

CLASSICS OF LITERATURE CENSORED BY A SING SING CONVICT

ONE of the most unique documents ever written by a convict in Sing Sing has just come to light. It was intended for the eyes of convicts only—for the readers of prison books—and is penned in a slang that every convict knows perhaps better than the more erudite language of the average author. The document is a review of prison literature, a guide book which tells the convicts what to shun and what to seek in Sing Sing's library; a criticism brief but to the point, and showing in a remarkable way the literary point of view of a criminal who has spent many years in the seclusion of his cell, absorbing the stories of fact and fancy which the prison library affords.

And strange to say, the master of this prison slang is a Bostonese. He says so, incidentally, in his prison book review. But beyond that one admission there is nothing to point definitely to the identity of the man, for the inmates of Sing Sing lose their names upon entering the prison portals. They are given a number instead, and even when writing for the Star of Hope, which is the prison newspaper, Sing Sing's inmates sign only the number which serves them as a name. It was in this paper that the review appeared.

It is only when a convict escapes, or his term is ended, that his name is restored to him. And additional interest is given the document which appears below by the possibility that one of the three convicts who escaped from Sing Sing on the evening of Jan. 25 may have been its author.

One of the three, William Busch by name, was the Assistant Librarian at Sing Sing. And in the nine years of his imprisonment for murder, he naturally became familiar with all the books of the prison library, and was in a position to criticize them perhaps as well, or better, than any other convict there.

But whether this convict critic, who chose the prison slang rather than the more conventional English to inform his fellow prisoners just which books to read and which to avoid, was a murderer or a sneak thief or even a forger, the document is none the less interesting.

The author of the unique review in slang is known as "Sing-Sing No. 57,709." And he calls it "My View on Books." As a foreword he has written:

"The author offers no apology for what follows, which perhaps will serve to illustrate the Stygian depths to which the English language may descend. Unlike many book reviewers, he refers only to works which he has read. Every book mentioned is in the library at Sing Sing (bearing the number given after it) and may probably also be found at Auburn and Clinton."

And then comes the review itself, a review which every book lover of Sing Sing has read with interest, and which may well have its effect upon the future reading in that prison colony.

Mark the Newsboy and nineteen other Alger stories (Nos. 46-66).

Kid stuff. Was strong for these a quarter of a century ago when I was in knicks. Classy line of goods for kids.

Eben Holden (No. 125) Irving Bacheller Yap yarn. There's no kick coming on this one. It's straight dope from the drop of the hat.

Caesar Birrotteau (No. 142)..... Honoré de Balzac Swell goods. Balzac is all to the mustard when it comes to giving us a line on the doings in Giddyburg.

Pere Goriot (No. 142).....Honoré de Balzac The Balzac stable has nothing but winners. This one is about an old frog-eater who, while taking life easy, was bled from the parlor to the garret by a couple of flashy dames that belonged to the family. Give this one the glad hand.

Cousin Pons (No. 143).....Honoré de Balzac Cast your glims over this; two old guys in this that are classy. It's an up-to-the-minute scoop that Balzac is in a class by himself.

The Chouans (No. 145) Honoré de Balzac Lots of scrap in this. It's fine and dandy. All about a lot of frog-eaters who turned fire-eaters. More thrills than ten, 'twent' an' thirt'.

The Idiot, A House Boat on the Styx, The pursuit of a House Boat, Mr. Bonaparte of Corsica, The Enchanted Typewriter, Coffee and Repartee (Nos. 147-153)..... John Kendrick Bangs

Johnnie with the hirsute name is there with the fun-fest, and sends over a line of funny-bone ticklers that are hot and crisp from the popper.

Sentimental Tommy, When a Man's Single, Two of Them, Auld Licht Idyls, A Tillyloss Scandal, The Little Minister, Margaret Ogilvie, Better Dead, and A Window in Thrums (Nos. 180-189).....J. M. Barrie

Scotch with the mist and the burr still on it. Fairly good. No. 185, "The Little Minister," is the one best bet.

Love in Old Clothes (No. 341)..... H. C. Bunner

Bun can call the turn for quiet fun. Short stories that get away with the decision.

The Christian, The Manxman, A Son of Hagar, She's All the World to Me, The Bondsman, The Last Confession, The Deemster, The Shadow of a Crime, Captain Davy's Honeymoon, The Scapegoat (Nos. 372-381).....Hall Caine

Hall is in the limelight for keeps. Our special wire for to-day:

373. The Manxman—straight.

376. The Bondsman—the place.

378. The Deemster—to show. All about the doings of a lot of rubes on the Isle of Man, wherever that is.

When Knighthood Was in Flower (No. 415)..... Charles Major, alias Edwin Caskoden

A flossie piece of work about a bunch of queens. The main fairy is a nifty bunch of skirts. Ed has certainly made a home run with the bases full.

The Pride of Jennico (No. 417)..... A. and J. Castle

This is all wool and a yard wide. Don't fail to get next. The Castle stable has nothing in the maiden class.

Don Quixote (No. 423).....Cervantes

This one grabs the cake. Cervantes won by a mile when he entered the Don in the Literary Handicap. About an old guy with a screw loose, who went out to rescue distressed damsels when knighthood wasn't in flower. The geezer that

Discovery of a Unique Document, in Modern Slang, Intended to "Steer" Patrons of Prison Library.

went with him was a fall-guy for fair. Wormwood (No. 542).....Marie Corelli

This is a strong yarn of a booze fighter with an absinthe yen-yen. He certainly was the original terrible example. Get next to this live wire; it'll do you good. Thelma (No. 543).....Marie Corelli Marie takes the candy. It is a sure thing you'll like this one.

The Romance of Two Worlds..... Marie Corelli

This one is a pipe dream of this world, and the one to come, as Marie sees it. You can scratch this entry if you want to. Other winners in the Corelli stable, are "Vendetta," (No. 546), "The Sorrows of Satan, (No. 951), and "Ardath," (No. 548.)

The Red Badge of Courage (No. 555) Stephen Crane

Steve came near being the big noise. This one of his is a winner for sure. Real war stuff.

Whilomville Stories (No. 567)..... Stephen Crane

Nix on this. It's too kiddish and cuts no ice with yours truly.

Tartarin of Tarascom (No. 629)..... Alphonse Daudet

Alphonse keeps them all guessing. He's some class when it comes to slinging ink. This one's about a very cheisty French payseed, who had a swelled bear over his ability as a lion hunter. He got stung for keeps when he started out to prove it, but it shows how a four-flusher, that hits the pike, can make good with the wise-gaz-

abos that stay home, if he only keeps at it long enough.

Soldiers of Fortune (No. 637)..... Richard Harding Davis

Dickie is the main squeeze when it comes to up-to-date stuff. His queens are hot-house beauts and his heroes, are good scouts that have everybody beaten to a pulp.

The Three Musketeers (No. 763)..... Alexander Dumas

Alec was no jollier; when he got to pushing the pen across the paper he got down to cases right away. This one breaks the bank. On your life, don't scratch this entry. The d'Artagnan guy in this is there with the knockout.

Trilby (No. 782).....Du Maurier

Chocolate creams have nothing on this, even if it is a triffly mushy at the finish. Trilby was a bird for fair, a regular pippin.

Janice Meredith (No. 886).... Paul L. Ford

Put your windows on for this one. It's a daisy. Me for Paul. There's something doing all the time. His "Honorable Peter Sterling" and "The Great K. & N. Train Robbery" have plenty of sit-up-and-git in them.

The Widow Lerouge (No. 929)..... Emil Gaboriau

This one is all right, all right. When it comes to detective stunts, Gab, old boy, is a record breaker. His "File No. 113" and "Other People's Money" will make you sit up and take notice.

The First Violin (No. 906)..... Jessie Fothergill

Get wise to this one. It's a classy show down. We have a hunch that Jessie is there plenty strong every time, even if this is the only one we have clocked. Will draw a line on her; others later.

Cranford (No. 944).....Mrs. Gaskell

This was tipped to me as a winner. I played it and it fell at the "Liverpool." Never again! The characters are a daffy bunch. I never could stand for these old lady stories, they cut no ice with little Willie.

Vicar of Wakefield (No. 963)..... Oliver Goldsmith

All about one of the pious push that was a dead game, sport and no quitter. He was game to the core and stood all the bumps Fate handed out to him. There's a 16* to 1 proposition in here that knocks the sky-pilot in order to steal his peacherino daughters, but he gets stung in the end, and they hand him the merry ha-ha. It don't get by me that Oliver is there with the goods.

She (No. 1089).....H. Rider Haggard

It's a cinch you'll like this. H. Rider is there when it comes to smooth biscuit-shooters. The queen of this tale is long on looks, plenty of life and action. There's a dinge scrapper in it that eats-'em-alive. He'd make Lil Arthur Johnsing and the rest of the chamois-pushers look like gold-bricks. The main guy gets hitched to the queen at the end.

The Man Without a Country (No. 1104).....Edward Everett Hale

This one is a corker and then some. You'd swear it was true. We got a little damp about the lamps at the finish. Hale should have stuck to short stories. He certainly was on the job when he framed this one.

Humors of the Fair (No. 1183)..... Julian Hawthorne

No, Reggie, this one is not about the fair sex. It's ancient history of the World's Fair held at Chi. in '93. This is a dead one now, and you're up against a con game if you fall for it. Julian, I guess, was hot after the mazuma in '93.

The House of the Seven Gables (No. 1186).....Nathaniel Hawthorne

Take it from me, Bo, Nat is there with the goods, but he will tire your think-tank a bit if taken after repeated doses of O. Henry. The main gees in this are an old maid with a pedigree, an ex-con that's peeved with the world after doing a long bit, and an old tightwad squire that'll make you feel like handing him one on the lug. The house, with the bunch of gables stands on ground that a relative of the above group got by the double-cross method.

Twice-Told Tales (No. 1188)..... Nathaniel Hawthorne

No kick coming on these. They're hot stuff, even if they are a re-hash.

The Scarlet Letter (No. 1189)..... Nathaniel Hawthorne

This one is there with the gray matter. There's a sky-pilot in this that was a welcher. He'll make you feel like putting him on the bum. The main dame is game to the core and the whole outfit of phoney knockers can't feaze her.

American and English Note Book (No. 1192).....Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nix on this. Cut it out. They put this one over on Nat after he passed in his checks.

The Rise of Silas Lapham (No. 1319) William Dean Howells

Some of the wise ones tout W. D. as a winner, but there's nothing doing with me. Skidoo for him.

Les Misérables (No. 1336).....Victor Hugo

Now we're getting down to brass tacks. This is the richest thing that ever came down the pike. It's a lalalalooza. You want to read it three times. The first time you won't catch on to all the fine points; you skip the descriptions to follow. Jean Valjean. The second time you'll fall for a little of the descriptive dope, and about the third time you'll read the swellest line on the Battle of Waterloo that was ever handed out. That line on the sewers of Paris is some class, too. The main guy in this is a con that makes a smooth getaway, but he's up against it for fair. The bull that is after him must be a little flighty in the bean. They don't have bulls like that now-a-days.

History of a Crime (No. 1344) Victor Hugo

Pass this one up. Vic had a grouch and got his hammer out because old Nap III. swiped the throne of France. He does as much beeping as if somebody had lifted his clock.

Many Cargoes (1358).....W. W. Jacobs

If you want to laugh and grow fat, go on and fall for all of Jacob's stuff. It's good for the blues.

The Author of Beltraffio, The Other House, The Spoils of Paynton, Tales of Three Cities (No. 1376-79) Henry James

Don't get busy here. Hen's English is like an old maid aunt, it's so prim and proper it's painful. Cut it out, Hen, and come down with the common herd. "Tales of Three Cities" was the limit. Wow! Wow! But that one about the Back Bay of Boston had me off my trolley; I hail from that burg myself. I thought this "Tales of Three Cities" would go Dickens's "A Tale of Two Cities" one better, but it was a rank hold-up. Hen is no relation to Jesse James.

N. B.—Henry James invented the English language and transcendentalism.

Hypatia (No. 1454).....Charles Kingsley

I love my wife, but oh, you Hypatia! This one is about a swell dame, long on mythology, who tried to stack up against a dum of religious fanatics and came to a swift finish. I don't like the way the dame got it in the neck. She didn't get a square deal. There's a dude in here that's a bird. He was certainly some loose with his change. It also contains one old hag you'll want to slap on the wrist.

Westward Ho! (No. 1459) Charles Kingsley

Like a chump I thought this one was about hitting the trail for our West. After I got the green goods I found it was westward ho from the land of John Bull in the days when the little old U. S. A. was an unknown shape on the map.

Gil Blas (No. 1527).....Le Sage

This one was a dark horse that galloped home with all the tin in sight. It's a brace for tired people. Gil Blas was a foxy outfit and that's no frame up. Don't fall to connect.

Charles O'Malley (No. 1539)..... Charles Lever

Lever is right there every time with the Harp stuff. All about Ireland before all the live ones came over here.

From Lands of Exile (No. 1867)..... Pierre Loti

This is just a smooth bunch of descriptive letters from an officer in the French Navy to some dame at home. If you'd fall for this you'd try to pick the little pea.

Handy Andy (No. 1570).....Samuel Lover

Wirra! Wirra! But this one is like fizzy-water. It's just what the doctor ordered. Handy Andy certainly was the original village cut-up.

Rory O'More (No. 1571).....Samuel Lover

This is a good thing; pass it along. Samuel can sure make you rubber some.

The Last of the Barons (No. 1597)..... Lord Lytton

The Warwick guy in this makes and un-makes kings as easy as a railroad company used to grant rebates; they're an easy by-play for him. Eddie, one of the near-kings, will make you feel like jumping on him. Dick III. is a little batty on the glory game. We don't fall for him, not on your tin-type. Don't fall asleep at this switch. There's something doing every minute in this one.