

Dinner and Toasts Commemorating
the publication of
Indiana Authors and their Books

A group of Indiana literati gathered at the Columbia Club in Indianapolis on April 18, 1949, to enjoy the hospitality of Lee McCanliss and to celebrate the appearance of *Indiana Authors and their Books, 1816-1916* (see review on pages 293-295). During the course of the evening after the guests had enjoyed a bounteous dinner, toasts to various Indiana authors were delivered. In some instances these were delivered by individuals who had known the authors personally and an item or two appeared which deserve to be recorded. Unfortunately some of the toasts were extemporaneous and no record was made. Because something of the spirit of the writers was pictured in these remarks and because the pleasant and memorable occasion requires a brief record, the following toasts are published.

Charles Major

*Anton Scherrer**

In his arguments for the immortality of the soul, Cicero polished off the subject with a kind of afterthought of startling modernity—unique, so far as I know, in classical philosophy. “No one,” said he, “has ever been able to persuade me that the memory of great men and their achievements would endure so long were they not themselves still alive and active in promoting it.” As Cicero saw it, the souls of the distinguished dead spend their long Elysian hours promoting their publicity and watching their political fences.

There is considerable evidence of a circumstantial nature to support his thesis. At any rate, there is every reason to suspect that the successful “Great Books” movement originated not in this world, as is generally believed, but in the celestial state of bliss known as Elysium; moreover, that it was the result of a conspiracy on the part of a group of bitter immortals—like as not led by the shades of Plato and Aristotle—who, for the past thirty years and more, have

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worried themselves sick watching the gradual and ever-increasing decline of the reputations they left behind. Nor is it possible to account for the general awareness of the biographical fact that this year marks the bicentennial of Goethe's birth without suspecting that the ghost of Frankfurt's Wunderkind had a hand in peddling the news.

And except for one conflicting fact, there is reason, too, to suspect that the group of Hoosier immortals we celebrate tonight not only conceived but actually abetted the plans of this sumptuous testimonial dinner. The damaging evidence, in this case, comes by way of the rather obvious discovery that had Charles Major been a party to such a plot he most certainly would have picked a more articulate booster than me to handle his publicity. There is nothing I can say to increase the stature of Charles Major. His place among the immortals is assured. I share a secret concerning two and, possibly, three collaborators, however, without whose help the novel-writing Shelbyville lawyer never could have attained the purple heights. And knowing what I do about the generous side of his nature—to say nothing of the Ciceronian concept—I feel fairly certain that Major would want me to give the story the widest possible circulation. An occasion such as this appears to be designed for the purpose. One of the collaborators was Lee Burns who, thank Heaven, is still with us. The other one was John J. Curtis of blessed memory. As for the third, his identity will emerge as the plot develops.

Fifty years ago the Bowen-Merrill people had Mr. Burns out on the road selling law books. He covered the entire state and, in the course of his professional perambulations, got to know every reputable lawyer including Charles Major of Shelbyville. It was on one of these occasions that the youthful book agent attempted to sell the seasoned lawyer the choicest item of his distinguished line. Major declined in a voice that Mr. Burns recognized as final.

A situation such as this called for *savoir-faire*, a God-given gift of which Mr. Burns had, and still has, plenty; enough, indeed to equip a dozen men. Thus by dint of playing his cards right, Mr. Burns learned that Major had written a novel in his spare time. What's more, that he had submitted it to Harpers who wanted no part of it. The dejected lawyer wondered whether it was worth while to let the Bowen-Merrill people have a look at it.

When Mr. Burns returned to Indianapolis, he dumped the *Major* manuscript into the lap of John J. Curtis who, at that time, ran the publishing end of the Bowen-Merrill Company, a department then still in its infancy. For some reason, Curtis was too busy to read the manuscript right away. And so it came to pass that Mr. Burns' intellectual curiosity got the better of him; thus establishing the first point I want to make—namely, that Mr. Burns was the first in Indianapolis, and possibly anywhere in the world outside of *Major's* immediate family, to read the novel in manuscript form. I deliberately dismiss the Harper people because of the highly probable fact that they never took the trouble to unwrap the manuscript, a not unreasonable conjecture when one reflects that Harpers had all they could do at the time supplying the demand for a Crawfordsville lawyer's best seller.

Eventually, however, Curtis got around to reading the manuscript, too. He liked it as well as Mr. Burns did. All except the title. The more he thought of "Charlie Brandon, Duke of Suffolk" as the name of a gripping love story with the colorful background of the sixteenth century, the more it got on his nerves. And there's no telling what might have happened to *Major's* manuscript—or, indeed, to Curtis' nerves—had not an eighteenth century poet continued to get into the act. Anyway, one night preparatory to going to bed, Curtis picked up Leigh Hunt's "The Gentle Armour" when suddenly, not unlike the behavior of a well-greased Jack-in-the-Box, two exquisite lines leaped from the page:

"There lived a knight, when knighthood was in flower,
Who charmed alike the tiltyard and the bower."

Which leaves me only to account for the singular circumstance that moved Curtis to pick up Leigh Hunt's poem at that precise moment. Obviously it was an act inspired from above by an almost forgotten English poet who, in 1898, after an Elysian residence of almost forty years, had watched his reputation slipping; to such an alarming degree, indeed, that he set out to do something about it—thus confirming the soundness of Cicero's argument for the immortality of the soul.

Booth Tarkington

*John G. Rauch**

In a group such as this there is little need to discuss Booth Tarkington as a writer. While all of his work is not of uniform quality, he did create some characters, Penrod, Alice Adams, The Man from Home, who have taken their places as immortals of English literature on the level with Tom Jones, Pickwick, Micawber, Becky Sharpe, Sherlock Holmes, and the host of imaginary characters who are more real to many of us than most of our personal acquaintances.

That is an accomplishment of the first order and places Tarkington in the forefront of the host of Hoosier writers who are enshrined in the bibliography just published.

But I should like to pause for a few brief moments to speak of Booth Tarkington as a man, a personality, who until just the other day was still among us and enjoying to the very end the various interests with which he enriched his life aside from writing. For his was a rich personality, of high spirits and of a lively, humorous fancy. He loved life. He loved good company. He loved luxury and lived in the grand style.

At the peak of his powers, from 1910 to 1930, when his books were best sellers and he had hits playing on Broadway, he made and spent large sums. He is still remembered in New York at the Lambs Club and other gathering places of old writers and artists and actors as the intimate of John Barrymore and James Montgomery Flagg and some of the greatest playboys of Broadway. He was full of fun and was ready for a frolic at the drop of a hat. He loved life and lived hard and was a gay spirit. His friends were legion, and his cheerful, happy nature endeared him to all of us.

In later life he collected beautiful objects of all sorts—paintings, porcelains, and fabrics. He maintained a magnificent estate at Kennebunkport, Maine, which he filled with things of rare beauty. He loved his garden, although he knew nothing of horticulture. His wife tells how he would walk about the grounds with his trained gardener and say "I want some red there—some heliotrope—some blues there." It was

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up to the gardener to get the plants. But the effect was gorgeous and suited his exacting tastes.

He worked each day almost to the end dictating rapidly to his secretary. He preferred this to changing his way of life and living more restfully and modestly. He preferred to work and spend and if the quality of his labor output was not up to his best, the quality of his personality never deteriorated. At seventy he had not yet passed the age of laughter and adventure.

He had a great life and he enjoyed every minute of it. And so I give you Booth Tarkington, the aesthete, the bon vivant of all of our writers. He was a connoisseur of life.

George Ade

*John H. Moriarty**

Here is a toast to George Ade first because he on June 9, 1887, predicted that "the hub of the literary universe is about to shift from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to an indefinite region which includes Crawfordsville, Indianapolis, and Tippecanoe County, Indiana." This prediction was made in a student valedictory at Purdue at the end of a stay there of which it has been said: No other college could have done this man less harm. And we toast him next because he went to Chicago in the nineties and looked upon that fierce and dazzling city as only a newspaper reporter can. He saw what Lincoln Steffens saw and Upton Sinclair saw but he left for us pictures of it not as a muckracker but as an average person had to see it, compelled to live there day after day and pushed to get some laughter and jokes out of life. We today know we toast the Fables in Slang for their social commentary as well as their concealed art. But our country boy himself went from one big city, Chicago, on to a bigger one, New York, and we here only follow many another toast to the Sultan of Sulu, to the County Chairman, the College Widow, Marse Covington, the Fair Coed, and Indiana's most successful playwright.

And now we must toast a man who consolidated theatrical and literary success as few others have. A man who cultivated host of friends both high and low and amazingly

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his own family too; who lived as pleasantly as most of us would ever want to, a traveler twice around the planet of his choice as he said; a shrewd farmer, a fine citizen, an ideal host, a generous alumnus to Purdue, in fine, a delightful celebrity as American as any of his stories. To this great Hoosier writer, personality, and Epicurean philosopher, I ask you to join in a toast, George Ade.

Kin Hubbard

*Stephen C. Noland**

Our Kin Hubbard was born Frank McKinney Hubbard at Bellefontaine, Ohio, September 1, 1868, and died in Indianapolis, December 26, 1930. He came to the *News* in 1891 as a chalk plate artist and became a caricaturist. His cracks attributed to a lanky rustic began to appear in the *News* December 31, 1904. Mixing sketches and lines produced laughs and led to his permanent assignment to keep his character, whom he called Abe Martin, going. His signature on his drawings was "Hub" which he made with six vertical lines which could not be read as spelling anything. Thus Hubbard became Abe Martin.

On the jacket of Hubbard's 1929 annual Christmas book is this writing by O. O. McIntyre: "Will Rogers, who is no slouch of a wit himself, once told me: 'Kin is the funniest man in America.' I'll take in a little more territory. . . . Kin is the 'funniest guy in the world.'"

Most of Kin's cracks were in the form of personals as written by country editors. But he ranged as whimsy and the passing scene caught him up. He said humor is not what you say, but what you nearly say.

Twenty and more years ago he was saying about the automobile: "'I did want t' live to see President Hoover drive poverty from our land, but I reckon I'll have t' miss it,' said Gran'maw Pash after tryin' to cross the street."

"'I can't say whether he was killed in an auto accident, or died in the middle of the week,' said Mrs. Tilford Moots, when she read a postal card sayin' her Uncle wuz dead."

"It takes some concentratin' to cross a street and remember what fer."

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Prohibition was in his time and with us when he died. He sometimes linked it with the auto.

"It is estimated that the traffic across the Detroit River can be speeded up to 989,000 quarts an hour."

"Tell Binkly starts for Californy in his auto tomorrow, an' he's tryin' to find a wet and dry map o' the western states."

Back in 1916 Kin was on the prohibition question and never let up.

"If we have national prohibition, there'll be more reformers than bartenders starve to death."

"Mr. and Mrs. Tilford Moots were awakened last night by burglars singin' in ther cellar."

" 'I wish it was against the law t' run a grocery, so I could make some money,' says Lon Moon."

Some people thought he was a little sharp in his digs at women.

"Mrs. Tillie Mapes, long prominent in political an' club life an' a writer of considerable power, has received word that her husband is still alive an' livin' in Iowa."

"Tilford Moot's mother-in-law is gonna visit him anyhow."

" 'Women are jist like elephants t' me. I like to see 'em but I wouldn't want one,' said Tell Binkly t'day."

"Elmer Bud has quit goin' with his girl till he can save enough to marry her."

"Miss Tawny Apple said she'd get a new fall hat if she thought anybody'd look that high."

"Miss Garnet Pash is in town havin' a little prenuptial dental work done."

"Miss Fawn Lippincut has adopted a fern."

"Women suffrage hasn't changed a blame thing but a lot o' women."

"Everybody's on vacation an' the ole town is as quiet as a prominent woman's husband."

"Miss Fawn Lippincut has the ole skillet her mother broke up housekeepin' with."

"You kin bluff any woman by tellin' her to do as she pleases."

"Chester Moots an' his wife have been married goin' on a year an' git along just fine. He's an Artic explorer and she's a girdle fitter at the Monarch 5 & 10."

Of people and their doings:

"Ther's no thrill like findin' a dime in an ole vest."

"By the time some fellers finally git ready t' pay you, it's jist like findin' it."

"A diplomat is a feller that let's you do all the talkin' while he gets what he wants."

"It's all right to be poetic if you can spare th' time."

"Business got so bad at the Fairy Grotto nickel theayter last week that they had t' put out the 'Adults Only' sign."

"I don't believe I ever heard anybody say they wanted a Christmas card for Christmas."

"Th' worst waste of breath, next t' playin' a saxophone, is advisin' a son."

"Tipton Bud has the sawdust contract for th' revival at the Baptist church."

"Mrs. Tilford Moots's niece has three children—two goin' t' school and one t' th' dentist's."

On life in general:

"Th' world gits better ever' day—then worse agin in the evenin'."

On such appearances as this:

"One o' the finest accomplishments is makin' a long story short."

And:

"The feller who speaks from a manuscript at least knows when to quit."

Theodore Dreiser

*Corbin Patrick**

I propose we drink to the honor or salvation, as you choose, of the man who made Kinsey possible; whose father, the child, grew up on the other side of the tracks and resented it bitterly; the black sheep among Indiana's authors, the prodigal son who never came home; the greatest American novelist of all, a voice crying in the wilderness—or, a mere reporter and a bad one, with no sense of shame, whose shocking frankness gave hypocrisy the tinge of virtue. Whatever the judgment, the fact remains he assisted powerfully in changing the course of this country's literature. He

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pioneered a new school of realism which has won many followers, and he fought persistently to defend its point of view. Faulkner, Hemingway, Caldwell, Farrell, and Steinbeck have him to thank for their relative freedom to present life as they see fit, despite would-be censors. He gave the censors battle, and he gave them cause. Never at peace with the world or himself, this man was full of conflicts and contradictions. He believed that most lives are failures and that human beings are powerless to change their destinies; yet he became a worker for social reform. He was a free-thinking individualist, yet he joined the Communist party and believed Stalin was a truly spiritual person. This most controversial of Indiana writers once wrote: "In short, I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came, confused and dismayed." To his more discriminating followers, he was a brooding, clumsy, earthbound giant, of little talent but much genius.

The Might Have Beens

Richard E. Banta*

To those who might have been—who, but for faltering of muse or pen had scaled the peaks. God rest their souls; they dreamed and dreaming saw the bright hills clear as those who gained the height. To Elmore, James Buchanan, Bard of Alamo and celebrator of the fame of sassafras and Jackville; Balhinch and the Monon; Autumn Roses and Lovers in Cuba. To Clodfelter, Noah J., traction car magnate, who gave us that stirring title *Saved From the Poor House*. To Martha Finley, mother of Elsie Dinsmore. To Luther Benson, apostle of reform, who warned us from the flowing bowl with his *Fifteen Years In Hell*. To Rose Hartwick Thorpe, whose *Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight* shall reverberate down through the ages as long as elocutionists persist. To all those others who, except for a minor lack of alchemy, might easily have brewed themselves a cup of fame—but failing that have still the power to wave a half-triumphant hand to charm us from beyond the grave.

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Maurice Thompson

*James I. Osborn**

About a Crawfordsville boy there was an atmosphere of real veneration for the great writers of Indiana, particularly for General Wallace and for Maurice Thompson. About these men, there were many things wonderful to a boyish mind. The one thing that seemed most amazing was that a great national weekly magazine of opinion, published in New York, *The Independent*, had as its literary editor not a New Yorker nor a Bostonian, but a man living along with the rest of us in our own Indiana county seat. That still seems rather wonderful.

When *Hoosier Mosaics* came out, in the middle seventies, an alarmed Eastern reviewer exclaimed, "Here comes another Goth from the other side of the mountains!" And he went on to deplore the injury done to American literature by the lowness of tone, the hopeless vulgarity of Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Eggleston,—and now this newcomer. The reputations of the other Goths have taken care of themselves very well. And as for Thompson, within a few years after *Hoosier Mosaics* he was supplying the publishers of books and magazines with novels and short stories, essays, and poems, as carefully finished, as urbane, as anything that was being produced in the East; and he was criticizing other men's books with what was everywhere recognized to be keen perception, sure taste, dependable judgment.

He began to write when it was the general belief that to be a Hoosier was to be a Barbarian and a Yokel. He had a great deal to do with changing that belief. In this he did us all a service, and it is with gratitude for that service in mind, that I give you—Maurice Thompson.

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