

# The Phoenix Nest

WE have recently run across a book of short stories of the waterfront region of New Orleans which possesses color, romance, humor, and sharply etched tragic shadows. \* \* \* It is called "Under the Levee," is published by Scribner's, and the author is a young newspaperman, *E. Earl Sparling*, who hails from Oklahoma City. He immediately enters the ranks of the natural-born storytellers and has produced a first book good enough to keep us on the lookout for his next. \* \* \* Mr. Sparling is familiar with life in the Southwest particularly and his next book of tales may have the oil region for background. His ear for vernacular, his observation of the exotic, are worthy of remark in "Under the Levee." \* \* \* *W. Pett Ridge* is an English writer we have always had a notion about, the notion being that he has yet to come into his full meed of appreciation. And recently we happened upon an article on him, by one *Richard Flecknoe*, in the *English Bookman* of last April. \* \* \* Among other things Flecknoe notes that Pett Ridge knows and loves the London of today as Dickens knew and loved the London of his own time. \* \* \* Also that "high life plays second fiddle to lower life when Pett Ridge calls the tune." \* \* \* It was his fifth novel, "Mord Em'ly," that gave him popular success in England in 1898. Since then he has continued to deal with office boys, old women, shopkeepers, policemen, railway porters, and girls who work for a living. \* \* \* He is chiefly a humane humorist. He holds that "the lives of the poor are in the lump brighter and more amusing than those of the well-to-do middle classes." \* \* \* Pett Ridge's 1925 novel is "Just Like Aunt Bertha," Aunt B. being a very modern managing woman, who finally experiences the romance that may interrupt even the most practical. Pett Ridge's long suit is characterization, and Bertha, they say, is one of the most charming women he has drawn anywhere. \* \* \* Though he now lives at Chislehurst, Pett Ridge may still be found almost any day roaming the loved London streets. He is a clubman and a witty after-dinner speaker. The following anecdote of his meeting with *Mark Twain* is related by Mr. Flecknoe:

He was introduced to Mark Twain after a London dinner as "the Mark Twain of England," and while Mark was expressing his faith in the description, Pett Ridge interrupted, with his air of imperturbable gravity, to say that his introducer was in error: "What he meant to say was that you are the Pett Ridge of America." "Ah," said Mark Twain, taking his arm in friendly fashion, "now I know we shall get along together."

\* \* \* We note *Everybody's Magazine* is now running a series of old stories with modern parallels, and also that the *Golden Book* has been reprinting some very good short stories of past years, the latest being *Perceval Gibbon's* "The Second Class Passenger." This brings us to the fact that we recently renewed our acquaintance with the Short Story Classics printed in 1905 by P. F. Collier & Son, and found lots of remarkably good stuff in them. Which is not surprising, inasmuch as they were edited by *William Patten*, a gentleman of most entertaining cultivation whose acquaintance we made some ten or twelve years ago. \* \* \* As we remember it, Mr. Patten had

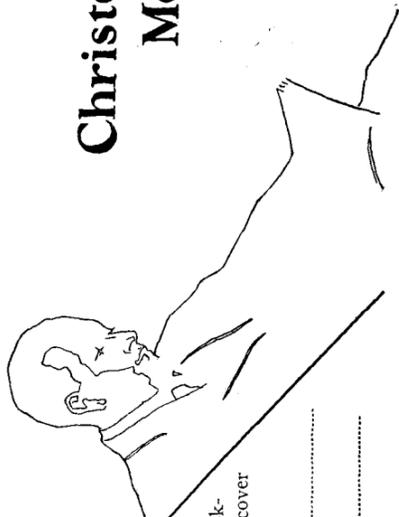
then two especial literary enthusiasms, namely, for the works of *Henry Seton Merriman* and of *Guy Wetmore Carryl*. In Volume Four of the Collier series he includes a short story by the latter master of light literature, "The Next Corner." This story is from Carryl's volume, "Zut and Other Parisians," which appeared in the last year of Carryl's life. \* \* \* Of course, to our mind, though their work is hardly comparable, Carryl at his best hardly surpassed his equally famous father, *Charles E. Carryl*, whose children's stories, "The Admiral's Caravan" and "Davy and the Goblin," certainly deserve immortality. \* \* \* Mr. Patten, we see, picked at least four American short stories of the past which may or may not be remembered, but which remain red-lettered in our own memory. \* \* \* First and foremost of these is *Virginia Tracy's* "The Lotus Eaters," of which the late *Richard Harding Davis* wrote, "Good as many people will find it, even they will not know how good it is." It certainly remains one of the very best stories of theatrical life that was ever penned. \* \* \* Then comes Davis's own story, "A Derelict." This, to us, remains Davis's highest achievement in fiction. And *Ambrose Bierce's* "The Damned Thing" is, we think, as certainly, his finest story. \* \* \* The day of the highly specialized fiction magazine is at its height. Western stories are segregated within one set of covers, love stories within another, detective stories within another, and so on. You can purchase a periodical full merely of the particular type of story you prefer. This leads inevitably to standardization to a degree it would have been hard to imagine some years ago. \* \* \* But the standardization of fiction must have its limits. \* \* \* Either the general magazine of varied fiction can come back into its own with an assortment every month reflecting true literary taste and discrimination, or the general fiction magazine will pass. It is an interesting speculation. \* \* \* But what, after all, have the magazines to do with the development of the short story? To return to the author of "Under the Levee," with mention of whom we began this column today, here is a case of a writer submitting a manuscript volume of short stories without having previously sold a single one of the stories to any magazine; and here also is the case of a publishing house accepting and publishing the volume, simply because of the freshness and power exhibited in the stories themselves. \* \* \* This, we take it, is a hopeful sign. For while it is true that short stories above the average would probably be recognized by the best magazines today, still it seems to us that this form of writing (one of the most difficult, and certainly involving, at its best, the subtlest craftsmanship) should not be entirely dependent upon the patronage of the periodicals, necessarily limited as they are in many diverse ways. \* \* \* The reason why more volumes of short stories are not published is given as "supply and demand," and yet we feel that the proper development of this most potential form of writing demands a more open market. Well, enough of this pro and conning! In our next we shall hope to give you more news of the coming fall books. Meanwhile, pardon our ruminations!

THE PHENICIAN.

To readers of *The Saturday Review* it would be superfluous to say anything about Christopher Morley except that we have just published his **TWO FABLES**, consisting of translations of de Musset's "The White Blackbird," and Wilhelm Hauff's "The Young Foreigner," done in a manner to delight both the original authors and Mr. Morley's own readers.

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