellect.

Many of our "big-game" hunters belong not to the organizations of sportsmen, but rather to the slaughter-houses.

Another score for the Fundamentalists: note the prophecy concerning the snake and the descendants of Eve: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Gen. 3:15. How about snake-skin shoes?

So much cocaine is now being illegally imported into our country, that it may fairly be called a drug in the market.

In certain parts of Australia, the population of the kangaroos increases by leaps and bounds.

The annual dinner of the FANO CLUB will take place at 110 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, on May 7, at 7.30 p.m. daylight-saving time. R. S. V. P.

Books mentioned in this article are named here, with their publishers.

"Complete Translations of the Works of Tolstoy,"  
edited by Aylmer Maude. Oxford.

"Leo Tolstoy and his Works," by Aylmer Maude.  
Oxford. 50 cents.

"The Stricken Deer," by Lord Cecil. Bobbs-Merrill.  
\$3.

"Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe," Every-  
man's Library. Dutton. 95 cents.

"Mrs. Gaskell," by Elizabeth Haldane. Appleton.  
\$3.

"Imperial Palace," by Arnold Bennett. Doubleday,  
Doran. \$2.50.

*From the chaos of the books, William Lyon Phelps and Robert E. Sherwood each month weed out the volumes significant for their skilful narration, their information, their gaiety, their importance. This month the contributors include J. Frank Dobie, Carleton Beals, V. F. Calverton, Clifton Fadiman.*



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# Behind the Swamp There Was a Village

(Continued from page 552)

delightful night!" and then added eagerly, "Let's go for a little walk before we go to the library."

"Shall we go up the hill at the end of the street?" I offered. "We can see the rockets over the trenches. It is a beautiful sight."

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"Oh, no, the bullets do not come so far, and there is no artillery fire."

"Then, let's go on."

It was difficult for her to walk over the rubbish and waste, but she went ahead bravely. A few times she stumbled and caught my arm, but when I took hers she gently removed it. Once she nearly fell headlong to the ground, but I caught her in time.

"Thank you," she said, "I would probably make a bad soldier."

We reached the hill and climbed to its top. A light wind blowing from the south brought to us the faint suppressed sound of a distant cannonade. It was quiet in our sector; not even the rifles disturbed the silence. Here and there at intervals brilliant rockets rose above the trenches and, bursting, made great flashes of strong, greenish light.

Mariana looked on for a long time and then, slowly turning her face to me, asked:

"And that is where you are the nights when you are not with us?"

"Yes," I said, "and all the days."

"Is it not horrible that your people and my people have to fight each other?"

"Maybe it will be over soon."

"But will it? Will it?"

I spread my overcoat on the ground. Mariana sat on it, while I placed myself at her feet.

"Mariana," I said, "do you know what my captain said about you?"

"Did you talk to him about me?"

"Yes, twice."

"What did he say?"

"He said that you are our enemy."

"Not yours," she said in a low voice after a short silence.

And again we watched the rockets incessantly rising before us in the west. . . .

"Do you hear?" whispered Mariana, slightly touching my arm. Her touch startled me. I listened and distinguished voices; they seemed to be approaching us. I rose; so did Mariana. She stood behind me, her hand on my belt. I could feel her shiver. . . . They were coming nearer and nearer. . . .

Mariana put her hand on my shoulder and gently pressed me down. I sank to my knees. Mariana knelt beside me. Behind a bush, we were perfectly hidden from the coming men.

But they did not come. They stopped near another bush about fifty feet from us, where they sat on the ground and lit cigarettes. This was evidently a two-man patrol.

A brilliant meteorite crossed the sky.

"Father," asked a boyish voice, "is it true, as they say in our village, that for every human being on the earth there is a star in the sky, and when he dies his star falls?"

"Nonsense," gravely answered another voice. "If it was true, there would not be many stars left in the sky when this war is finished."

"But I saw them falling mighty fast last August when the big battles were on," insisted the first.

"Nonsense," repeated the other, "women's talk!" Then, after a pause, he added, "And maybe they are right—I don't know."

Mariana's hand was still on my shoulder. She was listening, absorbed by the conversation.

"Well, let's go," said the older soldier, having finished his smoke. A minute or so later they rose and passed close to us.

"Is it true," I heard the younger voice again, "that the Czarina is helping out the Germans?"

"I wouldn't talk about that," the other curtly replied. And then we heard them no more.

"It is strange," said Mariana reflectively, "that we have the same story about the stars."

Her last words were covered up by a brisk fusillade which suddenly started up and spread all along the front. Our field battery not far from the hill began a quick fire; the others supported it; the enemy's shells were already coming and exploding behind the village;

rockets were whirling in all directions; and projectors from both lines were searching the fields.

"What is it?" asked Mariana, rising to her feet.

"A false alarm." I tried to say it assuredly.

And it was a false alarm. In a little while, the roar decreased and then died out entirely.

"Let's go home," said Mariana. Her voice was still unsteady.

"Aren't we going to get the books?"

"Oh, yes, we will get them."

A drizzling rain which started next morning lasted all day and changed at night to a downpour. At midnight the watch was given an order to retire. Waves of water rushed down the slope in front of us, filled our trenches, then, gushing over their tops, poured into the swamp behind us. All our work was ruined. We abandoned the trenches and stood in the open—wet, chilled through, despondent.

By daybreak, the rain was over. By noon the water had largely drained out from the trenches and we started repair work. We found the parapets washed away and the ditches, the approaches, and the dugouts caved in. There was no order of the day now, no shifts, no sleep—every one was abroad, digging, shovelling, and lagging. Only a few men were sent on watch, and even those were of no use. The enemy, too, had suffered from the flood and had plenty of trouble of their own.

The morale of the men and the officers was lower than ever. This inundation was an example of what we would have from now on. Once more we had occasion to realize how dangerous and inconvenient were our positions in this sector. What had been a swamp became a lake. The wooden planks across it lay deep below the surface of the water and, except through the trenches of a neighboring regiment, we had no way of communicating with the rear. This was long and troublesome.

On the afternoon of the sixth day, quartermasters of a strange regiment appeared among us and brought the news that their regiment would come at night to relieve us. I rushed to the captain. He confirmed the news and added that we were going to a very distant point.

Now there was one desire in me, one necessity; it was to see Mariana. I ran toward the place from which I first had seen the village, but I had to return; the pass leading to it was filled with water. I decided to go around but realized the folly of the enterprise and aban-

doned the idea. The captain came to my mind and, with a gleam of new hope, I rushed to him.

"I thought of it," he said, even before I could speak to him. "Wait until we are relieved and I'll give you a chance to get over there. But don't try to go now; you'd be sure to lose us."

He was right. Yet if there had been any chance to succeed, I would have disobeyed his order. But there was none. All I could do was go to the rear passageway, look at the water and the village beyond it. Water, land, and sky were all of the same color—the color of mud.

One of our lieutenants passed by. I rose to salute him. He stopped, looked at me for a while, then said:

"What is the matter with you, anyway? Got sick of the war?" His lips were twisted into a smile.

"Yes, sir."

With the darkness, the companies of the new regiment began to pour into our trenches and occupy our posts. Each of our companies, as it was relieved, proceeded as a unit through the passages of our neighbors, and went around the swamp to the assembling ground by the road. The orderlies were there ready with their officers' horses. Emelian, my captain's orderly, was there also. The captain, leading his horse by the bridle, approached me, saying, "Follow me."

When we were far enough from the company, he added, "Take Dolly and go there. I'll walk till you come back. We are going to Tarnopol."

I jumped on the horse and, bending over her neck, started her into a gallop.

"It is about ten kilometers to the village," I figured, "and it will take me half an hour." We swept by the crucifix, by the burned house, over the bridge, and were approaching the cut. From there but three more kilometers! I saw nothing now: my mind was already there in the house. . . . Dolly raced.

"Halt!" It was a firm and impressive command, given in a loud voice.

I straightened in the saddle. We were in the cut. In front of me, barring the road, were four horsemen.

"Who are you?" asked the one nearest to me.

"Private of the Eighth Company of the One-Hundred-Thirty-fifth Regiment," I answered saluting.

"Whose horse?"

"Captain Kootsoff's."

"Where are you going?"

There was a moment of deep silence. The man who had addressed me rode nearer and turned a flashlight on my face.

"I know him, Your Excellency. He is one of Captain Kootsoff's men, and is trusted by his officer."

I, too, recognized him. He was one of the officers of our regiment now attached as adjutant to the commander of our division. The general was with them. I heard nothing of what the officers were saying to each other. My mind worked fast, trying to find an excuse.

"But where is he going?" insisted the general.

"To our old trenches, Your Excellency," I said, to my own surprise. "My captain sent me to get his field book he has forgotten in the dugout."

"Either he, or you, or both of you are crazy," said the general angrily. "Are you going to swim the horse across the swamp and take it with you in the trenches?" He added another remark about me, my captain, and soldiers and officers in general. Then he spoke to the adjutant:

"Send him. He'll do."

"Send where?" I wanted to shout, but, trembling, I awaited the order.

The adjutant had another of his companions hold his flashlight while he wrote something in his field book. He tore out the sheet, placed it in an envelope, sealed and addressed it, and then gave the letter to me, pointing to the two crosses which he put on the back of the envelope signifying delivery with the greatest possible speed.

"Deliver it to the quartermaster of the division. He is in Koodbintsy," he ordered. Then, coming closer to me, he added threateningly: "And don't play any tricks."

He did not believe my explanation, that was clear to me, and he desisted to find out the truth only because they were in a hurry and, it seemed to me, in some confusion.

I saluted and turned my horse toward the new destination. I was in despair. Fourteen more kilometers, seven each way! Again I bent low over the mare's neck. Dolly was doing her best, as though she understood and was trying to help me in my trouble. She flew, but I (how ashamed I am to think of it now) pommelled her belly with the heels of my boots as though anything could make her go faster.

I raced east against the full moon that was rising from behind the forest. I passed by a team, through a small detachment of infan-

try which quickly gave me the way; burst into, and quickly passed, the forest; and landed in the middle of the long single street of a village. Not without waste of time, I found the quartermaster and delivered the letter. He opened it and read it with marked surprise and anxiety. Having finished, he looked at me, then reread the note.

"Where was the general when he gave you this letter?" he asked me.

"Three kilometers south of Borosovo."

"All right. You may go."

I left the house. Outside, I looked at my watch; it was a little after ten o'clock.

"I'll be there at eleven," I thought. "They will be already asleep."

A second later I was again galloping along the road. Dolly ran as never before.

We repassed the forest. Nearer, nearer was the village and again in my mind I was in the half-ruined house. . . .

Then a flash of light; an explosion which threw into the sky geysers of fire and rock; a trembling of the ground; then more fires, more explosions. The horse stopped.

"Our trenches undermined!" I thought. "Right there where I was two hours ago." Paralyzed, I waited for the rest to come.

The barrage ceased. "The Austrians must have come out of their trenches," passed through my mind. "They must have known of the changes which were going on." Still motionless, I stared at the cascades of glowing lights.

Mariana came to my mind, and the danger which surrounded her. With heels and hands I struck the horse. I rode with yells and shouts, with prayers and cursing; and she ran, ran in a panic of fear. . . .

Then, all of a sudden, she stopped again. I raised my head from her neck and looked around. Crowds of soldiers in disorder were hurrying away from the trenches.

"Retreating!" flashed through my mind.

"Where are you going, you damn fool?" several voices from the crowd shouted at me. "The Austrians are on this side!"

"And Borosovo?" was all I could ask.

"Occupied," somebody answered, and rushed by. Thicker and thicker became the retreating crowd. The men almost ran. Fiercer and stronger grew the fire and the shells exploding around us. One of them struck near me. But I did not move. . . . The horse turned herself and walked with the mob. . . . We came to the forest. I stopped the horse and, dismounting, let her take care of herself. The men moved by.

The night passed and the fight was over. I did not notice when it ceased. The cold of the daybreak brought me back. The front was quiet; not a sound from there. Dolly was not far from me. She slept, her head lowered. The forest was full of men sleeping with heads and shoulders rolled in overcoats and their legs sticking out.

The sun began to rise. But the men still slept around me.

I went to the horse, but, instead of mounting her, buried my face in the saddle.

"In the sunny South,  
In the far Crimea,  
Lost among high mountains,  
Was a Tartar village." . . .

I lifted my head. It was our company's favorite song.

My horse neighed loudly, recognizing her stable-mates. Unawares, I had overtaken my regiment and was riding only a few hundred feet behind our company. Not wanting our men to see me riding the captain's horse, I dismounted and, leading Dolly by the halter, approached the captain.

Seeing me coming, he stopped and waited for me. For a few minutes we walked without a word. And the company kept on sing-

ing of Ivass, a youthful Cossack who was kept as a war-prisoner in a Tartar village, and of a slender Tartar girl who fell in love with him and helped him to escape. . . .

"I understand you had no chance to see her," the captain broke the silence. "What happened to you?"

I told of the errand I was given by the general and again we walked in silence.

"They say we are going north," said the captain. I did not answer. It made no difference where we were going.

"Sonny," he addressed me, after another pause, "don't you think she is happier over there among her own kin?" Then he added, "And maybe this was the reason they did not move farther to the rear—always waiting for an opportunity to join their people."

I only glanced at him.

"In his own cherry orchards,  
On the bank of Dnieper River,  
Sits Ivass the Cossack youthful  
Thinking of Crimea."

"Sir," I asked the captain, "please make them sing some other song."

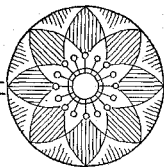
"Kaloogin," he addressed the top-sergeant, "change that song—or better, tell them not to sing at all . . . at all." . . .



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## Writer's Dilemma

Pot-boilers or novels? A novelist, whose works have been critical successes, relates his own experience and considers the place of the writer in the world of to-day.

A FEW years ago there was a newspaperman in his late twenties who felt moved to write a novel. You will at once recognize him as being in that regard just like a thousand other newspapermen. Most young newspapermen are either writing a novel or intending to write one. But this particular reporter differed from a large part of these in that he went ahead and wrote his novel. It took him nearly two years to finish it, and he devoted to it most of his spare time, including Sundays, holidays, and all of one vacation.

He differed also from most beginning novelists in that he had no difficulty in finding a publisher. He had a friend who was a man of weight in the world of books. This friend read the novel and pronounced it good. He took it to his own publisher, and the publisher presently sent the newspaperman a contract.

He still remembers the thrill and shock of that first acceptance and how it seemed to warm him so that on a cold January night he walked with his overcoat unbuttoned and his hat off. Nothing but the first kiss of love can stir the blood as does the first hint of success that comes to any creative effort, and nothing else can beget such a complete illusionment about the future. Had he known what was ahead of him, this man might still have been proud but he would not have been gay.

It was clear to him now that he was no longer a reporter, but an author. Soon he resigned his job and set about the composition of a second book, with no resources except a couple of thousand dollars he had saved.

In due course the first book came out and it was very kindly noticed in the papers. One reviewer somewhat pompously pronounced that even in a day of high achievement this novel was one to be taken seriously. Its author almost fell out of his chair as he read this. He did not take the reviewer as seriously as the reviewer took him, for he was a very modest

man, but for that same reason it raised his blood-pressure merely to see himself thus portentously mentioned in a reputable journal.

No woman was ever more concerned about her first baby than he was about that book. Feeling foolish but irresistibly eager, he hung around in book-stores to see if his book was there, and often found it missing. Whenever he saw any one reading a book in a street-car or a bus, he looked to see if it was his and always found that it was not. It soon became apparent to him that the public was not fighting for the privilege of reading his work, but he was hardly prepared for the news his first royalty statement brought him. It showed that his book had sold sixteen hundred copies and had earned him about two hundred dollars.

Now he began to see that to be an author and at the same time to eat was not a simple matter. Nevertheless, he worked on, somewhat grimly, and finished his second book. When it was done he had only a few hundred dollars and he was weary, with the great and enervating weariness that all writers experience after finishing a book. Nevertheless, he got newspaper work to do and made money, though often he felt as though he were writing in his sleep. While he was so engaged his second book came out, and it was more successful than his first. It got columns of space in the papers and it sold almost four thousand copies. It earned its author about eight hundred dollars—which was about one-third of what it had cost him to write it.

This small return caused him a temporary depression, but he already had an idea for another book and enough money to live in a retired way until it was written. So he went to work again, feeling, like Grant on the Mississippi, that he might as well fight out his battle on one line. Through all of his discouragements and exhaustions he was sustained by an intuition that he could, after all, ask