

# The Great Rabbit Hunt

A STORY

By Jo Pagano



THE history of that memorable episode, the great rabbit hunt, begins, properly, with a visit my parents and I paid one Sunday to the home of their *paesano*, Gianpaolo Maccalucci. ("A curse on the day we ever set foot in his house!" as my mother said forever afterwards.) This visit was simply one of the numerous Sunday visits we paid to the Maccalucci home, unmarked by anything unusual save that it was our initial introduction to Gianpaolo's hobby, the hunting of the "jack-a-rab."

We had hardly set foot in the house when our nostrils were assailed by a fragrance impossible to describe—a fragrance at once delectable and succulent, haunting and appetizing: a fragrance composed of the delicious aroma of some kind of tangy frying meat, blended poignantly with the commingled smells of garlic, sage, butter, parsley, black pepper, the whole capped by interweaving wafts of green bay-leaf. . . .

"*Per Bacco!*" ejaculated my father before he had so much as taken off his hat, his eyes turning kitchenward and his nostrils quivering like excited bird's-wings. "What is that?"

"What's-a-matter? What's-a-matter?" chortled Mrs. Maccalucci. "*Ti piace? You like it?*"

"Like it!" beamed my father. But it was a truly noble odor! And what (smiling ingratiatingly) might it be?

"Ah! Ah!" chuckled Mrs. Maccalucci, her mustache bouncing happily. "Gianpaolo, he'sa been hunting the ra-beetsa——"

"The ra-beetsa?" echoed my father, not comprehending.

"Rabbits!" explained my mother—she was considerably more proficient than he in interpreting the oft-times completely mystifying accents of their *paesanos*.

"Oh—rabbits!" said my father, his eyes lighting in understanding.

"*Sì! Sì!*" said Mrs. Maccalucci. "What's-a-matter? What's-a-matter? But come!" she added in Italian, bustling us toward the kitchen: he could see for himself.

Gianpaolo was just coming up from the cellar, carrying a dust-covered gallon of wine.

"*Ohé, paesano!*" he shouted upon spying my father. "*Benvenuto, benvenuto—welcome, welcome!*"

He set the wine down and threw his arms around my father enthusiastically, and for a moment or two the house rocked with the explosive reports of their affectionate greetings; then Gianpaolo turned to my mother, of whom he stood considerably in awe.

"*Cara signora!*" he said, bowing deferentially from behind his big nose.

My mother greeted him graciously, and my father turned ceremoniously to the huge old-fashioned kitchen-range upon which stood a steaming, lidded pan, from whence came the odor that had assailed us when we stepped in the house.

"And is this it?" he asked courteously of Mrs. Maccalucci, his brown eyes turning warm with anticipation.

"*Sì, sì!*" she beamed; and that he might better investigate the source of

the heavenly fragrance, she lifted the lid off the pan.

"Ah—" he sighed, bending above it and allowing, with half-closed eyes, the wisps of steam to circulate about his nostrils.

"You like-a the jack-a-rab?" broke in Gianpaolo, surveying this scene hospitably; and without further ado, he ordered his wife to bring out plates for my parents and myself.

"But no," protested my father—not very convincingly, I'm afraid: "It is too much trouble."

"No trouble, no trouble!" dissented Mrs. Maccalucci. "What's-a-matter?"

My mother glared at my father. "Please don't bother," she said to Mrs. Maccalucci. "Really——"

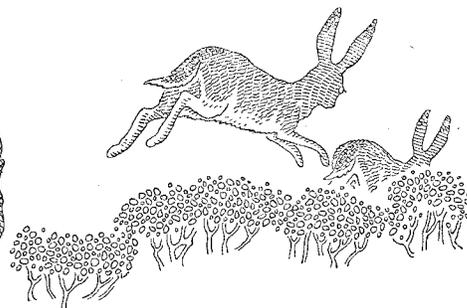
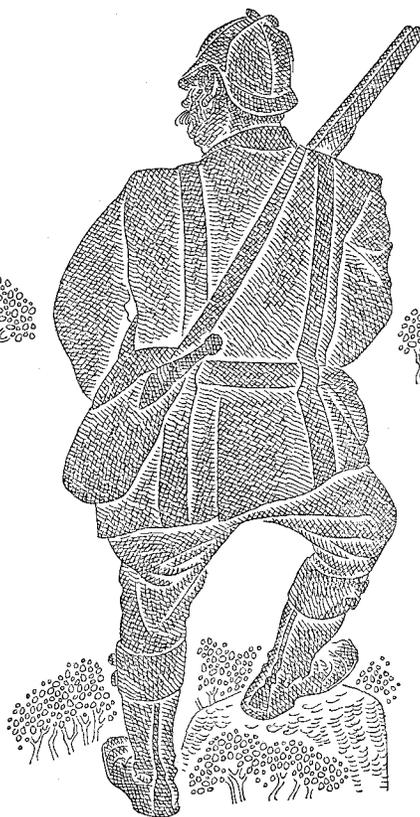
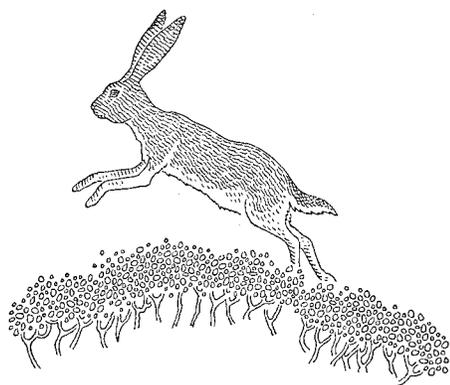
"What's-a-matter?" cried Mrs. Maccalucci. "It'sa no trouble. *E nu piacere*, it is a pleasure."

"*Sì, sì!*" beamed Gianpaolo. "*Mangia, mangia, eat, eat!*"

They appeared genuinely insulted at my parents' protests, and without further ado, Mrs. Maccalucci brought out plates and silverware and set them upon the oilcloth-covered table.

"Ah—" sighed my father contentedly when at last we were seated at the table, our respective plates heaped with fried rabbit and thick slices of homemade bread, a blood-red glass of wine at each of our elbows. He tucked a napkin into the vest that encircled tightly his huge belly, and took an anticipatory nibble of rabbit. "*Per Bacco!*" he belatedly. "It is a feast for a king, all right!"

"Then you like it, in truth?" beamed Gianpaolo.



My father's cheeks were puffed full of the delicacy: he waved his hands and nodded his head vigorously. ("At that moment," said my mother afterwards bitterly, "I should have known. I should have known *right then.*")

They were very easy to hunt, went on Gianpaolo. The country up near Bakersfield was filled with wild jack-rabbits. He had gone there yesterday with one of his sons, and between them they had shot thirty of the tasty animals within an hour.

"Thirty!" echoed my father.

"But of course!" said Gianpaolo. It was nothing, nothing! The country was overrun with them—in truth, without exaggeration, there were literally thousands of plump "jack-a-rabs" awaiting patiently the advent of the intrepid hunter.

"Imagine!" said my father greedily. He looked at Gianpaolo thoughtfully for a moment. And what, he added inquisitively, was needed in order to hunt them? (At this moment, I remember distinctly, my mother looked at him sharply.)

But nothing! beamed Gianpaolo. A gun, some shells. . . . He looked at my father with the light of an idea dawning in his solemn, furtive eyes. Would my father, by any chance, care to go hunting with him?

"But yes!" said my father enthusiastically, wiping his mustache with the back of one huge hand. When would Gianpaolo like to go?

It did not matter, said Gianpaolo: any time that was convenient to my father. The following Saturday or Sunday—

"What are you talking about?" broke in my mother, addressing my father. "Hunting! You have no gun—"

"That is no matter," said my father,

shrugging indifferently. "I will buy a gun."

("Ah! Ah!" wailed my mother afterwards. "I should have known, I should have known: I should have known *right then!*")

## II

For two days I had thought my father was acting suspiciously. There was that in his manner which suggested, to one who knew the signs, that something out of the ordinary was taking place: he walked about as though he were secretly bearing the load of some weighty problem, and occasionally I caught him looking slyly at my mother. But it was not until I by chance happened to move the corner of a piece of canvas in the garage that the secret of his mysterious behavior was revealed—for there, concealed from the gaze of prying eyes by the canvas, stood not only a shiny new double-gauge shotgun, but (heaven help him if my mother should see it!) a complete hunter's outfit—boots, corduroy suit, a knapsack (presumably to carry the "jack-a-rabs" which Gianpaolo had promised him the following Sunday), and, to top it all off, a leather hunter's hat with

a double-peak reminiscent of the head-gear familiarized by Sherlock Holmes. Yes, he had bought himself "a gun," and with a vengeance! The gun alone must have stood him upwards of eighty dollars: he could not possibly have purchased the complete outfit under a hundred and twenty-five. If my mother should find out . . .!

But she did not find out. The week passed without mischance, and at last the great day arrived.

All evening long the night before my father dinned into my ears the importance of our being on time—for it was I who had been elected to chauffeur him and his *paesano* on their bloody pilgrimage.

"Now be sure and set your alarm!" he told me at least a hundred times. "*Don't forget*, whatever you do! Understand? We must be up *no later* than one o'clock."

"But why so early?" I protested, not relishing the thought of getting up in the middle of the night to drive a hundred and fifty miles in search of jack-rabbits.

He looked at me contemptuously, shaking his shaggy head in disgust.

"All you are good for is to eat and sleep!" he said with rhetorical sarcasm. "Don't be so damn' lazy! Get up—get some morning air—it will do you good for a change!"

"*Ma quando chiachiere*, but what nonsense!" broke in my mother. All this excitement and work, and for what?

"When I was his age—" began my father.

"*Ma statte zitto, statte zitto*, keep quiet, keep quiet," said my mother calmly. How could he blame me? One o'clock in the morning! From the amount of fuss he was making one would think—

"That's all you know about it, you and your *baby*," retorted my father, jerking his head contemptuously toward me. Gianpaolo had told him it was better we get an early start, to avoid the crowds who would infest the country later: what was the use of going at all, if we didn't do it right? (As he made the last remark, he pursed his lips with sly self-satisfaction.)

"All right, all right," I broke in, to forestall the budding argument. "I'll be up on time, don't worry."

"Be sure you don't forget now!" he repeated. "One o'clock, and not one minute later!"

And one o'clock it was. It seemed to me that I had just dropped off to sleep when the jangle of the alarm rattled shrilly into my ears. I jumped bolt upright, thinking the house was falling down on my ears; then, fighting up through the fog of sleep, I turned the alarm off, yawned, and climbed dizzily out of bed.

From my parents' bedroom I could hear a series of groans, grunts, and gurgling wheezes. My father was getting up. In a moment he tiptoed out into the kitchen, his suspenders hanging in two loops along his well-padded flanks, his hair shaggy and touselled, his eyes bloodshot and half-blind from sleep. He grunted when he saw me and told me to heat the coffee. I wondered what he was going to do about the hunter's outfit, but said nothing; at last we tiptoed out of the house and down the back steps to the garage in the inky darkness. Once inside the garage, he ordered me to turn on the headlights.

"Now then," he said, turning to me with an air of heavy secrecy, "I want you to say nothing about this to your mother, understand?"

I promised, pretending to be mystified at what it was he wanted me to keep to myself.

He walked heavily over to the canvas, upon which the rays of the headlight cast a glaring illumination and, lifting a corner of the flap, brought out the hunter's suit.

"Well!" I said. "What do you call that?"

"Sh!" he admonished me, then held it up proudly. "It is a suit to go hunting. There is no use," he said, "in doing anything unless you do it right. Your mother—well, your mother, she

is a wonderful woman, but you know how she is when it comes to spending money. Here, give me a hand."

He sat on the running board of the car and I helped him lace on the heavy boots. His old clothes we hid beneath the canvas: in a few minutes he was arrayed in the new outfit, the knapsack slung smartly around his shoulder and the peaked cap sitting atop his shaggy head.

"How does it look?" he asked proudly.

"It looks fine," I assured him. "We should have brought a camera along."

"By God, that's a right," he agreed. "I should send some pictures to my brothers in Colorado!"

### III

It was not yet two o'clock when we arrived at the Maccalucci domicile, but already the rickety frame house was ablaze with lights. We parked the car in front and went around the back, entering by the kitchen. Here Mrs. Maccalucci, her waddling body girdled by the familiar lavender wrapper and her hair hanging in wisps about her eyes, stood sleepily above the stove, frying some hot peppers in oil in preparation for our breakfast.

"*Ohé, paesano!*" she cried in greeting. "But how magnificent you look!"

"Do you like it, in truth?" beamed my father, carrying himself as upright as a general in full-dress uniform.

"Like it!" she repeated. "But you look magnificent, magnificent!" They spoke in Italian, their words falling in a voluble stream from their lips, "Gianpaolo!" she added, calling to her husband. "Oh Gianpaolo! Come look at the magnificent appearance of *Signore Altieri!*"

The bathroom, in the Maccalucci house, opened directly off the kitchen: from behind the peeling door we could hear the sound of running water.

"What? What?" came the guttural, sleep-clogged tones of Gianpaolo; the door opened hastily, and out stepped my father's *paesano*, his close-cropped black hair plastered wetly onto his head, his leathery face and close-set eyes crinkling in anticipatory wrinkles of greeting. He saw my father and stopped short.

"*Sangue de la Madonna!*" he ejaculated wonderingly. He stood, awe-

struck, and stared at my father's resplendent uniform, then stepped forward and touched a finger to the coat. "*Sangue de la Madonna!*" he repeated. "What a magnificent hunter's suit!"

"Then you like it, in truth?" said my father.

"Like it! But it is magnificent, magnificent!"

"Ah well!" said my father, in sudden embarrassment. "It is nothing—only," he added in English, "there's no sense in doing anything unless you do it right."

"That's a right, you bet," agreed Gianpaolo, also in English; and to his wife, in Italian: "Is the breakfast not ready yet?"

A moment more, she protested: just one moment! She added thick chunks of bacon to the hot peppers, then raw slices of potatoes, and when the whole was cooked to a fragrant, golden brown, she broke a dozen eggs into it; a moment more, and we sat down to the steaming *colazione*.

Dawn was just appearing, gray and murky, as we reached Bakersfield. We turned west for another twenty miles or so and headed into flat desert country. Here, according to Gianpaolo, the "jack-a-rabs" abounded. The sun was up by now, touching the clumps of gray-green sage-brush with a soft radiance. We parked the steaming car, stepped stiffly out, and looked around. For miles and miles the country stretched, flat and desolate beneath the rose-colored sky.

"But where are the jack-rabbits?" asked my father politely.

"Patience, patience!" admonished Gianpaolo. "It is necessary to walk out for a space in order to catch sight of them."

"Out there?" said my father dubiously, looking with reluctant eyes toward the forbidding stretch of land and shifting his knapsack uncomfortably.

"But of course!" said Gianpaolo. "Do you expect that they should come and eat out of your hand?"

My father grunted.

"So be it," he said resignedly. "*Per Bacco*, but I have developed a thirst though!"

"Ah . . ." said Gianpaolo, grinning slyly. "That I had anticipated."

He reached into the back of the car and brought out the huge, wicker-han-

dled basket in which Mrs. Maccalucci had packed our lunch. He lifted up the cloth, reached inside, and pulled forth a gallon jug of wine.

"But what is this?" said my father delightedly.

"Drink!" said Gianpaolo. "Did you for one moment think that I would come unprepared?"

"After you," said my father courteously.

"No—you first," said Gianpaolo.

"But I insist!"

"And I insist too," said Gianpaolo his forehead wrinkling stubbornly.

"Come, come," said my father in sudden English. "Take a drink and be quick about it—the rabbits will be asleep again before we get started."

Gianpaolo pulled out the cork and took a sip of the wine, then handed the jug to my father, who lifted it high in the glinting sun and took several deep, gurgling draughts that echoed in his throat like a melodious brook.

"Ah—" he said, setting it down and wiping his mustache with the back of his hand. He stood for a moment, smacking his lips contentedly; then turned a menacing glance toward the desert. "Now then!" he said, clasping his gun firmly, "let's have a look at these rabbits!"

#### IV

For ten or fifteen minutes we trudged out into the desert without catching sight of a victim. The sun was well up by now, and it was beginning to grow hot. My father wiped the sweat off his brow and shifted his knapsack again.

"*Sangue de la Madonnal!*" he muttered, scowling toward Gianpaolo. "And where are the rabbits?"

"Patience, patience!" said Gianpaolo irritably. "We have hardly got here and already you—looka, looka!" he shouted in English. "There's a one now!"

"Where?" bellowed my father, whirling around and nearly knocking Gianpaolo down with one arm.

"Donkey!" shouted Gianpaolo in Italian. "There, there!" trying, meanwhile, to keep himself from falling and to lift his gun up at the same time.

My father lifted his shot-gun wildly and took aim. The jack-rabbit was scurrying madly toward a clump of sage-brush. My father levelled the barrel toward it and with scrooged-up face and pursed lips, pulled the trigger.

There was a deafening roar, the gun bounced upwards—and he sat suddenly on his posterior in a clump of brush.

"Did I get him?" he bellowed.

"Get him!" echoed Gianpaolo, with heavy sarcasm. "*Madonna mia*, where did you learn to shoot?"

My father looked up at him, then rose heavily to his feet and brushed off his breeches. He stood like that for a moment, brushing off his clothes with short flicks of his huge hands, looking with narrowed gaze at his *paesano*, then,

"My friend," he said in Italian. "I do not think I care for your attitude in this matter."

"Ees that-a so?" responded Gianpaolo heatedly. "Ees that-a so?"

"It is so, in truth," said my father, still speaking Italian. "Now then, if we are to continue on this expedition—"

"You'd better get going," I broke in. "It's going to be too hot to walk before you know it."

They both looked at me; then without a word my father picked up his gun and we started out again.

Another five minutes passed, then ten, then fifteen—and no sign of a rabbit. Every few moments, muttering to himself, my father shifted his knapsack: he wiped his forehead, took off his cap and stuffed it in one pocket; then opened his collar. At last, with an oath, he tore the knapsack off and flung it to me to carry. A deep scowl was grooved into his forehead, and his eyes flashed as he darted swift, belligerent glances into the brush.

Beside him, without a word, the squat, bow-legged figure of Gianpaolo trudged onward.

Suddenly my father stopped short. "And how much longer must we walk in order to find these 'thousands' of rabbits you promised?" he demanded coldly.

Gianpaolo looked up at him over his shoulder.

"And is it my fault if they appear scarce?" he retorted. "Only last week—"

"Yes, yes, I know: only last week you shot thirty rabbits here within an hour—that you have already told me."

"Then," said Gianpaolo, his eyes narrowing, "you think perhaps I was not telling the truth?"

My father spread his hands.

"That I could not say. I know only that you told me there were thousands of rabbits here: we have already been here almost an hour, and—"

"Hey!" I shouted. "There's one now!"

"Where? Where?"

They both whirled around, their shoulders colliding: they lifted their guns simultaneously and fired almost at the same moment, the reports of their guns blending in one ear-splitting reverberation.

The rabbit, bounding frantically toward a clump of brush, did a half-somersault into the air, flattened out, and fell prostrate upon the ground.

My father and his *paesano* stared at its recumbent form unbelievably; then with exclamations of delight, ran toward it. Gianpaolo lifted it up by the ears.

"A beauty, a beauty!" he cried gleefully, in Italian. "Dear friend, you shot nobly that time."

"Ah, but no!" said my father. "It was not I—I could not hit the side of a barn."

"But I insist it was you!" beamed Gianpaolo. "I remember distinctly that at the moment I fired my foot slipped in a gopher-hole. I could not possibly have hit him!"

My father looked from the beaming countenance of his friend to the rabbit.

"Do you think it was really I?" he asked shyly.

"But I know it! Here, take it—it is yours!"

My father took the rabbit from Gianpaolo's outstretched hand and held it up, surveying its limp carcass with a professional eye.

"Yes, it is a beauty, in truth!" he observed delightedly. He looked at it for a moment more, then turned to me. "Put it in the bag—and be careful you do not crush it," he added; then flung a fraternal arm about his friend.

"In truth, it is a great sport!" he said; and arm in arm they plunged briskly onward, their faces beaming.

For upwards of an hour we tramped amidst the sage-brush. By now the sun was well overhead and its rays beat down blisteringly. My father had not only taken off his cap and loosened his shirt: he had removed his coat and given it to me to carry. His face was drenched with sweat, and he puffed

and wheezed as he walked, his heavy boots sinking *plock plock* into the crusted earth.

"*Madonna mia*, this is work all right!" he muttered, wiping his face with his crumpled handkerchief.

Every once in a while he and his *paesano* made forays back to the car to quench their thirst: on an average of every twenty minutes they took a shot at a rabbit. By noon they had bagged three more between them.

"But I cannot understand it, I cannot understand it!" wailed Gianpaolo. "Only last week, in this very spot—and now, my dear friend has gone to all this expense and trouble——"

"It is nothing," said my father magnanimously. "What does a rabbit more or less matter? We will buy them in a butcher-shop if necessary." He hitched his trouser-belt. "Come, I'm hungry—let's go back to the car and eat."

They sat on the running-board and laid the basket on the ground between them.

"In all my experience I have not seen them so scarce," said Gianpaolo gloomily, munching a thick sandwich and squinting his eyes toward the scorching reaches of sand.

"It does not matter," my father assured him. "Drink, drink!"

They took great copious swallows out of the jug, which now stood at the half-way mark; by the time they had finished eating their faces were flushed and shining.

"And now," said Gianpaolo thickly, "would my dear friend care to make another expedition?"

My father wiped his mustache and looked toward the desert with reluctant eyes.

"The devil take it!" he said at last. "It is too hot and my feet burn. Come, let's start back."

"But the hunting!" protested Gianpaolo.

"Another day, another day," said my father, rising to his feet unsteadily. "I have had enough sport for one occasion."

#### V

On the way back in they finished the rest of the wine, and by the time we reached the Maccaluccis' home they

were singing *O Sole Mio* at the top of their voices. I pulled the car to the curb and killed the engine.

"But what is this?" said my father, cutting his voice off in the middle of a note. "What are we stopping here for?"

"We're here," I explained.

"Here?" he echoed, looking uncertainly out of the car. "*Per Bacco!* Already?"

He opened the door and climbed heavily out of the car. They got their guns and the four rabbits, which they had divided, two apiece, between them, and started up the steps. My father slipped his coat and knapsack back on, and he was buttoning the coat as we went in the front door. At that moment, from the back of the house, we heard the melodious accents of a familiar voice. My father stopped short, his face paling.

"*Madonna mia!*" he whispered, terror-stricken. "My wife!"

And so it was. She had taken the street-car to the Maccaluccis', and in company with Mrs. Maccalucci was awaiting our return.

"My suit, my suit!" he whispered frantically, and began tearing off the knapsack and ripping open the coat.

At that moment Mrs. Maccalucci and my mother, having heard us enter the house, stepped out of the kitchen. My mother looked at my father: he stopped fumbling with the buttons and gazed at her foolishly.

"*Cara moglie*, dear wife——" he began, swaying a little, and smiling in her direction.

She did not answer: she stared at him with an expression of disbelief, her eyes running up and down his hunter's suit—now, alas, sadly covered with dust.

"And what is that you have on?"

"Ah . . ." he said, shifting from one foot to the other and smiling ingratiatingly. "It is a suit," he said, "that I bought for the occasion——"

"A suit you——" Suddenly her glance darted with quick comprehension to his shiny new gun, to the knapsack, the new boots. "And how much did you spend?"

He looked at her helplessly.

"Not very much," he said; and then, as if with sudden inspiration: "But look!" he cried in Italian, snatching the

limp bleeding rabbits out of the bag. "Observe the beautiful rabbits!"

She continued to look at him, her eyes narrowing slightly.

"And *how much did you spend?*"

"But *cara moglie*——" he said, gesturing helplessly with the rabbits: blood dripped off them and onto his breeches; he seemed to become suddenly aware that he was still holding them and stared at their skinny carcasses foolishly.

"Well?"

He looked up at her, then shrugged tormentedly.

"Not very much," he repeated.

"And how much is that?"

"Well, perhaps a ——" He coughed, squirmed, began to grow red. "Perhaps a hundred dollars."

"A hundred dollars!" she repeated, her face blanching. "*A hundred dollars!*"

"But yes," he said, with false affability, and gaining courage. "You see, the suit——"

"God save us!" she muttered piously in Italian. "God save us!" She looked from him to his *paesano*, who stood, crushed and trembling, a little behind my father.

"But *cara moglie*," said my father. "For the sake of the sport——"

"For the sake of the sport!"

"But yes! And look—look what beauties they are!" He lifted the rabbits up and took an unsteady step forward. She stared at the rabbits dazedly, then,

"Don't come near me with those horrible things!" she suddenly screamed.

"But *cara moglie*——"

"Ah! Ah!" she wailed; and suddenly snatching one of the rabbits out of his outstretched hand, she brought it down on his head.

"Wait, wait!" he pleaded, ducking and holding his arms up for protection.

"A hundred dollars!" *Thwack!* "A hundred dollars!" *Thwack!*

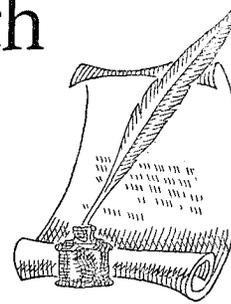
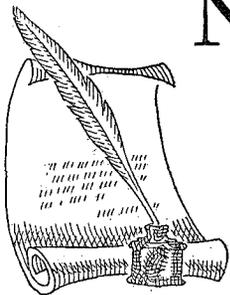
"*Per Bacco!*" he bellowed; and turning tail, fled out of the house.

She stood for a second staring after him, white-faced and trembling; then suddenly dropped down in a chair.

"A hundred dollars——" she muttered. She looked up at us. Tears were in her eyes. "And I could have bought them both for eighty cents!"

# New Frontiers of Research

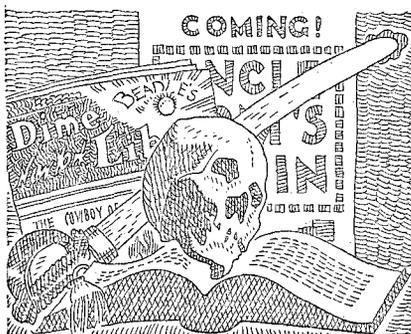
By Arthur Hobson Quinn



*In an old trunk in your attic may be records, documents, or diaries which should be preserved. Libraries and research organizations are taking an added interest in anything which illumines the study of American institutions and American life*

ALTHOUGH the geographical frontiers of the United States have been closed for many years, the intellectual and spiritual frontiers must remain open as long as the Republic lives. For national decay can set in only when limits are set to that restless spirit which in the early days pushed onward the borders of the Union, and which today is spending itself in the task of preserving the civilization three centuries have established. To prevent such a check upon the pioneering of the spirit is one of the main functions of *modern research*. I shall not attempt here to define "research." Like charity, it covers a multitude of sins, and to many it is associated only with the test tube and the telescope, and the average citizen leaves it to its own devices.

I am concerned here with a different aspect of research, the effort to illuminate the present and to preserve for the future those human relations which the study of American institutions can best accomplish. Every American, I take it, is vitally interested in knowing that the records of his race shall not be lost. Not only the records of battles, depressions, and recoveries, but also of what his predecessors were thinking, feeling, hoping, and planning, and how under an apparent crust of materialism they were keeping alive that spark of practical idealism which has distinguished us from the days of John Smith, of William Bradford, and of William Penn. These records are of value not only in themselves, but also because the past has a way of repeating itself, and crises may often best be met through a knowledge of what keen minds foresaw in days when the invisible ink of the future was read only by those whose vision was sharpened by the light of peril. Emerson, for example, foresaw the Civil War four years before Lincoln, and Edwin Arlington Robinson in "Cassandra" foretold much that politicians could not or would not see.



It would seem perhaps to the casual observer that there is plenty of material, lying all around us. That is just the trouble. There is so much of it that it is being destroyed every day through carelessness, indifference, ignorance, or even by the impersonal clutch of climate. Sometimes the very activities of research are fatal to its material. Every month from the floor of the room in the New York Public Library in which the older newspaper files are kept, the attendants sweep up forty pounds of paper which has dropped off in the mere process of handling the papers. How long will they last under this condition? Some few years ago, the situation grew so acute that the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council became so much concerned that they established a joint committee to report on the best steps to take in the education of the public in its share in the great task of preserving materials for research in the United States. How complicated the problem is soon dawned upon the committee, and we divided ourselves into sub-committees. To my lot it fell to belong to a sub-committee who were to determine just what kinds of material should be preserved and what should be destroyed. The title of my sub-committee, "On Categories of Research Material," almost defeated our efforts, for as soon as we began our preliminary inquiries to scholars and experts, from one and all came back

the reply, "What is a category?" It was a useful lesson in simplicity and it began our own education, which consisted largely of the abolition of frontiers and the creation of new ones.

One frontier which soon disappeared was the presumptive right of any one to say, "This *is* and this is *not* material for research." The natural impulse of a historian is to associate research with something that is old, since time is a great destroyer of the unimportant. But time destroys also the important, if its significance is not early recognized, as those collectors know who are now trying to buy a copy of the first volume of Eugene O'Neill. "Old" and "new" are really not the terms to use. "Permanent" and "passing" are better. How much of the scientific theory, the social theorizing, the political speculation, the literary criticism and especially the articles by educational "experts" which now seem important, will disappear, yet they take up a great deal of space in the newspaper or magazine of today. Perhaps they will have some value when the *History of Human Error* is written. Yet our natural impatience with such loose thinking should not blind us to the fact that the historian of the future will find our age an intensely interesting one, and the total impression gained by a reading of at least part of the periodical literature of today will be essential to his purpose. The post-Civil War period was an age of political corruption and sectional hatred, which has of late been quite adequately brought out. Yet on turning over the pages of *Scribner's Monthly* in the Seventies or its successor, *The Century*, in the Eighties, we see how nearly every number contains an article or a story making clearer to the North the real life of the South or to the South the meaning of the Union. It was a great national service and, since many of the articles were not printed in book form, the problem of the preservation