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Some Gloom, Iron and a Woman

Tragic Atmosphere, the Irreverent Honora and the Charge
That Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer Favors Side Whiskers

SOMETHING tells the reader of romance, at once and almost unerringly, when he has made a find. On the instant the oak door clanked to behind Denis de Beaulieu and trapped him in the house of the Sire de Male-troit the young reader of the late seventies—whose sons are now in France with the descendants of Denis and Blanche—knew that this R. L. Stevenson would do. Perhaps Bret Harte's popularity was born in the same paragraph with the tragic infant of Roaring Camp. It is unlikely that any romantic reader of two centuries ago got more than a yawn out of Daniel Defoe until the Sallee rover sailed into the fourteenth page of *Robinson Crusoe* and out came the small shot and the pikes. The first paragraph of that classic, by the way, would never get past an English publisher now, for therein Robinson confesses that his real name is Kreutz-naer and that his father was born in Bremen.

This brings us by easy stages to Joseph Hergesheimer, whose forbears have been native Americans for several generations and whose book, *Gold and Iron*, is further proof that the reader of romance has instinct for what he wants. Mr. Hergesheimer grabbed his audience in the first half thousand words of *Wild Oranges*, which is the first story in the book, as it was the first of the three to be published serially:

"The odors of the flowers, of the orange blossoms, uncoiled in heavy, palpable waves across the water, accompanied by the owl's fluctuating cry. The sense of imminence increased of a *genius loci* unguessed and troublous, vaguely threatening in the perfumed dark."

Coupled with what had gone before, the arrival of John Woolfolk's yacht in the bay, this brought to the reader, apart from the smell of wild oranges, a sensation akin to that of the fan who sees a new pitcher warm up. Presently the watcher cries out: "That bird has got something!" Great is the joy of the discoverer, even if he returns to Spain in chains, remains to see the pitcher knocked out of the box, or lives long enough to observe his romancer becomes a realist.

Oh, Joy, Here's Gloom.

In the case of *Wild Oranges* it was evident that gloom was just off the port bow; gloom as thick and delectable as split pea soup; slow, sticky gloom, gloom that cheers by its very despondency. There are five characters in the novelette and Mr. Hergesheimer kills three of them. Was that necessary? the soft hearted reader may ask. Yes, the rules must be followed. You may not gloom in the first part unless you kill in the last. The god of the novelist decides. Mr. Hergesheimer can be imagined saying to the idol on his desk: Well, here we are close to the end. I have been obedient; I have killed Lichfield Stope and Nicholas; is all well? The idol answers: No; old Stope and Nicholas had to die; one was nearly dead, the other a crazy criminal. Kill the girl, man, kill the girl! Kill John Woolfolk too; he is 46 years old and has had a lot of trouble. Joseph Conrad would kill them both. The novelist protests: I can't kill Woolfolk; I need him for another book, maybe for a long novel. It would be a shame to kill a girl who has spent all her life in a weird old house on the



Joseph Hergesheimer.

Georgia coast and never saw even the subway. Millie and John are going to be married.

So they argue, and at last compromise; Mr. Hergesheimer agrees to kill Poul Halvard in a nice way. We were sorry to see Poul go. It would have been better if there had been some way of killing Nicholas twice.

Queer names Mr. Hergesheimer has for his women; Millie Stope in *Wild Oranges*; Gisela Wooddrop in *Tubal Cain*, and Honora Canderay in *The Dark Pledge*; and every one of them at least thirty. Hergesheimer is the Munyon of spinsters.

Millie Stope is a carved ivory figure against the dusty black tapestry of Doom. Gisela is "a finch in an elaborate cage" until Alexander Hulings's imminent failure opens the door. But Honora Canderay, she is a bearcat.

"I trust," says Olive Stanes to Honora, "that Jason has been given grace to walk in the path of God."

"Grace be damned," replies Honora, and departs "gracefully swaying against the wind."

The Two Strong Characters.

Honora is the great woman of the three stories. The reader finds a faint interest in Jason Burrage and his dissolute ways; but this daughter of a New England ship captain—she's past 36—is to be waited upon. There is the feeling, as certain as the sense of tragedy in *Wild Oranges*, that Honora will bust out into something hotter than irreverence. She does it with a whip, a whip "flickering again, cutting and wrapping about a face." It was not Jason's face, but it lets Jason and all Cottarsport know who's boss of that town. Jason needed a boss; the Lord knows.

So much for the masterful woman; now for the masterful man—Alexander Hulings, the iron man of *Tubal Cain*. Some whispering has been done in literary circles about the liberality with which Mr. Hergesheimer puts side whiskers on his men. In the case of Hulings they were of the period; he would have been queer looking without them at the height of his prosperity. He wore also a bright blue coat, tight black trousers and flat, glistening slippers. Such was his makeup when he killed Sinnox the duellist. He had neither whiskers nor fine clothes when he worked at Tubal Cain in his Homeric struggle to become an iron king and down Gisela's father. Hulings did not depend on side whiskers. He was not at all a comic character. He was a failure financially at 34; from that time on he was bankrupt only morally. He ran away from poverty and bluntly announced it to the woman he had courted for ten years.

"Then I'll never be married," said Hallie Flower.

There they left her, Alexander Hulings and Mr. Hergesheimer. Many a good woman is left standing in a novel, twisting her apron. In Hallie's case blame Alexander's greed for iron and Mr. Hergesheimer's artistic methods. What can an author do with a woman who has been courted for ten years except leave her standing!

Alexander Spills the Beans.

Alexander gets his for snubbing John Wooddrop if not for deserting Hallie Flower or not telling Gisela

how things were going at the foundry. Really, says Gisela, she ought to have sapphires to wear with her new dress from Vienna (this was way back in the sixties, before Dumba's time):

"Sapphires!" he cried shrilly. "Why, next week we'll be lucky if we can buy bread! I am practically smashed—smashed at fifty and more. This house that you fix up and fix up, that dress and the diamonds and clocks, and—and— They are not real; in no time they'll go, fade away like smoke, leave me—us—bare. For five years I have been fighting for my life; and now I'm losing; everything is slipping out of my hands. While you talk of sapphires; you build bedamned gardens with the me I need to keep us alive; and peacocks and!"

The sharps will say that *Tubal Cain* is the real Hergesheimer. The reader of romance will nod intellectually. A year later, when he picks up the book to read it again—and Hergesheimer bears rereading—he will turn first to *Wild Oranges*.

Tut, says the follower of realism, putting down *Wild Oranges*; owls are not property creatures, uttering their fluctuating cries at the cue. Tragedy comes in the sunlight, when owls are asleep; and we hope John Woolfolk reported the death of Poul to the nearest Swedish consul.

This, of course, is false. Owls come with gloom and help to make gloom. If it were necessary for romance, owls would wear side whiskers.

As for Hergesheimer, he should be carefully watched—if necessary by a Federal commission—to make sure that he keeps on writing romance and does not become a realist.

GOLD AND IRON. By JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER. Alfred A. Knopf, \$1.50.