

## "Number Seventeen"

Louis Tracy's Latest

By GRANT M. OVERTON.

IN his novel published last fall, *Diana of the Moorland*, Mr. Louis Tracy achieved a mighty good murder mystery tale, as Mr. W. B. McCormick certified to readers of *Books and the Book World* and as many readers have since certified to themselves. In *Number Seventeen*, which Mr. Clode has just published, Mr. Tracy does it again. Perhaps, as a matter of fact, did it earlier; for a footnote to a conversation informs us that *Number Seventeen* was written before August 1, 1914. Which, we hasten to add, is entirely immaterial to the main action of the tale.

A successful young author living at 18 Innesmore Mansions, London, observes a caller at No. 17, next door, where resides a gentlewoman. The caller is very evidently a gentleman and a person of some distinction. He appears at 11:30 P. M., but remains not more than five minutes. The next morning the gentlewoman is found strangled to death.

Our author (the hero, not Mr. Tracy) has an appointment to meet the next day a very rich man interested in aviation and in preventing the use of the airplane in war. The meeting is purely to enable Frank Theydon to prepare a magazine article. Naturally Mr. Theydon is dismayed to find that Mr. James Creighton Forbes, millionaire and philanthropist, and father of a lovely girl, is presumably the last person who saw his neighbor alive.

Have we said enough? We think so. But what is a reader to make of a murder where an evilly grinning ivory skull, very tiny and carved of ivory, is the token of the slayer? What is a reader to make of

that extraordinarily alert person from Scotland Yard, Furneaux? From the Isle of Jersey, if you please.

The ingredients of Mr. Tracy's novel—a book to be read at one sitting, or at least in one day—are extremely good. They are highly picturesque, "colorful," without being bizarre. The story is, furthermore, nearly all action. It would make a superb movie play. It is not so satisfactory as it might be, in cloth covers, because Mr. Tracy will interject his little conventional remarks on the marvel of all this happening in staid London and because the love theme is trite and too obviously written into the action so that a love story will be present. Americans will think Frank Theydon very stupid in despairing of his love because the girl's father had millions and he had not much more than enough to live on, earned by his pen. Americans will like greatly Mr. Tracy's use of one of their countrymen, a Chicagoan, to work out the plot, while deploring the queer dialect Mr. Tracy puts in his mouth.

It is disappointing, too, not to go more deeply into the story that lies back of the culminating events. Too much is left to conjecture there. Conjecture, which is the life of a mystery story for several hundred pages, has no place in the last dozen. To compare *Number Seventeen* with a good story by Wilkie Collins, would be harsh. Suffice to say that it provides a restful, exciting evening or afternoon.

NUMBER SEVENTEEN. BY LOUIS TRACY. New York: Edward J. Clode. \$1.50.

Julian Bojer's novel, *The Great Hunger*, went into second printing ten days after publication. Joe Hergesheimer was credited with an assist by Box Scorer Howard W. Cook.

## "White Man"

By DOROTHY SCARBOROUGH.

**WHITE MAN**, by George Agnew Chamberlain, is an extremely entertaining yarn. You don't believe that a bit of it could actually have happened, but that, of course, is inconsequential and irrelevant. If you are depressed with reading overmuch Russian gloom, or bludgeoned with war books, or nauseated with sex stuff, try this for a change. You can for a time forget your agitation over the prices of things, or your mental strain connected with income tax returns, or your perturbation over the approaching aridity of the nation by giving an evening to this romance, even though you'll not be permanently enriched by the experience.

The scene of this adventurous love story is in South Africa, where the climate is temperamental and dramatic, and where all sorts of creatures, from mosquitoes to bull elephants lend excitement to the situations, and where natives furnish local color in abundant blackness.

The events of this whizzing novel move with scenario rapidity and variety. Andrea Pellor, impoverished British maiden of aristocratic family, is on her way to marry her fiancé in South Africa. As she is 25 and he 58, with much wealth but little besides to commend him, she is not enthusiastic over the prospect. To escape for a few minutes the boredom of a hotel dance she slips away to the beach, where she sees a white man and a native making ready to mount in an airplane. Craving a new sensation for a half hour, she says, "Please, Mr. Man, take me with you." We read:

"She was certainly something to see and to wonder it. Her brown hair was a bit mussed like a sea teased into catpaws by puffs of air. Her eyes of Irish blue danced

with a light younger than her face—a light that attends the eternal wistful child within us—but beneath the shining gaze were shadows and her cheeks were overpale. She was slim enough to look tall in spite of the cloak-like affair of dark blue glove cloth that fell from her shoulders to her ankles in ever-widening folds.

"Through all his inspection the man's face never changed. He looked her over deliberately and deliberately let down the little ladder that gave access to the observer's seat. He helped her up without a word, strapped her in and then turned to pour out voluble instructions in dialect to the bronze statue that stood at attention, black eyes fixed on his master's face, red lips repeating like a prompter at a Latin theatre all that his master said."

When they had gone some fifty miles Andrea commands the silent aviator to take her back at once.

"You asked me to take you with me," said the man in the same calm voice, "and I don't happen to be going back."

He does not go back. And Andrea Pellor presently finds herself set down in a mysterious colony of natives in an unknown wilderness, with no other person of her own color save the bird man, whom for lack of any other name she calls White Man.

Since the plot of this book is the chief thing, it would be criminal to reveal it to any prospective reader. One must find out for one's self the reasons and the outcome of this unusual adventure, must experience for one's self the thrills which Mr. Chamberlain has so lavishly provided. *White Man* isn't at all a contribution to literature, but it will give honest pleasure to those who like novels with plenty of action and romance.

WHITE MAN. BY GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN. Bobbs, Merrill Company. \$1.75.

## Homer Croy on "How Motion Pictures Are Made"

By FRANK P. STOCKBRIDGE.

THE monthly magazines have already lost their grip on the public, the weeklies are slipping rapidly, and soon it will be the turn of the daily newspapers to succumb to the all pervading and resistless influence of the movies. So much one gathers from Homer Croy's *How Motion Pictures Are Made*; indeed, the author explicitly sets forth these startling assertions and prophecies, together with other facts and forecasts that are hardly less interesting. The motion picture of the future will be shown in natural color—sufficient success has attended the experimental efforts in that direction to justify this confident prediction. It will no longer "sub titles." The pictorial presentation will be so detailed and artistic as to be perfect that the story will unfold itself entirely in pictures. This was Mr. Edison's ideal aim when he made the first of all motion picture dramas, "The Great Train Robbery," which cost, incidentally, but \$400 and yielded a profit of \$20,000, away back in 1902. There were no interruptions to the rapid movement of the drama, nothing to divert the attention of the audience from the scenes themselves and incidentally to eat up some hundreds of feet of costly film. Motion picture producers have already made much headway in this direction; Mr. Croy explains that the simple expedient of abbreviated spelling, not always according to the rules of the Simplified Spelling Board, has resulted in the annual saving of some quarter of a million dollars worth of film.

While the motion picture of the future will be in colors, it will not be coupled with a talking machine, except in the case of educational films, which doubtless will carry some development of an ingenious electrical device, which the author describes, by means of which the wavering line made by the vibration of an arc light under the impulse of the voice is photographed on the edge of the strip of film and can be retranslated into sound waves

through the same medium of the speaking are. All education will be by means of films, the author believes, and he indicates in some detail methods of adapting the motion picture to the teaching of ancient history, mathematics, science and geography. Indeed Mr. Croy's enthusiasm and confidence in the power of the unaided film to convey any sort of a human message leads to the suggestion that mankind may, through the cinema, return to something approaching the "picture writing" of the primitive Indians if not the ideographic word signs of the Chinese; certainly the range of recognizable emotions and ideas already included in the repertoire of any motion picture star and almost completely standardized, so that the "registering" of any one of them conveys always and to every one the same meaning, is much greater than the possible range of even the most complicated combination of brush strokes.

Mr. Croy writes from the inside when discussing the movies, for he has been a motion picture actor, one gathers, a scenario editor, one suspects, and a producer or director of film productions. He was in Singapore making motion pictures when the European war began and ran up against a rigid censorship that put a stop to photographic activities in the British possessions. No such censorship obtained in the Spanish war, the first armed conflict after the development of the motion picture camera, and not the least interesting incident related by the author is of the movie operator who risked his life at the battle of Santiago only to find, after dodging Spanish bullets all day, meanwhile turning his crank industriously, that something was wrong with the mechanism and he had not made a single foot of pictures! The company that sent him out, however, was not to be balked so easily; the battle of San Juan Hill was staged in New Jersey and shown to huge and delighted audiences all over the world. In tragic contrast is an episode of the battle of Verdun. Motion picture photographers in the war just ended used cameras containing a gyroscopic stabilizer operated by compressed air, so they were not under the necessity of mounting their "boxes" on tripods—thereby being mistaken for machine gun operators. The gyroscope keeps the camera level and steady while held in the hands and the compressed air also operates the film mechanism. J. A. Dupre, French photographer, advancing with the troops at Verdun, was killed while seeking shelter; his camera, the mechanism still in operation, fell across his knees with the lens still pointing at the advancing Germans, and one of the most wonderful pictures of the whole war resulted! The marvellous development of the motion picture in less than a quarter of a

century, from Muybridge's "Zoopraxiscope" to the familiar product of to-day, is told in sympathetic detail; the mechanism of the camera and projector are described and the methods by which various screen results are obtained explained interestingly. One learns that the "animated cartoon" requires the services of thirty artists working constantly for a week to produce a 500 foot strip of film, known in the trade as a "half reel"; that audiences do not laugh when custard pies are thrown into ladies' faces, though this is the most humorous of all screen situations when the victim is a man; and that cannibals get \$2 a day for "acting in the movies." Why some good actors fail as screen stars and vice versa, what makes vehicle wheels appear to turn backward on the screen and why actors don't break their necks when they fall off the pyramids are among the curious and interest-

ing phases of the motion picture industry discussed by the author.

For one who has been so intimately associated with the motion picture business Mr. Croy is singularly frank in discussing its literary shortcomings. He admits that the general run of screen "stories" are about fourth reader grade and that the men who control the industry are much more concerned over the present nickel than the future dollar.

"I've got something big!" exclaimed a scenario writer to one of the film magnates. "I've got the film rights to *Pudd'n-head Wilson!*"

The film magnate, Mr. Croy records, took the announcement calmly. With an expressive shrug he replied:

"Ve don't want to knock the President."

HOW MOTION PICTURES ARE MADE. By HOMER CROY. Harper & Brothers. \$4.

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