

The Sun.

BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 1919.

I, WHO FADE WITH THE LILACS.

By William Griffith.

I, WHO fade with the lilacs
And with the roses fade,
Am sitting this hour with them
Conferring in the shade.

Life has not left the wonder
With which it first began
To make Pierrot a poet,
In making him a man.

It has not made a rainbow,
In all the sorry years,
But was a sailing glory
Upon a sea of tears.

Somehow life leaves one stranded
On shores too near or far,
Hitching, forever hitching
Ships—shallops to a star.

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THE SECRET OF THE BEST SELLER.

BY "best seller" we may mean one of several things. Dr. EMMETT HOLT's *Care and Feeding of Children*, of which the fifty-eighth edition was printed in the spring of 1919, is one kind of best seller; OWEN WISTER's *The Virginian* is quite another. The number of editions of a book is a very uncertain indication of sales to a person not familiar with book publishing. Editions may consist of as few as 500 copies or as many as 25,000 or even 50,000. The advance sale of GENE STRATTON-PORTER's *A Daughter of the Land* was, if we recall the figure exactly, 150,000 copies. These, therefore, were printed and distributed by the day when the book was placed on sale, or shortly thereafter. To call this the "first edition" would be rather meaningless.

One thousand copies of a book of poems—unless it be an anthology—is a large edition indeed. But not for EDGAR GUEST, whose books sell in the tens of thousands. The sale, within a couple of years, of 31,000 copies of the poems of ALAN SEEGER was phenomenal.

Authors' Earnings.

The first book of essays of an American writer sold 6,000 copies within six months of its publication. This upset most precedents of the bookselling trade. The author's royalties may have been \$1,125. A few hundred dollars should be added to represent money received for the casual publication of the essays in magazines before their appearance in the book. Of course the volume did not stop selling at the end of six months.

Compare these figures, however, with the income of one of the most popular American novelists. A single check for \$75,000. Total payments, over a period of fifteen years, of \$750,000 to \$1,000,000. Yet it is doubtful if the books of this novelist reached more than 65 per cent. of their possible audience.

Books One-Quarter Sold.

It is a moderate estimate, in our opinion, that most books intended for the "general reader," whether fiction or not, do not reach more than one-quarter of the whole body of readers each might attain. With the proper machinery of publicity and merchandising book sales in the United States could be quadrupled. We share this opinion with HENRY BLACKMAN SELL of the *Chicago Daily News* and were interested to find it independently confirmed by JAMES H. COLLINS, who, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post* of May 3, 1919, under the heading *When Merchandise Sells Itself*, said:

"Book publishing is one industry that suffers for lack of retail outlets. Even the popular novel sells in numbers far below the real buying power of this nation of readers, because perhaps 25 per cent. of the public can examine it and buy it at the city book stores, while it is never seen by the rest of the public.

"For lack of quantity production based on wide retail distribution the novel sells for a dollar and a half.

"But for a dollar you can buy a satisfactory watch.

"That is made possible by quantity production. Quantity production of dollar watches is based on their sale in 50,000 miscellaneous shops, through the standard stock and the teaching of modern mercantile methods. Book publishers have made experiments with the dollar novel, but it sold just about the same number of copies as the \$1.50 novel,

because only about so many fiction buyers were reached through the bookstores. Now the standard stock idea is being applied to books, with assortments of fifty or 100 proved titles carried by the druggist and stationer."

The Case of Harold Bell Wright.

Speaking rather offhandedly, we are of opinion that not more than two living American writers of fiction have achieved anything like a 100 per cent. sale of their books. These are HAROLD BELL WRIGHT and GENE STRATTON-PORTER.

We are indebted to Mr. FRANK K. REILLY, president of the Reilly & Lee Company, Chicago, selling agents for the original editions of all Mr. WRIGHT's books, for the following figures:

"We began," wrote Mr. REILLY, "with *That Printer of Udell's*—selling, as I remember the figures, about 20,000. Then *The Shepherd of the Hills*—about 100,000, I think. Then the others in fast growing quantities. For *The Winning of Barbara Worth* we took four orders in advance which totalled nearly 200,000 copies. On *When a Man's a Man* we took the biggest single order ever placed for a novel at full price—that is, a clothbound, 'regular' \$1.35 book—250,000 copies from the Western News Company. The advance sale of this 1916 book was over 465,000."

Mr. REILLY wrote at the beginning of March, 1919, from French Lick, Indiana. At that time Mr. Wright's publishers had in hand a novel, *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent*, to be published August 21, 1919. They had arranged for a first printing of 750,000 copies, and were as certain of selling 500,000 copies before August 1 as you are of going to sleep some time in the next twenty-four hours. It was necessary to make preparations for the sale of 1,000,000 copies of the new novel before August 21, 1920.

The sale of 1,000,000 copies of *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent* within a year of publication may be said to achieve a 100 per cent. circulation so far as existing book merchandising facilities allow.

The sale, within ten years, of 670,733 copies of GENE STRATTON-PORTER's story *Freckles* approaches a 100 per cent. sale, but with far too much retardation.

Securing a 100 Per Cent. Sale.

How has the 100 per cent. sale for the Harold Bell Wright books been brought within hailing distance?

Before us lies a circular which must have been mailed to most booksellers in the United States early in the spring of 1919. It is headed: "First Publicity Advertisement of Our \$100,000 Campaign." Below this legend is an advertisement of *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent*. Below that is a statement that the advertisement will appear, simultaneously with the book's publication, in "magazines and national and religious weeklies having millions upon millions of circulation. In addition to this our newspaper advertising will cover all of the larger cities of the United States." Then follows a list of "magazines, national and religious weeklies covered by our signed advertising contracts."

There are 132 of them. The range is from the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New Republic* to *Vanity Fair* and *Town Topics* in one slant; from *System* and *Physical Culture* to *Zion's Herald* and the *Catholic News*; from *Life to Needlecraft*; from the *Photoplay World* to the *Girl's Companion*; from the *Outlook* to the *Lookout*—and to and fro and back and forth in a web covering all America between the two Portlands.

The secret of the sale of Mr. WRIGHT's books, so far as the External Factor is concerned, resides in the fact that his stories have been brought to the attention of thousands upon thousands who, from one year's end to the other, never have a new book of fiction thrust upon their attention by advertising or by sight of the book itself.

Of this External Factor, more in this place next week.

THE BEST OF THEIR KIND.

The Moon and Sixpence, by W. Somerset Maugham. Candid novel of a genius. "There are few men to whom love is the most important thing in the world, and they are not very interesting ones."

Mare Nostrum (Our Sea), by Vicente Blasco Ibanez. German submarine warfare in the Mediterranean. A novel as tremendous as his *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

NOTE: Other titles will be added from week to week. The number will never exceed twelve. To this end, titles may be dropped after one or more listings, but may reappear, displacing more recent books. The test is *specific interest*, a sort of intellectual equivalent of specific gravity. We will not try to name books of the greatest interest to the greatest number solely, but books of the most violent interest to any considerable number of readers.

The Librarian's Corner

CONDUCTED BY
FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE.

LIBRARIES AND JUST BUILDINGS.

MY friend Joseph L. Wheeler, librarian of the Reuben McMillan Free Public Library of Youngstown, Ohio, than whom there are few librarians more keenly alive to the responsibilities as well as the opportunities of their high office, writes to correct the statement made recently in this column that the county library system of Van Wert county, Ohio, is unique in the service it renders to the people of a whole county. California, says Mr. Wheeler, much of whose library experience was gained there, has many county library systems under a beneficent State law permitting the levying of a per capita tax upon the people of the whole county for the establishment of library service.

Under the California system it is not necessary to have a county library building as such. There may be one or a dozen local public libraries in the county, and the administrative headquarters of the county library may be in one of these or anywhere else. But all over the county there are branches and library stations located in stores, schoolhouses, village halls, residences or wherever a custodian can be found who will perform the small local service necessary in a central point where people naturally gather.

How It Works.

Books are kept constantly circulating. The stock at any particular branch is replenished and renewed at frequent intervals. Thus a single copy of an expensive book, like *The Education of Henry Adams*, may in the course of time be made available to every one in the county who cares to read it. Agricultural Department bulletins, on the other hand, may be distributed almost ad lib. Some of the counties carry the service further, shifting books from one branch to another by means of a motor truck rigged up, except for the means of propulsion, like Roger Mifflin's justly celebrated *Parnassus on Wheels*, and giving the farmers along the route from station to station a chance to exchange old books for new!

Of course California is the place where one would expect library service to be carried to its ultimate end of serving everybody at all times with any books he wants. For in thrice blessed California everybody reads, just as in Indiana everybody writes. Except for the necessity of having the printing done in New York or Chicago the annual output and sales of literature would hardly be affected were the other forty-six States to be suddenly submerged. The California county library system, moreover, is based upon a fundamental truth which in the rest of the United States is rarely fully recognized.

This truth is that a library is not a building.

The first thing most Americans think of when libraries are mentioned is buildings, whereas a building is the last thing one should think of. It is this idea that before you can have a public library, or a branch of a public library, in any given town or part thereof you must have a building specially designed and erected for the housing of the books that helps to keep people who otherwise would read from becoming readers. It is doubtless true that many American communities would have no public libraries at all (like Richmond, Va., for instance) if Mr. Carnegie had not imposed as a condition of his gift of a building that the community must stock it with books and maintain it. The sort of local pride that likes to show off the court house, the jail and the library succumbs to the temptation to add another to the town's monuments, and behold, the community has a "library."

The Case of Brooklyn.

Over in Brooklyn the borough is spending a huge amount of money, some \$6,000,000, I believe, to put up a new main building for its public library. To the authorities to whom power over such things is delegated by the people of Brooklyn "library" means "building," while Dr. Hill, to whom "library" means books in circulation, is put to it to find ways of keeping up even a moderately adequate service of books to the Brooklynites who want to read them, so niggardly is the sum provided for the realities of the library.

As if there weren't already buildings enough, and more than enough, belonging to all the people in which libraries could be housed. New York city has a hundred or more branch library buildings, but it has nearer six hundred schoolhouses. Is there any earthly reason why every school building should not also house part of the library?

One of the most successful public libraries in Wisconsin was started in a railroad station. And some day every one of Uncle Sam's 55,000 post offices will contain a branch public library.