

The Portrait of a Man

POWER. By ARTHUR STRINGER. Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Co. 1925. \$2.

Reviewed by H. L. PANGBORN

MR. STRINGER, who began his literary career thirty years ago with a couple of volumes of poems that attracted considerable attention, and who has produced a long series of respectable novels of a wide range in variety, rises with this new book far above anything he has heretofore done. It is a novel that sticks out head and shoulders above the ephemeral, fashionable stories of the day, chiefly because of its conception, its matured understanding and envisagement of life, its breadth and sureness of vision. The philosophy that underlies it reminds one somewhat of the attitude of a Thackeray: an understanding pity for the tragedy of human life, critical, even unsparing yet genial, in no wise impatient or angry, and always seeing things in their due proportions. The execution of the book is also masterly; a triumph of technique, both in its surface finish and in its construction. It has style, in the sense of Mr. Brownell's use of that term, and in its exemplifications of the Greek maxim of "nothing too much."

It is the portrait of one man, a "strong man" who has lived only for power, who has gained his ends, ruthlessly, and finds the result not altogether satisfying although he is far from being unhappy. Indeed, he is at peace with himself, untroubled by any remorse for the wreckage he has left behind him: yet, at the back of him is a sense that he has missed something, a certain bravado in his attitude toward his children, the son who openly despises and defies him and the elder daughter who has made a complete mess of her life. Everything else is subordinated to the presentation of this one man, John Rusk, the "self-made" railroad magnate who has worked his way up from the yards, the shops and the clerkships to the presidency of a great trans-continental railroad system, the making of which has been his personal achievement.

Power—construction at any cost, the defeat of rivals by any available means. At one point he makes use of a woman for the undoing of a labor leader and also of an aristocratic incompetent whom he wants to get rid of, with no feeling that such things "aren't done." Incidentally, the suicide of this incompetent is an extraordinarily fine example of concentrated, restrained tragedy. That restraint and an accurate sense of proportion are the distinguishing traits of the book. Most attempts to draw such a figure as that of Rusk tend to burlesque or mere melodrama. But Mr. Stringer never exaggerates: his man is all there, shown "in the round" but there is never any distortion, however you look at him.

A Moral Holiday

MR. GODLY BESIDE HIMSELF. By GERALD BULLETT. New York: Boni & Liveright. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by EDWARD TOWNSEND BOOTH

Mr. Godly, who had been middle-aged at twenty-five and had then contracted a marriage of prudence and warm friendliness, was at forty-two an adolescent, his mind invaded by cruelly tantalizing visions of ideal beauty. From time to time that ideal became flesh, and he beheld its glory. . . . The latest and most miraculous of these incarnations was now employed . . . to type the firm's letters in Leadenhall Street; and she had come, he told himself bitterly, only just in time to save him from the suicide he still contemplated. The frustration of unappeasable desires was driving him, slowly but certainly, to self-destruction. That was a way out which the malign fates had no power to deny him. He had planned the thing in considerable detail; indeed some of the happiest moments of his life had been occupied in planning it.

TELL yourself what one of the Edwardian novelists would have made of the familiar predicament of middle life which Mr. Bullett's sentiment and humor have leavened into extravaganzas; what one of the "behaviorists" might have done with it in four or five hundred pages of clinical observation; recollect the current in the "stream of consciousness" of Joyce's Mr. Bloom that carries the same theme; then read the story of Mr. Godly's elopement with his typist, Miss Maia M'Gree, and you may well believe that the weather is changing from Cimmerian to fair and warmer. But Joyce and Lawrence and several of the Edwardians were—to write retrospectively of the living—men of genius, and Mr. Bullett is a man of talent? Yes, that is something like the truth, I suppose. But it seems highly probable that the very word "genius," in so far as it implies romantic in-

dividualism, is swiftly coming into disrepute in a world which chooses to laugh for a season at and with the inescapable ironies. Those who cannot bring themselves to celebrate with mirth an armistice between the "unappeasable desires" and the limitations which life imposes upon them, seem nowadays to be renewing themselves in the supreme romanticism of religion for still another attack on the imperfections of human life and human nature. Romantic genius, no doubt, will be reappearing one of these days as religious genius. Meanwhile, let us hope, there will be a great many men of talent, like Mr. Bullett, light-heartedly celebrating a moral holiday of sentiment and humor, in an atmosphere not quite so bland as the words might suggest, but tonic with irony.

"He had not wanted the impossible," Mr. Bullett writes of Mr. Godly. "His demands of life were far more modest. All he had wanted, and wanted still, was . . . eternal youth, immortality, truth, beauty, goodness and perpetual ecstasy. With these trifles he would have been perfectly content; for he was not grasping man." So Mr. Godly reflected when the fantastic adventures, begun when he escorted his typist to her home in Wimbledon, had carried him beyond the furthest boundaries of what he had considered his "unappeasable desires." The middle-aged fugitive from the Mercantile Hope Corporation was becoming alarmed. The ways of a "season-ticket" holder had fallen so far behind in his pursuit of Maia M'Gree that the full moon, which to be sure had been shining with extraordinary effulgence when he had set out from Wimbledon, had turned green.

All the world, indeed, was a symphony of green, from the profound green nigrity of the forest-trees to the region of sky, hued like an unripe lemon. . . . Mr. Godly, catching sight of his own hands, was frightened by them. He was impressed by the beauty of this enchantment . . . but it destroyed his peace of mind, and it made him tremble to find himself in a capricious universe. It was pleasant enough, in the security of his office in Leadenhall Street, to be promised the impossible by a charming young lady, but a green moon was more than he had reckoned on.

Mr. Godly, however, is dogged enough to continue in his perilous world of fantasy until the young lady who seems to have conjured it requites him after her fashion. His retreat from the rewarding ecstasy to the Mercantile Hope Corporation and his suburban home is successfully manoeuvred, although there are moments when it seems highly probable that he will be delivered over to a refuge for those who are the incurable dupes of their dreams. Reconciled to his middle-aged wife, who has had her taste of the handsome unrealities which have beguiled and bewildered her husband, he is about to "plight her a new and profound troth." She flees to the scullery. Fearing that emotion has overcome her, Mr. Godly follows.

"What is it, darling?" he inquires.
"It's all right," says Florence, "I just remembered I'd left the milk on the stove. . . . You were saying, John . . . ?"

With such an almost imperceptible jar Mr. Godly comes to earth. Suicide, the South Seas, a new cycle of disillusion, apparently are out of date.



Woodsmoke

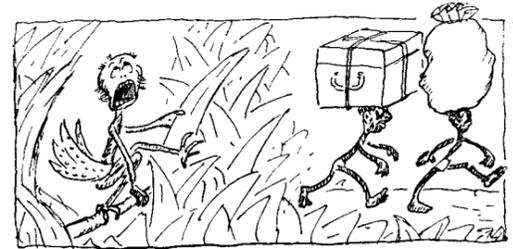
(With Apologies to Francis Brett Young)

AT a quarter past five the safari started. Antrim marched in front with Rawley. Behind him came Asmani, armed only with a *koboko* and, at his heels, Tincaan carrying both *donga* and *kijabe*. The *m'toto* walked beside Mrs. Rawley's *shamba*. There followed the files of *redcapi*, treading warily with bent knees under their sixty-pound *shenzi*. The armed *askari* brought up the rear.

The sun leapt up and the light-proclaimed Africa, the Africa of the *tove* and the *borogove*, the *pad-erewski* and the *pajama*. The dead ashen silver of the *'bagwe* contrasted with the auburn locks of the *m'ginnis*. Deep in the bush, with inexpressible melancholy, an *o'conor* began its complaint, as shrill as the keening of the *o'hara*.

The light flooded the recesses of the *subwayo*, so piercing in its brilliance that the tremulous *uneeda* of the *postum* glittered like *nabisco*, so intense in its heat that the *swetto* poured from the glistening back of the *nigro*.

Jimmy Antrim's singularly honest eyes of deep blue searched the *kiwanis*, ever alert for signs of the deadly *octopi* and the edible *fungi*. But always his thoughts were engaged with the Rawleys, with Mrs. Rawley in particular. Did that tall, slim, silent woman with golden eyes really love her husband? How could she love a fat man, when his own six feet of lean muscle and lithe sinew, topped by ten inches of bone, were disengaged? He thought of the brilliance of his own red hair, glowing like



Deep in the bush an *o'conor* began its complaint

the *mazda*, the copper hue of his own sincere freckles, the extraordinary honesty of his own blue eyes. Surely the wife of this gross creature must eventually love someone else—why not now? And Africa is the easiest country in the world to lose a husband in!

But suppose—suppose that her straying affections should come to rest on the *m'toto*! The thought agonized him.

II

They were encamped in a *bogglywallah*, by the side of a great *wapagaza*, whose grateful shade gave them relief from the sun, while the murmur of its waters soothed their ears and the splendour of its plumage rejoiced their eyes. Asmani, the *antjemima*, came to Antrim, his face glowering like a *bozo*.

"*Bigga stiffo*," he said. "The *redcapi* have deserted *en massi*. There is none left to carry the *lugadge*."

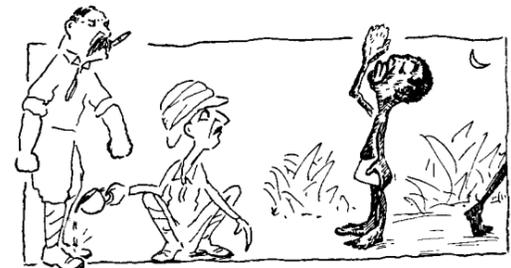
Antrim, suffering from the dread scourge of the tropics, *pricklyeet*, was irritable.

"*Texaco socony sunoco mobiloil veedol!*" he exclaimed with bitter scorn.

Asmani turned pale but stood his ground. "*Halitosis pyorrhoea pepsodent*," he answered firmly.

It was true and Antrim knew it. "*Dioxgen!*" he hissed and turned to Rawley. "You heard what he said. There is no other way."

"My God!" exclaimed Rawley, aghast. "Is it as bad as it sounds?"



"*Bigga stiffo*," he said, "the *redcapi* have deserted"

"Almost," said Antrim moodily.

"There is but one hope," said Asmani. "*Pofo-catapetl chimborazo!*"

"No!" cried Antrim, horrified, unable to credit what he had heard.

"Either that or *balisand lavengro*," replied Asmani.

There could be no room for doubt. It stared them in the face. The *fujiyama* were *kilimanjaro*. It was their lives or theirs. Something must be done at once, no matter what it was.

Unfortunately, at that moment, the *m'toto* approached them. Its long furry ears flapped disconsolately, its feathers were bedraggled, it limped on three legs, holding the fourth clear of the ground. Thrusting its little hand into the great paw of Tincaan, it flapped its wings and brayed. The sight was too much for Rawley's tense nerves. His terrible temper was beyond control in an instant.

"You devil!" he screamed and raised his *gorgonzola*. Tincaan was at his throat before he could strike. Over they went, scattering the *banjo* like dry leaves. Tincaan's fingers locked about the throat of Rawley. Antrim shouted "*Radiola ampico!*" and throttled Tincaan.

And then, as by a miracle, the thing happened! The *m'toto* spoke! In a high shrill voice, it wailed "*Trochee spondee! Trochee spondee a-a-anapest!*"

Rawley gasped and fainted. Tincaan staggered to his feet and fled. Antrim and Asmani, almost overcome by the horror of the thing, leaped behind the nearest tree. When they looked again the *m'toto* was gone!

III

To-morrow came, for anything can happen in Africa, the land of surprises. Antrim left the camp in search of game, preferably the sleek, spotted *mahjong*, the most timorous of all animals. Vast herds of *bezique*, tribes of *casino*, multitudes of *solitaire* crossed his path unheeded. He heard the thrilling chorus of the bird-song, the tiny *gazabo*, the brilliant *hoosis*, the great crested *oofle*.

He emerged from the dark *subwayo* and the light dazzled his eyes. He saw a shape coming toward him. "My God! The *m'toto*!" He raised his rifle. His finger felt the trigger. Then, of a sudden, he dropped his gun and ran forward. It was Janet Rawley!

"Why are you here?" he asked, in agony.

"My husband was drunk last night," she said quietly.

It was his duty to save her. He took her in his arms. She stood it very well. He pressed her closer. She clung to him. He kissed her and she responded.

"Come with me," he said, "I'm much nicer. I get drunk much less frequently."

"Well," she murmured. "If you say so."



The *m'toto* flapped its wings and brayed

They did not see another, different shape emerge from the dark *subwayo*. It was Rawley's. He stopped dead in his tracks and a horrid leer overspread his obese countenance. "Africa is the easiest country in the world to lose a wife in!" he said grimly. He heard a noise behind him and turned. He stood face to face with the *m'toto*!

IV

The sun rose and found them already up and travelling due northward, all that were left—Jimmy Antrim, Janet and Asmani. It was sixty miles to the Pangani River and they must make it by midnight or not at all that day. Step by step, they fought their way through thorn-bush. Step by step, they climbed the *slipperyellum* and step by step they slid down the other side. Always step by step they advanced, for they knew no other method of advancing.

Twenty miles on their way, Janet fainted. Antrim seized her in his arms and plunged forward. Ten miles further, Asmani collapsed. Antrim took his rifle in his teeth, hung their luggage on his ears and shouldered Asmani. "That's about as many as I have room for," he said grimly and, cheered by the thought, he again plunged forward. At twelve midnight he heard the sound of rushing water. It was the Pangani. Janet opened her eyes.

"Where is my husband?" she asked.

"The *m'toto* got him," said Antrim quietly.

"Did it—eat him?" she queried.

"Only partially," Antrim reassured her.

"Jimmy, dear one," she murmured, as she lay in



"My husband was drunk last night," she said quietly.

his arms. "Would you mind one more question?" He bent to hear her whispered words.

"Jimmy, dearest," she faltered, "What the hell is a *m'toto*?"

CHRISTOPHER WARD.

Illustrations by CLARENCE DAY, JR.

The BOWLING GREEN

Postscript to the Log

THAT morning the Nigger was first on deck. Behind Duck Island breakwater, where the *Narcissus* (a 41-foot ketch) had taken shelter the night before, it was quiet, warm, and hazy; but there was a kind of omen in the air. 7 A. M. Bar. 29.64—light breeze SSW was the Nigger's entry in the rough log, for he was learning the laconic brevity esteemed in log-books. But he mentioned his suspicions of the weather to the Skipper. The latter, by the simple act of putting on his cap, was ready for command: he had turned in all standing after a hard day.

The Nigger lit the fire and put on Charley Noble Senior to speed the draught. In sailing craft, as perhaps I don't need to tell you, the top section of the galley stove-pipe, with its lateral vents to keep rain out of the fire and to catch the air at any slant of wind, is traditionally known as Charley Noble. But the spare cylinder of pipe, tall and open at the top, put on when a hot stove was needed in a hurry, we had honored with the name of Noble Sire or Charley Noble Senior. (The two, collectively, were referred to as the Two Noble Kinsmen.) When the Skipper saw Noble Senior put on, his eye always brightened; this meant that victual was toward.

A wonderful quiet morning, the light air gradually hauling to westward, a hazy pallor all round the horizon. In that widest stretch of Long Island Sound we were soon out of sight of land; no other craft was visible; we rippled softly in a great vacancy made all the more precious by faint foreboding that something was stirring in the far blue hollows of the weather. It grew so surprisingly hot that the Nigger wondered whether some of his warmth wasn't due to sunburn. The Skipper was overhauling gear in the forepeak. "Were you rumbling something down there?" asked the Nigger presently. The Skipper said No; so that almost inapprehensible rolling of weights, that soft shifting of huge volumes of air, must have been thunder. The glass kept pretty steady around 29.63 and .64; the Skipper enhanced the mid-ocean feeling of our shimmering solitude by getting out his sextant and shooting the sun. But a pleasant lethargy circled in our veins; the Skipper did not work out the position, contenting himself by narrating how once, passenger in S. S. *Tuscania* at sea, Captain David Bone had allowed him to take a noon observation from the bridge; but, rattled by the proximity of this famous navigator, the amateur misread his tables. When he presently announced his finding of *Tuscania's* position he had located her somewhere in the placid waters of Lake Sebago, Maine. At midday the *Narcissus* was softly dipping in a lucid calm. To put on some porridge to simmer was all the Nigger could persuade himself to achieve. He even forgot (and now remembers it with chagrin) to clean up the sticky place at the back of the grocery cupboard, where in the heavy rolling of the day before a tall marmalade jar, too loosely wedged, had toppled over and oozed a sirupy juice. Presently came a slant of breeze from NE and land was duly ho'd. This was Herod Point; and the name sounded threatening too.



So passed the warm divisions of early afternoon. A spell of airless silence, a breath of air from SE; another sleepy interim and a puff from ESE: the beguiling comedians of Aeolus seeking to distract their audience's attention from what was really preparing behind the backdrop. Only the boatman's ever-present necessity of something to be done kept the two from yielding to the torpor that was heavy in their legs. The Skipper got out his lead line and marked off fathom lengths with scraps of flannel. The Nigger finished a painting job that had been keeping him busy on the cabin roof. The dinghy was lashed a little more firmly to the deck. Both remarked the number of insects that came aboard: a ladybug, a wasp, and two or three other fitting midgets. Instead of blundering about for a moment or so and then winging away, as they usually do a few miles offshore, these creatures seemed disposed to crawl into corners and take cover. The

Nigger found the wasp tucking himself into a niche in the very angle of the stem, between the bowsprit and the deck. Surely, he said to himself, this too is a sign of storm. He made sure that the porridge was well anchored on the stove, and sat to write up the log. In the pleasures of that task he was completely absorbed: his pipe was drawing well, the Skipper was ware and watchful at the wheel: for the time being, all portent and presage had vanished from his mind. It was eight minutes past four when the master called down "I think it's really coming." They hastened to get down the mainsail and stow away the painting job which had been drying on the cabin trunk. Just as the thick clouds let loose their rain—at 4:35, when commuters get ready to leave the office and make for the train; for all Long Island thunderstorms are justly calculated to catch the homeward traffic—a little school of porpoises came plunging almost alongside of us. When you see them from the tall deck of a liner you can't hear the snorting sneeze they make each time they emerge. They came close by on the starboard side, until we could see their little eyes catch sight of us: they dived under and vanished. Within the next hour, with drenching tattoos of rain, musketry of hail, and lively stripes of lightning, we were almost as wet as they.



A long steadily pouring wet night was what he expected. Now, off Mount Misery (which you will find near Port Jefferson on the map) came a flavoured southeastern breeze. It was strong with all the odors of wet pinewoods and dripping May earth. Only Long Island, exclaimed these two enthusiasts, could so tincture an air with whiffs of richness. The Nigger, still pondering the problem of getting into the narrow rulings of the log-book as much as possible, asked whether it would be too literary to note 5.50 *Mount Misery abeam*. *A beaker full of the warm South*. In this fresh and resinous current they laid their course West. Thunder and lightning seemed to have gone by. Even, at 6.45, all seeming propitious, they were wondering whether the mainsail might safely be raised again. At midnight, they were reckoning, they ought to make Glen Cove.



"If this one hasn't got wind in it, I never saw any," said the Skipper. His tone brought the Nigger instantly to the companion. In the northwest was a huge white raft of cloud, curiously whorled and voluted over itself, not unlike the downward curve of the water at Niagara's edge. Behind it was dark purple; under it, ink-black. There was just time to sling on an oilskin coat and stand by the mizzen sheet. When it struck, carrying level shots of rain, this was no mere wind. It was a solid body, moving from somewhere to somewhere else at sixty miles an hour. The purple water was instantly ribbed with crisper parallels of silver, which, as soon as they were high enough, were whipped off in ragged membranes. Down to her lee rail *Narcissus* wallowed. The jibboom snapped: the jib, catching tons of pressure in that sharp angle, might well have gone to ribbons but didn't. Both, though they didn't admit it until later, waited to see the mast go; which would have meant the lee shore of Mount Misery a mile away. Why, was the first thought of the Nigger, as he sat on the weather gunwale up to his hams where the seas were creaming down from forward, Why did he rename her *Narcissus*? She's going to do the same thing as Conrad's. I wonder which is more anxious in such moments: to be Skipper at the wheel, with the full responsibility; or to be Nigger hanging onto the weather stay, winking sluices of salt from your eyes and waiting to obey whatever orders may come. But, as the Skipper remarked, it can't blow like this very long. It did, though. Half an hour can be a long time. Of course you know that a solid bit of Maine boatbuilding won't turn turtle; and yet when you crawl into the cabin to look at the barometer after twenty minutes of hurricane, you rather expect her to go Jonesward as soon as you are below. The Nigger hasn't forgotten that barometer reading. It was 29.62. It had turned upward again. Nor did he ever know exactly how the potatoes that had been boiling on the stove got into the coal bin.

As Conrad said in his title-page motto for the original *Narcissus*—"My Lord discovered a great deal of love to this ship."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.