

"He must have given himself a lot of trouble," remarked Muir. "When I climbed Tyndall I ran up to the summit and back before breakfast."

On different occasions he guided both Roosevelt and Taft through the Yosemite during their Presidential terms.

"Presidents somehow don't interest me very much," Muir observed to the writer. "Taft was a pretty good fellow, but he annoyed me by his irreverence. He refused to regard Yosemite as a place to worship in and cracked some pretty poor jokes. Roosevelt was more serious. He showed some appreciation of the grandeur of the valley and asked very intelligent questions."

Muir was a master of woodcraft and could tell any tree at a glance. As a mountain climber, in the Sierras, the Andes, or the Himalayas, he was a marvel. He could stand on the sheer edge of a cliff and look straight down four thousand feet or more without the least dizziness. He could cross a crevasse on a sliver of ice with the ease of a rope walker. He attributed his athletic hardiness and his level-headedness to his

obedience to the simple laws of health which he pursued all his life. Thoreau was his model and he exceeded him in his rigorous regime. Although enduring the most strenuous exercise and terrible exposure he rarely had a cold.

"Whatever illness I have suffered," he said, "has been from indoor living." His remedy for bronchitis was to go out and camp on a glacier, which drastic treatment, he declared, proved wholly effective.

He was a slow, laborious writer, much given to considering the infinite possibilities of expression. It took him three weeks to write a six thousand word review of Sargent's tree books. All of the poetic chapters of *The Mountains of California* and *Our National Parks* were written and rewritten many times before they were put into print. But the finality—that is the word—with which he treated such great subjects as the Yosemite and the Yellowstone must be the despair of all the truly appreciative writers on those themes who shall come after him.

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD—AN APPRECIATION

BY GRACE ISABEL COLBRON

IN these days when popularity, for an author, means that his books are read some, but are talked about a great deal more, and that he himself is talked about more than his books, it comes with a shock of pleasing surprise to discover a writer who is read more than he is discussed. This has been Algernon Blackwood's fate thus far. The majority of his books have gone into several editions in England and in this country, and yet they are little talked about and the man himself even less. He has escaped requests for his opinion on all the multi-

farious subjects, from Esoteric Buddhism to the width of women's skirts, which our popular authors are expected to elucidate in the daily and weekly journals, a deadly result of wide advertising. Algernon Blackwood has been little advertised, except by readers who have come under the spell of his unique literary personality.

It is scarcely ten years since the first book over the name of Algernon Blackwood appeared in England, and already there are twelve volumes of remarkable stories bearing his name, stories that

haunt one after reading, tales that are heady as new wine. His imagination and insight are as rare as his choice of subjects is unusual. But there is no pose about this choice, we feel the man could not express himself in any other way. His rather unique life experience, if one may judge from the few biographical facts he is willing to give, has kept him singularly free from the trammels of the Obvious. From a childhood and youth spent in a Moravian school in the Black Forest, he went to the Canadian wilds and to the life of the man who has only his own exertions upon which to depend. This in spite of titled ancestry which would seem to chain him to conventional habits. Every sort of work came his way, even newspaper work in New York, until he returned to Europe and began to express in literary form some of the rich experiences that had piled in upon a brain of rare sensitiveness. Having apparently entirely escaped the usual sort of life that should have fallen to his lot, there was little to inter-

pose between the eyes of his mind and the Core of Things. The physical eye became the immediate receiver of impressions that registered themselves on a brain which did not have to forget prejudices and the superimposed opinions of others. The result is one of the most remarkable literary personalities of the present day, a personality too powerful to be imbibed in large doses even by the most hardened reader. To criticise this personality calmly, by the canons of accredited literary criticism, is a task that taxes self-control. One's pen limps lamely after his ten-league strides and in a moment of exhaustion one acknowledges that to do Algernon Blackwood justice one should be—Algernon Blackwood himself.

At first it seems that it is the subject which enthalls, then comes appreciation of rare insight and finally a realisation of remarkable stylistic power, rich and exuberant, a rush of words like a mountain torrent, suiting sound to sense poignantly, hypnotising like some East-



ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

ern drug. The reader's progress to understanding follows the writer's progress of achievement. In his earlier books the subject sometimes taxes his power of expression. But with growing practice the gift of interpretation in words grows and grows—until his tendency to linger over the soul conflict and hurry with a sentence past actual happenings is handled with such mastery that it gives the chosen theme its greatest charm. There are few others who dare to do this. No one else comes to mind just now who ventures it in such degree unless it be that wonderful Danish prose stylist J. P. Jacobsen, who dislikes actualities and lingers lovingly over realities as Blackwood does.

Algernon Blackwood's chosen theme is the Unknown, the great realm that lies beyond the world of the Known and the Obvious. He finds it in many places, in the forest depths of pathless Canadian wilds, in Egyptian desert sands, in smiling mountain valleys, and even in London streets and offices. It comes to the adult with a tinge of horror, because the adult dislikes and fears all that will not fall in line with his notions of what the world should be like. It comes to the child as something exquisitely sweet, in dreams of Star Dust Caverns, of beautiful beneficent Beings that understand one's play. And it comes to the cat—but then the cat is half in that world always and often has to come back from it when we would call her attention to our humble human selves! For Algernon Blackwood is one of those rare adults who can so sink his own consciousness of self that he can find his way into the psychology of the little child and the cat. They have taken him into the secret garden where they really live and he has interpreted it for us in tales of poignant sweetness. The child and the cat are the supreme non-conformists of a world which spends its energies trying to conform to some set pattern changing with the decades. They simply *don't* try, that's why so few adults understand them. In *A Prisoner in Fairyland*; *Jimbo*; some of the stories in *Pan's Gar-*

den (New York: The Macmillan Company), and *The Education of Uncle Paul* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), Blackwood has given us lyrics of childhood that will last. Children themselves may not understand them until they grow up, and then only if they are the sort of children that never grow up. But the adult who Knows will find great store of riches, and the lover of cats will find much delight, in these books.

But when the adult mind finds itself approaching or crossing the borderland that parts the Known from the Unknown, sorrow or horror even take the place of joy. And in the expression of this creeping horror that chills the heart when the human comes face to face with what is not human, Algernon Blackwood excels. It is not done sensationally, it seems to come from the man's inmost heart, as an expression of personal beliefs and experiences, and his stories have little dealing with organised or accredited spiritualism. He has only scorn for such futile mental debauches, he has no interest in ghosts that are ticketed and classified, and have even become fashionable. He lays no claim to "scientific research," but he can enthrall the reader until the sweep of unseen or dimly glimpsed Presences crowd thick upon us in the silent room and we long to get back, in sheer shrinking fear, into the "sweet wholesome business of To-day." Every degree of emotion felt by the mind and heart under stress of such experience figures in the many stories that deal with this subject. For sheer naked concentrated horror, unexplained and unexplainable, such tales as "The Wendigo" (*Lost Valley*, New York: Vaughan and Gomme) and "The Willows" (*The Listener*, New York: Vaughan and Gomme) may be said to lead among the stories of the supernatural. But many others are a gorgeous, haunting riot of imagination and creepiness, mingling terror and a sense of splendid free life, Real and Unreal, in bewildering confusion. "The Regeneration of Lord Ernie" and the stupendous "Descent into Egypt" in

the book *Incredible Adventures* (New York: The Macmillan Company), "Ancient Sorceries," "Secret Worship," and "The Camp of the Dog" in *John Silence* (New York: Vaughan and Gomme) are some of the most noteworthy among these, although many others have power to hold and thrill unendurably. *The Centaur* (Macmillan Company) has sustained power of imaginative writing equal to the best Blackwood has produced. Arnold Böcklin, the Swiss painter, had such an imagination. And many a sentence in the best of the Blackwood stories takes the form of a Böcklin picture to the inner vision. One wishes Böcklin were still among us to illustrate these conceptions of a kindred spirit that can see the teeming life just beyond the Border of what human vision, hampered by human prejudices, considers fitting limit for the soul's sight.

And yet through all these tales of the power of *What Lies Beyond* to act upon human lives, there is a note of splendid courage in the appeal to the mind of man to understand that he may control—by controlling himself—all these powers, and take their strength into himself to form it over for Good. It is this note and the sincerity of the style which free the tales entirely from any reproach of desired sensationalism, and which also relieve the strain of horror, that might otherwise prove too strong to be wholesome. Algernon Blackwood stands in a class by himself. What effect it will have on his work if he should ever become popular and Sunday-supplemented, cannot now be foretold. But somehow there is that about his writing which arouses the hope that the good in it may survive even such a fate.

ON THE TRAIL OF STEVENSON

BY CLAYTON HAMILTON

V—THE REST OF EUROPE

I

OUTSIDE of France, Stevenson's acquaintance with the continent of Europe was singularly limited. His failure to familiarise himself with many of the cities that are known to nearly every traveller arose not from any lack of opportunity, but merely from a lack of inclination. He had a gypsy love of journeying; but he devoted little forethought to his journey's end. In his attitude toward travel, as in his attitude toward college education, he might be "pointed out for the pattern of an idler." He would never go deliberately to any place for the sake of seeing any particular thing, however famous it might be. Travel of that sort would smack of system; and he preferred a drifting truancy. He was a fortnight at Frankfort-on-the-Main; but he

never went to Heidelberg to see the castle. He spent some time at Montpellier; but he never went to Nimes to see the temple, nor to Carcassonne to see what might have served as the setting of such a mediæval story as *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*. One cannot imagine Louis going all the way to Castelfranco to see that single picture that some of us have seen,—a picture so consummate that it makes blood-brothers ever afterward of all the men of all the nations who have made that sacred pilgrimage; and if ever any accident of destiny had tossed Stevenson ashore at Patras, it may be assumed as certain that he would not have bothered to complete the journey to Olympia, even to see the Hermes of Praxiteles. He was not that sort of traveller. "The most beautiful adven-