

THE
Indiana University Bookman

March, 1967

Number 8



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STUDIES
in the
Bobbs-Merrill Papers

Edited by
Edwin H. Cady

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INTRODUCTION

By EDWIN H. CADY

WHEN THE OLD "New Criticism" was fresh and dewy, it was perceived that a useful way to look at works of literature was to pretend that they had no history but existed as "pure" objects. For certain uses of esthetic realization, that "New-Critical" fiction about "absolute" literature was effective; and surely in literary criticism techniques are justified by results. Just as surely, it is sophomoric to raise by generalizing any technique, no matter how useful, to the majesty of law. So, it seems to me, were all the efforts to bar historical considerations from literary study. The attack on "the Intentional Fallacy" was itself a fine example of the fallacy of the unitary generalization.

The foregoing is a technical and academic way of setting the stage to say that when I heard from Professor Robert Mitchner about his adventures with the archives of the Bobbs-Merrill Company, I was envious. When David Randall, Lilly Librarian, told me that the Bobbs-Merrill papers were coming to Indiana University, I was delighted. And when the opportunity offered in the spring of 1965, I declared a seminar on "Problems in the Study of a Literary Archive: The Bobbs-Merrill Papers."

The nine Argonauts who "took" the seminar could be assured that their principal reward would be to learn how to pioneer. Publishers' archives are one of the few remaining virgin frontiers for the student of American literature. Robert Frost is reported to have remarked that he knew a

few people who *said* they were "waste-basket poets" writing for no audience—and that he thought they were liars. Books are written for audiences and reach them through commercial publishers. To understand a work of literature is to be able to read it: perfect understanding is perfect reading. Since one of the best ways to understand anything is to study its growth through a process of origins, works of literature must be understood by way (among many ways) of studying the effects upon their origins of the business of authorship and the business of publishing. A publisher's archive is the uniquely valuable source for such studies.

The one major lack in the Bobbs-Merrill list, unfortunately, was that of a great, standard author. There was no Cather, Dreiser, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, or Faulkner. But to help students get their bearings, one could suggest a set of fascinating general topics for consideration:

1. The Business of Authorship
2. Author and Publisher
3. Author, Publisher's Reader, and Editor
4. The Art of Best-Sellerism
5. International Publishing
6. The Fine Art of Libel Suits
7. Regional Literature
8. Indiana Authors
9. The Historical Romance
10. Travel and the Exotic
11. Biography
12. American History
13. The Civil War
14. Abraham Lincoln
15. Muckraking
16. Redbaiting
17. Whodunits
18. Popular Religion
19. Cook and Etiquette Books

20. Children's Literature
21. Literary History and Criticism
22. The Hack Writer

And a wonderfully diversified selection of authors:

Adams, Samuel Hopkins
Ade, George
Alden, Roberta M.
Atherton, Gertrude
Bacheller, Irving
Barnes, Harry Elmer
Barrymore, John
Barton, Bruce
Baum, L. Frank
Beveridge, Albert J.
Biggers, Earl Derr
Brant, Irvin
Burgess, Gellett
Calverton, V. F.
Casey, Robert J.
Cawein, Madison J.
Chamberlain, G. A.
Chester, G. R.
Cobb, Irving S.
Coffin, R. P. T.
Crabb, A. J.
Crothers, S. M.
Curwood, J. Oliver
Davis, Elmer
di Donato, P.
Earnest, Ernest
Edman, Irvin
Eisenschiml, Otto
Erskine, John
Ferguson, Delancey
Fisher, Dorothy Canfield
Fletcher, I.
Gale, Zona

Gruelle, Johnny
Hahn, Emily
Halliburton, Richard
Harding, B.
Hatcher, Harlan
Hobart, A. T.
Hough, Emerson
Hubbard, Kin
Hueffer, Ford Maddox
Hueston, E.
James, Marquis
Johnson, Robert Underwood
Jones, S. M. ("Golden Rule")
Kroll, H. H.
Lardner, Ring
Lewisohn, Ludwig
MacGrath, Harold
Major, Charles
Mellett, John C.
Merwin, S.
Miller, H. T.
Nathan, Robert
Nicholson, Meredith
Nye, C. F. ("Bill")
Pendexter, H.
Perry, Bliss
Peterkin, Julian
Phillips, David Graham
Phillips, Henry Wallace
Quick, H.
Rand, Ayn
Riley, James Whitcomb
Rinehart, Mary Roberts
Rives, H. E.
Rombauer, I. S.
Salten, Felix
Sangster, Margaret E.
Sedgwick, Henry Dwight

Seitz, Don C.
Sherman, Stuart Pratt
Sousa, John Philip
Stone, G.
Stringer, A.
Styron, William
Sumner, C. R.
Terhune, Albert Payson
Terhune, M. V.
Thompson, Maurice
Thompson, Vance
Webster, H. K.
Whitlock, Brand
Wilstach, Paul
Wiltse, C.

Both lists were at best partial. But armed with them and supported by the active cooperation of the University Librarian, the Lilly Librarian, and the steady assistance of the Lilly manuscript curators, Doris Reed and Elfrieda Lang, the seminar plunged into the woods. Its members had two charges: find a rewarding topic for a seminar paper; as a *quid pro quo* for extraordinary privileges, help the Lilly by arranging the papers as you go.

Dusty in dented, rusty old file drawers, the archival papers consisted of seven main groups: authors' correspondence (forty-five files); promotional material (eighty-six files); autobiographical questionnaires filled out by authors at the promotional department's behest (six files); readers' opinions of manuscripts (twelve files); libel cases (one box); bound volumes (financial records, including royalty reports, minutes, ten volumes of a literary house organ: sixty-four volumes in all); and, inevitably, miscellaneous, three boxes. Predictably, some students found sorting and rationalizing all this for the Library soothing, some found

it exciting, others intolerable. One of the functions of the seminar was to be supportive of tenderfeet at loose in the wilderness of primary research. Other functions were to stimulate imaginations; suggest reading; guide, Socratically or otherwise, budding perceptions; insist stubbornly that there could, there *must* be definite, perhaps original, literary insights. Intellectual work is the hardest kind.

Eventually, as most seminars do, this seminar began to "work." Its members, grubbing in the peculiar dust of old papers, began to see things. They began to talk to each other, to labor side by side, exchanging discoveries. The indispensable, essential work of a true seminar, always done mostly outside of class, began to occur. And when the papers came in, even in early forms, it seemed to me that the best of them might well be published as original contributions to understandings of the authors in question, as examples of what studies in a publisher's archive might bring forth, as a tribute to the publishing firm of whose largess scholars were beneficiaries.

It was fine luck to have Professors Stith Thompson and Robert W. Mitchner, who had contributed generously to the seminar, willing to contribute papers. And it was luck again to find that Thomas D. Clark, our Sesquicentennial Visiting Professor, had Bobbs-Merrill tales to tell, and Professor Louis E. Lambert, a political scientist, had been doing researches of love and nostalgia in the files. These men are great enough to let me thank them for giving us the "grave" of our volume: the students have provided the meat.

EDWIN H. CADY is *Rudy Professor of English at Indiana University.*

AN OFFICE BOY REMEMBERS 1902

By STITH THOMPSON

AS A HIGH SCHOOL BOY in Indianapolis at the age of sixteen in 1902, I found that my late afternoon and Saturday job in a law office demanded a full-time worker and I was no longer needed. Through J. W. Fessler, a friend of my father and a rising young lawyer, and by means of a phone call to his friend, W. C. Bobbs, I was given work in the Bobbs-Merrill shipping room for all my spare time. Some temporary financial reverses of my father made this place very welcome.

In those days the Bobbs-Merrill Company was already a prestigious publishing house, and I found the two years there very important as a part of my education. The Company occupied a four-story building on Washington Street on part of the present site of the L. S. Ayres Company. The first floor was devoted to a store for retail books and stationery—which years later was taken over by W. K. Stewart. As I recall it, this was an extraordinarily large and well-equipped retail house. On the second floor were the editorial rooms where the editor, Hewitt Hanson Howland, presided. We knew him, of course privately, as H.H.H. In the rear of that floor was the shipping room. The third floor was the law department, from which the smell of the sheep-bound books penetrated to the regions below. The fourth story I suppose was storage space, though I avoided the upper regions.

In the shipping room were huge bins each filled with one of the titles then in demand. Soon I was initiated into

the necessary skills—opening great boxes of books that came in from the printers and binders, packing outgoing boxes economically and efficiently and, above all, wrapping bundles properly for shipment. We unwrapped incoming manuscripts before taking them to H.H.H. Some of these were in longhand, occasionally in pencil, and one of the girls in the office spent her time making fair copies before they went out to the referees.

These were the days of the illustrated novel. We would unwrap the large drawings and admire the lovely ladies of Howard Chandler Christie before they went in to the editor.

In due time I received a promotion, not in salary, which remained at five dollars a week, but in prestige, for Mr. Howland had me copy his letters every evening. These letters, typed with copying ribbon, were entered in large, thin paper books and pressed between damp blotting paper. Eventually I became so skillful that I left only the suspicion of a smear. I had curiosity enough to learn some of the secrets of acceptance or refusal of manuscripts.

And I saw something of the authors themselves—not only the Bobbs-Merrill writers but others who dropped in and chatted with the editor. I am not certain of all these, but I seem to remember Meredith Nicholson, Mrs. Mary Hartwell Catherwood, Charles Major, Booth Tarkington, George Ade, Harry Leon Wilson, and James Whitcomb Riley. I recall taking proofs of *The Main Chance* out to Mr. Nicholson and spending an afternoon setting up sectional bookcases for Mr. Riley at his home on Lockerbie Street. Of course I did not get to know these men, but it was at least educational to see them at close range.

Indianapolis was then a very important center for literature, especially when the Crawfordsville group was

added. I heard General Lew Wallace give the dedicatory address for the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. The city felt a most proprietary interest in Riley; and nearly everyone who had any claim to literary taste owned at least one of the special editions of *An Old Sweetheart of Mine* and kept it on the parlor table. At his death in 1916 a line of people two blocks long paid their respects to his remains, which lay in the state house. No one has caught the Indianapolis of my boyhood better than Booth Tarkington—the city of *Seventeen* and *Penrod*, which lay between Meridian and Delaware Streets and Tenth and Sixteenth. But the great ones were moving out, and Mr. Nicholson lived as far away as Thirtieth Street—the Ultima Thule.

Like any great publishing enterprise, Bobbs-Merrill's was a wonderful intellectual stimulus. I read some novels in galley proof, but we could also buy books at a discount—those published by the house at 48 cents and others at 95 cents. And occasionally an unsuccessful edition was dumped into the waste box. I thus acquired a copy of Nicholson's *Short Flights*. But I find to my chagrin that it has disappeared during the moves of sixty-four years.

The career of this great publishing house has been remarkable, for it is one of the very few which has survived the temptation of moving its principal activity to the great Eastern centers. I was especially gratified when I was Dean of the Graduate School to be able to recognize this achievement by the honorary degree we gave to the editor, David Laurance Chambers. His editorship almost spanned the years since I left my duties as office boy.

STITH THOMPSON is *Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of English and Folklore at Indiana University.*

"LIKE THE BRAND WHITLOCK WE ONCE KNEW? HELL, NO."

By JOYCE CHENOWETH

IN THE EARLY 1900's Brand Whitlock wrote groundbreaking political novels dealing with life as he had learned it during years spent as legislative reporter for the *Chicago Herald* in Springfield, Illinois, and as the reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio. In 1913 he took a diplomatic post as Minister to Belgium to have more time for writing. That plan went awry when, six months after he arrived in Brussels, the German army marched into the country. When he returned to writing after the war, he had lost touch with the realities. The books written prior to 1913 were published by Bobbs-Merrill; his postwar work was published by D. Appleton and Company of New York. Somehow the years and Belgium changed Brand Whitlock: the sincere social critic became a conservative, middle-aged diplomat ambitious for fame.

I

Whitlock began with Bobbs-Merrill in 1901. His short stories in magazines had come to the favorable attention of W. D. Howells. Howells arranged for the Harpers to read the manuscript of Whitlock's first novel; but, as Whitlock wrote to Octavia Roberts, they "wanted it all written over into a romantic novel—think of it!" Eventually, it was submitted to another publisher:

I sent it off at once to Bobbs-Merrill; they published *Knighthood*, *Alice of Old Vincennes*, *Lazarre*, etc., you

know, and are the most "hustleful" publishers in the country. My friends in New York, Mr. Howells included, thought I would be fortunate if they took it. One day, the middle of November, the bluest day I ever knew, up to a certain hour in the afternoon, my nerves, every one, were vibrating like tuning forks, and I thought I was going to die, I received a telegram from Bobbs-Merrill—they took the book. I was too ill to go to them, so they sent a man here, a delightful man, Mr. Howland, who was so enthusiastic about the book that I began, I fear, all at once to take myself pretty seriously. Well, we signed the contract, and the book is to come out in the Spring The name, *For Congress*, Jerome R. Garwood, they do not like, and I do not like it very well myself. They wish me to get another name. Could you think of a few for me? I have considered several others, for instance, *Houses of Clay* (see Job 4:19) and then *The Thirteenth District* (Allan Nevins, ed., *The Letters and Journals of Brand Whitlock: The Letters*, p. 35).

The 13th District was published by Bobbs-Merrill in the spring of 1902 and scored an immediate success. The *Chicago Inter-Ocean* (April 6, 1902) said "‘The Thirteenth District’ is a worthy addition to the list of American political novels and ranks with the best of its kind." The *Chicago Tribune* (May 10, 1902) thought that:

Mr. Whitlock might have made a stronger story, perhaps, had he not made the story hinge upon such a constant succession of Congressional campaigns, but this fault is a minor one. The story is one of the best and strongest of the year, and it is important also in the fact that between the lines the reader can discern the promise of stronger and better work to come—and when better and stronger work than *The 13th District* comes it will be good to look upon.

The *New York Times* (May 17, 1902) was less kind: "The immorality of betraying the man who has betrayed the public to send you to the Legislature or the State Senate

or to Congress is the lesson it teaches, if it teaches anything besides the cheap, venial and vulgar methods of our public men." The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (April 24, 1902) saw both good and bad:

As Mr. Whitlock puts good, strong work and plenty into his study of a contemptible man; his invective is forcible, his dialect oaths original, his contrasts of character well marked, he displays first hand knowledge of the machinery of nominating and elective bodies, and his rectitude of judgment is rigid. But the novel does not interest, the character of Garwood has no surprises, and is neither dependent upon nor developed by circumstances.

The novel sold 5,563 copies the first year, earning for its author \$834.60 in royalties. A second novel, *Her Infinite Variety*, did better, selling 9,512 copies the first year and earning \$1,426.80 in royalties. But *The Happy Average*, Whitlock's next novel, sold only 3,079 copies the first year, netting \$461.85 in royalties.

II

Whitlock's greatest success came in 1907 with *The Turn of the Balance*. It sold 11,432 copies the first year, earning \$1,639.80. The involved plot primarily concerns a youth from a poor but honest German family who returns home from the army and drifts into crime. After a year in prison, Archie comes back, only to be persecuted by the brutal detective who had arrested him before. The detective finally is shot and killed by Archie, and the trial forms the center of the book. Each juryman is characterized, especially pompous, pious Broadwell, the foreman. Archie's electrocution is described in precise detail.

The *New York Evening Sun* could not approve the novel: "Its logic is sophomoric, its dialogues wooden, its

climaxes vague and unclimactical, and its thieves' talk unintelligible and, therefore, apparently good dialect." The *Sun's* point about dialect is sound. When Whitlock's thieves talk, it is often impossible to tell what they mean. The *New York Herald* (March 16, 1907) obtusely headlined its review: "Mayor of Toledo Writes Satire on Society and Politics." *The Churchman* (May 11, 1907), published by the Protestant Episcopal Church, called the novel a "powerful but rather indiscriminate indictment of the way society treats its criminals and dependents." Perhaps it was peeved by the clergyman in the book.

The March, 1907, number of *The Reader*, a literary magazine published by Bobbs-Merrill, advertised *The Turn of the Balance* with a picture of the author which it said "looks like an Ogallalla squaw." The copy exulted over "a book of the scope, breadth, and humanitarian impulse of Dickens" and "a great drama made out of the stuff of actual life." The same issue carried a "review" of the book by David Laurance Chambers, Bobbs-Merrill editor, and an article by Brand Whitlock, entitled "Thou Shalt Not Kill." The article argues for the abolition of capital punishment on theological and humanitarian grounds, but from a lawyer's point of view. Whitlock fought long and hard to abolish capital punishment in Ohio. In 1906 and again in 1912 he introduced bills into the legislature abolishing the death penalty; both failed.

Chambers' enthusiam knew no bounds:

To find another who might have written this book one must look to the masters. Surely it is beyond the range of other Americans, and as surely there is no man in England to whom it might be attributed. There was a man in France; one thinks naturally of Zola, but of a Zola with a great tenderness and without sensualism. There is a man in Russia;

one thinks instinctively of Tolstoy—of a New World Tolstoy, whose ideals are under the rein of an American practicality.

The book, he said, "brings terrible charges against society. It charges society with making the reformation of a criminal impossible and absurd." Chambers' words were strangely echoed by the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books* (March 9, 1907): "This book is a sweeping arraignment of American modes of administering justice. It brings terrible charges against society. It charges society with making the reformation of a criminal impossible and absurd."

The Turn of the Balance was attacked by judges, prison officials, politicians, and even one convict as untruthful. It was charged with exaggerating a few injustices into an indictment of the whole judiciary and penal system. These attacks Whitlock refused to answer publicly, but in a long letter to Chambers he detailed the sources of his information, including a visit he himself made, accompanied by Mrs. Whitlock, to the Ohio State Penitentiary at Columbus. Mrs. Whitlock was unable to complete the tour, being of faint heart and sensitive stomach. Bobbs-Merrill published a pamphlet, for distribution to booksellers and other interested parties, entitled *Has Brand Whitlock Told the Truth?* It contained forty-eight statements "For" and twenty-three "Against." These came from senators, congressmen, judges, prison officials, ministers, literary people, and convicts. A federal district court judge wrote, "The author has no words of condemnation for the saloons, the breeders of crime . . . and he seems to have taken pride in displaying his personal and intimate knowledge of their slang language, which it is better for the youth of our country never to know." A U.S. circuit court judge declared:

That our institutions have produced as high a type of civilization as the world has ever known is the best answer to such a hopeless view as Mr. Whitlock takes. The teaching of the book is evil and its circulation can only tend to increase the feeling of the criminal classes that they are unjustly dealt with and strengthen their attitude of resistance to the law and its enforcement.

A state supreme court judge called upon the author "to write a sequel to his book blazing the way to a practical and humane solution of the problems that he deals with that have vexed mankind since the beginning of time."

Not all members of the judiciary were outraged, however. The Chief Justice of the U.S. Court of Claims wrote:

The Turn of the Balance is a piece of realism fresh from a heart that beats with sympathy for those who have little chance in life. . . . The author . . . cries out against the rigor of the criminal law that takes little or no account of the motives or past environment of those charged with crime. It is a lamentable fact that where one has been found guilty of crime the attitude of society toward him lessens if it does not take away hope.

A U.S. circuit judge pointed out that "there is need of reform all around, not only in the law, but in its administration, and if *The Turn of the Balance* impresses that upon the people, it may do good."

Clarence Darrow, whom Whitlock credited with having "first opened my eyes to the truth about 'crime' and 'criminals,'" wrote: (*Letters*, p. 78)

If only the judges would read it, if only the lawyers who have not yet become mere soulless machines would read this book, it would do something at least to soften and nullify the effects of the cruelest, most heartless, misery-breeding fetish that the cumulated ignorance and brutality of the ages have developed—the law and the courts!

An "anonymous ex-convict" stated, "The conditions in prisons are true as described by the author. . . . I have experienced many of the punishments mentioned in the book. The others I know to be true. Any man who has served time in Columbus, Jackson, Michigan City, and most of the other prisons can say the same if they are truthful." However, the warden of the penitentiary at Michigan City said, "If such a prison exists in this day, it ought to be named and its management investigated and reformed." The warden of the Ohio State Penitentiary at Columbus denied all: "If *The Turn of the Balance* pretends to be based on facts, and where in the chapters it refers to the penitentiary, if it means this institution, it is a tissue of falsehoods, and is evidently written by a prejudiced mind." However, Perry D. Knapp, Toledo's Chief of Police, backed up Whitlock: "I advise people who doubt its truthfulness to visit court rooms, police stations and penitentiaries and familiarize themselves with the work of these places, and I am sure they will have no reason to doubt Mr. Whitlock's story."

The opinion of Convict #2656 of the Iowa State Penitentiary differed from that of "anonymous ex-convict":

Seasoned though I am to vice and degradation, my better nature revolted from the gruesome baseness of the stuff. . . . Now if *The Turn of the Balance* affects me—a low-grade criminal—to the vomiting point, figuratively speaking, what, think you, will be its effect on folk whose sensibilities are delicate.

The Inspector of Police in New York City angrily wrote: "If the object of the author . . . is to convert people to anarchy, then I would say his work is a success." But New York's Police Commissioner, Theodore A. Bingham, reported, "*The Turn of the Balance* is all true, ghastly

true. It will certainly give true information to those serious enough to wish to know."

Opinions cited from lights of the literary world were unanimously favorable. Upton Sinclair pronounced it

. . . an extraordinary piece of work. It is simple and natural, as true as life itself, and yet irresistible in its grip upon the reader. I know of nothing with which to compare it except Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, and it is a greater book than *Resurrection*.

Jack London described it as "a splendid book, [which] displays a noble and sympathetic understanding of society, of men and women, and of the mental processes of men and women. It is strong, and it is true. The truth of it makes one weep." Dr. B. O. Flower, editor of *The Arena*, called it "as true to present-day conditions as were the great works of Charles Dickens, which uncovered the evil conditions of London in the nineteenth century." Flower said, "It is a book that would have made glad the heart of the Golden Rule Mayor of Toledo, the noble predecessor of Mr. Whitlock, and he who reads the last pages of *The Turn of the Balance* will realize how deeply the life, example and teachings of Samuel M. Jones have been impressed on the life of the author of this powerful novel."

Whitlock had expected the criticism he got and was gratified, as he wrote to Clarence Darrow, by the sources of what was adverse. In a letter to William C. Bobbs, informing him that the manuscript was on its way, he had explained what from the start he tried to accomplish in *The Turn of the Balance*:

Primarily, I have told this perhaps depressing story purely for the sake of telling a story, that is, with an artistic purpose and with all the art I can command; and secondarily, I have tried to tell the story so the reader, if he has

any powers of deduction and is given at all to the fatal habit of thinking, may draw certain conclusions as to the stupidity and inefficacy—to use no harsher terms—of our so-called criminal system. I hope that the reader may see that our system is no system at all, but a crude, blundering, vicious, capricious, and almost wholly accidental expression of the primitive brute passion of revenge that is still in the hearts of men and society. My hope is that in some small measure this book may serve to accelerate the moral impulse that just now is quickening the social conscience (*Letters*, pp. 60-1).

III

Bobbs-Merrill published five more books by Whitlock during his tenure as Mayor of Toledo: *The Gold Brick* (1910) and *The Fall Guy* (1912); two volumes of short stories; and *On the Enforcement of Law in Cities* (non-fiction, 1913). None was an outstanding success. It is unlikely that the publishers or the author expected high sales of a nonfiction work, but *On the Enforcement of Law in Cities* was the last Whitlock book that Bobbs-Merrill was to publish. In May, 1913, he wrote to William C. Bobbs to discuss the book publication of reminiscences which had been appearing in the *American Magazine*. Whitlock explained that Mr. Howland had written him some time before to ask for the book. Since that time there had come offers from Macmillan, Appleton, and Henry Holt. He had, however, told them all:

That you had always published my books and that I wouldn't do anything that would seem in the least disloyal to you, or to our friendship, and that before I did anything at all in the matter I would have to take it up with you. . . . These other publishers have all said that they thought a book of this sort would do better under their imprints, because they didn't exclusively publish fiction, and they make

a great deal of the English rights. I wish, my dear Will, that you would tell me frankly what you think I ought to do in this matter (*Letters*, pp. 170-71).

Six months later Whitlock wrote to Rutger B. Jewitt, editorial head of D. Appleton and Company, concerning a novel then in the planning stage: "I am quite sure it would interest you." He had evidently decided by this time to give Appleton the book of reminiscences which came out in 1914 as *Forty Years of It*. Friends were by this time trying to secure a diplomatic post for him. He had announced a decision not to run again for mayor in order to devote more time to writing, and he agreed that a quiet diplomatic post would help. On December 2, 1913, he was appointed by President Wilson as Minister to Belgium. As Allan Nevins wrote in his introduction to *The Letters of Brand Whitlock*, "He went to Brussels as Minister, to find in . . . its assured peace [which] was guaranteed by treaties among all of its neighbors, the serenity, repose and leisure which imaginative writing requires." Unfortunately, the Minister had scarcely had time to adjust to this new life when the German army marched into Belgium. Brand Whitlock distinguished himself throughout the war by service to the Belgian people and received their country's highest decorations when the war ended. Literary work was laid aside during these years of crisis.

His new experiences, however, provided him with material for another nonfiction book: *Belgium, A Personal Narrative*. Placing the manuscript was entrusted to Curtis Brown, a leading London literary agent.

An aggrieved Bobbs wrote to Whitlock on December 24, 1917:

I know that you would not have arranged for the publication of your book without offering it to us, and I realize

that you would not have approved Curtis Brown's action unless you thought he had offered it to us. I want you to know, therefore, that the first knowledge we had of it was from the magazine announcements, that the manuscript was not offered to us at all, and that if it had been, we should not have allowed any financial consideration to take it away from us.

But the reply on February 6, 1918, was diplomatic:

The task of writing it was so great, and the details of international publication so complicated that I had to put it into the hands of an agent, and so Curtis Brown disposed of it as you know. He mentioned your name among those publishers whom he expected to consider or approach but I had left it all with him. Please don't bear me any grudge.

Though for this and other reasons relationships between the firm and Whitlock had become less than cordial, in late February or early March, 1920, editor Howland wrote Whitlock to suggest a new edition of *The Turn of the Balance*. Whitlock replied on March 10: "I am delighted with the thought of a new edition of *The Turn of the Balance*. . . . I think probably before it comes out I ought to look it over and change a word or two, here and there. . . . As to the preface, I am willing to adopt any suggestion you may make." But changing a word or two turned out to be a bigger job than Whitlock had supposed. On January 22, 1923, he wrote Laurance Chambers that he hoped to return the corrected copy in a few days. On the same date he told Howland: "Of course if I were to write the story now, I should write it altogether differently if I were to write it at all." If he successfully resisted temptation, it was no doubt due at least partially to lack of time. As he wrote to Howland again on November 20, 1923:

If I had it to do now, I should write it in a different way, but of course I had to decide, and wisely too, that the

thing is done and must stand for good or ill as it is. I therefore only made a few corrections, cutting out some opinions that time had softened and turning a phrase here and there a little differently, but respecting the whole.

In March, 1923, the re-cemented friendship suffered a fatal crack. As Howland wrote to Whitlock, Mr. Bobbs brought "bad news from Summit," where Mr. and Mrs. Whitlock stayed during a trip home to the United States. Evidently Bobbs had visited the Whitlocks and learned that Appleton was to publish Whitlock's new novel, *J. Hardin & Son*. When finally, on November 9, 1923, the corrected copy of *The Turn of the Balance* arrived, Chambers wrote to ask Whitlock: "Aren't you going to supply a preface?" Whitlock did write a preface which arrived at Bobbs-Merrill on June 25, 1924, barely in time to be included in the new edition. (The manuscript of the preface is in the Bobbs-Merrill collection.)

The *Chicago Continent* (December 25, 1924) commented on the new edition that the book "must be still regarded as one of the greatest novels this century has produced." *The Churchman* (December 20, 1924), in an observation which must have cut Howland to the heart, wrote: "Its literary style is very boyish compared to Mr. Whitlock's recent novel *J. Hardin & Son*." W. T. DeWolfe in the *Toledo Bee* (September 20, 1924) declared:

We are of the opinion that Brand Whitlock has the ability to write the great American novel if there is such a thing. We doubt if he will. For it must be a book that will appeal to a great many persons, and must be couched in the simple language of the "plain people." And there has been so much water passed under the bridge and over the dam since those delightful "The Turn of the Balance" days.

DeWolfe had written to Howland on September 12, 1924:

In those days Brand Whitlock was writing real stuff, as he did in "The Thirteenth District." No straining for effect, no plain attempt to use big words, no "titivation," nor "ineluctable," nor "exiguous," as show up in the new preface—just plain English. In his last novel, . . . "J. Hardin and Son," I picked out a list of 100 words of that class that, I believe, not one in a thousand would understand. Brand can write like the devil, but he isn't going to write the great American novel of which I believe he is capable until he buries his flair for "high Brow" and comes to earth to us "ordinary brows" with two dollars in our hands.

Howland replied:

You are dead right about Brand, I am sorry to say. Between us, Belgium has worked an amazing change in him. He has lost the common touch, been completely de-democratized, politically, socially, and literarily. I wouldn't confess this to anybody else in the world, for I love Brand, just the same. But his chance of writing the great American novel is, I'm afraid, gone forever. He won't be able to bury his flair for highbrow stuff, and the longer he stays away from Toledo the less likely is the interment to occur. What a pity it is. He writes me: "I am delighted with the looks of the book and feel you have done me proud indeed; your introduction was quite charming and ever so stylish." I ask you, does "ever so stylish" sound like the Brand Whitlock we once knew? Hell, no.

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EMERSON HOUGH: "MERRY CHRISTMAS. SUED YOU TODAY."

By JOHN H. MILLER

"I LEFT THE Bobbs-Merrill Company in 1913, suing them at that time for breach of contract. They are a strange bunch down there—having no earthly regard for their spoken or their written word. They will put any author in the poor house who sticks to them." So wrote Emerson Hough to John S. Phillips, editor of *The American Magazine*, four years after his break with Bobbs-Merrill (June 15, 1917, Phillips collection, Lilly Library). The first ten, however, of the twelve years Hough spent on the house list of the Indianapolis firm had been profitable and mutually cordial. Hough's quarrel with Bobbs-Merrill, which began in 1912 after his *John Rawn* died a quick, expensive death in book store windows, was primarily the result of a physical, financial, and psychological crisis in Hough's life. It made him change both his purpose in writing and his publisher. On the other side of the quarrel stood a firm gradually losing faith in Hough's ability to create profitable manuscripts as he became a personal nuisance.

If anything, the fact was that Bobbs-Merrill found Emerson Hough close to the poor house and put him in a Surf Street apartment. *The Mississippi Bubble* (1902), his first and most successful Bobbs-Merrill (then Bowen-Merrill) title, was partly written at home between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. and partly dictated at the Chicago office of *Forest and Stream*, where he had worked since 1889.

Hough was already forty-five years old and was filling out his \$15 a week salary with newspaper work and syndicated articles on conservation and the outdoors. Although he had published three books which made no money, *The Story of the Cowboy* had received the public praise of Theodore Roosevelt. The three books were *The Singing Mouse Stories*, New York, Forest and Stream Publishing Co., 1895; *The Story of the Cowboy*, New York, Appleton, 1897; and *The Girl at the Halfway House*, New York, Appleton, 1900.

I

Hough had two reasons for bringing *The Mississippi Bubble* to Indianapolis instead of to his former publisher, D. Appleton and Co. of New York. The first was the advance against royalties Bowen-Merrill was offering promising authors. This advance was to become the sore point of his later law suit against the Company in 1913. The second reason was the extensive illustrated newspaper and periodical advertising Bowen-Merrill was pioneering. Such publicity would not only sell books but also spread his reputation, helping him to sell short stories and sketches in the periodical market.

The Mississippi Bubble, which out-romanced the other famous historical romances of the time, was a smash hit. A reviewer in the *New York Evening Sun*, June 13, 1902, wrote: "Mr. Emerson Hough only followed the prevailing fashion when he selected a historical personage and a great historical event around which to build his romance. . . . But, unlike the run of such novels, this one has for a hero a personage whose career was more wonderful and whose personality was more interesting than could be imagined by those who rely simply on their imagination for plot and incidents and characters." It placed fourth on the best-

seller list of 1902 and earned Hough \$11,640.15 in its first year, \$16,597.93 in all. He was never to do so well again, although two other successes in the same genre brought Hough over \$6,000 each—*54-40 or Fight* (1909) and *The Purchase Price* (1910).

When sales of *The Mississippi Bubble* promised to establish Hough as a best-selling author, the publicity department at Bobbs-Merrill compiled his biography. After boasting of his hunting prowess and his having read over three hundred volumes as background for his book, the staff writers described their subject: "Mr. Hough is five feet nine in height, weighs about 160 pounds, is nervous in temperament, emphatic in opinions, and a very fair exponent of the strenuous life. He is a business man as well as writer, and gravely regrets that he did not either remain a cow puncher or learn to be a worker in iron." Hough's nervous temperament was to bring him to the verge of a breakdown in ten years. And emphatic in opinions he certainly was, as his novels began to show. His central dogma was that nature is the source of American democracy, religion, and heroic character. He glorified the West, especially the frontier, to which he returned continually as a setting for nostalgic, idealized historical romances. Such cultural primitivism made Hough critical of a society which he saw as flabby, corrupt, and undemocratic because it was either ignoring or destroying nature. The public was eager for Hough's sugar-coated pills, especially when they idealized the past of America and implied a not too specific condemnation of the present. After all, this was the era of Theodore Roosevelt, Hough's avowed political hero, who had captured the popular imagination as an exponent of conservation and the strenuous life.

For ten years the management at Bobbs-Merrill cajoled, flattered, and coaxed Hough through brief spats over money. When he visited Indianapolis, it paid his hotel bills. It purchased the rights to his first book, *The Singing Mouse Stories*, and brought out a fancy edition with almost no hope of recovering its investment except through good will. Hough and William C. Bobbs, President of the Company, developed a friendship beyond the jovial camaraderie Bobbs-Merrill habitually cultivated with authors. Bobbs helped Hough with business investments, advised him on the stock market, and tried to sell off certain worthless books of abstracts Hough owned in Chickashaw, Oklahoma.

Emerson Hough could not write a big-selling book again until early in 1909, when he repeated the formula of *The Mississippi Bubble in 54-40 or Fight*, the first of a projected trilogy on American democracy to be dedicated to progressive political leaders. When advertisements appeared for the new book, Bobbs-Merrill ran bold face type through the centers of its displays: "Dedicated to President Roosevelt." The main idea, that it is the manifest destiny of our country to expand over the entire North American continent, was obviously Rooseveltian.

That Hough took the theme of these novels seriously was still more evident in his next book, *The Purchase Price*, published in the fall of 1910. Dedicated "To Hon. Albert J. Beveridge—A Progressive in the Cause of Actual Freedom," this second part of the trilogy came out only a few weeks before Beveridge, supported by the Roosevelt faction of the Republican Party, was defeated in the Indiana senatorial election. Its thesis that the Compromise of 1850 was an injustice because it sacrificed principle to party was clearly applicable to the split in the Republican ranks. *The*

Purchase Price remained good romance, not sermonizing; its reviews and advertising ignored all but the broadest of political implications. But when Hough wrote to Beveridge, October 4, 1910, to thank him for permission to use the dedication, he emphasized his purpose and method:

I am tickled down to the ground to have your hearty telegram this morning. I only wish my book were better, just as I wished that "54-40" was better when President Roosevelt was good enough to let me dedicate that book to him. I am sure that both you and he, however, would realize that novel writing is not much good unless it has novel reading connected with it, and to get readers you must sometimes sacrifice a part of the very sermon you really want to preach . . .

Indeed—although I and a good many others may seem rather youthfully radical—I don't believe that the split in the Republican party can be or ought to be patched up. I believe it ought to be widened, and that the break ought to be permanent. I believe we need and must have a new party before we can achieve any actual victory. We have got to break the eggs, but by the Lord Harry! we have got to have this omelette made. There is as much need now for the birth of a new party as there was at the time in which the scenes of this novel are laid. Compromise today is just as hopeless and as ruinous as it was in those days.

Hough proposed that the writers of America establish a periodical, call it *The Insurgent*, and get out "on the stump." Beveridge might have smiled to read that writers with much bigger names than Hough's were actively supporting him in a losing fight. Novelist Winston Churchill, whose historical romances with political overtones topped the best-seller lists for over a decade, was actively campaigning. David Graham Phillips and Robert W. Chambers were friends and supporters.

It is not clear how much Bobbs-Merrill encouraged Hough in these covertly political novels. When Hough sug-

gested the Beveridge dedication, they approved it without much comment. It is true, however, that Beveridge became a Bobbs-Merrill author shortly after his defeat, developed a close friendship with William C. Bobbs, and ran for the Senate once again in 1922 at the urging of members of a "militant organization" that sometimes met in the office of the President of Bobbs-Merrill.

II

Thus, at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Hough was making good money, not only from novels but also from investments in stocks and land. He tended to be smug about money and his ability to get it without compromising his ideas. In an autobiographical piece for promotion of *The Purchase Price*, he wrote:

Money does not seem to mean success or to bring happiness, so far as I can see. Each Fellow ought to want to do something, and money ought to mean only the opportunity to work out one's own personal equation to the last figure. A few dollars more, and I will have a hundred thousand, and that latter is all I want, because then I can take time and write one book or so, which I cannot write now.

In 1910 that was a lot of money.

In spite of wealth, Hough complained about royalties; he threatened that he could "go to practically any eastern publisher that I like." Hewitt Hanson Howland, the chief editor, usually explained that the firm's regular rate was 10 per cent and that good business policy did not permit higher royalties, but not always. Businesslike, dapper, cajoling Howland sometimes got tired of complaints. On May 11, 1913, Hough wrote to Bobbs, "Two years ago Hewitt,—when I was complaining about royalty receipts, as usual!—told me the time would come when discontented authors

would not find it so easy to get their books printed; and last January, when I brought all my stuff down to you, he said, rather grouchy as it seems to me, that we would get the stuff all together so I could take it all to another house if I liked." However, as Hough kept pointing out, bickering was between businessmen and ought not affect friendly relations. Howland still closed his notes "Affectionately yours"—albeit rather lamely when he rejected a Hough manuscript in March, 1913. That one book Hough yearned to write when he had made his hundred thousand was probably *John Rawn* (1912). The last volume of the trilogy, it sacrificed very little sermon to attract readers. Hough was sure it would not sell. Instead of being set in the romantic past, *John Rawn* told of a corrupt Chicago tycoon of 1912. The primary issue between Wilson and Roosevelt, both progressive candidates in that presidential year, was monopolies, and *John Rawn*, which concerns the attempt of a financier to monopolize the power sources of the United States, is clearly pro-Wilson propaganda. So no one could miss the point, Hough dedicated it "To Woodrow Wilson, One of the Leaders in the Third War of American Independence." This book said what he really thought. "I presume the novel would sell better if it had a pleasanter ending," Hough wrote to Laurance Chambers of Bobbs-Merrill. "I told you, however, that I intended to let this book write itself for once, and it did." And a day later he wrote Elia W. Peattie: "Your letter is very welcome to me and makes me feel as though I was paid in writing a book which possibly will not be a financial success. . . . Mostly, documents do not sell as novels."

Howland and Chambers were less pessimistic. Their letters spoke praise as ever, and they sent Hough his regular

\$2,500 advance with the contract. At Hough's suggestion, advertisements quoted the review in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: "It is a progressive novel—one of the little voices of the era. *You would better read it, for it will teach you something.*" Surrounding this were up to a dozen texts of commendation from progressive politicians and public men who had received advance copies from the publicity department.

Reviews were mixed, but even the most favorable gave only qualified approval, and that usually for message rather than writing. For example, the personally informed Mrs. Elia W. Peattie wrote, March 30, 1912, in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*:

It is apparent almost from the outset that here is no bid for popularity. In this violent, often repellent book there throbs a sort of patriotic anguish. . . .

The tale itself never assumes quite the accent of verity. It will seem like a parable. . . .

Other reviews accused Hough of seeing America as totally corrupt, of being a socialist and un-American. Chafing under criticism, he defended himself in a lengthy piece for the *New York Times*, April 7, 1912, titled prophetically, "Why Authors Go Insane." "The first of these three books was dedicated to Theodore Roosevelt, then President of the United States," Hough wrote. "He ceased to be President soon after. The next was dedicated to the Hon. Albert J. Beveridge—who soon thereafter lost his seat in the United States Senate. Perhaps Gov. Wilson shuddered when he saw this dedication—I don't know. All the author can know about it is that he did not try to do anything pretentious, but did the very best he knew how." Wounded by critics, Hough seems to be backing away, denying that his work is serious. There is a note of sorrow, almost

futility, in the article. Governor Wilson did not lose the election, of course, but *John Rawn* lost its fight for popularity. It sold just enough—slightly over twenty thousand copies—to require Bobbs-Merrill to advance another \$2,500 under the terms of the contract. Then sales stopped, and the royalties actually earned totaled \$1,917.77 less than Hough had received in advances. By mid-1913 Hough felt ethically, though not legally, in debt to Bobbs-Merrill for almost two thousand dollars.

III

Normal procedure for liquidating such debts was to publish a popular fifty-cent edition. Although royalties on these were only $2\frac{1}{2}\%$, the volume of sales could usually be counted upon to bring in several thousand dollars. This way Hough had finally earned almost seven thousand dollars on *The Purchase Price*. But Hough hated popular editions, mainly because he felt that he should receive at least 10 per cent rather than the 5 per cent that was standard at Bobbs-Merrill. When he refused to accept less than 10 per cent on a popular edition of *John Rawn*, the publishers decided to get tough.

Now difficulties with Bobbs-Merrill became only a part of Hough's general feeling of failure. On December 12, 1912, he wrote to Howland: "For many months I have not been very happy in my work. The returns of my list seem disconcertingly small this last year. But so much of our mental makeup is physical that maybe I am just tired. At least I hope so. I have lost considerable time this summer, but have got the old mill started once more." The old mill may have been started again, but it creaked audibly. The same refrain sounds again and again through letters

of the next few months. Business investments were going sour. Hough had been lashed by the critics for a book which said plainly what he had been concealing in romance for years. He had been working so hard that his health was going bad.

Worst of all, his manuscripts were being turned down by magazines, and the man who had boasted three years before that he had almost a hundred thousand dollars was beginning to be "scared about the future for Mrs. Hough." His nervous illness got worse when readers at Bobbs-Merrill advised rejection of *The Lady and the Pirate*, which no one accused of too serious a purpose, and Howland wrote that the house wanted to reconsider the matter of advances. "How are we going to safeguard the investment?" he asked. "I can't see it myself. I don't believe it sound business. The situation absolutely doesn't warrant it" (April 19, 1913). Hough's reply the next day was nearly the cry of a beaten man:

Dear Hewitt:

As perhaps you know, I have been ailing for some time, & this spring on the verge of a breakdown. I need *rest* & above all freedom from worry. Your letter comes like a sort of blow on the head, & I am not in shape to answer it now. I have been waiting a long time, for good news, from Indianapolis.

Tomorrow I am going to a friend's in the country. When I come back in a few days I want to see Mr. Bobbs. My plans must be made before long so I can go north all well & not worry. It is killing me.

According to Bobbs, when Hough came down to Indianapolis early in May, "He begged with tears in his eyes that I take up for personal review the judgment of our editors, claiming that the readers had been influenced by the per-

sonal antagonism of the Chief Editor and laying the utmost stress upon the importance to him to have the book published at once" (Bobbs to Gale Blocki, January 24, 1914). Bobbs agreed to look at the book immediately, since Hough was leaving for the Yukon to try to recover his health. Upon reading the manuscript, Bobbs opted for publication and talked to Hough in Chicago by telephone on May 20, the day before he left for Canada.

Hough's mind was somewhat confused, as letters of this period show. He either did not understand Bobbs' intention or Bobbs left the publication date vague. In Canada Hough quarreled with his host and wrote a check for his expenses that almost destroyed his bank balance. Trying hard to keep himself under control, he returned to Chicago in early September and found that *The Lady and the Pirate*, which he thought full of printers' errors, was already in the book stores. He had no contract and no advance. The book was to be a moderate success in spite of poor printing. Hough had quit trying to save the country, as a promotional release put it, and produced a purely frivolous comedy. But it was to be a long time before Hough got any of the royalties which he now needed merely to satisfy creditors.

Bobbs apparently was trying to force Hough to make up for the *John Rawn* deficit somehow, preferably by granting permission to publish cheap editions of his Bobbs-Merrill titles at a 2½¢ royalty. Bad feeling grew both in Chicago and Indianapolis as one delay followed another. Hough finally got his contract late in October for the regular 10 per cent and advance, but the check did not arrive in spite of repeated complaints and pleas. On November 12, 1913, Bobbs traveled to Chicago to bargain with Hough. "After

a prolonged and painful interview, in which Hough was extremely violent," Bobbs reported, "I accepted a proposal which he made for a settlement not because it was adequate, but because his condition made further negotiations impossible, and said to him that on receipt of a letter from him setting out his proposal as he had then made it to me, I would send him a check for the \$2,500. His letter bore so little resemblance to his proposition that the only charitable view of the matter was that he did not know in the morning what he had said the night before" (Bobbs to Blocki, January 21, 1914). The letter from Hough admitted to a deficit of only one thousand dollars, rather than two thousand, and consented to a popular edition of *John Rawn* of only forty thousand copies. After this, all pretense of cordiality was dropped. On December 26, 1913, Bobbs received a telegram which read: "Merry Christmas. Sued you today."

As Gale Blocki, Bobbs' Chicago lawyer, pointed out, Bobbs-Merrill had little chance of winning. Hough was under no legal obligation to make up for the advance on *John Rawn*, and holding up the stipulated advance on *The Lady and the Pirate* was a breach of contract (Blocki to Bobbs, January 23, 1914). Blocki urged Bobbs to settle the matter out of court and to visit Hough once more, but Bobbs declined to do business with a mad man. In addition, Bobbs-Merrill was negotiating to sell some of Hough's books to the motion picture industry, and Hough was beginning to declare that his movie rights had not been forfeited when he agreed to split dramatic rights with his publisher. Bobbs felt that this contention might jeopardize movie rights in all the contracts that belonged to the house.

In April, 1914, Blocki finally worked out an agreement, out of court, much in Hough's favor. Hough received an immediate check for \$1,500 and the motion picture rights to all his books. The *John Rawn* deficit was to be made up from 5 per cent royalties on cheap editions of *John Rawn* only, which was not very likely almost two years after original publication. Blocki consoled Bobbs with the information that Hough's lawyers were getting two thousand dollars a month for their services (Blocki to Bobbs, April 2, 1914).

Hough ultimately established a lucrative new relationship with D. Appleton and Co. His work appeared regularly in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Covered Wagon* (1922) became one of the most popular motion pictures produced up to that time. Hough never repaired his friendship with Bobbs or the house. His royalties from Bobbs-Merrill averaged five dollars a year, and he kept protesting through his lawyers until he purchased his plates and rights in 1919. For the rest of his life a quarrel which was partly their fault, but largely his own, made him think of Bobbs-Merrill as that "strange bunch down there" in Indianapolis.

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MEREDITH NICHOLSON: THE QUEST FOR A LITERARY IDEAL

By JUDITH LEAS EVERSON

MEREDITH NICHOLSON's literary career, which spanned forty years and won him the title "Dean of Hoosier Letters," suggests contrasts. A high school dropout at fifteen, he found time between odd jobs to write poetry which won praise from James Whitcomb Riley, Lew Wallace, and sister authors, Mary Hannah and Caroline Krout, from Nicholson's birthplace, Crawfordsville. Undaunted by the typical sales of his slim sheaf, between 1891 and 1929 Nicholson persisted to write nineteen novels, five collections of essays, two biographies, and a book of short stories. During thirteen of those years, 1903-16, eight of his titles graced national best-seller lists. Yet a generation later the "tall sycamore" of Indiana literature was out of print everywhere—the penalty, he supposed, for becoming "a classic" in his own time.

Like other neoromantic novelists, Nicholson had been warned by critics that pandering to popular taste would severely limit the worth of his work. Throughout his literary years, however, Nicholson wavered between viewing literature as a pleasant way to make money and considering it as a serious art. Admittedly fond of the tangible fruits of best-sellerism, he also longed for an artistic fulfillment which he associated with the realistic movement. The resulting confusion of goals is revealed not only in Nicholson's published work but to a significant degree in

his letters and other archival materials in the Bobbs-Merrill collection. Nicholson was a delightfully frank and engaging correspondent. His hundreds of letters in the Bobbs-Merrill collection contain fascinating references to literature, politics, history, and diplomacy. This paper proposes to trace the contrast between his literary goals, especially as this dualism influenced his "realistic" period.

I

From the beginning of his career as a professional writer, Nicholson remained uncertain about a proper literary direction. Aware of gaps in his self-education, he lacked that easy confidence which had prompted Riley to promise: "As to your appointed high place in the literary galaxy, you have but to go and occupy it" (*Letters of James Whitcomb Riley*, ed. William Lyon Phelps, p. 231). In one of his earliest poems, "Striving," Nicholson expressed, perhaps for the first time, his internal conflict between artistic vision and literary achievement, a dilemma which would distress him even more when he tapped the resources of the romantic novel during the golden age of Hoosier literature.

Neither his first novel (*The Main Chance*, 1903) nor his second (*Zelda Dameron*, 1904) prepared Nicholson for the resounding success of his third, a romantic mystery entitled *The House of a Thousand Candles*, published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1905. Freed from financial cares by a wealthy wife, spurred by the success of the popular *Prisoner of Zenda*, and convinced that romance could be transplanted profitably to Hoosier soil, Nicholson conceived the plot one evening while shaving and wrote the novel in seven months ("Secrets of Greatness of Two Indiana Authors," *Indian-*

apolis Star, December 6, 1908). This American best-selling mystery, later adapted to stage and screen, sold well over 250,000 copies in the United States and entertained readers in six foreign languages. But his sudden fame, however gratifying to Bobbs-Merrill, rather embarrassed Nicholson, who rationalized the novel's superficial melodrama by explaining ruefully that *Candles* was at least clean and cheerful. Most reviewers regretted that the book offered so little and predicted that such froth would never hold a place in literature. Try though he might to persuade the public that his "tallow-dripping saga" was not his only cultural contribution, Nicholson never surpassed *Candles* in sales and never outlived the best-seller notoriety it gave him.

Having learned that romances were easily written and were well received by women, the "great book buyers and book readers," Nicholson quickly composed three more, none so delightful to the public, but all as irritating to the critics, as *Candles*. Perhaps a sharp drop in sales combined with steadily negative reviews helped him begin to see best-sellerism as a "dark and unholy thing." At any rate, in 1909 he published in the *Atlantic Monthly* his anonymous apology for romance. Professing that better tales would require "harsher garb" and hopeful that he was ready to climb the less accessible literary slopes, Nicholson promised to join the realists in their attempt to serve the best literary interest of the time.

The same year he issued a first semirealistic novel, *The Lords of High Decision*, in which greed, poverty, pride, alcoholism, and divorce come to a happy ending in Pittsburgh. Although such "ignoble" material depressed the author's friend, George Edward Woodberry, others felt that

Nicholson had merely repeated his best-seller formula. Critics had expected more from his serious work and agreed that his talent still exceeded his discipline.

A second essay at realism, *A Hoosier Chronicle* (1912), more clearly marked Nicholson's trial transition from frivolous entertainer to earnest artist. Although this regionalist description of political, social, and cultural Indiana became Nicholson's favorite among his own works, it enjoyed less popularity than his romances and failed of solid critical acclaim. Understandably disappointed, Nicholson scoffed at accusations that he had begun writing "problem novels" to make money. As he countered, the easiest way to win a fortune was to "do the Pollyanna stuff." Caught between a desire to join better literary company and a revulsion at what he considered realistic cynicism and sordidness, Nicholson eventually concluded: "I never had any business toying with realism. I should have remained among the romantics with one leg in the door of the whimsicals" (Nicholson to Chambers, May 4, 1935).

Indeed, when his serious fiction is compared to the variety of authentic realistic hues presented by Howells, Crane, Cather, and James, it is clear that Nicholson had never been truly affiliated with the literary movement he now rejected. His recurrent themes and techniques had been decidedly romantic: the sudden loss and miraculous recovery of fortunes, impossible coincidences, frequent use of aliases and disguises, black and white characterization, breezy style, the inevitable triumph of respectability, and the blatant idealization of the common man. Why had Nicholson been unable to join the realists he respected in the writing of serious fiction of which he could be proud?

II

Nicholson certainly possessed the knowledge of his region necessary to portray it realistically. Furthermore, he believed that the writer's prime obligation was to scrutinize the unique material in his environment. These two factors contributed to the best work Nicholson produced. Ironically, they also hindered his efforts as realist. Nicholson understood his region too well to separate himself from it emotionally. He loved Hoosiers too well to expose their frailties or "draw them in caricature." Freely admitting their peculiar faults—stubbornness, complacency, naiveté—he preferred to describe Hoosier virtues—curiosity, cheerfulness, common sense. In his sympathetic treatment of the farmer and his righteous defense of Main Street, Nicholson demonstrated the depth of his provincialism while he added to the literature of local color. Ever loyal to what he considered his duty—the defense of Hoosiers from smug cosmopolitans—Nicholson seldom took his neighbors for what they were. In print he glorified them. His most popular novel revolves around a grandfather who teaches his heir to appreciate the beauties of Indiana. And his most ambitious novel concludes with a hearty affirmation of his faith in the "folks": "It's all pretty comfortable and cheerful and busy in Indiana, with lots of old-fashioned kindness flowing 'round; and it's getting better all the time" (*A Hoosier Chronicle*, p. 606).

Unbridled optimism typified Nicholson's fiction. Even would-be realistic novels featured happy endings, often at odds with their content and development. And therein lay experience which had not re-enforced a shallow philosophy of life. His essays and correspondence reveal a mind deeply

concerned with cruelties, injustices, and inconsistencies, just as his civic activities demonstrated his determination to deal with "realities." Yet despite his awareness of hypocrisy, corruption, and stupidity around him, Nicholson seldom used the novel to protest. On more than one occasion he argued that the world suffered from too much criticism. He defended this outlook in a letter to David Laurance Chambers of Bobbs-Merrill: ". . . I don't see much use in Herrick or Dreiser. Awhile back some one writing of novels in the *Atlantic* called a bunch of us . . . sentimentalists. Well, I'd rather be just that than a writer of gory tales . . . whose whole attitude toward life is hard and cynical" (June 4, 1914). Rejecting the pessimism of more sober realists, Nicholson felt obligated to resolve happily the problems posed in his novels. This not only limited the topics he could treat but also the manner in which he could treat them.

Unlike many minor writers of the day, Nicholson never deceived himself about his work. Instead of veiling his insecurity with arrogance, he openly regretted that his style kept him from pleasing the "fit though few." Better than his harshest critics, Nicholson knew that the "books . . . read by everybody six months ago are read by nobody to-day" ("Current Fiction," *Indianapolis Journal*, April 23, 1899). For his novels' immediate popularity, he offered a timid explanation: "There are not enough novels of the first order." For their ultimate lack of value, he also knew the cause: ". . . my talent is so slender." Believing himself the "worst living author" and his books "poor candidates for oblivion," Nicholson was unable or afraid to improve his art by experiment and innovation. Although he tried

to "forge on into the seas where it is Art for all time," he recognized that most of his work had no lasting merit. His best-sellers cheered millions during the muckraking era, World War I, and the Red Scare; but their harmless escapism revealed an author unable to grapple successfully with the dilemmas of his day.

Critics who urged him to write for posterity dealt Nicholson's ego another blow. While churning out commercial novels, he appeared relatively oblivious to reviews. He did not take his first novels seriously and hardly expected that the critics would. When compared to Howells and Stevenson, he blushed, replying that false praise did more damage to writers than unjust criticism. But with his attempt to create lasting fiction, Nicholson developed a painful sensitivity to negative reviews, so much so that he once told a favorable critic: "It's a blamed pleasant experience . . . to be written of . . . as though you were not a common blackguard" (quoted in Robert C. Holliday's *Broome Street Straws*, 1919, p. 184). Further evidence of his disappointment at the cold response to his realism can be found in his letters to Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's: "I didn't quite understand the coldness of the critics [regarding *Broken Barriers* and/or *Hope of Happiness*]. . . . It is an idea of mine that America needs to know herself; and my picture was certainly honest" (March 24, 1923; Nicholson collection, Indiana State Library). Bewilderment changed to Hoosier defensiveness in a later letter: "Most of the newspaper criticism is influenced by . . . Bolsheviki, who see only the Sherwood Anderson School and knock everything that looks like cornbread American stuff" (to Perkins, November 17, 1923; Nicholson collection, Indiana State Library).

III

As negative reviews cut at his pride, the comparatively low sales of his realistic novels removed him from the best-seller lists only a decade after his reign there. Accustomed to a comfortably high standard of living, Nicholson found the cut in his royalties discouraging and, in view of earlier triumphs, insulting. In 1911 he temporarily left Bobbs-Merrill. Of his "realistic" works Doubleday published *Lords of High Decision*; Houghton-Mifflin handled *A Hoosier Chronicle*, *Otherwise Phyllis*, and *Proof of the Pudding*; and Scribner's released *Blacksheep! Blacksheep!*, *Broken Barriers*, *Hope of Happiness*, and *And They Lived Happily Ever After!* Although *Hoosier Chronicle* sold reasonably well for a while, none of these novels cleared much profit for the houses or the author. Correspondence between Nicholson and Perkins reveals the writer's attitude about the disappointing sales: ". . . it is with sincere regret that I . . . have decided to give this MS [*Cavalier of Tennessee*] to the Bobbs-Merrill Company. . . . I was not satisfied that your sales department did the best that could have been done with my later books" (October 8, 1927; Nicholson collection, Indiana State Library). Four months later he had decided that the unprofitable results of his realistic venture had been partly his own fault, for he sent Scribner's a \$500 check to cover the balance against him (Nicholson to Scribner's, February 23, 1928; Nicholson collection, Indiana State Library).

When he entered the diplomatic service in the deep depression year of 1933, Nicholson faced still more severe financial strains. As he confessed to Chambers: "I am in such straits that I would welcome an offer from you for

my rights in everything, including Eternal Salvation" (August 24, 1932). On another occasion he commented: "It is the prospect of a little mazuma that makes it possible for me to throw kisses to my creditors" (Nicholson to Chambers, 1932). Again in 1935 he admitted: ". . . The cost of living in this charming post is most altitudinous" (May 4, 1935).

Despite his sobering financial situation, Nicholson could not now respond to Chambers' repeated pleas that he do another book. Perhaps the death of his first wife, the rigors of diplomatic service in three countries, and a divorce from his second wife had eroded his literary impulse. But his self-doubts, regional loyalty, incurable optimism, and unclear understanding of realism, combined with negative reviews and low sales, had also been strong factors in limiting his effectiveness and in ending his literary life. He had won reputation and riches as a romanticist; but, "cursed with ambition," he had tried to write something of lasting merit (to Prof. Beers, May 23, 1906). Failure would have been less frustrating if he had not known earlier the thrill of success and if he had not seen clearly the gulf between his work and his vision.

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THE SALAMANDER: FICTION AND FASHION

By BARRY NOVICK

IN 1914 the Bobbs-Merrill Company, seeing the potential of the ever-growing feminist controversy, bought from *McClure's* the book rights (along with the illustrations) to Owen Johnson's eighth novel, *The Salamander*. The series in *McClure's* ran from August, 1913, through June, 1914. Illustrations were by Everett Shinn. The first installment contained Johnson's sociological foreword to the novel in which he explains his reasons for, and some of the problems involved in, writing the novel. The salamander, a mythical creature which could live in fire unharmed, represents the new American woman who, with increased economic and social freedom, was able to indulge an insatiable curiosity for life without penalty. As if inspired by this concept of immunity, the publisher promoted the novel virtually without regard to cost. In a year the book sold some 76,000 copies; for six months it appeared on best-seller lists. It had the distinction of being parodied in *Vogue* and *Smart Set*; it created a new woman's fashion, was dramatized for the stage less than half a year after its publication, and ultimately was made into a motion picture.

I

In the copious promotional file of Bobbs-Merrill, one sees the complexity of producing a book for the mass reading public. Illustrations got particular attention in repeated

attempts to catch the delicately slender and graceful figure of Dore (or "Dodo") Baxter, Johnson's "salamander," while preserving the aura of freedom pervading her person. Two different images finally emerged. The first, and most popular, was a figure of wholesome innocence and youth unlikely to escape unscathed from the flames her zest for life have kindled. With a subtle touch of the chameleon, her right foot is extended, revealing a good part of her leg; her dress is a relatively narrow skirt with a Russian peasant blouse. Her head is tilted slightly, with the face almost undelineated except for two large eyes, an inkling of the nose, slightly rouged cheeks, and small, red lips. The second figure has a more sinister look; her face is more detailed. She is less the coquette and more the demirep—for one who had not read the novel a more appropriate figure to point up the advertising copy.

Successful advertising can be no better illustrated than by the firm's handling of prepublication promotion (before blurbs from reviews could be used). Exploiting the public nose for controversy—controversy the novel was sure to arouse—the early promotion aimed to create antagonism in groups on both sides of the "woman question." Then, a month in advance of publication, copies were sent to leading feminists and antifeminists with requests to voice opinions. To reach the public at large, press releases were prepared bearing a gamut of titles, including "Johnson. Feminist or Anti-Feminist," "How Owen Johnson Happened to Write the Salamander," "Owen Johnson: What Sort of Fellow is He, Anyhow?" and a list of stories for future use, with such titles as "The Haunts of the Salamander," "Salamander Boarding Houses," and "Is the Salamander a Worse Grafter than Her Conventional Sister on Fifth Avenue?"

Complementing the stories was Johnson's foreword to the novel, separately printed in pamphlet form by the publisher for counter display and bearing the subtitle "A Perplexing Type Created by the Great Feminist Upheaval."

Office suggestions for these advertisements, generally written in memo form, were voluminous. In the material one finds not only the common editorial jargon of "Kill" and "O.K." to sort out ideas, but some pieces were given letter grades to further condense the volume of paper crossing the editor's desk. The Company was bent on provocation, and some of the final choices, of which it is possible to give only a sampling, were:

A girl of the present day in revolt, adventurous, eager and unafraid, without standards or home ties; with a passion to explore but not experience and a curiosity fed by the zest of life.

Where lights are brightest you will find her. Where life is freest she will join the group. Where danger lurks, she always enters, defying you to judge her other than she is.

What other girls shun, she courts . . .

She abhors convention, she defies custom . . .

And what came to be a favorite slogan: "The girl who wants to know!"

Considering that similar advertising is still in use half a century later, one can imagine the effect it had on an age which, though slowly elevating women within the social structure, had not yet given them the vote, looked askance at those who went riding in cars unchaperoned, and regarded the unmarried woman as an anomaly.

Bobbs-Merrill put advertisements on every conceivable size and type of paper, the variety of gimmicks running into dozens. Colored posters, almost billboard size, appeared beside post cards. Two-page pamphlets saluted

the reader ("This is to introduce the Salamander") and included an order form with a blank for specifying the number of copies desired. Large stamps, not unlike present-day Christmas and Easter seals, colored in bright blue and green with a salmon-colored figure of the Salamander, were placed on outgoing letters. Company envelopes carried below the return address a similar salmon-tinted illustration. To book-sellers they sent out Salamander kits of leaflets with "A Bit of Biography" of the author, bookmarks and broadsides which reproduced copy from the forthcoming dust jacket, and a two-foot square white handkerchief with the intense figure of the Salamander extending the length of the diagonal. Finally, Everett Shinn, the "Ash-Can" painter, drew a portrait of Johnson—a dominating figure in his own right—for the decoration of innumerable counter and window displays.

Within a short time the Company could boast in the newspapers that "More copies of *The Salamander* have been printed in advance of publication than any book published by us in the last five years." Whatever happens, it said, "*The Publication will not be deferred.*" To potential readers it also sent out a pamphlet announcing the unprecedented action "of the French critics in reviewing *The Salamander* before it appeared in French translation." The first (and only) printing ran to 100,000—25,000 more than were actually to sell.

II

The publishers could not, of course, rely on sensationalism or "delicate" subject matter to create a best-seller: other novels of the period dealt with the more volatile themes of adultery and free love. Nor was it the first novel to treat the women's rights movement. But Bobbs-Merrill

could see in the novel a logical development from Johnson's earlier literary endeavors, writings which moved Sinclair Lewis (a personal friend of Johnson) to write: "The future is his. We prophesy that he can do anything he wants to" (promotion brochure published by Frederick A. Stokes & Co., publishers of Johnson's *Stover at Yale*, p. 7).

Lewis' judgment apparently was not based on Johnson's earliest novels, *In the Name of Liberty* (1905) and *Max Fergus* (1906), stories highly derivative from Balzac and failures in the selling market. More likely he referred to the boy stories which Johnson had begun to write in 1901 while still a student at Yale. Collected into novels, *Arrows of the Almighty* (1901), *The Prodigious Hickey* (1908), *The Varmint* (1910), and *The Tennessee Shad* (1911), these were products of experiences at the Lawrenceville School and of a gifted imagination. Together they yielded tales of adolescents which, despite their relative obscurity now, for two decades were the *vade mecum* of hilarity.

The stories trace the antics of the Tennessee Shad, the Triumphant Egghead, Doc MacNooder, the Uncooked Beefsteak, Brian de Boru Finnegan, and Dink Stover—a gallery of characters whose names became synonymous with spontaneous ingenuity, cunning, and guile. But the virtues of the stories lie in Johnson's refusal to portray purely simple little creatures motivated by the "bad boy" love of practical jokes and youthful rebellion against authority. He attempts to show the realistic side of adolescents as they develop, in the process shedding the "embryonic maliciousness" of youth. Unlike other juvenile writers, Johnson was said to have drawn "perfect little 'varmint' possessed by every obnoxious quality a boy can have, influenced by hero-worship, emulation, and the senses of

responsibility, and emerging, finally, into admirable specimens of American manhood" (Diane Gatlin, "Owen Johnson: Literary Rebel," *Book News Monthly*, July, 1914, p. 519; the manuscript is in the Bobbs-Merrill files).

Almost as if his own development was to be achieved by outgrowing the adolescent, in *Stover at Yale* (1911) Johnson followed the development of Dink Stover through college. The pseudoaristocratic snobbery of secret fraternities within a democratic system provided the main problem of this novel. But whereas the emphasis on values had been implicit, universalized, subdued, and minimized by the earlier humor, here it becomes localized and individual, and as the humor falls into the background it becomes the primary force accounting for Stover's growth. Individual responsibility, whether to one's self, one's friends, or society at large, and the compromises involved provided a question that deepened Johnson's thought and his ability to handle ideas with a degree of realistic significance.

Johnson's objective and controversial treatment of social problems continued into his next two novels, *Murder in Any Degree* and *The Sixty-First Second* (both 1913). Lewis' enthusiasm for the author persisted and led him to prophesy that "His books are in effect the beginnings of an American '*Comedie Humaine*'" (Sinclair Lewis, "The Real Owen Johnson," *Book News Monthly*, July, 1914, p. 519; also in the *Boston Post*, June 13, 1914).

Perhaps encouraged by this hint of the literary rebel, Johnson sought to enhance the notion with his next novel. How *The Salamander* originated is difficult to say. If we rely on press releases it would seem that Johnson had been deeply concerned with feminism and had pondered a novel about it for some time. A more likely account is given in

The Bookman. There we are told that in the early 1900's in a Washington Square studio a party was thrown. Among the guests was an uninvited young woman who announced she had just arrived in New York, had heard of the party, had never attended one, and wanted to find out what it was like. The first to come, she was the last to leave (A. B. Maurice, "A History of Their Books: Owen Johnson," *Bookman*, LXX, December, 1929, p. 414).

The bold mysteriousness with which a woman appears and disappears is only one of the perplexing aspects of the Salamander. In Johnson's foreword to the novel we are told that she is a new type of American woman, come "roving from somewhere out of the immense reaches of the nation, revolting against the commonplace of an inherited narrowness, passionately adventurous, eager and unafraid, neither sure of what she seeks nor conscious of what forces impel her." In a sense she is a development from the old idea of the parasitic woman who has moved to a life of freedom more from necessity than choice. She accepts presents from men which she converts into money to pay the rent. She makes men take her to the finest restaurants and night clubs, arouses their passions, plays with their affections, then walks out, leaving them frustrated, confused, and infatuated. She treats it all as nothing more than a game, a game with its own rules and restrictions, its own moral code, and its own jargon. After she has immersed herself in such a life for from three to six years, tired of flouting convention, she either marries or settles down to pursue a career. To the more astute critics she represented no more than a type come down through the ages: the coquette, the paramour, the tease—Becky Sharp with a philosophy of moral purity.

Of Dore Baxter, Grant C. Knight said, "Few characters in American fiction of the time are more complex than is this Salamander." We watch her flit through the city, involving herself in a variety of relationships—the more dangerous ones referred to as "precipices"—each time extricating herself with guile, force, and daring—the standard attributes of the *femme fatale*. In each affair she operates at a different level of consciousness, now displaying the indifference of a man, now the instinctive weakness of a woman overcome by masculine superiority. She is romantic and seeks love but is repulsed by the thought of marital confinement. She is compassionate and understanding, yet impervious to pleas or reason; and while she will allow her suitors a certain amount of freedom, she gives only one warning, admonishing her well-wishers that she is "different." Johnson is generally convincing in his portrayal, carrying the reader along by his "tantalizing liking and dislike for several figures in the plot, especially for Dodo herself, as changeable as the color of silk turning in the sunlight, as deserving of censure as she is of affection" (*The New Freedom in American Literature*, Lexington, Kentucky, 1961, pp. 17-18). Yet, at the time, the majority of critics, intent on proclaiming Johnson a rebel, or an astute judge of the social scene, or as the forthcoming leading novelist in America, overlooked the literary qualities of the book.

III

If the novel was a product of the women's rights movement, it also had a certain effect on it. The spirit of rebellion in *The Salamander*, bolstered by a constant flow of propaganda from the publisher, was infectious. It initi-

ated such a wave of imitation and a craze for novelty that, in retrospect, one can see some of the origins of the girl who "was presently to be a farmerette or a worker in the railroad yard, the girl who was later to be a flapper, a gold-digger, a crazy mixed-up kid" (Knight, p. 18).

First and foremost, the novel precipitated a new fashion, very different from the Victorian dress which had long shrouded the female figure behind massive skirts. In the early pages of the novel Johnson described Dore's dress:

. . . gold stockings and low russet shoes with buckles of green enamel. She was in a short skirt and Russian blouse . . . the neck was bare; the low broad, rolling silk collar . . . was softened by a full trailing bow of black silk at the throat . . . the costume exhaled a perfume of freshness and artless charm, from the daintiness with which the throat was revealed from the slight youthful bust delicately defined under the informality of the blouse, to the long clinging of the coat, which followed half-way to the knee, loins of young and slender grace which cannot be counterfeited (pp. 2, 8).

Throughout, her simple but radical apparel and the freedom of social and physical movement it gives her are repeatedly alluded to. Johnson may have anticipated a fashion success. A summary of publicity for *The Salamander* tells that Johnson was a personal friend of many of the top clothing designers in the city and had initiated a meeting between the designer from *Vogue* and the chief designer from Wanamaker's which ultimately resulted in a style "with the idea of putting the dresses within reach of every girl who loves daintiness and comfort, yet does not forget the weapon of her own allure" (*The Morning Telegraph*, May 21, 1914). The same task force aimed to get leading women in society and the theatre to model the dresses.

Later, huge advertisements from Wanamaker's proclaimed that "The Salamander is—a girl, a book, a play, a fashion, a craze." It featured a picture of Johnson and below a certification written in his own hand that "your designs have caught the peculiarly free spirit of the American girl. . . . It gives me great pleasure to grant you sole privilege of applying the names 'Salamander' and 'Dodo' to your new fashion." The Russian blouses, the advertisements said, were to "give the free alert air and the slender graceful silhouette which are always associated with the American woman"; and, utilizing a popular phrase from the book, all styles would show "A bit of the throat, a bit of the ankle, and a slash of red" (*The Evening Telegram*, May 19, 1914). Soon the newspapers pictured live models who, to give reality to the notion that "The spirit of 'revolt' is shown strikingly in all these gowns," wore a grim, defiant—and utterly false—countenance. In their Russian blouses, they suggest to the modern observer four buxom Cossacks.

Salamander styling was attached to every conceivable article: petticoats, corsets, stockings, slippers, gloves, neckwear, handbags, handkerchiefs, sunshades, umbrellas, bracelets, watches, and stationery. And the craze was not confined to America. As one reporter noted: "The French designers saw the artistic merit in the long declining lines . . . and their La Salamandre gowns began to appear. . . . Then the word began to be utilized right and left. It was easy to say, nice to roll around the tongue, and the Salamander label began to grow in size while it covered a multitude of merchandise from breakfast foods to night caps." Indeed, it was predicted by many that the word would become a part of the English language, forever associated with the girl

who takes without giving. Certainly the word had nothing pejorative about it. As a dance only the tango could rival it. When it was announced by producers that they were casting for the lead role of a Salamander play, their office swelled with "young women who quite frankly and openly described themselves as Salamanders in real life and were ready, if necessary, to detail experiences with men in New York which would prove their rights to the title" (*Baltimore American*, October 11, 1914).

Encouraged by the first success of the book, Johnson dramatized it for the stage. It opened on October 23, 1914, under the same title; but fourteen performances later it closed. Perhaps it was Johnson's failure as a playwright; in any case, in the transfer of media, the story lost its luster. The common complaint of critics about the play was that of static sameness in characters and plot. Whether or not it was a coincidence, at about this time the novel began to decline as a best-seller.

If the novel was a success in its quick, wide-spectrum popularity, it was as much a failure in its early death. Johnson's literary career experienced a like fate. But it was not until the novel had its run that Johnson bought up the plate rights to negotiate movie rights. With the release of the film both he and the novel went into oblivion. (The film was produced by a minor company under the title *The Enemy Sex*. There is no evidence that it enjoyed great success.)

Fortunately for the publishers, the expense they devoted to promoting the book was not in vain. It not only sold well for more than a year but it also was translated into half a dozen languages. Johnson himself earned well over \$6,000 in royalties, to say nothing of side income. In

fact, until January of the year following publication there was mutual satisfaction between publisher and author. Then the situation changed. One of the few pieces of correspondence surviving is a letter from Mr. Bobbs to Johnson dated January 9, 1914: "As regards the Salamander, the sale of the book was satisfactory up to the time of the war. I was delighted with the book, proud of the campaign our organization put on it, and am confident that it would have reached our expectations if it had not been for the war." Johnson's reply, a week later, showed disillusionment:

I have had a growing feeling that your house has not looked upon your arrangement with me with the same enthusiasm as at the beginning, perhaps feeling that my work did not fit into your scheme of publishing. This is not in criticism, but recognising the situation as it has developed, I myself have begun to wonder if the quality of work I produce is susceptible to your popular handling.

In spite of "the quality of work" he produced and the high acclaim of Sinclair Lewis, Johnson had reached the apex of his literary career with his one best-seller. Though he continued to write he failed to achieve either literary importance or further popular success.

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EPISODES IN THE PUBLISHING OF TALBOT MUNDY'S *THE IVORY TRAIL*

By LOUIS E. LAMBERT

A GREAT MANY MEN now in their forties or fifties remember reading the books of Talbot Mundy; those who, in the 1920's and '30's, read *Adventure*, a magazine that was issued three times (not four) a month, might remember him with special fondness. Starting in 1911, Mundy began writing for this magazine, and his stories continued to appear there even beyond his death in 1940. Some of his stories also appeared in *Romance*, *Argosy All-Story*, *Everybody's*, *Blue Book*, and other magazines; but of his approximately 150 stories, more than 100 appeared in *Adventure*. After publication of *King—of the Khyber Rifles* in 1916, nearly all of his magazine stories were published in book form either in this country or England, and generally in both. After Scribner's published *Rung Ho*, his first book, in 1914, Bobbs-Merrill was his American publisher until 1931, when he shifted to The Century Company (later Appleton-Century), remaining with this firm until his death.

Born in London in 1879, Talbot Mundy was educated at Rugby and served almost ten years as a government official in Africa and India. After traveling in Australia, he came permanently to the United States in 1911, making his homes in Maine, Vermont, and New York, and later moving to California. (The bibliographical and biographical material is from the *Talbot Mundy Biblio*, ed. Bradford M. Day, Denver, New York, 1955, mimeograph.)

There is a thick file of Mundy material dating from 1916 to 1931 in the Bobbs-Merrill archives. Advertisements, reviews of the books, interviews of Mundy by reporters and book editors, illustrations, and layouts of title pages are included; but the most interesting papers are letters from Mundy to H. H. Howland. Most of these are typed, but there are some letters handwritten by Mundy when he was traveling.

Although Mundy wrote at least thirty-five books and Bobbs-Merrill published fourteen of them, this brief article will deal with only one. It comprises the middle two thirds of what Dr. J. Lloyd Eaton of Berkeley, California, writing in the Day bibliography of Mundy, has termed the Monty Saga. Monty is the Earl of Montdidier and Kirkudbrightshire, a retired cavalry colonel who had served in India, and the natural leader of the three adventurers: Fred Oakes, who had been to school with Monty; Yerkes, an American who had attended Bowdoin College; and the nameless narrator (presumably Mundy).

The first part of this saga was published in *Adventure* but never in book form. The first book, *The Ivory Trail* (1919), tells of a search for ivory buried by Tippoo Tib, the most famous of the Arab slave traders who led caravans from Zanzibar to central Africa in the 1870's and 1880's. The action takes place while Tippoo Tib is still alive (he died in 1905) but after the close of the Boer War in 1902. The archvillain is Professor Schillingschen, an ethnologist who is also a German agent; a more colorful "bad guy" is Georges Coutlass, "a citizen of three countries," who is Greek. Lady Isobel Saffren Walden, who has lost her reputation and accepted service as a German agent, complicates the plot. Strongly anti-German feeling appears throughout,

which is quite understandable in 1918. Mundy, however, had a personal reason for disliking Germans. A significant part of the book is autobiographical, the only Mundy book that is. In a letter to Howland dated November 7, 1918, Mundy wrote:

. . . I believe myself to be the only person in the world who could have written it. I believe I am the only man who saw conditions as they really were in German East [Africa] before this war, who thoroughly know and understand British East Africa as well, who have hunted lions and elephants, have held a civil job out there, have fought, sickened, been wounded, recovered and so on all up and down the monstrous land. . . .

I am the guy, for instance, who was wounded in the leg with the poisoned spear, whose grave the Germans dug, who was eye-witness of the floggings and hangings, who returned up Lake Victoria Nyanza on the dhow, who saw the cannibals on Elgon, etcetera, and so on.

Later in the letter Mundy suggested that the title might be improved. (In *Adventure* the title had been *On the Trail of Tippoos Tib.*) He also volunteered to "dope out a verse to go between" the chapters. This was not new with Mundy since in *Rung Ho*, his first book, a short verse heads each chapter. In *King—of the Khyber Rifles* the verses become longer, but in *The Ivory Trail* there are not only bits of verse, some more than forty lines in length, between chapters but also verses that Fred Oakes makes up and sings, accompanying himself upon a concertina. The following excerpt is typical:

Silver and black sleeps Zanzibar. The moonlit ripples croon
Soft songs of loves that perfect are, long tales of red-lipped
spoils of war,
And you—you smile, you moon!
For I think that beam on the placid sea

That splashes, and spreads, and dips, and gleams,
That dances and glides till it comes to me
Out of infinite sky, is the path of dreams,
And down that lane the memories run
Of all that's wild beneath the sun!

On the Trail of Tippoo Tib had been changed to *Up and Down the Earth Tales*, to which title Howland wrote that one of his best readers had given "a fine report." In a February (1919) letter Mundy reported that: "A young friend of mine (age 13) assures me that 'The Ivory Trail' would be a better title." After considering various alternatives, Mundy decided:

I am all in favor of *The Ivory Trail*. Thirteen letters. 13 is a *very lucky number*, all the more so because so few fools want it!

Bobbs-Merrill, however, warmed slowly to *The Ivory Trail* as a title. Howland reported:

We love the word "Ivory" and should like to see it used in the title but when you combine it with "Trail," doesn't it sound a bit like a boy's book? What do you think of *Yellow Ivory*? Or *The Ivory Folk*, or *The Wealth of Ivory*?

Howland then added:

. . . the fact that there are thirteen letters in *The Ivory Trail* will influence the judgment of both Mr. Curtiss [Bobbs-Merrill's New York representative] and Mr. Bobbs because thirteen seems to be the B.M. Company's lucky number.

By the end of March the title had become *Dead Man's Ivory*, which Mundy said ". . . gets my vote. 13 letters. Covers the whole ground. Suggests unimaginable things. . . ." Howland congratulated Mundy upon this title and moved to make it unanimous. Constable in London, however, preferred *The Ivory Trail*, and Mundy later

switched to agree with them. In a letter to William C. Bobbs late in April Mundy explained his logic:

The Ivory Trail has flair—a sort of poetic suggestion of a long trail leading somewhere. *Dead Man's Ivory* comes to a full stop, and might refer to false teeth!

In a return letter Bobbs gratefully accepted Mundy's reasons, saying:

The suggestion of false teeth kills *Dead Man's Ivory* for a book title and it is most fortunate that this idea occurred to you. "Ivory" is indeed a beautiful word and it has been in my mind from the start as the main word for the title.

The Ivory Trail is perfectly satisfactory. . . .

Thus the title which Mundy's young friend (age 13) had chosen by February 18 eventually became *the* title. It is worth wondering, however, if it would have been chosen if it had not had thirteen letters. (Howland's fear that the book might be taken for a boy's book seems unduly apprehensive. It *is* a boy's book and a very good one. The present writer read it when he was twelve, his first Mundy book, and it remains his favorite.)

Bobbs-Merrill gave *The Ivory Trail* vigorous promotion, and it was reviewed widely. It received the first page position in the "Books and Book World" section of the July 6, 1919, issue of the *New York Sun*. According to typed excerpts by Bobbs-Merrill there were favorable reports from various newspapers. The following are typical:

In the manner of Kipling, Mr. Mundy paints a vivid background for the game of international intrigue and crime in which British, German, native, and non-descript adventurers engage in pursuit of Tippoo Tib's storied ivory (*New York World*).

Here is a tale of adventure fit to rank with *She* and *King Solomon's Mines* (*Los Angeles Examiner*).

The Ivory Trail pulsates with adventure. The action that enthralls begins on the first page, and continues until the last line. And as Mr. Mundy tells his story, he reveals Africa, as through a panoramic camera, appalling at times in its fierceness and its savagery, in its tropic grandeur and its overwhelming mystery (*Philadelphia Record*).

The Ivory Trail is an entertaining and often thrilling adventure story, with plenty of incident, admirably portrayed characters, and a number of extremely narrow and entirely plausible escapes from sudden and violent death, told with spirit and skill (*The New York Times*).

But even favorable reviews and strong promotion by its publisher failed to turn *The Ivory Trail* into a substantial money-maker. The original edition in its first ten months netted Mundy just \$2,143. Still, there were royalties from the English edition; A. L. Burt issued a reprint edition; and McKinley Stone and McKenzie published it as one of their "Masterpieces of Oriental Mystery." (This was somewhat puzzling since, strictly speaking, it was neither oriental nor a mystery; in its own field, however, the present writer considers it a masterpiece.) In 1954 Universal Publishers brought out a paperback edition under the title, *Trek East*. Since Zanzibar is an island off the east coast of Africa and the trek is toward the interior of the continent, it seems regrettable that Universal lacked a young friend (age 13) to tell it that *The Ivory Trail* was not only more accurate but in every way a better title.

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HERBERT QUICK: ART AND IOWA

By P. L. REED

IN *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade*, Frederick J. Hoffman noted that "the fictional exploitation of all aspects of the American past was especially lively 'during the decade' and that by far the most popular single subject for historical novels of the period was the westward movement." Likewise, in a section entitled "The Midwest as Metaphor," Hoffman discussed the phenomenon of the Midwestern writers who had to leave for the East or Paris (Floyd Dell, Willa Cather, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, to name only a few). "The Middle West had become a metaphor of abuse; it was on the one hand a rural metaphor, of farms, villages, and small towns; on the other, a middle-class metaphor, of conventions, piety and hypocrisy, tastelessness and spiritual poverty" (p. 184, note 44; pp. 369-77).

The Iowa trilogy of Herbert Quick, written in the first half of the twenties, matched this metaphor only in that it treated the settlement and growth of the state. In depicting Iowa life, Quick saw things to criticize (the economic and political exploitation of the farmer, the lack of opportunity for the aspiring young writer), but he wished to chronicle first. His regionalist impulse centered upon recording history in fiction and suggesting change through growth rather than upon indicting or escaping. Although he left the Midwest for government work in Washington during World War I and lived until his death in 1925 on a farm in West

Virginia, his heart never left rural Iowa. He saw no better world elsewhere. The Midwest, as he viewed it, could cure its own ills, and what was wrong there was only part of the whole. His novels were devoted to the healthy whole.

I

On April 28, 1924, Quick wrote to a critic: "After I published my first really successful novel—*Double Trouble* away back in 1906; I locked my law office door on the outside, and became a writer by profession. This was at the early age—for a Dutchman—of 45. . . . I always got along. When the fiction failed, I took up editorial work. . . . I am now just finishing far the best novel I ever wrote"—*The Invisible Woman*, the final book of his trilogy about Iowa life roughly from 1850 to 1900 (letter to Frederic F. Van de Water, April 28, 1924). The modest "success" of *Double Trouble*, a popular romance the melodramatic machinery of which turned on the idea of the split personality, was financial rather than literary. (The book sold 18,109 copies of the regular edition during the first year of publication, though little thereafter.) The novels of the trilogy (or at least the first two), however, were, as Quick's statement implies, esthetic as well as financial successes, though they were only briefly best-sellers and none sold extremely well. *Vandemark's Folly* (1922) sold 30,677 copies in the year after publication; sales of *The Hawkeye* (1923) reached 36,209 copies six months after publication, though virtually no sales occurred thereafter; but *The Invisible Woman* sold only about 14,500 copies of the regular edition during the fifteen months after its publication in October, 1924. All three novels were serialized in the *Ladies' Home Journal* prior to their publication in book form.

Still, the impulse which produced Quick's later work was genuinely esthetic. He spoke often with pride of being a writer. (As teacher, lawyer, and politician he signed his name "J. H. Quick"; as a writer, "Herbert Quick".) His comments in correspondence with the Bobbs-Merrill Company show that he was concerned first with the techniques of writing fiction to express what he himself had to say and second with the techniques of writing to sell.

The formal success of Quick's trilogy stems largely from his finding a fictional mode to suit his purpose, to "cover the history of Iowa from its early settlement to recent times" (to W. C. Bobbs, February 26, 1921). After finishing *Vandemark's Folly*, he wrote to Bobbs on February 26, 1921:

The first [novel] . . . is the way things look and happen to a green boy settling in Iowa in the fifties. It is a cross-section of the life of a boy born in southeastern New York in 1837 and takes in life on the Erie Canal, the factory life of the day, the things people thought and did, and the great flood of immigration into the midwest. It sees only what a boy of that sort could see struggling with life, on the trail, and on the prairie farm. It has the lost prairie of Iowa in it. . . . I think it a good story. But in it I have prepared the way for the stories which will follow. The three will constitute a single work, and will be the story of Iowa, and the whole Middle West. It will be a sort of prose epic of the greatest thing in history of its kind. I lived this life, and am the only writing man who did. Garland did not live it, nor did Hough, though the former was born in Wisconsin, and the latter in Illinois. [Quick is mistaken; Hough was born in Iowa.] I was of the thing, as they were not. The story I have finished is a mingling of the life of my father, of my wife's father, our relatives, and neighbors. The second will be in some measure my own history and experiences. I have done a great deal of real work on the story written, that it

may really be true. All the books will titivate the interest of Iowa people particularly as they will be to a very great extent historical. The books will be discussed.

In spite of Quick's nod in the last two sentences toward sales (in the letter he was jockeying with Bobbs for a higher royalty), he reveals here the sense of mission, even duty, he felt to present to the world the history of his region. Moreover, because they coincided in time, the history of Iowa was synonymous in his mind with the life of Herbert Quick. Such expansion of ego by association could only result in the author's visualizing himself within his fiction. Quick's persona appears first in *Vandemark's Folly* as J. T. Vandemark, an old settler, who writes "the History of Vandemark Township" in the first person; then in *The Hawkeye* as Fremont McConkey, "a middle-aged man" and aspiring writer, who completes "the History of Monterey County" with McConkey as its main character before he reveals that the "he" of the story "has really meant 'I.' " The progressive sophistication in technique continued through *The Invisible Woman*, where Quick attempted to abandon the strict autobiographical mode and write "a real novel" (to H. H. Howland, January 12, 1924), but failed to break his former habit. These novels were the final products of Quick's career as a writer (except, appropriately, for an incomplete autobiography of which one volume was published posthumously), and the germs of their narrative technique as well as their subject matter are present in earlier pieces of writing.

II

After a boyhood on farms in Iowa, Quick's first profession was teaching in rural schools, then towns. Later as a lawyer, politician, and editor of rural journals, his efforts

were devoted to improving farm life and attacking corruption in local government. These efforts allied him with the Progressive movement, and he held for a time the associate editorship of *LaFollette's Magazine* for Senator Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin. However, notes for Quick's projected autobiography indicate that editorial work was originally a substitute for fiction because his novel, *The Broken Lance*, 1907, failed to earn him enough. He wrote to Howland on March 16, 1910, ". . . I am incubating great novels. Sat in the University club in Milwaukee last night and grew greatly excited discussing with a friend a series of three novels—finest creations of the mid-continent mews," and elsewhere claimed that he had planned the Iowa series before the age of twenty (to Frederic F. Van de Water, April 28, 1924). Yet he did not begin writing the first volume until 1917. Editorial work saved him financially and provided an outlet for didactic prose. If not fiction, he was writing, and his progress toward the Iowa trilogy can be traced through two preliminary stages.

After *Double Trouble*, Quick's next mildly successful seller with Bobbs-Merrill was *The Brown Mouse*, 1915. A narrative which thinly disguises a treatise on making the rural school more effective, the book presented no claim to greatness. Quick said of it in a letter, "I once wrote a calm little story with an educational sermon in it for *Farm and Fireside*, in which as editor I felt bound to turn down all the hectic stuff which we had been using, and against the judgment of the New York crowd . . . because it was too mild" (to S. S. McClure, July 15, 1922, in the McClure Mss., the Lilly Library). When he submitted the manuscript to Bobbs-Merrill, he wrote:

. . . I don't think it will get me any eternal fame, but it has one or two points with which I am pretty well satisfied. First, it is a serious contribution to a subject which is fundamentally important, and unlike some of my economic views [he was an ardent follower of Henry George and strong on the Single Tax], the world will sympathize with this book and accept its leadings as going in the right direction. Secondly, I think you can sell it. I believe it is one of those books, published once in a generation, in which acceptable tendencies in education are embodied in an acceptable story. Such books never fail as far as sales are concerned (to Howland, March 31, 1915).

The book did sell 30,000 copies in ten years, mainly to educational groups. Thus in 1922 Quick could boast that *The Brown Mouse* "turned out the best puller we had ever had, and is now a recognized educational classic in use wherever education is studied."

Immediate reader reaction was favorable; the use of a sentimental plot to spark interest in Quick's "sermon" seems to have worked. But readers apparently liked the fiction as such. In referring to a letter from an appreciative reader, Quick wrote to Howland on April 16, 1915, "I really think it [*The Brown Mouse*] is straight fiction for our purpose. My reason for thinking so is because it produces the effect of straight fiction." And on April 20, Howland replied, "It has a fictional value in a very subtle and unusual way. I can't analyze it but I feel it and that's far more important." Favorable reactions from "city people" prompted Quick to write that ". . . the book has ordinary-novel possibilities" (to D. L. Chambers, December 23, 1915); and, finally, in a reply to a college professor interested in dramatizing and producing *The Brown Mouse* on the stage, he said, ". . . I believe that through the Brown Mouse idea a new art, dramatic, literary and poetic will

eventually grow up in the country. By the Brown Mouse idea I mean the lifting of rural problems and rural life up to their proper intellectual level and the vitalization of local things" (to Professor A. G. Arnold, November 8, 1915, University of North Dakota). In light of the obvious relevance of this last statement to the motive of the Iowa novels, it must be supposed that the warm reception of *The Brown Mouse* carried Quick a step nearer the trilogy. He had produced a kind of "literature" out of local materials, stock melodrama, and didactic purpose—and he obviously wanted to believe that he had written "straight fiction." The same ingredients would form the substance of his trilogy.

If Quick discovered the substance of regional fiction in *The Brown Mouse*, he found the autobiographical method, as well as an elementary technique for handling a large bulk of material, in a series of unsigned articles for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1916. (They were published as *The Fairview Idea* by Bobbs-Merrill in 1918.) Each article dealt with a specific aspect of rural life or an individual in the farming community: "the retired farmer . . . the country church . . . the rural school . . . the farmer's wife . . . the country boy . . . the country girl . . . the bookfarmer . . . the back-to-the-lander . . . the county agent . . . the landlord and tenant question . . ." (to Howland, April 19, 1916). Quick described the work as "semi-fiction, told in the first person."

In a letter to Bobbs on February 12, 1917, Quick attempted to justify the collection as a whole, hoping the firm would publish it:

[The articles] . . . deal with almost every big nationwide problem of rural life, and embody pretty completely my philosophy of rural betterment—a philosophy, I think I am justified in saying, which is at this time affecting more minds

than the thoughts of any other man in America. They constitute a rounding out of the study which I made in *The Brown Mouse*. They have all the interest of a novel, in view of the fact that they are all told in the first person, by Uncle Abner Dunham, an old resident farmer of the Fairview neighborhood, and in every story the main character, Uncle Abner and his wife, Tome Whelpley, the schoolmaster; Frank Wiggins and Daisy, his wife; Adolph Tulp, a German; and others appear and reappear, so that the thing possesses continuity of interest. I do not think I have done anything better.

Quick had now populated the community of his idea (the projection of his influence on the "minds" of America indicates the size that idea assumed for him) and had given his collection unity through a set of characters and a presiding voice. His estimate of the quality of his work reveals that his development is taking a desirable path and, perhaps, that he is prepared for the goal of writing the Iowa novels. He wrote to H. H. Howland on May 1, 1917, with obvious pleasure, that he had been getting letters from readers of the *Post* articles, letters "addressed to the *Saturday Evening Post* and to the unknown author of these articles, frequently under such terms as 'Dear Uncle Abner.' " He had discovered the narrative persona. As further evidence that Quick had reached the point where he could begin the trilogy, he did not send Bobbs-Merrill the revised manuscript of *The Fairview Idea* until May 1, 1917; yet he wrote to Howland on March 15, "The trilogy of which we have talked is growing on me all the time and taking form in my mind. All I need to do now is to put it on paper." On March 20 he added, ". . . incidentally, I wrote three or four pages of the first chapter of the first volume of the Great Trilogy."

III

In 1918 Quick wrote that the Iowa novels would constitute his "principal bid for fame" (to Chambers, May 14, 1918). His personal involvement in the books had become enormous. In 1921 he described *Vandemark's Folly* as ". . . a piece of work that I have long felt I owed to the mid-west and to the mid-westerners wherever they may be. . . . It is the story of my father's time, and the time of the fathers and mothers and grandparents of many thousands of people from twenty to sixty years old. While it begins earlier than any memories of mine of the prairies, it does embody my own memories." Thus it had become his *duty* to write this book, for earlier times were part of his inheritance. Further, he says, "The life in New York and along the canal in the earlier portions of the book is historically accurate. My father and mother and my grandparents, and my wife's parents and grandparents lived in New York state during these years. I got the cottonmill facts from an old man who knew from having worked in the mills. He was eighty-five years old. The canal life is from a hired man who used to come to Iowa and work in the harvest field with me on my father's Iowa farm year after year, and talked all the time of life on the canal" (to Howland, December 22, 1921). Thus the narrative voice in *Vandemark's Folly* is that of old settler Jacob T. Vandemark, full of old-timer reminiscences.

In a letter of December 5, 1921, to Howland, who had objected to Vandemark's insistence on writing "a history of Vandemark Township" and to the old man's frequent pauses for side-comment, Quick justified the character of his narrator: ". . . the type of man represented in the narrator must be established in the mind of the reader.

This is essential, for what is said as well as the manner of saying it is all given color and even substance by his life-long environment and the changes therein. The story is not only a narration of what one man saw taking place, but of what he did not see, and of his thoughts and his philosophy." Quick even mentions that when Vandemark ". . . begins to discuss some subjects he has a considerable scientific vocabulary. This comes from reading done on such subjects as stockbreeding and agriculture in his later years. When dealing with ordinary topics he uses short words and common ones . . . except where he falls into locutions which are preserved, and . . . in his day were still more numerously preserved, in the speech of the country people. . . . I myself have been from childhood intimately acquainted with them." Quick has carefully created his narrator's character and verbal style, but inevitably in explicit commentary he ties the man to himself.

On September 27, 1921, Quick told Howland that he had begun work on the second book in the series which would "be told by a different sort of person from Vandemark," he said. "It will really be more a personal story than the one I have written—more the things I know." Two years later he noted that ". . . the form [of the three novels] changes with the broadening of the theme. The first was purely autobiographic and individualistic. The second was only half autobiographical and somewhat more complex and extended in its character" (to Chambers, September 9, 1923). Although *The Hawkeye* does reflect the Iowa of Quick's time and the story of his own life, the broadening of social scene from the first novel to the second justifies a less limited narrative mode for the second. Such complexities as those of town living and county politics in

the later period could hardly be successfully presented through the narrow consciousness of a Vandemark. Quick saw that the wider scene demanded a wide-angled narrative viewpoint. The "I" of the autobiographer was transmuted into the controlled omniscience of the traditional novelist, though the story line of *The Hawkeye* follows McConkey's life as told by a narrator kept anonymous until the story's end.

More important, once Quick had used the strict autobiographical mode to present a "history" written by an amateur, he could hardly employ the same form to represent the work of a frustrated regional poet. *Vandemark's Folly* celebrated the virgin prairie and its pioneers; Quick rightly noted its "simplicity and elemental character" (to Howland, June 22, 1922). Explicit throughout *The Hawkeye*, however, is the "continuing struggle of a typical personality with the conditions of a great era of opportunity—for other sorts of personalities. . . . This struggle still goes on all over America between the dreamers, the visionaries and the poets, and a materialistic age" (to Chambers, November 26, 1922). Fremont McConkey ends his "History of Monterey County" with the following observation:

Iowa has been a wonderful place for certain people. . . . But Iowa has not always smiled on her dreamers, her poets, her children with the divine fire in their souls, whether much or little of it. I am just a newspaper man! And yet, I know that if the artist born in Iowa could only be allowed such a life of the soul as would impel him deeply enough, every element of great art would be found here (Quick, *The Hawkeye*, pp. 476-77).

Such was Quick's special theme; the result of his writing has to justify the claims he made for the regional writer, the Iowa "artist."

On March 22, 1923, Quick wrote to Chambers that he had been working on "the new book [*The Invisible Woman*] . . . in a general way all winter" but that actual writing might "not . . . start for a few days owing to a division of ideas as to the first chapters." On August 18 he sent Chambers the "first two chapters of the first draft" of *The Invisible Woman*, feeling that the work was "rotten stuff" and asking for the editors' opinions of his beginning. Bobbs-Merrill was pleased with what he had done, and Howland's comments indicate that his first draft was almost the same as that which appeared in published form (Howland to Quick, September 3, 1923). However, Quick's insecurity in beginning the novel stemmed from his attempted break from the autobiographical mode. Written in the third person and narrated by an almost completely disembodied narrator, this story was "far more completely socialized and generalized as to locale" (to Chambers, September 9, 1923). The scene was the whole of Iowa, together with Chicago and a suggestion of Texas, the "new frontier." Quick wrote to Howland on January 12, 1924, ". . . this book is essentially a set of character studies with dominant spiritual values. In other words, it cannot rely on historical verities for its drawing power. It must be a real novel." On April 13, he said, "The real story is that of the interplay of human elements with the estate matter and the debauching of the state government in the background. . . . The interest I have tried to maintain by the successive subplots . . . with an attempt to build up a set of characters in whose fate the reader will have some interest. . . . It is, I feel sure, the best thing I have done from the standpoint of straight novel-writing. I knew I had to succeed along lines of that sort, for I have not here the primitive stuff [which] was such a lure in *Vandemark's Folly*."

The Invisible Woman is essentially the story of Christina Thorkelson, who, "as a lawyer's stenographer and court reporter . . . becomes a sort of article of furniture . . . things are talked about before her, reduced to writing, and embodied in letters, so that she learns everything—much more than most well-informed men know, because she works with insiders" (to Howland, April 9, 1923). For most of the novel she is more a disembodied register for other characters than significant in herself, but she becomes important in the final chapters. Quick draws her too weakly to enable her to perform the function, say, of a Jamesian register. Without a strong narrative voice, the author commits what he later felt might be a mistake in his autobiography: "Following queer and interesting characters off into their manifestations, and running out odd and interesting happenings without much regard to their conventional values in the history of either my life or the society" (to Chambers, November 16, 1924). Without a central representative placed to control the work, Quick lost touch with the cluster of values centered upon his regional impulse. The traces of autobiographical mode in *The Invisible Woman* interfered with the central regional point of view he needed to focus his imagination. His efforts to create "a real novel" resulted in a sprawl of "queer and interesting characters."

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SUPER-SELLERS: BARTON, ERSKINE, HALLIBURTON

By MARSHA STEPHENS

ONE OF THE PERIODS of greatest prosperity and influence at Bobbs-Merrill came in the late twenties. Even a superficial glance at best-seller lists shows the happy fortunes of the firm during the half-dozen years before the Great Depression. The boom began in 1926, when trade receipts doubled and profits tripled. Of Mott's seven all-time best- and better-sellers which appeared in 1925, three bore the Bobbs-Merrill imprint: *The Man Nobody Knows* by Bruce Barton, *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* by John Erskine, and *The Royal Road to Romance* by Richard Halliburton. Study of these three books sheds light not only on the history of the Bobbs-Merrill Company, but also on the publishing business and reading tastes of the twenties, and on the art of best-sellerism in general.

None of the three writers had published with Bobbs-Merrill before. Though only Halliburton was writing his first book, none was quite a writer by profession: Barton was an advertising executive, Erskine an English professor at Columbia, and Halliburton a twenty-five-year-old adventurer. Each book brought fame and wealth to its author almost overnight, and each writer went on to produce for Bobbs-Merrill a series of books similar in conception and almost equal in popularity to his first. The interesting question is: why did these books sell as they did?

The production of best-sellers is one of the trickiest businesses imaginable. Happily, among critics, only pub-

lishers' editors need to predict, and explanation after the fact is rather less perilous. It is not so difficult to say what a best-seller must *not* be: it must not, for instance, be "difficult" or experimental, or suppose a command of the Locarno Pact. For any given period, the list can be slightly extended; in 1925, apparently, a best-seller could not be long or printed in small type—if it could be read in one thrilling session, so much the better.

No one was more surprised at the enormous success of the three books in question than their authors, though Bobbs-Merrill, except perhaps in the case of the Barton book, was hardly less so. *Helen* had been dressed out in a lavish \$2.50 suit calculated to beguile the eye of the moneyed sophisticate. A few months before its publication, D. L. Chambers wrote Erskine that it might "take a little longer to reach its public than a flashy novel," and Erskine replied, agreeing to the \$2.50 price tag, "Let's hope she justifies herself at any price!" (letters of August 20, 24, 1925).

The Halliburton book seemed less promising. Halliburton was later to exult in tracing its wanderings from publisher to publisher—it was rejected, he said, by no less than eight. But a Bobbs-Merrill editor heard him lecture one night and asked him if he did not have a manuscript. When Bobbs-Merrill readers read *The Royal Road to Romance*, they agreed that it was in pretty bad condition but could be shaped up. Not only Halliburton but apparently almost everybody in the Bobbs-Merrill office shared in the revision.

The Man Nobody Knows had a different history. Barton's father, W. E. Barton, had long been a Bobbs-Merrill author, and Barton first gave his manuscript privately to Hewitt H. Howland for his opinion of it. How-

land read the book over a weekend and immediately cabled Barton acceptance. Barton replied that he had promised two other publishers a reading and intended to take the best offer. It is known that one at least, Scribner's, then turned it down. Howland, meanwhile, wasted no words. "I must publish that book," he wrote Barton:

What others can give you I don't know, but I do know that it is not greater understanding, enterprise or enthusiasm. There is not another publisher who could center the force of his drive on one title—your title—as could we; the very length and importance of his non-fiction list would make it impossible (April 7, 1924).

The effort to sell itself to an author was not one Bobbs-Merrill often felt called upon to make.

I

What Howland felt about this view of Christ, portraying him as "the father of modern business," was to be shared by thousands upon thousands of readers. Again to Barton he wrote: "I was enthralled by it and tremendously moved. You have done more for the cause of righteousness than all the pulpits in the country have done in a generation. You have taken Jesus out of the stained glass window and made him a man" (January 18, 1924). It is impossible to be sure with publishers, whose eulogies of their investments are fluent and all but automatic, but it seems from his letters that Howland *was* moved by the book and at the same time was excited by the possibilities of its exploitation. "If properly presented," he wrote, "I believe that even the world's best Babbitt can be induced to read your book, and when he has read it he will be as strong for Jesus as he is now for his local Rotary" (January 18, 1924). The

"Blue-Sky" book continues to be a familiar phenomenon in publishing, as these lines published by Bobbs-Merrill in 1954 for Albert Van Nostrand attest:

The attainment of Salvation through material success is the particular pursuit of happiness that Americans have always been anxious to read about.

Books that gratify this gross inspiration are known in the publishing industry as "Blue-Sky" books, and they succeed commercially whenever the authors themselves believe in it. The knack in commercial publishing, of course, is to exploit—and to establish if need be—the coincidence of a writer's personal beliefs with the reigning public attitude. And if the publisher believes in it too, so much the better. His belief will affect the promotion of the book and probably its contents (*The Denatured Novel*, p. 25).

It requires a feat of the imagination for the modern reader, bearing in mind that *The Man Nobody Knows* was written by an aggressive Manhattan advertising executive, to realize that it was not cynically produced for financial gain. Can a man of Barton's intelligence not have known, for instance, that he was making an amusingly perverse play on words in quoting in the frontispiece the line "Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?" with the word *business* italicized? In his introduction Barton said that he had envisioned a book which every businessman would read and pass on to his partners and salesmen. Each of the famous events of Jesus' life is made to illustrate a "great principle of executive management." Here, for instance, is Christ's "calling" of Matthew: "*And as Jesus passed by, he called Matthew.*"

Amazing. No argument; no pleading. A smaller leader would have been compelled to set up the advantages of the opportunity. "Of course you are doing well where you are

and making money," he might have said. "I can't offer you as much as you are getting; in fact you may have some difficulty in making ends meet. But I think we are going to have an interesting time and shall probably accomplish a big work." Such a conversation would have been met with Matthew's reply that he would "have to think it over," and the world would never have heard his name.

There was no such trifling with Jesus. *As he passed by*, he called Matthew. No executive in the world can read that sentence without acknowledging that here indeed is the Master (page 25).

Yet it is clear from Barton's correspondence with Bobbs-Merrill and from his other writings and activities that he wrote his religious books from a deep, if confused, necessity within his own mind. He held great affection and respect for his remarkable preacher-father with his old-fashioned Christian ideals (for some years after his father's death, Barton was almost wholly occupied in supervising the publication of his posthumous works). But the exploitation of his own talents had led him into quite a different walk of life, and perhaps he felt a desperate need to show that the two could be reconciled. Happily for his books, a like need was felt by many thousands of his contemporaries.

One can see similarities between *The Man Nobody Knows* and *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*, but the over-all appeal of the two was of course quite different. Both were "modern" in that they introduced sanctions for relatively modern tendencies—to intense competitiveness in business, and to freedom in relations between the sexes—and both were distortions of ancient myth. Erskine's distortion was, however, frank, deliberate and meant to amuse; his modernity was far more liberal. It is hard to envision a reader at once sincerely moved by Barton and frankly amused by Erskine. Helen was related, at least, to that

"new woman" the periodicals of the day were always prattling about—in her general independence of spirit and her audacious conviction that a woman's spiritual well-being might not be measurably enhanced by a life-long and make-believe devotion to a dull husband. Erskine loved ironies and delighted in creating an adulterous Helen who was, nevertheless, the only moral person on the scene. A necessary foil to Helen's liberality was provided in Hermione, her proper daughter. Erskine's text is almost entirely dialogue; the lines are nearly always funny, sometimes impossible, often perceptive.

Almost any page exemplifies Erskine's humor of ironic understatement. Here is the beginning of Helen's first "good long talk" with her daughter after her return to Sparta:

'Hermione, I find certain scandalous rumors circulating about me here in Sparta. Perhaps you can explain them.'

'Which do you refer to, Mother?'

'So, you have heard of them. Scandal is always annoying, and usually it is unnecessary.'

'At times, mother, it is inevitable.'

'Never,' said Helen. 'I've met people who thought so, but I don't take their view. In any case, the question hardly concerns us. I wish to get at the bottom of these stories in which I figure rather discredibly. When did they first come to your attention?'

...
'There's a legend,' said Hermione, 'that you deserted your husband and ran away with Paris to Troy. I first heard of it right after you went away.'

'But that's not scandal,' said Helen, 'that's the truth.'

'If that's not scandal, I don't know what it is.'

'I see you don't,' said her mother. 'In scandal there's always some falsehood, something malicious and defamatory. Scandal, to my mind, is such a story as I heard yesterday from Charitas. She says I never was at Troy at all. Paris carried

me off, against my will, and some valuable furniture too, for good measure. The winds blew us to Egypt—you know the absurd tale? Well, that's what I call scandal. What should I be doing in Egypt? And would I have gone off with Paris if he had been a thief? . . . Paris didn't steal me. . . . But if he had stolen me, I'd prefer to think he would have had no margin of interest left for the furniture' (page 32).

"Is this the face," cracked the *Chicago News*, "that launched a thousand quips?"

If the successes of Barton and Erskine illustrate the public's desire to explore and justify the realities of life, *The Royal Road to Romance* illustrates the conflicting desire to forget all about them and go climb the Matterhorn instead.

When Halliburton graduated from Princeton in 1921, he and a classmate, heeding a raucous little voice which kept urging "Realize your youth while you have it," signed on a cargo boat for Hamburg. Adventures were hard to come by at first, but Halliburton learned to produce them with regularity. He sent home to his parents in Memphis sketches of his exploits in those blinding colors which were to make him famous, and his father passed them along to the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. During state-side sojourns, Halliburton then commenced giving brilliant lectures and peddling manuscripts to publishers. They all must have been, as Bobbs-Merrill remained, somewhat baffled by him. "He's a fool in some ways and needs watching," wrote Chambers to an assistant after Halliburton's attempt to circulate reports of his own death (undated memo of Chambers—probably addressed to an assistant, Anne Ross, sometime during July, 1926). Was his stuff, they must have asked themselves, mere undergraduate poppycock, or was it—just possibly—the very stuff of romance the tired school-

marm and housewife yearned for? Here is Halliburton's description in *Royal Road* of his famous swim in the "alabaster pool of the Taj Mahal":

Higher rose the moon; fairer gleamed the Taj, a harmonious pile of masonry in the sunshine of the morning, a specter underneath the stars, now transfigured to a gleaming gossamer, an airy bubble that might evaporate into ether while one looked upon it. . . .

No one was awake to see me creep forth into the balmy night, or to watch my shadow as it left the marble platform and moved again across the moon-blanchèd park. . . .

Only an insomniac owl watched me remove my clothes, or heard the faint ripple as I dropped into the alabaster pool. This was a page from the *Arabian Nights*, a reversion to the fabled luxury of ancient emperors,—this, at last, was Romance (page 25).

Some of the things Halliburton saw in his travels are interesting in themselves (the polyandrous household he visited in Andorra, for instance), but exactly as in those promotional posters where the Matterhorn is just a tuft rising from his well-oiled head, Richard himself tends to get in the way of a full view. Halliburton wanted readers to interest themselves in Halliburton (alias Romance! Youth! Adventure! and what-not) rather than the Taj Mahal, but they persisted in being interested in the Taj Mahal, and this fact depressed him.

II

The Man Nobody Knows appeared in the spring of 1925 and the Erskine and Halliburton books in the fall. All attained their greatest sales in 1926, and with three best-sellers in the stalls, Bobbs-Merrill's fortunes rose accordingly. The Company's total trade receipts in 1926 were close

to \$700,000. Though it is not possible to reckon the total number of books sold, it is interesting to note that the sales of the three specified titles, approaching, as they did, 190,000 for that one year, must have brought in, at the very least, a third of the total gross trade income and approximately half of the Company's trade profits.

Barton's book sold the longest (it was still a popular reprint in 1930) and made the greatest over-all sales record: close to 300,000 copies sold (exclusive of modern paperbacks), at a profit to Barton—on royalties alone—of about \$65,000; in 1926 he took in over \$30,000 on the one book. *Helen's* total was more modest, 200,000 copies sold; *The Royal Road to Romance* did not much exceed 150,000.

To what extent, one might ask, did Bobbs-Merrill's promotion account for the success of these books? It is impossible, of course, to say for sure, because, for one thing, all three authors were active promoters of their own books. On the evidence of promotional files, it seems that though *The Man Nobody Knows*, certainly, and to a lesser degree, *Helen*, were given whooping send-offs, real advertising money did not begin to flow until the books had demonstrated sales potential. Bobbs-Merrill was spending, during these years, slightly more than the average 10 per cent of gross income usually devoted by publishers to advertising.

The trade department had been built up by two extremely energetic editors, Chambers and Howland (Howland was to leave in the fall of 1925 to become editor of *Century*), and their general perspicacity and knowledge of the trade must have been remarkable. Chambers was to continue to be the moving spirit of the Company for the next two decades—he became president in 1937. No one who reads his correspondence (he seems to have written

literally hundreds of letters every week, often two in one day to the same author) can have any doubt that he ran a strenuously efficient operation. No detail seems to have escaped him, no possibility to sell books to have gone unexplored; he handled authors with seemingly effortless tact and shrewdness and almost unfailing good cheer. The office as a whole had every bit its share of the twenties' pep and high spirits—and well-oiled tongues. Everything and everybody was the “bulliest,” the “snappiest,” the “keenest.” “We all know, every man-jack of us,” goes the patter, “your next book'll knock 'em dead!” “Keep those chapters pourin' in, old man, we're gettin' thrilled and thrilled!” Chambers wrote to Halliburton in 1927:

And if we've done anything for you, why surely it's been a joy to work with you. We've never had an author who gave us such wonderful cooperation, to whose interest we could feel more personal devotion, to whom we felt more closely bound. You have made a royal road into our hearts, my dear fellow, and all our contact with you has been a glorious adventure (May 31, 1927).

“One of the trials of life,” wrote Chambers in an inter-office memo, “is the necessity of constantly showing an accommodating spirit to the authors” (to H. S. Baker in the New York office, May 27, 1926).

One thing that *is* known about the best-seller audience is that it is not one but several, and it must be the publisher's aim to bring a book to the attention of its “natural” public. Bobbs-Merrill courted the “religious” readership by sending free copies of books to ministers over the country asking for their endorsements. In the case of the Barton book, these endorsements came pouring back with profuse congratulations and promises to commend the book from the pulpit. The promotional files contain countless church

programs announcing talks, reviews—indeed Sunday sermons—on the book in churches from coast to coast and of all denominations. The “business” group was likewise courted. Endorsements came back on letterheads of such firms as the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company; the Standard Conveyor Company of St. Paul, Minnesota; and the Hickok Belts, Buckles and Beltograms of Rochester, New York. Erskine’s appeal was thought to be primarily to the “cultivated,” as Chambers put it. Particularly prized endorsements of *Helen* came from other sophisticated novelists and critics, presidents of universities, and chairmen of English departments.

It is impossible to estimate the real value of such machinations—because no one knows who actually bought the books. Perhaps a more important factor was the Company’s carefully cultivated relations with bookstores, upon whose good will publishers in the twenties depended. Indeed, Halliburton’s success seems to have been closely related to his personal popularity in bookstores and the publicity derived from his incessant book teas and autograph parties.

With regard to the vaunted magazine influence on book sales through serialization and the consequent subsidizing of the industry they are thought to have provided, it appears that it was not the aim of every publisher to get every book serialized. Chambers felt, as he explained to Erskine and other authors, that though serialization was always desirable for authors who had not yet gained a large following, it was of dubious benefit for those whose books were going to be bought anyway—in fact, it probably cut into their sales. Of course authors realized large profits from serialization, and Bobbs-Merrill often had to promote

it to satisfy them. Additional side-money came from the movies, which were beginning to exert their own influence and effect publishers' decisions on what books to publish or try to get written. Erskine sold three of his books, including *Helen*, to film producers for a total of \$24,000, the publisher's share of which was something more than one third.

III

The good fortune of each of these writers had, indeed, just begun with their first big sellers. Advance sales alone of each of Erskine's next two books exceeded 30,000 copies. He was to publish thirteen books with Bobbs-Merrill during the dozen years after *Helen*, but with such steadily decreasing sales that in 1937, the depression having dealt him a mortal blow, and feeling "pretty sore" about what he felt was a diminishing interest in his books among the sales force, he left the Company and took his books elsewhere. D. L. Chambers had from the beginning a profound respect for John Erskine, and the two had become close friends. He and Erskine both felt that Erskine's books were going to survive over time far better than they have. Indeed, Erskine, foreseeing a day when first editions of his books would be extremely valuable, prompted Chambers to "brand" the first printings as a service to collectors.

But Erskine's activity was by no means confined to novel writing. He is better known today as a great teacher-innovator (as, for instance, the initiator of the overseas university program after World War I and the pioneer at Columbia of the Great Books program). He was also a poet, critic, and a respected concert pianist—a man, as Fannie Hurst put it, of "parts and parts and parts." *Helen*

is still eminently readable, though oddly and casually constructed of long conversations among the principal characters. There is at least a possibility that had not Erskine become attuned so suddenly and almost accidentally to a popular demand in fiction, his novels would have eventually taken a more important form. But he was a man, as he himself said, who loved to be applauded. He wanted to continue to please his huge following and at the same time to write great books, and he fortified himself with the conviction that he could best find his voice by singing a succession of slightly different tunes into the public ear and noting its reaction. In 1935 he wrote Chambers:

The report of your reader as well as your good opinion confirm me in the conclusion that what the world wants from me is my original type of story and not a modern novel. *Sincerity, Unfinished Business, and Forget If You Can* contain from my point of view a good deal of the best of me, but apparently I register best as a satirist, or at least as a reviser of the past (March 13, 1935).

That Chambers did not practice on Erskine the art, as it is called, of "creative publishing" (in which the editors help to plan and even to write their authors' books) appears, considering the jobs he performed on Halliburton and other writers, to indicate the respect he felt for Erskine's powers.

Barton, too, he felt had better be let alone; in his case the problem was just to keep him writing. The theory was that a big seller had better be followed up by a new book every eighteen months or the capital built up for the writer would go to waste. Barton was sincerely committed to his writings and was not inclined to spout them off the top of his head. His objection to Bobbs-Merrill's advertising, for instance, was not that it would not sell his books but

that it would sell them for the wrong reasons. In 1932, after submitting *He Upset the World*, the story of Paul, and the fifth and last book Barton wrote, he wrote Chambers:

My reluctance about the piece of copy you sent us is not based on any criticism of it as an advertisement. I feel it gives the impression, however, that I have written a sensational book, and I do not regard this book as sensational. Perhaps I flatter myself, but I really feel it is the best and most interesting book that has been written about Paul.

In other words it would please me very much if Bobbs-Merrill or some reviewer would say, "This is the best and most interesting little book ever written about Paul." But the piece of copy you sent gives me the feeling that the book isn't much good and therefore has to be treated with a certain amount of ballyhoo (Feb. 9, 1932).

Halliburton, on the other hand, was one whose gifts were ruthlessly subjected to financial wizardry. The Halliburton files provide a view of "creative publishing" at its boldest: "I'm shifting rapidly," wrote Chambers, "toward Richard Coeur-de-Lion for the subject of your next book, and I have it much on my mind as to when that book will appear" (June 6, 1927). To Halliburton's objection that he did not like the "lilt" of a sentence Chambers had rewritten, Chambers replied, in a rare lapse of the "accommodating spirit": "My lilt is just as good as your lilt" (January 8, 1927). After establishing his name in the trade with his first two books, Halliburton took stock and decided that he wanted to produce something more substantial. He wrote Chambers that he thought he could do a good job of a Rupert Brooke biography which would show the world that he could write something of real value. Chambers replied—alas—that he would not oppose the

project if Halliburton was set on it, but that he need not be defensive about his travel books:

There is nothing about *Glorious Adventure* or *Royal Road to Romance* that needs apology or counteraction with the public. You will find the public eager for more travel things from you of the same sort and 90% of the authors in America envy you. Do not be affected by the words of a few supercilious critics (August 15, 1927).

Of the three, Halliburton proved to be the Company's most valuable property over the years. In 1939, when Barton had quit writing and Erskine had worn out his popularity and was trying with small success to get himself rejuvenated by another firm, Halliburton's fortunes were very much alive. In the fall of that year he went down in the Pacific in a Chinese junk which he was sailing from Hong Kong to San Francisco in hopes of making a sensational appearance at the World's Fair. Not even the depression had greatly affected the sales of his books.

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CHARLIE CHAN: THE MAKING OF AN IMMORTAL

By NEIL ELLMAN

THE CREATION OF Earl Derr Biggers' fictional detective Charlie Chan was the result of a change in the author's attitude from that of a young and idealistic humorist writing for the *Boston Traveller* to that of a more worldly writer with an appreciation for steady royalties. In his column, "The Fact Is," the early Biggers had belittled best-sellerism:

Peter de Puyster Blottingpad,
Who wrote "Marie, the Subtle Sinner,"
Does his best work when he has had
Plenty of artichokes for dinner.
Mable Redink, the "girl Dumas,"
Who mingles history and fiction,
Read books on corporation law
In order to improve her diction.
Samuel Gay, who's all the rage
Because he has convulsed the nation,
Spends hours before a monkey's cage,
Gathering loads of inspiration.
Mildred McNeal, the poetess,
Sleeps on a book of Villon's verses;
Unkind remarks cause her distress,
And so do funerals and hearses.
Thus is our sadness put to rout
By publishers—kind gloom dispellers—
Who send us cheery news about
The folks who write the worst best sellers.

After writing his first novel, *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, Biggers retained his idealistic desire to create great litera-

ture: "I am anxious to try another novel soon, but I want it to come to me—I don't want it to be one of those things that the author had to go to. So far it hasn't come. And when it does come I hope it will be, not a giddy farce thinly covering a play, but a fine, real, true story of American life, with plenty of humor and characters that will stand out and be beloved by the readers" (to H. H. Howland, April 26, 1915). If Biggers sounded fearful of becoming a "Peter de Puyster Blottingpad," indeed, a "giddy farce thinly covering a play" aptly describes his next novel, *Love Insurance*. Perhaps, while contemplating a genuinely "literary" novel, he began to realize that he never would write one.

Shortly, under the pressures of domestic life, Biggers began to show more interest in income than in art. Offered advance royalties for *The Agony Column*, he wrote to Howland on July 27, 1916, "I feel that I owe it to my family to accept the largest of these." A month later, he explained, "We are just furnishing a house in Pelham [New York], and I don't feel like letting this chance for unexpected money go by" (to W. C. Bobbs, August 1, 1916). What remained of idealism now took the form of pride in his craft. Money, however, became increasingly important. Thus, he wrote to Bobbs on December 12, 1916, "I used to feel, when a book failed that I could easily write another, but as I grow older that feeling is not so strong, and I begin to worry about the future and to acknowledge the need of getting all I can as I go along."

By 1919 Biggers had found short story writing more lucrative than novels. To be sure, although he was generally doing well, neither he nor the Bobbs-Merrill Company had earned much from the publication of his first three novels.

In August, 1922, in answer to Howland's insistence that he try another novel, he explained, "At the present moment G. H. Lorimer [editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*] is paying such fantastic figures for short stories that I am not contemplating a novel in the near future." But two months later he wrote to Laurance Chambers, "I am . . . contemplating a novel—a mystery story of Honolulu." The reversal stemmed from the same motives—money and security. In the same letter he asked for a loan of \$1,200 to make a payment on his new house. Financial need, worsened when he suffered a nervous breakdown in 1924, amplified his need to finish the book.

It was this new novel which turned out to be the first in the Chan series, though it is clear from correspondence that Biggers began with no intention of a series featuring one character. Chan was a secondary figure in this first work. It is even doubtful that Biggers had any initial intention of writing "detective fiction." He pointed out to Howland, ". . . as I have said from the first . . . the book should be put forward as 'a romantic mystery story' with the emphasis on romantic" (to Howland, December 20, 1924).

Biggers first got the idea for the novel during a three-month stay in Honolulu, where he thought of "a suspicion-proof method" of murder, "a trick that is most easily possible at Waikiki Beach, and would be impossible nearly everywhere else" (to Chambers, December 18, 1922). The "trick" was to be a feat of long-distance swimming. His plot, as he then imagined it, concerned a young writer seeking material for a murder mystery at Waikiki and finding the situation turned into real murder. At this point, Chan had not entered the picture.

The use of a Hawaiian setting particularly appealed to Biggers. He explained to Chambers on November 21, 1924, "I felt that in pushing it, it might be well to soft pedal murder and play up the setting. I have never mentioned Honolulu to anybody but what they said—'Oh, I've always wanted to go there. . . .'" By using the setting, Biggers hoped to sell his book to a clientele outside the regular mystery audience. In effect, he considered local color more important than the detective fiction element.

The plot of *The House Without A Key* turned out richer than Biggers first imagined. The primary addition was a humorous, almost satirical, subplot concerning John Quincy Winterslip's conversion from stodgy Bostonian to carefree man of the Islands. Another addition, of less immediate impact on the plot, but of more lasting significance, was the introduction of a Chinese-Hawaiian assistant detective—Charlie Chan. Whether or not he was based on a real human being has been much debated. Chang Apana, one of the few Chinese members of the Honolulu police force, claimed to be his original, a claim which Biggers loudly denied time and time again. Even his wife defended his originality with vehemence: "As of course you know, nothing could be farther from the truth. Earl had written three Chan stories before he ever heard of Apana, who was the very antithesis of Charlie in every way, appearance, character, point of view and career. It seems cruel, after all the hard work Earl put into creating Charlie Chan, and inventing again and again such original and clever plots, for a lot of hack reporters to claim that it all came from a little Hawaiian cop, whose only activity was running down opium smugglers in Honolulu" (Mrs. Biggers to Chambers, January 17, 1934).

Years later, Biggers was to write: "Sinister and wicked Chinese are old stuff, but an amiable Chinese on the side of law and order had never been used up to that time. . . . If I understand Charlie Chan correctly, he has an idea that if you understand a man's character you can nearly predict what he is apt to do in any set of circumstances" ("Creating Charlie Chan," *New York Times*, March 22, 1931). This is a fine description of the later Chan, but it is hardly adequate for the earliest Chan, who had not quite ceased to be the "sinister and wicked Chinese." He was not, of course, a Hawaiian Fu Manchu, but there was something opaque and uncanny about his abilities. As Chan himself explained in *The House Without A Key*: "Chinese most psychic people in the world. Sensitives, like film in camera. A look, a laugh, a gesture perhaps. Something go click." Furthermore, his rather "sneaky" police methods closely fitted the whodunit convention of the Oriental. For instance, Ronald A. Knox had believed that a Chinese character should *never* figure in a mystery story. "Why this should be so," he tried to explain, "I do not know, unless we can find a reason for it in our Western habit of assuming that the Celestial is over-equipped in the matter of brains, and under-equipped in the matter of morals" ("A Detective Story Decalogue," *The Art of the Mystery Story*, p. 195).

A reflection of such attitudes in the character of Charlie Chan no doubt reinforced stereotypes of the Chinese and contributed to the immediate popularity of the detective. The author originally cared very little for *The House Without A Key*, which he described as "ideal stuff for the lads who get their fiction at the drug store." Furthermore, he explained, "I can't quite take this kind of tale seriously, and never could—now less than ever" (to Chambers, De-

cember 18, 1922; September 18, 1924). Description of Chan as "a Chinaman" in the early stories reveals the author's original attitude toward his famous character. After becoming involved with Chan, Biggers never used the word "Chinaman" except as an insult (Mrs. Biggers to Chambers, May 22, 1933). In the later novels, Chan was always "a Chinese."

That Biggers used Chan again, however, is not to be wondered at. Although the first Chan novel was not a best-seller, the detective attracted and inspired a flood of letters demanding his future appearance. Until then, Biggers had never mentioned Chan's name in his correspondence, but, on April 20, 1925, he advised Chambers to "play up Charlie Chan a bit" and further explained, "I never followed up on Baldpate the way I should have done, and I am not going to be so stupid this time." On August 23 he was saying, "I am conscious at the present time of a larger following in the mystery field than I ever had before." By the time Biggers had finished a second Chan novel, *The Chinese Parrot*, he felt at last financially secure (to Chambers, February 9, 1926). The greatest contributing factor was the money from the first serial rights to the novels, all of which were to be placed in *The Saturday Evening Post*. For *Behind That Curtain*, Biggers received the then staggering sum of \$25,000 (to Chambers, January 10, 1928).

In *The Chinese Parrot* Biggers did not play upon the stereotype. Instead, the detective became more American, more Western, more human. This novel is hardly so funny as the first, for Chan, now promoted to the rank of detective sergeant, is no longer a comic figure. Humorous abuse of English is now replaced by aphoristic and sagacious remarks. But the most important change involved Biggers'

play upon Chan's oriental-occidental dual nature. In the first novel, Chan, dressed in occidental clothes, was very much Chinese. In *The Chinese Parrot* Chan is still a Chinese, but his whole way of life is changing in the face of occidental ways. When his cousin, Chan Kee Lim, asks, "The foreign devil police—what has a Chinese in common with them?" Chan answers, "There are times, honorable cousin, when I do not quite understand myself." The new Chan is no longer a stereotyped oriental but a more rounded and more human character. The great detectives are seldom married; even more seldom do they have home lives. Chan was the first and most successful "domestic" detective in fiction. Although Biggers was concerned primarily with financial success, he went beyond the earlier Chan because he had always wanted to create characters who would "stand out and be beloved by the readers." The almost sinister, certainly comical, Chan of the first novel was attractive but hardly lovable. Furthermore, the author thoroughly knew his audience and no doubt catered to its susceptibility to the domestic possibilities inherent in Chan.

Not until the third Chan novel, *Behind That Curtain*, did Biggers decide to make Chan the hero of an extended series. The relatively poor book sales of *The Chinese Parrot* forced him to reflect: "'Am I on the right track with Charlie Chan?' But thinking back on the readers' comments and the notices, I think I am. They all like him, they all want more of him. Charlie's not the guilty party" (to Chambers, November 11, 1926).

In the third and remaining novels of the series, Chan's "image" became firmly established. The reader is introduced to Henry, his eldest son, and Rose, his eldest daughter, both Americanized to an extent their father cannot fully

comprehend. Chan's aphorisms grow in number, wisdom, and eloquence. Typical of them are the following from *Charlie Chan Carries On*: "Many times honey in the mouth means poison in the heart," and "The drum which makes the most noise is filled with wind." Chan's new seriousness is balanced by the addition of a fumbling assistant, Kashimo, who may be the first Japanese detective in literature.

Biggers early became afraid that the movies would ruin his creation. When Conrad Veidt was being considered as the movies' first Charlie Chan, Biggers feared that the German actor and his German director would "scare the public to death, and brand Charlie as a sinister devil from the Orient" (to Chambers, January 31, 1927). After Sojin and Warner Baxter played the detective, Chan's career in the movies seemed at an end: "The news is all about over there that Charlie cannot be cast—Fox tried every Chinese laundryman on the Coast, but never thought of trying an actor—and the issue looks like a dead one" (to Chambers, December 10, 1929). The successful portrayal of Chan finally achieved by Warner Oland meant a great deal to Biggers, for he considered it the final step needed to establish Chan "as the leading sleuth of his generation," as he wrote to Chambers on February 6, 1931. Toward that end, he became careful not to overexpose Chan and forbade the radio broadcasting of Chan scripts as well as the publication of comic strips based on the detective.

The following year, 1932, saw a complete reversal of the situation. Not only was this a period of ill health for Biggers, but the depression began seriously to affect the publishing industry, and Twentieth-Century Fox decided that Chan was finished in the movies. Now despondent, Biggers was forced to allow the radio broadcasts and to

admit that his plans for Chan were futile: "As it seems to me that Chan is just now at the peak of his 'run' . . . my theory is that I had better toss off all Chan stories I intend writing as quickly as possible, before he fades out of the public mind, and get it over with. *I don't believe he is immortal after all*" (to Chambers, January 18, 1933). But he was to write no more. Three months later, Earl Derr Biggers was dead.

In some respects, Chan's continuing fame owes more to the radio series, the comic strip, continuation of the movies, and now television than to the original novels. Indeed, though the detective's name is a household word, the name of his creator is known by few. Whether or not Biggers was a true artist, he was a craftsman who created a character that outlived him. The mystery is that Charlie Chan, begun for financial need and developed following the leads to financial success, has an independent existence.

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DAVID LAURANCE CHAMBERS AS I KNEW HIM

By THOMAS D. CLARK

IN THE LATE 1920's I read the sprightly biographies of Sam Houston and Andrew Jackson by Marquis James, Robert Selph Henry's story of reconstruction, and several other titles which had been published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company. When I first joined the University of Kentucky staff, I was especially impressed by a rather handsome book the Company published for William H. Townsend of Lexington, Kentucky. Everybody in Lexington was praising *Lincoln and His Wife's Home Town*. Mr. Townsend was a master storyteller, and his book did not slight the challenge of describing life in ante bellum Lexington at a time when the Lincolns came from Springfield, Illinois, to visit with the haughty Todd family.

I came to know William H. Townsend intimately. Many times I talked with him about his experiences with Bobbs-Merrill. In 1937-39 I was engaged in research and writing a book on frontier humor. By the spring of 1939 I had the manuscript completed and was ready to approach a publisher. Mr. Townsend offered to write a letter on my behalf to Mr. Laurance Chambers, but one night at a dinner party I met an old Bobbs-Merrill salesman who said he would go with me to Indianapolis to see Mr. Chambers.

In the meantime I wrote Mr. Chambers describing my manuscript, and asked if I might bring the manuscript in for him to examine. I will never forget the excitement with which I received his reply, written on his famous fawn-

colored stationery and enclosed in a slender executive-type envelope. The letter was brief and pointed: he would look at my manuscript, but he made no commitment in advance about publication. I looked at his almost feminine signature many times trying to guess what kind of man he was. Neither Mr. Townsend nor Virgil Steed had really given me a description of him. Virgil and I left Lexington at four o'clock in the morning for Indianapolis, and I am certain we arrived there before Mr. Chambers came to his office.

The Bobbs-Merrill Company was located on North Meridian Street in a narrow "shotgun" building. The facade of the building, with its muted classic columns, was as impressive as the Company's stationery. On display at either side of the entry were recent Bobbs-Merrill books. Though I gazed at these hoping hungrily that not too far in the future my own book would be there, I was never to know whether it ever was.

Associate editor of the house at that time was Mrs. Jessica Mannion, wife of an Indianapolis attorney. Jessica gave my manuscript a hurried perusal, and then said Mr. Chambers was ready to see me. I know now that if she had not seen promise in the manuscript she would have turned me back at that point. I have never been more anxious to make a good impression than at the moment I crossed the threshold of Mr. Chambers' office. I was not, however, prepared for what I saw. Mr. Chambers was a fairly tall, stooped, grey-haired man. He gave me the impression of having stepped fresh out of a Dickens novel. His shirt tail was out, his hair was rumpled, and he looked at me over pince-nez glasses as if I had brought a dead fish into the parlor. He made me sit down across the broad, tousled desk before him and talked in such a low voice that only

by the grace of God could I tell what he was saying. The main points I got were that the book business was bad and that he had not worked his shirt tail out in anxiety to publish my book.

He asked me to unwrap the manuscript and hand it to him. When I handed him the manuscript, I slipped off a rubber band. In a nervous fidget, I cocked my pencil on the band, forgot about the pencil, and let go. My missile sailed over Mr. Chambers' head in a perfect arc, just missing him. I do not think he ever noticed what happened. No doubt I came within inches of shooting myself out of a publisher.

A short time after I returned to Lexington I received a contract. It was clear Mr. Chambers did not consider me another Marquis James, but he would publish the book. I worked closely with Jessica Mannion, and two or three times in the process of readying the book for release I talked with Mr. Chambers, always in half-whispered conversations. Once a question arose over whether they would allow me to publish a comic story about a backwoods incident involving a slight matter of miscegenation. Mr. Chambers vetoed the story. It was Jessica who grabbed me by the coat lapels and said, "You can't publish that story!" It was harmless, and today would not be questioned.

A young author could have worked with no finer people than the staff at Bobbs-Merrill. They were not, however, so sentimental about books as their authors were. I was most anxious to see what the *Rampaging Frontier* would look like in final form. So far as I knew, Bobbs-Merrill had closed its doors after I sent the page proofs back to them. One day I was walking across the campus of the University of Kentucky when I met a student with a new book under his arm.

I asked to see it, and to my utter amazement it was my book. When I asked Mr. Chambers about this he said he thought it more important to get books on dealers' shelves than into authors' hands.

At this time the Bobbs-Merrill Company was under rather severe pressure. Jessica Mannion told me that the house had advanced \$50,000 to Edith Bolling Wilson for her book, *My Memoir*. As a matter of fact, Bobbs-Merrill stationery carried a line of advertising for this book on the flap of the envelope. I think I am correct in saying that *My Memoir* was a disappointment. Mrs. Wilson seemed to me to say little in her book that had real substance.

After the appearance of the *Rampaging Frontier*, which received rather good reviews, I signed a contract for a second book, this time on the role of the country store in modern southern history. Before I had the manuscript of this book ready, Rosemary York became associate editor. I traveled over the South gathering tons of dusty store records as sources for my book. In Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I was told that an old classmate, Bell I. Wiley, was there working in the great Southern collection of the University. He and his wife were living in an old board-and-batten student shack, and I drove around to see them. When I drove into the yard, Bell was standing at a front window stripped to his waist. He yelled for me to come in—I was the very fellow he wanted to see. He told me that Bobbs-Merrill was publishing his *Johnny Reb* and that he was having trouble with Mr. Chambers, Rosemary York, and his wife. He had collected several letters which spelled out in purplish prose the more relaxed phases of soldiering in the Confederate Army. They did not support the image which the Daughters of the Confederacy cherished of the

South's brave soldiers. Mr. Chambers and Rosemary would not let Bell publish the letters, and his wife said he should not publish them. A week or two later I was in Indianapolis and asked Rosemary about Bell's letters. She told me they were locked up in the Company's vault, where they were going to stay.

When I delivered my store book manuscript I had no title for it. Mr. Chambers said he liked the manuscript but he could not publish a nameless book. I had exhausted my feeble imagination trying to produce a title, and I showed him a rather long list of suggestions, but none suited him. In sheer desperation I suggested *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows*. He accepted it immediately. This was a fortunate title. The book became the point of an argument with the Book-of-the-Month Club Committee. I was told the reason it was not selected was because Amy Loveman did not believe life could be so hard for people. I had trouble with city girls over this book. One day an assistant editor said to me that I talked a lot about grass. "Was grass a problem with southern farmers?" This almost caused me to go into shock.

I never could persuade Mr. Chambers to take advantage of certain potential sales outlets for *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows*, and I still believe these would have proved worth while. Sales had become the Achilles heel of the Bobbs-Merrill Company. Mr. Chambers, no doubt, was hard on his sales managers and promotion people. Too, the depression years were hard on the book business generally. I felt, as perhaps every author has felt from the beginning of time, that the Company did not always push books as effectively as it might have done.

About the time I published my second book, the Company had hard luck in the death of an author. Lew Sub-

lette, a member of the famous old Kentucky pioneer and Rocky Mountain family, died just before he had completed a manuscript. I read this manuscript and made suggestions as to how I thought it might be completed. Mr. Chambers asked Harrison Kroll to finish the book, and it was published under the title *Rogues' Company*. This was an interesting account of flatboat life on the Western rivers.

I am sure that this Midwestern publishing company had difficult financial sledding. I felt that it was a real asset to this region, and was happy indeed to be one of its authors. When I delivered the manuscript for the *Southern Country Editor*, and after the manuscript had been edited by Harry Platt, Rosemary York asked me one day to come into a back office for a private conversation. I had no idea what we were to talk about, but when we were in the office she said the Company felt it necessary to ask its authors to renegotiate their contracts at lower royalty rates. I agreed to this, even though there ran through my mind some debate on this matter. I could legally stand on my original contract and incur the wrath of some very warm friends, or renegotiate and perhaps help the Company; I did not feel the income from my book would be tremendously important either way. Later I learned that one or two authors proved unruly indeed. I remember one of them afterwards refused to write Mr. Chambers a letter of congratulation on the occasion, I believe, of his eightieth birthday. An appeal had gone out from his friends asking authors to do this.

Rosemary York came to Lexington to visit at the time we were in the midst of publishing the *Country Editor*. My neighbor of many years, A. B. Guthrie, Jr., had long planned to write a book about the opening of the Rocky Mountain

West. Bud was born in Indiana but grew up on the Gallatin Fork of the Missouri at Choteau, Montana. He had written four chapters and brought them over for Rosemary to read. She told him he had the beginning of a fine story but that it was a rugged beginning. I have often wondered what might have happened if Bobbs-Merrill had shown enough interest in the manuscript to give Bud a contract. His *Big Sky* proved to be valuable literary property indeed.

One of the parts of Townsend's book which Mr. Chambers most enjoyed was its account of the original Cassius Marcellus Clay. Clay was the son of a wealthy old pioneer land and slave owner who went to Yale University and fell under the influence of early abolitionists. Back in Kentucky he published the *True American*, a mild abolitionist journal which aroused the slaveholders of the Bluegrass to the point where they destroyed the paper. Later Clay became notorious for his ready use of the Bowie knife on opponents. Mr. Chambers asked me in later years if I would not do a biography of Cassius M. Clay, and to this day I have been glad I turned down the invitation.

In his later years I had several pleasant visits with, and letters from, Mr. Chambers. Upon occasion when I was in Indianapolis, I stopped by the Bobbs-Merrill office to visit him. He was in retirement but still came to the office. The last time I saw him he asked me to come around the desk and sit by his side. We had a long conversation about authors and books, and when I got up to go he put his arm around my neck and gave me a fatherly pat. I could not help recalling how different that meeting was from that first nervous moment when I came within inches of shooting myself out of a publisher.

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THE VIRGIN ARCHIVE

By ROBERT W. MITCHNER

FOR SOME FOUR YEARS I enjoyed the distinction of knowing more about the early activities of Bobbs-Merrill than anyone else. Not hard-won, this distinction came simply because I alone happened to have both access to the papers and time to study them. Now, of course, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Howard W. Sams, the letters, records, and documents pertaining to the Hoosier publishing house up to the year 1940 are available to scholars in Indiana University's Lilly Library. It occurs to me, however, that there may be some interest in a personal account of my experiences in becoming acquainted with those materials while they were still in Indianapolis.

I owe these experiences to a statement I read somewhere, some time during the spring of 1961, to the effect that the Bobbs-Merrill files were about to be given to the Princeton University Library. When my friend, Mr. M. Hughes Miller, then President of Bobbs-Merrill, came to Bloomington to visit the Writers' Conference early that summer, I urged him to reconsider. He assured me that there was nothing to reconsider, for no such step had been seriously contemplated. And he agreed with me that the files should stay in Indiana. Like me, he was convinced that they must be of extraordinary interest, since the Company (then Bowen-Merrill) had sprung from nowhere (in the opinion of the Eastern publishers) just at the turn of the century to revolutionize publishing, especially those

aspects of it which have to do with the advertising and promotion of books. And it had gone on, through the next several decades, to produce a long series of popular novels, an amazing number of which became national best-sellers.

Mr. Miller felt sure that the records were complete; it was his opinion that they went clear back to the founding of the house—or at least to the disastrous Bowen-Merrill fire of 1890. Naturally, I said that I would like to see those files. Almost immediately after his return to Indianapolis, he wrote me that Mr. Sams agreed with him that I should be allowed to do so.

His letter reached me just as the Writers' Conference ended. I went to Indianapolis the next day and presented myself at the Bobbs-Merrill offices, ready to go to work. Here Mr. Miller introduced me to Bobbs-Merrill's oldest (in point of service) and most devoted employee, Lois Stewart Baumgart, who was asked to show me the files and to see to it that I was allowed to inspect anything I wanted to. I promised to try to keep out of everyone's way and not to pry into anything that wasn't directly concerned with the early days of the Bobbs-Merrill Company (as opposed to the current files and the affairs of the Howard W. Sams Company). To begin with, I was given a booklet, written in the 1920's, called *The Hoosier House*; a reading of it was to give me a quick view of the history of the Company. I read the booklet that night. It was intensely interesting, and nearly every line suggested to me something that I should investigate further. Unfortunately, I was to discover, after wasting hundreds of hours trying to follow up its leads, that almost every statement in that little book, especially the first part of it, was inaccurate. Still worse,

practically every story about the history of Bobbs-Merrill printed in the last forty years has been based, essentially, on that booklet.

There were to be other frustrations, too. I ran into the first and worst of them the next day, when I was turned loose among rows of rows of file cabinets, with other cabinets piled on top of them and, on top of everything, stacks of heavy cardboard boxes. The file drawers which contained letters were arranged chronologically, and there were none dated earlier than 1908. When I pulled that 1908 drawer open, I found almost nothing in it. There were all those large, unlabeled boxes up near the ceiling, though, and I optimistically assumed that the files of earlier years would turn up in them. I plunged right into the scanty correspondence for 1908, 1909, and 1910, taking notes as fast as I could write. Then I encountered an inter-office memo from one of the editors, asking to see a certain author-editor correspondence from its beginnings in 1899 or so. On the bottom of this memo the person to whom the memo had been addressed had written these chilling words: "Everything prior to 1906 was destroyed."

I was jolted, but I kept working. What was available to me, even if it was not exactly what I had hoped to find, was itself fascinating; and there were hundreds of drawers of it. Also, my early optimism returned when, some days later, I learned that shortly before Bobbs-Merrill had moved from 724-730 North Meridian Street to its East 38th Street location, Lois Baumgart had been instructed to burn all the "dead" files. Having been with the Company almost all her life (she started out as D. Laurance Chambers' secretary when she and the century were in their teens), she knew the historical value of those doomed files, and she

was unable to force herself to carry out the order. She went to Julius Birge, then a vice-president of the Company, and told him her problem. At his suggestion she, with the help of a sixteen-year-old boy, hid the files away in large boxes and put the boxes where they would not be noticed.

When, in 1957, the Company moved (for the third time in thirty-one years) to a building at 1720 East 38th Street, which had formerly been a candy factory and where there was a large basement storage room, those precious boxes, containing almost all of what now makes up so valued an acquisition of the Lilly Library, were opened and their contents put in file cabinets. And that is where they were when I saw them. Knowing, then, that one planned destruction of old files had been aborted, I persuaded myself that the 1906 catastrophe might also have been less than total. After all, the files in plain sight down there in what I called the Chocolate Room (because that's what a sign above its door said) were not in perfect order. And I reminded myself that anything might be found anywhere, considering the moves the Company had made, considering how little time any of the busy employees had had to spend with old files, and considering that filing had been done, over the course of half a century, by many different people—people with varying degrees of concern with whether anything could ever be found again or not and with individualistic ideas as to where in the files a given letter or document should go. It became clear that no single person—not even Lois Baumgart—knew exactly where any one thing in the file room (or, for that matter, in the library or the “morgue”) which dated that far back might be found, or even *if* it might be found.

It seemed to me that somebody ought to know where things were—and that it was up to me to become that person. I even entertained the notion of repaying the Company for its kindness to me by sorting things out as I went through them, since I planned to go through everything, anyway—everything except the files marked with the Howard Sams sticker or seal. I soon discovered, however, that the jumble was even worse than I had supposed and that if I were to get through that mass of material, I could rearrange only the most obviously displaced items. A file folder in a drawer marked 1922 and labeled with the name of a 1922 author was quite likely to contain letters from (and carbons of replies to) other authors of other years. There were two separate banks of files of alphabetized promotional materials. (These, incidentally, are of great interest to students of the history of American publishing methods and practices, and they are also unique, in that other publishers of that era did not take pains to save such materials.) When I wanted to find out what was done to promote a certain publication of, say, 1911, I had to search in both sets of file cabinets, and I would often find it in neither. It might turn up instead in one of the cabinets supposedly reserved for clippings of reviews; or it might be filed under the working title of the book rather than its published title; or it might not be there at all. When such a folder was found, however, its contents always proved to be of much interest. There would be the earliest drafts of advertisements and publicity releases, revised and corrected by several editors, and there would be copies of the advertisements and releases as they had actually appeared. There often would be rough sketches for the dust jacket, together with drawings submitted by the artist to whom the job was

assigned and a copy of the final jacket itself. There would be suggestions made by various editors for devices to use in promotion, with comments on them by other editors. There might even be drafts of "reviews" written by the editors—or even by the author himself—along with tear sheets of these rave notices as they had actually appeared in print, exactly as submitted. Sometimes these tear sheets, attached to the letterhead of the newspaper or magazine which had printed them, carried a scribbled line at the bottom: "We trust this is satisfactory." Almost anything might turn up in the early promotion files, in fact—even samples of gadgets somehow related to the title of the book, gadgets distributed as gifts to bookstore managers who might place large orders.

After three or four weeks of working ten hours a day in the Chocolate Room, I had to face the fact that the pre-1906 materials were simply not there. It was time to begin looking somewhere else. At Mrs. Baumgart's suggestion, Mr. Miller assigned me a cubicle upstairs in the editorial office, where I could organize my notes and from which I could venture out on explorations. I had already become familiar with the morgue, another basement room where all kinds of valuable items were stored (and also great quantities of things that were there because no one could think of anywhere else to put them). Here were several copies of all the books published by the Company in recent years and all too few copies of some of the earlier books, stacks of records which were too recent to be of interest to me, and box upon box containing all sorts of other things. One never knew what additional things to expect until one had investigated—and one was almost always disappointed. Upstairs, I knew where the contract files and

copyright records were kept, and I had seen and taken notes on some interesting materials there (a few pre-1906 letters, for example, letters in which an author had consented to some alteration in the terms of the original contract or in which a threat to break that contract had been made).

I had found, too, a bank of small drawers in which had been kept on cards the records of the MSS submitted to the Company and the disposition of those MSS. From these cards I learned that during the exciting days of the early 1900's, when eager agents and would-be authors were sending in MSS so rapidly that it was almost impossible to deal with them adequately, *Tarzan of the Apes* had been rejected, as had been Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Gene Stratton-Porter's *Freckles*, and many other books which were to enrich Bobbs-Merrill's competitors, including *Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall*, submitted by the author of Bowen-Merrill's first best-selling novel, *When Knighthood Was in Flower*, and returned to him three days after the MS had been received! Promptly accepted by Macmillan, *Dorothy* became an even greater and more enduring success than *Knighthood*, which Bowen-Merrill had promoted so tirelessly and effectively that there was great public enthusiasm for anything else its author might write. This rejection may have been an error of judgment (assuming it wasn't mere accident), but it was not an error of taste. One reviewer—a "real" one—described *Dorothy Vernon* as a mere rehash of *Knighthood* and even less worth reading. Other legitimate reviewers agreed with him. Almost no one liked the book except the public. And this public, ironically, had been created by Bowen-Merrill—that is, by the three ingenious and industrious young men respon-

sible for the sudden emergence of their Indiana publishing house on the national scene: William H. Bobbs, Charles W. Merrill, and John J. Curtis. A New York newspaperman wrote, in 1901, of the Company's amazing success, and in the course of his article he makes the point I have just hinted at:

This once "obscure publishing house" has organized victory in a remarkable way, which has not yet received adequate attention. Its possession of great keenness of judgment in the matter of books needs no demonstration; its career is proof enough. Where credit is mostly due to it is in its development of a new territory, but imperfectly covered before its advent, its cultivation of an enormous class of readers, whose purchasing powers were tested to the full with "Alice of Old Vincennes," written by the late Maurice Thompson at the suggestion of Messrs. Bowen-Merrill.

In the course of further explorations of the building, I found a narrow windowless room just off the long hall leading to the production department. I had often noticed the door as I went down the hall to the coffee machine; finally it occurred to me that I had never seen anyone go through it, and that perhaps I should see what was inside. I obtained a key and went in. There I found ceiling-high shelves piled with huge thick books, all very dusty. Some of these contained royalty records going clear back to the early 1900's; others, covering the same period of time, contained detailed production records. These were prizes I had almost given up hope of finding. On other shelves were boxes containing manuscripts, some of which had been printed from and others of which had proved unpublishable but for some reason had not been returned to their authors. I put all these aside to be taken down to the morgue where they belonged. Then I noticed that one of

the end walls of the narrow room was not really a wall but only a semipartition, one which stopped a few feet short of the high ceiling. There was a door in the partition and I tried it, but it was locked. I spent two or three days studying the royalty records (and wishing they went farther back in time than they did); I think that locked door was always on my mind. Finally I asked for the key, and a two-day search for it was organized—but it could not be found. All the more reason, obviously, why I had to see what was behind that door. I put on the coveralls I wore when my researches involved grubbing about in dusty places; then I climbed up the shelves and over the partition and dropped down into the tiny locked room. I opened the door from the inside and looked around.

At first I saw only Howard W. Sams Company records and other things which did not concern me. But then I discovered treasures that concerned me very much: records that had to do with the activities of the publishing house in its earliest days—even before the March 17, 1890, fire that was supposed to have destroyed everything. Among these were some flat black books with onionskin-like pages which had served in some way the function of carbon copies. Here were the earliest royalty records: handwritten statements of amounts paid to James Whitcomb Riley for his initial efforts, to the compilers of some of the first of the Company's still famous series of law books, and to a great number of authors whose names I had never heard and who had written books with titles unfamiliar to me. There was no desk or chair in the room, hardly more than a closet, so I sat on the floor as I pored over these new discoveries. When I had to leave, I pulled the door shut behind me, knowing that until a new lock could be installed I would

have to continue to enter by climbing over the partition. And one morning (the lock never was changed) while I was studying another kind of old record book, I heard Lois Baumgart ask one of the office girls if I had come in yet. "Oh, yes," the girl replied. "He's already in his rompers, climbing the walls."

It was all great fun—often frustrating but always exciting. I discovered no more secret rooms; I was forced to face the fact, finally, that I had seen everything and that no additional material relating to the period in which I was particularly interested remained to be unearthed. I envy those scholars whose interests lie in the years from 1915, say, to 1940, for the Bobbs-Merrill files for those years now in the Lilly Library seem to be gratifyingly complete. I had counted on learning everything about the trials and triumphs of the Hoosier publishing house just at the turn of the century—but I learned enough. Now, in fact, I see that I have more information, all of it fascinating, than I can ever use.

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