

# Scribner's American Painters Series

No. 6 — "WHITE-FACED CATTLE," BY HOWARD COOK

FEW artists of our time have so clearly expressed the character of the various parts of this country as Howard Cook. He is keenly aware of what is going on in America today and paints his rural fiddlers, cowboys, baptisms, and landscapes with seriousness of purpose and naturalness. Unlike the favorites of the critics, there is no conscious striving after style in his work, no effort to produce a typical Cook picture or print. Everything is adapted to the particular situation which confronts him, and when he does a sharecropper of the Southeast, there is no mistaking the portrait for anything else.

Born in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1901, he spent part of his youth in farm work and finally came to New York, where he studied for three years at the Art Students League. Most of his ability is the result of application and practical personal experience. In New York, he was drawn to the life of the docks, ships, and city streets. One of the most formative influences in his life was a period of travel and intensive sketching through Europe, the Orient, Asia Minor, and Central America.

Magazine experience came next, with woodcut illustrations for Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, appearing in the *Forum* in 1926. Since then the Guggenheim Foundation has twice awarded him a traveling fellowship, once to Mexico, where he learned the technique of fresco painting, and once for a trip through the United States (1935-36). In 1927 he had his first one-man show in the Denver Art Museum and two years later his first Eastern show at the Weyhe Gallery in New York. Up to this period the bulk of his work had been concerned with woodcuts, lithographs, and etchings. During the past ten years he has extended his activities to water colors, pastels, and fresco murals.

In the course of his second Guggenheim expedition, Cook traveled through the South and the Southeast, particularly Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Alabama, and southern Texas. He says that it was his aim

to find out what made the Kentucky mountaineer different in character from the Texas cowboy, why the natives of Alabama think and feel differently from their brethren in North Carolina. In his last exhibition in New York, Cook proved conclusively that he is both artist and sociologist, for never before have the different sections of America been painted with the searching analytical seriousness that is the reason for his success.

The picture reproduced here, "White-faced Cattle," is part of a group done in Texas. Cook speaks of the "cattlemen, physical giants equaling in grandeur the vast country to which they belong as essentially as the mesquite and prickly pear that cover their desert," but in this sketch the men are subordinated to the imposing geometrical quality of the cattle, a special breed developed in our Southwest. Everything becomes secondary in the face of the vertical architectonic design that the artist has imposed on his composition, while the forms are kept angular to suggest solidity and massiveness.

For five years Cook was represented among the annually chosen "Fifty Prints of the Year." His most recent honors include this year's Architectural League gold medal for a fresco sketch, "Mississippi Stevedores"; first prize in the Philadelphia Print Club show for his woodcut, "Baptism"; a fresco mural in Mexico (1932); two fresco murals in the Springfield courthouse (1934); a Treasury Department fresco in the Pittsburgh courthouse (1936); and the winning of a Treasury Department commission to do a 750-square-foot fresco in San Antonio, Texas. "White-faced Cattle" (reproduced opposite) is to be part of this history of Texas. Considering the impressive list of the things he has done and the far places he has visited and studied, one might expect Cook to be an unusually dramatic or romantic type of individual. Actually, he is a calm, deliberate, and hard-working person who is unusual only in the sense that he thinks with his brush.

*"Scribner's American Painters Series" is edited and supervised by Bernard Myers  
Picture, courtesy Weyhe Gallery, New York*



Howard Chandler Christy 3/5/2000



# Why Do They Read It?

BELLE ROSENBAUM

*Explaining that bewildering American phenomenon, Gone with the Wind — how it changed the reading habits of a nation, why it outsold all best-sellers*

A NATION that presumably has no time for books has found time for a novel that contains only twenty-five pages less than the Sears Roebuck catalogue. When the Pulitzer Prize Committee gave its annual fiction award this year to *Gone with the Wind*, the news was greeted with popular approval. A few critics, and some more exacting persons, had hoped for another choice, but by and large, it was considered a natural and inevitable selection. Millions of satisfied readers nodded approval and smugly felt their enthusiasm vindicated. For the first time a Pulitzer prize has been awarded to a novel with a sales record of over a million copies.

*Gone with the Wind* was published June 30, 1936, and by Christmas of that year it had sold a million copies, setting a record as the fastest-selling volume in history. It is 1037 pages long, and if all the copies sold to date could be piled one upon another, the stack would be two hundred and fifty times taller than the Empire State Building.

The Hollywood producing firm which bought the motion-picture rights has received 100,000 letters suggesting various film stars for the rôles of Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, leading characters in the novel.

A New York taxicab driver has claimed the record for reading the book through in the shortest possible time—eighteen and a fraction hours. The average is a week, though it can easily be done in three days with time out for meals and sleep. If all of the 50,000,000 Americans who are old enough and literate enough to read the book were to follow this procedure, the time expended would amount to 410,000 years, or, in round numbers, infinity.

Nothing like it has ever happened in the publishing industry. *Anthony Adverse*, a forerunner in size and romantic appeal, was a tremendous seller for two years, but it sold a mere 300,000 copies in its first six months and only about 750,000 in three years. The combined books of Joseph Conrad, when he was at the height of his fame, sold a million copies in five years.

A lot of other time—enough if used wisely to under-

stand the relativity theory or discover a cure for cancer—is being spent by critics and publishers to divine the reason for this mass immersion in a story about the South after the Civil War and what happened to certain people whose lives were disrupted and left dangling by the surrender at Appomattox.

In part, it is an ordinary phenomenon of taste. The

Civil War has always been popular as a fiction subject with Americans, because it contains more elements of human drama than any other crisis in the country's history. It set us against each other, and it left the South in the appealing position of a beaten but beautiful foe. The Southerners were charmingly romantic in their perpetuation of the dispute at a higher level. They continued rebellious in spirit, proud and gracious of manner, and dignified among the ruins of their economic system.

But there have been other books about the Civil War and the Reconstruction days. Stephen Crane, without ever seeing a battle, wrote a magnificent story about a young Federal soldier, *The Red Badge of Courage*. It made Crane famous, and it is still a favorite. There were thousands

of other books about the struggle and its aftermath between Crane's book, written in the nineties, and *Gone with the Wind*. Yet these two stand out, and because both writers followed the same method of preparation, it may be that there was method in their system. As a boy, Crane read everything he could lay his hands on that pertained to the War. He lived with a dream of himself as a young soldier. He executed his book with simplicity. Margaret Mitchell did likewise. She lived for seven years with her characters, and she knew them thoroughly, even to the clothes they liked to wear and the foods they liked to eat, and how much money they had in their pockets at any given moment. When she executed her book, she did it with the simplicity of rushing narrative.

Both Crane and Miss Mitchell recognized, perhaps intuitively, that the primary task of a writer—poet, novelist, or playwright—is to tell a story, a story about ordi-

