

## "Against the Winds"



KATE JORDAN

THE impediments that interfered with Naomi Tway's pursuit of liberty and happiness, in Kate Jordan's *Against the Winds*, were a singularly sordid and brutal assortment of tragedies. She was driven from her dirty, unkempt home in a Southern town by the discovery that her mother followed the profession of Mrs. Warren of unsavory memory. She made a failure of a stenographer's existence in New York and married a commercial traveller as her only port in the storm of her life. Then experience revealed to her that her husband was given to sodden sproes that lost him place after place in spite of his superficial cleverness as a salesman.

To tide over one of these periods of financial depression Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Careen went to live in a suburban Hudson River village which was Andy's birthplace and where he still owned his boyhood's home. Now Naomi Careen was distinctly lovely and Gilbert Hampton (the inevitable rich, idle waster of fiction) fell in love with her. He persuaded Naomi to elope with him with the understanding that when Andy got his divorce they would be married. But Naomi's beauty of character was too much even for Gilbert the

wicked. He came back and told Naomi on the eve of their elopement that he had never intended to marry her. And back she went to Andy to discover he was dying of cancer.

And while Naomi performs this service to her husband of playing the sacrificial wife Gilbert is fighting with the French in the war. The reader is left with the sense that no Boche bullet is numbered for Gilbert and that he would return to find Naomi a ready to be consoled widow. Like all of Mrs. Vermilye's stories, this one is very well written and has many beautiful passages concerned with rural and urban vistas. But Naomi is such a parasite that it is impossible to sympathize with her; and this antagonism the heroine arouses is not atoned for by the horrors of her backgrounds.

AGAINST THE WINDS. BY KATE JORDAN. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. \$1.50.

### Sea Stories

TO THE EDITOR OF BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD—Sir: Is the sea story dead? Really I cannot recall a single first class sea yarn since Jack London's *Sea Wolf*. And yet it seems to me there is no class of fiction which affords a better field for contrast, color and action, for powerful appeals to the imagination and the emotions, than the sea story—the maritime novel.

Recently my mind was turned in this direction by an oil painting hanging in the lobby of one of our San Francisco hotels—a picture of a ship riding the waves in midocean. It was an impressive thing. The sky was gray, the sea was gray and a gale was sweeping over the water, which, swinging to the rhythm of the wind, undulated enormous waves, each capped with a roaring cataraet of white. Across that ocean a tall ship was driving—an old-fashioned wooden sailing ship with painted ports and quarter boats. Under two topsails and a foresail the vessel flew before the wind, avalanching down the face of a following sea and the foam roars from the bow. Above, the sails were almost buried from the pressure of the wind.

A spirited salt water novel would be a splendid thing, even in these utromantic days. Whether the scene be set on the deck of schooner, or clipper, or ocean freighter, the background of land and ocean is the same, and that's the thing.

ROGER SPRATON,

Berkeley, Cal., April 12.

## "Robinson Crusoe"

By ROSSITER JOHNSON.

TO THE EDITOR OF BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD—Sir: Reading your timely and interesting article on *Robinson Crusoe*, a worldwide book published 200 years ago, I could not help seeing one fault in it. The writer elings to the assumption that Defoe got the idea of his story from Selkirk, who passed the four years alone on Juan Fernandez, in the Pacific (1705-9). Capt. Rogers, his rescuer, published his narrative in 1712.

It is said that the accusation against Defoe was originally set afloat by his political enemies. However that may be, it has been very persistent. When I was a boy one of my schoolbooks declared boldly and baldly that Defoe "stole the story from Alexander Selkirk." And this venerable theory causes every voyager and every writer that has occasion to mention Juan Fernandez to speak of it as "Crusoe's Island."

Many readers are ignorant of the fact that in perusing a book they should first attentively read the title page. That page in any good edition of *Robinson Crusoe* informs us that his island was "near the mouth of the great River Orinoco"—3,000 miles from Juan Fernandez, with a continent between.

This fact alone would not prove that Selkirk's narrative was not the original of Defoe's book. But now turn to *The Royal Commentaries of Peru*, Spanish original, published in Cordova, 1609-17. The author was a mestizo, who took the name of his father, Garcilasso de la Vega, one of the conquerors of Peru. A translation into English by Sir Paul Ryeant, Kt., was published in London in 1688, thirty years before Defoe wrote his famous story. This translation is in the New York Library. The third chapter includes the story of Peter Serrano, who was shipwrecked in the Caribbean Sea and, alone of all the crew, swam ashore to a desolate island near the mouth of the Orinoco. He lived at first on shrimps and small shellfish, then learned to catch turtles, drink their blood, eat their flesh and use the shells to catch rain water. He produced fire by using seaweed as fuel and striking his knife blade with a pebble. Ships did not venture near the island on account of shoals and reefs. (Was not the famous Kearsarge lost in that region?) At the end of three years another man swam ashore from a wreck—prototype of Crusoe's man Friday. Serrano was now completely covered with long hair, and the two surprised men distrusted each other as devils till they proclaimed themselves Christians by reciting the Creed. They lived there four years, and were then rescued. Serrano told his story in Spain and in Germany, received a liberal pension and died in Panama.

Selkirk was not wrecked, as Crusoe was; he was put ashore at his own request and was provided with the means of mak-

ing a living. Serrano, thrown upon a desert island, with nothing but his knife and the clothes he wore, had to use extreme ingenuity and unflinching courage, and Defoe, of all writers, was the one to expand that ingenuity to the utmost. Indeed, that is the essential characteristic of his book.

It appears to me to be quite as proper and significant to memorialize the centennials of worldwide books as of famous men. Milton says: "A good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." We always remember the recurrence of Shakespeare's birthday and deathday, but have we ever done likewise for Cervantes and his *Don Quixote*? Our own Irving finished his most successful work, *The Sketch-Book*, in 1820. As is usual with the very best books, it was declined by the publishers, and he printed the first edition at his own expense. Let us remember him next year. The centennial of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will occur in 1952—if there shall be any 1952. The French revolutionists of the 1790s changed the calendar to suit themselves and the Bolsheviks (might as well anticipate the inevitable contraction) may abolish it altogether. Who can tell? The general condition of the world, not less than the destruction of French cathedrals by the Huns, recalls that solemnly eloquent passage with which Ruskin closes his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*:

"I have paused not once nor twice, as I wrote, and often have checked the course of what might otherwise have been importunate persuasion, as the thought has crossed me, how soon all Architecture may be vain, except that which is not made with hands. There is something ominous in the light which has enabled us to look back with disdain upon the ages among whose lovely vestiges we have been wandering. I could smile when I hear the hopeful exultation of many at the new reach of worldly science and tiger of worldly effort; as if we were again at the beginning of days. There is thunder on the horizon, as well as dawn."

This was written in 1848 or 1849, when a revolutionary movement on the continent of Europe was in progress. The passage might well be pondered by the architects of a new Europe—a heterogeneous commission of statesmen with credentials and mediocrities without—who sit in Paris filling a sprinkling pot with milk and water to extinguish the bonfire around which the Bolsheviks are dancing and at which they expect to light a torch for America.

ROSSITER JOHNSON.

New York, April 20.

The publishers of Robert W. Chambers beg to announce that they are printing the sixteenth and fifty-eighth editions, respectively, of those real best sellers, *Adolescence*, by G. Stanley Hall, and *Care and Feeding of Children*, by Dr. Emmett Holt.

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