

A Pen Picture of Elinor Glyn

Not the Flaming Vampire Her Writings Depict

By JOHN B. WALLACE

HOW seldom do persons whom you have never seen look like you expected them to appear—especially authors. For instance, take a story of buccaneers, pirate gold, buckets of blood and weeping victims walking a plank. You would naturally picture the writer as a big, husky, upstanding specimen of humanity with beetling brows and thews like an ox. Yet nine times out of ten he will be an anemic, pale-complexioned youth, hiding watery-blue eyes behind a pair of horn spectacles. Hints to the lovelorn, so popular in our daily papers, are only too often hacked out on a typewriter by a black-whiskered, tobacco-chewing individual who ought to be digging ditches.

Mind and matter seldom synchronize in the writing game.

Thus it was with my conception of Elinor Glyn. I had pictured her as a long, languorous creature with all the characteristics of that modern siren known in our terse patois as a vamp. Where I obtained that conception I do not know unless I thought she had incarnated herself in the heroine of "Three Weeks."

I found Madame Glyn to be a brisk little Englishwoman with gray-green eyes—more green than gray—and brick red hair—red not auburn—at least what I could see of it for we were out-of-doors and she had her hat on. Her manner is more French than English although she can trace her English ancestry back for many generations without a break. Her accent, however, is decidedly English.

She reminded me oddly of Becky Sharp, the clever little heroine of Thackeray's masterpiece, "Vanity Fair." Not that I would imply that Madame Glyn is of the adventuress type. Far from it. She was a devoted wife for many years, her husband dying five years ago and she is the mother of two grown daughters. Her vamping has all been done in her mind and projected via her pen into her novels.

Madame Glyn is still an attractive woman but her attractiveness is rather of personality and mentality than physical pulchritude. She talks in epigrams. Her powers of observation seem to be exceptionally keen and she has no hesitancy in voicing her opinions. Perhaps that is why she is so popular as a speaker at club luncheons. Our society women like to be told the truth about themselves provided, of course, that the teller has the required social qualifications. The fact that Madame Glyn has been presented at nearly every court in Europe leaves no doubt as to her eligibility.

To the discovery that she had the gift of writing Madame Glyn ascribes the fact that she is alive today. Born on a country estate in England she was married to a neighboring country gentleman, known in England as a squire, while in her early twenties. At twenty-five she was in ill health and life held out little promise to her. She was an intimate friend of her nearest neighbor, the Countess of Warwick, of Essex. One day in rummaging through some old trunks she came across an old diary which she had written when a schoolgirl. Through her family connections she had been a constant visitor at the houses of the great and near great. Many of her impressions she had recorded in this diary. While glancing through it she suddenly conceived the idea of writing a story giving these impressions through the ingenious eyes of an innocent schoolgirl.

The result was "The Visits of Elizabeth." She read the story to her husband and he thought it very amusing. He was a friend of the publisher of the London *World*, a weekly magazine, and one day he happened to mention that his wife had written a rather clever little story.

The publisher expressed a desire to see it.

"I'll never forget the day I received a telegram from that man saying 'Elizabeth will do,'" Madame Glyn told me. "I was lying in a hammock on the lawn reflecting on how long I would have to live. That message seemed to revive me and from that day I began to recover my health."

The story was published in the *World* as a serial but its immediate popularity caused it to be withdrawn before its completion and published in book form. It had been published anonymously and Madame Glyn had a great deal of amusement listening to the comments of her friends. They wondered who on earth could have written it as many of the anecdotes and experiences told in the story could have been known only to one who moved in the inner circle of society.

Madame Glyn knew nothing of copyright laws and failed to protect her copyright on the book. She therefore got practically nothing for it except the knowledge that she could write. Soon after its publication she went to Egypt for her health and while on this trip wrote her second book, "The Reflections of Ambroisine."

"Three Weeks," her greatest success, was her fifth book. She had always been interested in the character of the Slav, especially the Russian women. While on a visit to a friend's country house in Scotland she became attracted by the clean-cut, innocent minded appearance of a young man who was also a guest there. She pictured him under the spell of a Russian siren. The result was "Three Weeks" which took her six weeks to write and has brought her a fortune in royalties. "Three Weeks" has been translated into every known language except Spanish and still sells in the United States at the rate of more than 25,000 copies a year. Strangely enough it has also been extremely popular in Japan. "Three Weeks" also brought an invitation to the Russian court where she remained six

months as a guest of the royal family, who were later murdered by the Bolsheviks. It was her sympathetic interpretation of the Slav woman that won her this honor. While at the Russian court she wrote "His Hour."

This is Madame Glyn's fourth visit to America. She likes this country very much and thinks she understands Americans much better than do most Europeans.

I found that Madame Glyn and I had one thing in common and that was a hatred for snobs. Madame Glyn thinks that most American women whom she has met are snobbish.

"The American spirit is this," she epitomized, "I am as good as you but no one beneath me in station is my equal."

She says that most American men, no matter what their walk in life, are naturally gentlemen but she believes that they allow their women to dominate them too much. Being a man, I did not dispute her. However, there are worse things than petticoat tyranny.

Although she has written a score of novels Madame Glyn seldom reads fiction. Her idea of light reading is a copy of Gibbon or Stern with an occasional dip into the classics of which the "Letters of Lucian" is her favorite.

Madame Glyn came to America, this time, under contract to a big motion picture concern for which she is to write scenarios. She is enthusiastic over the possibilities of the new medium of expression but knowing the ways and wiles of motion picture directors I fear that there will soon be a clash of that intangible yet only too real thing known as artistic temperament.

The Wood Hollow Papers

By ROBERT PAGE LINCOLN

AS I was chopping wood in the afternoon I heard a twittering in the air above me and looked up. It was a merry crew of goldfinches coming apparently from nowhere and alighting in the field to feed upon the weeds. They always seem to drop from the very clouds, even like the snowflakes themselves, with a lightning-like glimmer, and then, before you are aware of it, they are busy close to the earth picking up the seeds that make up their daily fare. For all the lamentable gloominess laid at the door of winter; for all the uncomfortable attendances that are said to rise out of the ice and snow, how then shall we interpret the presence of the goldfinch whom even winter cannot drive to cover? January days or February days at their blackest are no bar to this little fellow. His rise and dip through the air and his twitterings en route are music to the soul. One is forgiven going into rhapsodies over it. No song of hermit thrush in the summer or lyric outburst of a thousand associated harbingers in the spring or early summer can equal that one song of the goldfinch, fragrant memory as it is of the liquid music that flows from that same throat in the summer. While our wintry doors creak grimly shut, like the sound of chains and bolts being fitted into place, who shall listen and hear across the immensity of the bleak fields one happy voice, rising, rising, and then fading, rising and fading until these little ones are lost over a hill or down in a snow-covered swale? While the snows come out of the frozen North and while these heralds of its coming ride downward out of the unvanquished wastes, let us not mourn over our own petty chills and misfortunes, for here we have wintry happiness represented in the very atoms.

The bird that people know in the summer as the "wild canary," so familiar to our woods and lanes, is none other than the goldfinch as it is technically termed; yet how many people are aware of the fact that the so-called "wild canary" stays with us the year around and that in the winter it changes to another color and so escapes attention. Birds that stay through the winter change plumage color with the coming of cold weather. The goldfinch or "wild canary" is yellow in the summer with a black cap on its head. In the winter it takes to itself a sparrow coloration, with whitish underparts, a yellow throat, and, as though it would follow the fashions, it obtains for itself a yellow winter cap.

The tree sparrow is also with us in the North in the winter. This specimen and all the other sparrows, of which there are thirty varieties in this country, belong to the finch family. The tree sparrow, *Spizella monticola*, destroys vast quantities of weed seeds, and government estimates have it that in one state alone the tree sparrows destroyed in one year close to nine hundred tons of weed seeds. Of course this is an estimate and like all estimates it must be taken on its face value. I do not know how such estimates can be made, but the system of examining the stomach contents of the birds no doubt has led to the basis for such reckonings. Thus if one bird is found to have such and such an amount of seeds in its stomach this amount is no doubt multiplied by the number of possible tree sparrows in a state, thus a daily figure of seed consumption being obtained. A well-known ornithologist has stated that a scarlet tanager has been seen to consume thirty-five gipsy moths a minute for eighteen minutes at a time. To which an exceedingly shrewd observer remarked:

"According to this estimate that is 630 gipsy moths in 18 minutes. I have never measured or weighed gipsy moths but I believe that 630 would weigh a pound and would fill two quarts. Nor have I accurate figures of size or weight of scarlet tanagers, but believe them not over two ounces in weight. Here we have, then, a two-ounce bird eating two quarts, 630 moths, each a possible three-quarter inch in length, eight times its own weight in eighteen minutes!"

The seed-consuming birds have surely not the value of the tree-working birds which destroy parasitical life with such finality, but in the wisdom of her course nature has set them to their duties and the tree-working birds to theirs. A flock of seed-consuming birds alights in a thicket of weeds and while they pick a few seeds from the tops it must also be remembered that hundreds upon thousands of seeds are scattered on the snow. These seeds attract the rays of the sun as any dark surface will that lies on the snow. Soon the seeds sink into the snow and by their own heat are preserved. In the spring they fix themselves in the earth and rise as a new generation. Unconsciously the birds sow broadcast the seeds that nature produces—that is part of the infallible Great Design. Is it a bird working among the pine cones in the forest? Where a few seeds are consumed a hundred fall to the earth below. These seeds are washed away to new places and so new pines arise to beautify the land. Does not the bluejay cleave to the shelter of the oak trees, nesting in them, staying by them, winter or summer? The oddest trait in the bluejay is its strange passion for burying acorns; thousands of them; and they never return to consume them. Men who have studied deeply cannot explain it. Then there is only one solution: the bluejays are set to plant the oak trees. We scoff at this because it appears a poetic fancy; we are blind to the working of the Great Scheme of things; rather we spend the major portion of our one-hour existence probing into gigantic theories, attempting to set them to work, forgetful of the natural processes, the avenues to which are so near to us and yet so far away!

(Continued next week)



ELINOR GLYN