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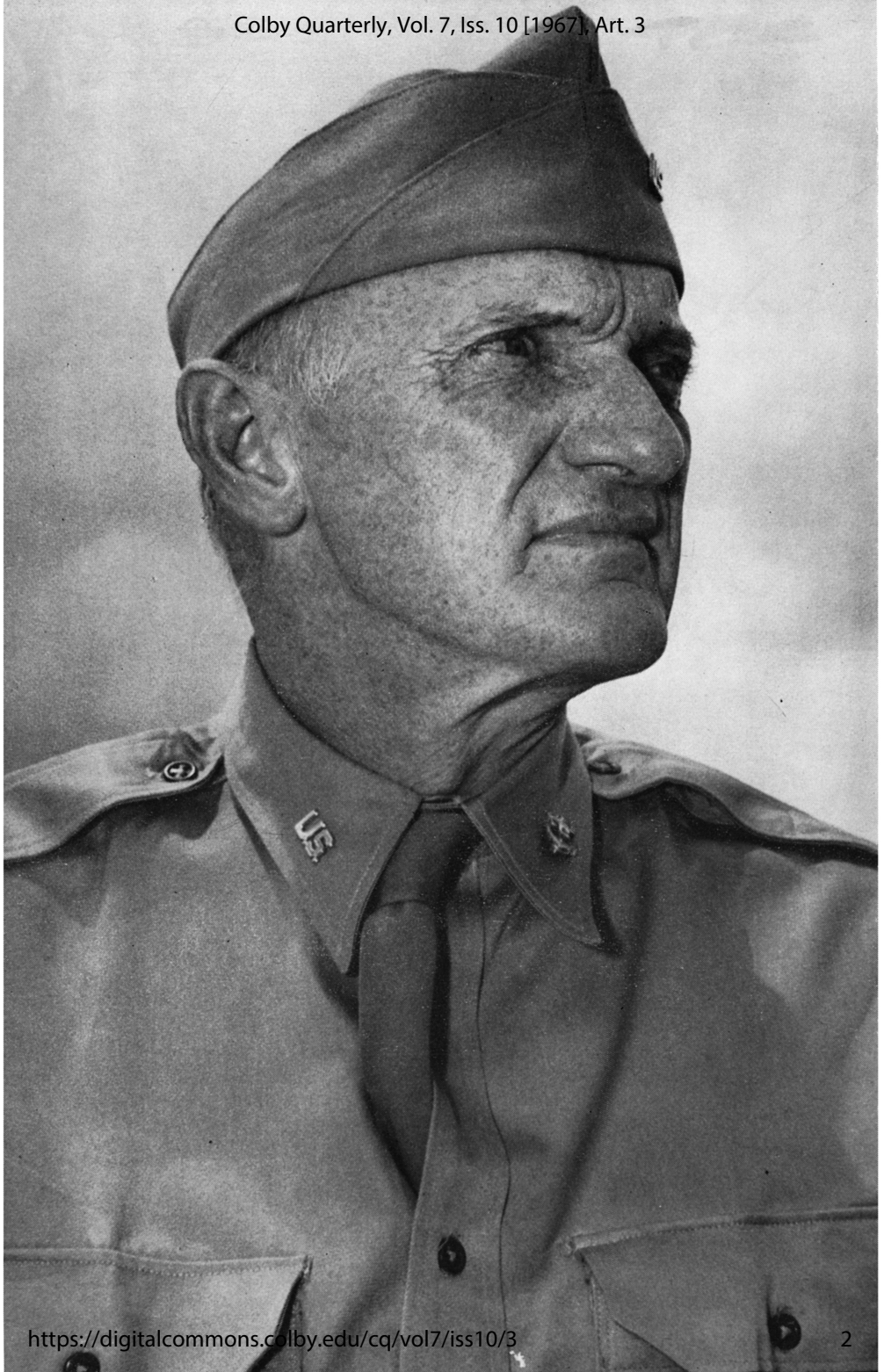
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For the
Eightieth Birthday
of
Richard Matthews Hallet

Born in Bath, Maine
July 21, 1887

We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams.

ARTHUR O'SHAUGHNESSY



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RICHARD MATTHEWS HALLET: ARCHITECT OF THE DREAM

By RICHARD CARY

AT ROAD'S END on Spruce Point in the morning of a spring day, white light deflects off the blue waters of Boothbay Harbor and picks out the equally blue eyes of a large man slumped in a deep chair, deep in the room. Books in long files dominate the walls, and tables are stacked with reading matter of many descriptions. Out of this deceptively passive atmosphere rises a voice with the quality of a subdued gale, rich and easy and glad, the voice of a born yarner. Remembering seas and heights and horizons of yesterday, and the lives of sailor, sheep shearer, line rider, stone breaker, oil drillman, hobo, gold miner, copper mucker, policeman, stoker, trapper, naval officer, author, and war correspondent he has lived.

Fair Harvard

On July 20, 1887, Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., Maine author of *The Gunmaker of Moscow* and some thirteen hundred other fictions, died. On the next day, in Bath, Maine, Richard Hallet was born. From this congruence of mortal events Richard's father adopted the notion that Cobb's disembodied soul and his dint for literature had transmigrated into the body of his brawny new offspring. At the other end of the stick, his fabled Uncle Will Jackson wrote to inquire how much Richard weighed and whether he had the makings of a sailor.

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Five years later, the Hallets were living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Here Richard attended the Cambridge Latin School, absorbing the heavy curriculum of classics and developing the tendency to allusiveness that was to mark his style thereafter. From the first, his father nudged him toward reading and writing. "I had to write . . . the old rascal . . . gave me stuff to read when I was a kid that stirred up what was already in my head. Stevenson and Henty, Kipling and Fenimore Cooper, Tomlinson, Trowbridge, Stanley Weyman, William Stearns Davis and, of course, *Westward Ho*." Chuckling, he adds: "I read incessantly, but not the best — Horatio Alger through and through, and Captain Mayne Reid's stories of the sea."

His Certificate of Admission to Harvard in 1904 indicates that "he passed with credit in Elementary Latin, History, Algebra, Chemistry, and Advanced Greek." With these credentials, and an enabling scholarship, he took his place in the class of 1908. The bulk of his courses were in history and economics, he audited philosophy, but most memorable to him was freshman composition with its required daily theme. In a registration of eight hundred he received one of only three A grades awarded. This he attributes to his job as guide in the Venetian palazzo on the Fenway which housed the art treasures of flamboyant, iconoclastic Isabella Stewart Gardner, known over the world as Mrs. Jack. Hallet will not verify that she kept lions in the basement or that she greeted her guests from the branches of a ceiling-high potted mimosa tree, but he pays tribute to her critiques of paintings for his lofty stance in English A. He went frequently to Copey's famous Wednesday night readings and says they "fired" him to emulate the authors of the selections so appealingly rendered. Within Harvard's halls he also heard Jack London indict the softening effects of civilization and was stirred by his call for literary roughage.

To lay away some money for college expenses, Hallet took a summer job as policeman at Mayflower Grove, an amusement park in Bryantville, Massachusetts, which comprised a pine-board hotel, a lake, a theater *al fresco*, and a carousel, largely patronized by shoe operatives from Brockton and cordage workers from Plymouth. Here the Harvard innocent, whose toughest problem up to this point had been to contend with Wendell's *English Composition* and Taussig's *Principles of Economics*,

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underwent some eye-widening experiences among the “worldly” chorus girls who embellished the syncopated musical comedies and vaudeville acts. Here too he met John L. Sullivan, thenceforth one of his heroes and a prime source of literary provender. The Boston Strong Boy, now retired from the prize ring and weighing in excess of three hundred pounds, often wandered into the park from his nearby farm. When Sullivan first spotted Hallet the policeman, he seized his biceps in massive fingers and roared: “What’s this for a muscle? It’s an oyster on a broomstick!”

On an idle Sunday afternoon during his sophomore year, Hallet was moved to write a short story which he called “The Handkerchief.” With the intrepidity of his nineteen years, he dispatched it to the *Cosmopolitan* and expectantly checked results in the return mail. He was destined to wait considerably longer. On November 17, 1908, an assistant editor of the magazine wrote: “We must apologize for the length we have retained ‘The Handkerchief,’ but it was held up for further consideration. We shall be glad to make use of it if \$60.00 is a satisfactory price for the manuscript.” Satisfactory! Hallet turned half a dozen somersaults and began reckoning the size of his future fortune. All he need do of a Sunday afternoon from now on was to pound out a story and earn \$60, which would carry him through college handsomely and over any other conceivable economic shoals. It was an illusion that served him well. In the face of rejection after rejection in following years, he mumbled stubbornly to himself, “By God, I did it once and I can again.”

Hallet does not have a copy of “The Handkerchief” about, nor can he in fact recall anything about it except that it was “a pretty wild sort of mystery story.” *Cosmopolitan* promised its readers “a little masterpiece of a short story — the kind that made DeMaupassant famous.” It does display an element of Maupassant in the reflexive denouement, but Hallet goes one turn the better, swiftly transposing a sudden access of horror (a corpse) into a romantic symbol of impotence (the handkerchief). In the first lunge of a youth unsure one expects further excesses, and finds them: a superfluous frame, an autobiographical lawyer-narrator who dashes off poems in the absence of clients, needlessly bizarre names, mechanical dialogue, rainbow rhetoric, mummery.

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While still at Harvard, Hallet had another unusual fling at professional writing. *The Arena*, once a robust monthly under the direction of Benjamin O. Flower, had come on sallow days. For several issues before it ceased publication, Hallet ground out most of the editorials and non-fictional content. He thinks now that this may well have hastened the end.

The Law, Learned Hand, and the Sea

Hallet disclaims high rank in his class, but there is ample testimony in print that his colleagues and the administration rated him "an exceptionally bright student." Bright enough, assuredly, to be accepted in the Harvard Law School, to attain his degree in 1910, and to be chosen as secretary by Judge Learned Hand, then thirty-eight years old and rising through the hierarchy of the Federal District Court for Southern New York. Hand impressed Hallet, physically and mentally. "He had the jaw of a lion, the eye of a gazelle, and a memory of iron." Their talks would start with law and invariably digress into literature, philosophy, politics. In those metropolitan days Hallet's dinner often consisted of a five-cent beer and cuts of ham and hard-boiled eggs from the free lunch counter of the Gaiety Bar on Broadway. "There I would spear an egg as nonchalantly as if I had no need of eggs at all, as if I were a successful business man eating an egg in a fit of absentmindedness, or just because it happened to be there." He felt that there must be some mystic point at which free eggs ceased to be free, and he lived in terror of the barman's hand descending upon his shoulder. But he was young and ate heartily despite his dread.

He had embraced law "because a man's got to have some profession," yet the urge to write would not be quelled. He submitted stories and ruefully read editors' comments linking him with Meredith and Conrad — and declining the manuscripts. He wrote mainly of outdoors and the sea, although he could not then tell a capstan head from a martingale. He dived into Kipling, London and Conrad, and liked Galsworthy, Maurice Hewlitt and Hardy. He was vaguely dissatisfied with his lot.

In June 1911 Judge Hand decided to close his chambers and go to Europe for the summer. This was Hallet's Rubicon and he crossed it unflinchingly: he would go to Europe too. Hand

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arranged for him to ship on a square rigger belonging to the Standard Oil Company — “so I shipped on the windjammer and never got back to the law at all.”

What conglomeration of motives impels a man, basically intellectual, to opt for the strenuous life? For Hallet the mixture included his legendary Uncle Will Jackson who “surely started me off on the sea adventures,” and John L. Sullivan, who looked upon his slim frame and admonished, “Me lad, get on a vessel; you’d better go to sea.” There was the fascination of the faraway — “the wide sweep of the bay, the glittering sands, the wealth of green infinite and varied, the sea blue like the sea of a dream, the crowd of attentive faces, the blaze of vivid colour” — in Conrad’s *Youth*, a ten-cent volume plucked from a bookstall in Cornhill during law school days. And there was the ineluctable message from within, “a feeling in me that my spine was soft and that I must go looking for trouble.” He mulled over Trollope’s recipe that the way to write is to drop a piece of sealing wax in your chair and stick to it; rubbed it against Scott’s dictum that it is better to do something worth writing about than merely to write something worth reading. He concluded that “to write, you must first have something to write about, if not adventures of the soul, then adventures of the body.” Thus it was that with two Harvard degrees he put to sea as an ordinary seaman on a baldheaded barque, the *Juteopolis*. For him, as for Conrad’s young Marlow, it was no mere shipboarding. “O Youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it! To me she was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight — to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life.”

Australia

The *Juteopolis* left the port of New York with a million gallons of case oil and touched Sydney 124 days later. A reporter pictured Hallet on arrival as the biggest man for’ard, hair unbrushed, face unshaven, mustached and goateed, wearing a Crimean shirt, soiled pants, and no shoes. Conditions aboard having been less than ideal, Hallet and his mate jumped ship and plunged into the wilderness. They trekked for the next five months, covering approximately a thousand miles through thick

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brush, down roads built by convicts, and along the Murrumbidgee River. They fought midges and black flies, dodged bulldog ants and venomous snakes, slept under the open sky or in bush tents, and when it rained they broke into empty huts or inns. To survive, they took jobs shearing sheep, driving bullocks, breaking rock, and punching rabbits. "At night I used to sit beside a campfire, chew my pencil and put down what had happened during the day, in the form of a sort of tale. Kipling said that was the way to do it." After a time they built a sixteen-foot bateau, roofed it with a tin whisky advertisement that flaunted a white horse striding a blue ground, and launched it into the Murrumbidgee. It was prophesied they would last half a day at best among the river snags; they managed to stay afloat three weeks before collapsing against a sunken gum tree near Wagga Wagga. Here they abandoned the craft and struck south for the city of Melbourne.

Hallet took lodgings in a trolley car barn containing twenty cots for which a larger number of drunken sailors vied nightly. He cajoled a hundred sheets of paper from the editor of the Melbourne *Argus* on the promise to deliver an account of his exploits in the back blocks, rented a typewriter with his last five shillings and, working day and night shifts, produced "The Seaman's Book of Swag." (A swagman, Hallet explains, is a floater who carries all his earthly possessions on his back.) The *Argus* turned down the script as too colloquial but it found haven in the *Herald and Weekly Times* for the life-saving sum of thirty golden sovereigns.

Two other stories of note germinated in this era. In "With the Current," Hallet tried to "make this actual river, the Murrumbidgee, leave its bed and flow through the story." The outcome failed his expectations in several respects. "My heroine had no business in the piece . . . the sawdust could be seen leaking out of every joint." And once, while rolling up a Sydney *Bulletin* to feed a fire, his eye caught an item which he transformed into "Southampton Bill and the Siren." An editor with a steel-trap memory spotted the expropriation, which Hallett sheepishly eliminated. To tranquilize his sense of guilt, he wrote "There's Nothing New Under the Sun," wherein he demonstrated he was neither the first nor the worst offender of this kind, citing as colleagues Prometheus, Dumas *films*, Musset, Martial, Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle, Conrad, and Mark Twain.

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Conrad, Canada, and Copper Mucking

Hungering for new pastures, Hallet signed up as a stoker on the British steamship *Orvieto*, bound for London. In temperatures ranging to 140° Fahrenheit, he shoveled coal while the ship plowed through the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Mediterranean, stopping at Naples and Toulon before discharging him at Tilbury on Thames. The literal hell of a life he led in the boiler room — “I saw black, thought black, spit black; the base of my brain was enclosed in a black fog” — the abrasive sociality of the crew, the impenetrable wall between firemen and first-class passengers, all these he etched in baleful detail in “The Black Squad.” He tried first to sell it to the *London Times*; in his sea garb he could not get past the office boy. Next he went to *Nash’s Magazine* in Fleet Street. As he climbed the dingy stairs to the editor’s office, he passed a stocky man in brown tweeds and brown beard, whose unusual eyes pierced him with a glance. The editor, an American, skimmed hastily through Hallet’s story, shook his head, and said: “You should take a leaf out of the book of the man who just left.” “Who was he?” “Joseph Conrad.” And then Hallet knew that the man walking downstairs was the very man who long ago had unwittingly ordained that silent rendezvous.

Shortly afterward he mailed the manuscript to the *Saturday Evening Post*, with return address to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and thought no more of it. He bicycled for an interlude along the South Coast, joined an archaeological expedition to the west of England, then settled down to research at the British Museum. There he wrote an article on Dartmoor, “Archaeology for Amateurs,” which the *Times* also turned down. When further free-lancing produced not a red pence, he took another job as fireman in order to get back to New York.

Judge Hand supplied him with a letter of recommendation to a prominent admiralty law firm. Hallet was promptly hired, and he agreed to start work on Monday. That weekend he went to see his family in Cambridge. On arrival, he found a letter from George Horace Lorimer offering to buy “The Black Squad” for \$250. This was June of 1912. The *Titanic* had gone down in mid-April with a loss of over fifteen hundred lives, rousing public curiosity in the workings of great ocean liners. To this day

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Hallet insists that it took a major disaster to sell his story. Whatever the propellant, Hallet resolved then and there that literature, not law, was his game. He never reported back to Burlingame & Beecher.

For a spell he stayed in Boothbay Harbor, writing incessantly in long yellow pads on a marble-topped table shaded by a lobster cactus. In this atmosphere of swooping gulls and flowing waters he began to make some headway. In 1913 two of his stories appeared in *Harper's* and one in the *American*. Henry Mills Alden, then a silver-crowned patriarch among editors, asked that he be permitted to abbreviate "The Foreign Voyager," promising he "would cut like a priest, not like a butcher." Hallet was in need of just such a trimmer. These early stories about prideful idealists who are beached by time linger too fondly over details of description which contribute little to inner development. Characters lean to eccentricity, and action to melodrama.

At this time he first met Mary Holton under circumstances that found him accoutred in a pair of crepe-paper angel's wings and holding a basket of artificial flowers. He was sure she thought him asinine. In the longer run she learned he was neither ass nor angel, and eventually consented to become Mrs. Hallet. In this period he also completed his first novel, *The Lady Aft*.

Restive as ever, he took to the Canadian woods with a hardy cousin, four flitches of bacon, some patented camp food, and a surveyor's map of the region. In this wasteland of lakes and rocks, of wild animals and a few tribes of nomad Indians, they trudged, often aimlessly, hoping by some miracle to stumble upon gold. One night Hallet fired at a wolverine or Indian dog who was trying to swipe bacon from their kettle of cooking beans. Soon two armed Northwest Mounted Police materialized out of the void and informed them it was against the law to fire any weapon within Kenora Township limits during wartime. So it was that Hallet discovered the onset of World War I. He and his partner had breached the forest shortly after the assassination at Sarajevo; it was now November.

He sold nothing in 1914, and hove off to Chicago after fresh material with \$10 in his pocket. He hitched rides in boxcars, hauled trucks along railway platforms, ate with hoboes, slept

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with sheep, and made innumerable notes. Through the beneficence of a Chicago *Tribune* editor who paid him \$50 for a story (\$49.50 went for fare and four bits for ham sandwiches), he rode in elegant style out of the Midwest capital southward. Soon he found himself in Arizona in company of a Swedish butcher, a deserting soldier, a Mexican miner, and a burro named Yim, once more in pursuit of the elusive yellow metal. When the search petered out, he made for the town of Globe, site of the Old Dominion Copper Company. Through the intervention of the local bank president, who was too canny to lend him money on the dubious security of an unfinished manuscript, Hallet secured a job in the pit. He mucked for four months and recounted the hazards of working on the twelfth level — equivalent to one of Dante's lower circles — in an essay, "Shooting Off the Solid." Daily, when his stint at the mine ended, he wrote news copy, editorials, and obituaries for the Arizona *Record* until midnight. What time remained of the twenty-four hours, he persisted at his fiction. Proceeds from the copper-mucking article (the *Saturday Evening Post* paid \$400) finally enabled him to head back to Boothbay Harbor and another term of concentrated writing.

The Lady Aft

Hallet topped off his first novel between the time he returned from London and before he set out on his continental hegira. He sent it to the house of Doran and, after a space, was summoned for a conference. He was ushered into a cubicle of a room occupied by stacks of boxes which seemed to contain manuscripts. Wedged among these was "a stringbean of a man, redheaded and homely," who muttered funereally that the book had too much plot, a crutch at best. However, since publishers had to print books if they were to stay alive, Doran would accept his novel. Years later Hallet learned the identity of his first reader — Sinclair Lewis, then author of two novels but effectually unknown. Hallet asked \$200 in advance of royalties; Doran offered \$100. Hallet took the book to Small, Maynard & Company, who acceded to \$200, and *The Lady Aft* was published in 1915.

The story concerns a lawyer's clerk whose forebears had built ships and sailed them boldly down the salty reaches. Like

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Melville's Ishmael, the clerk finds the constraints of land overbearing and takes to sea. Like Melville's *Pequod*, this ship is a microcosm of the world's motley of human types, shapes, shades, and sizes. To complicate the normal politics of a ship's crew, Hallet inserts aboard the captain's daughter, a capricious maiden whose difference the men try hopelessly to assimilate into their habitual hostilities. Instinctively they shy from the allure and torment of her presence, for they agree that women poison ships — "It ain't what she does. It's what she is." Her only ally among these seaworn cynics is the young naif, known throughout simply by the epithet, The Stiff. Hallet's use of anonymity insinuates a sense of universality, for this fumbling, nameless hero, without knowledge or experience but with ageless pluck, personifies the eternal thrust toward life, the priceless foolhardiness of Every-youth who must ram his head against the wall of the world and thus come to uncover for himself the meaning of existence.

The Lady Aft, then, is Hallet's *bildungsroman*, his chart of progress from unfledged lawyer to aware, self-determined manhood. The movement is symmetrical: from defeat in a fistfight, through the climax of a murderous squall, to victory in a fistfight, sheathed in a Conradian mood of brooding mystery and menace. Day-by-day life in the forecabin is realistically portrayed, there is a good deal of rough masculine humor, and character is evoked by sudden dips into the psyche rather than by slow unfoldment. Hallet's point of view is that of stage manager, denoting his control by numerous sententious asides. Most effective is the language which rolls like drops of golden brandy on the tongue, heady in color, rhythm, alliteration, and in the electric quality of Stephen Crane's muted hyperboles. Regrettably, the resolution is somewhat forced and implausible; the lady aft too facilely stripped of her secrecy and absolved of her duplicity.

Today Hallet calls it "a mighty bad piece of work," but on July 3, 1915, Rudyard Kipling wrote that he had read *The Lady Aft* "with great interest." The book had preceded Hallet to Arizona and was, indeed, the reason he had no difficulty obtaining his position with the *Record*. Curiously, the review in that newspaper had said "he writes like a young Kipling." Mary Austin, laureate of our western deserts, picked up the book at

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random in a strange hotel and was touched by its exceptional "freshness and promise." "*The Lady Aft* has quality," she told him, "it has fiber, and that most rare detachment which the work of our younger writers so often lacks. With such a beginning you should go far."

Domesticity and Early Fruits

Three short stories published in *Everybody's* during 1915 braced his courage to the sticking point. These are a far remove from their antecedents in *Harper's*. The scene is Australia, Hallet and his partner are on the wallaby to Melbourne, local color abounds, the tone is bantering, and the loose plots collapse on comic reversals. In italics, the editor advises his clientele to "*listen to him while you read.*" Justifiably, for Hallet handles the vernacular here like lyric poetry.

The year 1916 was a big one in a host of ways. *Everybody's* brought more stories and the *Atlantic Monthly* printed "Archaeology for Amateurs," a rollicking record of his search for dinosaurs among the tors of Dartmoor. Magazine editors began courting him for manuscripts; Doubleday and Macmillan sent feelers about book publication. Small, Maynard brought out his second autobiographical novel, *Trial by Fire*, which he hoisted from his brief season as a fireman on the *James M. Jenks*, a Great Lakes iron ore freighter. As in "The Black Squad," Hallet vivifies the hellpit of below-decks and poses a contrast with the passengers who occupy cabins. The confrontation of Cagey, the anthropoidal stoker, and Avis Wrenn, an heiress, presages that of Yank and Mildred Douglas in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, produced six years later. In *Trial by Fire* Hallet's consuming love for the music of words is still salient although he curtails his usage in the tenser scenes and holds descriptive passages to reasonable bounds. The plot strains too mightily yet is more nearly subservient to development of character than before. One critic found the book commensurable with Ernest Poole's gaunt classic, *The Harbor*, and George P. Brett, president of Macmillan, sat up until two o'clock reading it and regretting he had not published it himself.

In the latter part of 1916 Hallet wound up his revisions of *The House of Craigsides* and sold it to the *Saturday Evening Post* for \$2000. Of this sum he lent \$500 to a relative, and

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thereupon proposed to Mary Holton. "Do you think we can make it on \$1500?" he asked. She did. They were married in Boothbay Harbor in November. Lorimer ran the novel in four installments during February and March the following year. It opens in portentous Poesque fashion: the landscape of an eerie mansion on the encroaching dunes of a lonely coast, a house with a hooded personality fostering a grim drama of ancient guilt and vengeance. The narrative is encased in a frame — unfortunate Conrad carryover — sustains a high pitch, and totters under excessive description and lateral commentary. Ghostly wails, dire prophecies, jade gods, trances, murder, the aroma and enigma of the Orient form the root of plot and mood, while characterization remains external. This is one of Hallet's "adventures of the body," outright escapism. It has not been issued as a book.

On October 9, 1916, anthologist Edward J. O'Brien wrote from South Yarmouth, Massachusetts: "May I formally ask your permission to reprint 'Making Port' in my new book to be entitled *The Best Short Stories of 1916*? I have selected it as one of the best twenty American stories after reading about twenty-five hundred stories published in America during the past year." If 1916 needed anything more to qualify as Hallet's *annus mirabilis*, this was it. (His "Stradivarius and the Food of Love," a jape about an aging Lothario and a 90-cents fiddle, had been cited as a story of distinction the year before though not selected for republication.) To pile roses upon laurels, O'Brien dedicated the volume "To Richard Matthews Hallet" and said in his critical summary: "'Making Port' is, in my opinion, the best short story of 1916. It is elemental tragedy played out worthily against an eternal background, with an intimately human foreground of intensely realized personal experience. Mr. Hallet's style, always mannered, is here at its simplest and best, and the subtlety of his substance is lucidly conveyed through deft characterization, clearly revealed atmosphere, and richly colored speech. The story ranks with the best of Conrad, with whom Mr. Hallet shares much in sympathy, although their literary methods are very different." No small praise when one observes that this volume also carries "The Lost Phoebe" by Theodore Dreiser, stories by Gertrude Atherton, Irvin S. Cobb, Fannie Hurst, Elsie Singmaster, and Wilbur

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Daniel Steele, as well as acclaiming others written that year by Sherwood Anderson, Alice Brown, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, and Edith Wharton. In his annual Roll of Honor, O'Brien scores Hallet's "The Quest of London" as a "mannered piece" yet espies "a transition from euphuism to style," a style which is becoming "adequate to the richness of his substance It is told with all the prolixity of a sailor in the forecastle."

The Best Short Stories of 1917 includes the misinformation that Hallet was born in Yarmouthport, Massachusetts, but it also includes "Rainbow Pete" among the best twenty stories published that year. Applying what he defined as his test of substance — "how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents" — O'Brien chose this brawling ballad of gold-hunting in the Canadian barrens on the strength of its "incorrigibly romantic mood. Mr. Hallet casts glamour over his creations, partly through his detached and pictorial perception of life, and partly through the magic of words." This is acute appraisal of Hallet's penchant for mythmaking. Pete is a gargantuan sailor, coarse but captivating, who has roamed the South Seas, plays the flute, is piquantly tattooed, and maintains unquenchable faith in the pot of gold at the foot of his rainbow. Some figment of the marvelous and the mystic invests every tale so far told by the young Maine dreamer who dropped Blackstone and set forth, eyes ablaze, for lands that shimmered over the wide seas, "so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise."

World War I

Hallet's idyll of connubiality and growing renown was abruptly punctured in the spring of 1917 by America's entry into the war. Forthwith, he went back to Harvard, satisfactorily completed a six-weeks course at the Navigation School and qualified as Third Mate on steam vessels of [unlimited] tonnage for [whatever] oceans. Notwithstanding, he made his first trip as Junior Officer on an interned North German Lloyd liner with a cargo of nine hundred horses and one hundred mules. After assorted contretemps with leaks, the beasts, rabid seas, threats of submarines and ships in the night, they debarked at St.

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Nazaire, reposed briefly in France, and returned without animals or incident.

Boothbay Harbor, though agog with shipbuilding, was too tame to engross him. He passed the course in navigation given by the Recruiting Service of the United States Shipping Board and was certified as a deck officer in the U. S. Merchant Marine. His next assignment was on a Seattle freighter which was being rebuilt in dry dock at Hoboken. Hallet capitalized this layover time by scribbling away at a story about Aronowsky and the rammed ship *Tankard*, "The Anchor." Sitting in his cabin one night, pencil in hand, surrounded by scores of ruled yellow sheets covered with gnarled jottings, Hallet suddenly sensed himself under scrutiny. The Captain, a dour but able veteran with whom he was involved in a tacit feud, stood in the doorway, unshaven, in turtle-neck grey sweater and carpet slippers. Scornfully he surveyed the scene, then with a calculated flier demanded: "What the hell are you doing — writing a love story?" For one unholy moment Hallet suffered temblors of misgiving about the manliness of his chosen métier. "Better for me if I had been caught making love than writing about love." Through the remaining hours of that tortuously hot night he could not dispel from his mind the image of Jane Austen writing *Pride and Prejudice* on pale blue slips and stuffing them under her apron at the approach of footsteps. The Captain was a very masculine man.

Hallet's ship this time loaded locomotives. "Iron horses instead of the flesh and blood variety," he grunted. Under convoy they made for St. Nazaire again. In a café there, halfway through a chess game and a bottle of Medoc, news came that the Armistice had been signed. Thence to Brest for oil, to Bermuda, and once more Boothbay Harbor, the lobster cactus and the yellow pads. When the twenty-four articles of the Franco-German peace treaty were announced, Hallet said shortly: "Same old wagon-lit."

The war year and its immediate successors were especially prolific for Hallet. Whatever else arrogated his attention, he contrived to write. While he was still in service the *Saturday Evening Post* published "Ticklish Waters." Subtitled "A Tale of an Ocean Pussyfooter," it describes without flourish the tribulations of a novice navigator on a ship transporting horses during

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wartime. At supper, the captain of Hallet's current ship, now plowing across the Atlantic, held up a copy of the story and proclaimed to his gathered officers: "This was written by a man of vast knowledge and experience." One of the mates laughed. "Captain," he said, "do you know that the man who wrote it is your third mate on watch upstairs?" Hallet does not recall that this made the trip any easier.

The Lorimer Sunroom

The products of this intensive period found their way into the pages of *Harper's*, *Collier's*, *Century*, and the *Pictorial Review*, but primarily into the *Saturday Evening Post* which offered ten of his titles between February and November 1919. The first two, couched in supple, anecdotal prose, examine the condition of the merchant marine fleet and the insufficient provisions of the Merchant Seamen's Act. The eight stories draw upon his recent naval travels and recollections of New England coastal waters, towns, and inhabitants. The modification in Hallet's approach is instantly notable: his diction is less grand, his characters less postured, his story line more casual, his point of view steadier. The Atlantic crossings doubtlessly took some of the flutter out of his wings, but Hallet is quick to acknowledge the sure hand of editor George Horace Lorimer, who for the next seventeen years acted as literary counselor and physician. "Lorimer's motto was 'story above style.' He liked things well-written, but mere felicity of phrase would get you nowhere with him." Lorimer advised Hallet on composition and viable topics, and turned down enough of his effusions to make him toe the mark. Around this time Hallet acquired the services of Ann Watkins as literary agent. Lorimer, who preferred to deal directly with his authors, asked why he found this necessary. Because, Hallet confessed, Lorimer had rejected two of his stories and had promptly purchased them from Ann. Lorimer burst into a laugh and exclaimed: "For one thing, she's a damn sight better looking than you."

In these postwar years a new note was rising in American literature, and it became clear that sultry queens of Zanzibar with blood-red rubies on their breasts were no longer on call. Hallet wheeled around for a sharper look at reality, now the

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mode, and sought to ensnare truth — that “sad hamperer of genius” — in less luxuriant locales and language. “Limping In” and “Everything in the Shop,” for example, limn austere the perils of wartime passage along the northern sea lanes. “To the Bitter End,” “The Mountain and Mahomet,” “Inspiration Jule,” “The First Lady of Cranberry Isle,” and “Bluebeard Shadrach” run their courses in an environment not specifically labeled but definably the Maine seaboard.

The overweening trends of the day were toward themes of sex flagrancy (Stinkers) and the will-to-die (Gloomsters). Hallet tried a combination Gloomster-Stinker and quit depressed after five chapters. Lorimer recommended that he create a zesty character and implicate him in a series of short stories, along the lines of Mr. Tutt, Scattergood Baines, Jeeves, or Potash and Perlmutter. Hallet’s immediate invention was Hat Tyler, powerful, brash, irascible captain of her own boat, and antecessor of Tugboat Annie. With her pindling husband Jed and a set of salty Down-easters, she bustles through several risible predicaments. As a radiating center, Hallet provides the Tall Stove Club, a rendezvous where local legends are born and mature by convivial increment. The pace and structure of these tales are relaxed, colloquial talk is dominant and effectively furthers the narrative and characterization. While Hallet was not falling in with the New Realism he was assertedly in tune with a New Regionalism.

This new feet-on-the-deck factuality was hearteningly recognized. Edward J. O’Brien singled out “To the Bitter End” as one of the best twenty American stories of 1919 and republished it in his annual volume. This is a Hat Tyler episode founded on an incident at Boothbay Harbor which Hallet first wrote up for the local newspaper then dramatized with humorous, homespun overtones. In his Roll of Honor this year O’Brien prefaces “The Anchor” by three asterisks, signifying its “more or less permanent literary value.” Among *The Best Short Stories of 1921* is listed “The Harbor Master,” a tale of hapless passion which relentlessly entwines a solitary scapegoat over two generations.

A Backward Glance

Hallet once took comfort in Pascal’s observation that the men who write long books are those who will not take the time to

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write short ones. This may explain the surprising reversion of his 1922 novel, *The Canyon of the Fools*, a distinct throwback to the days of gold fever and copper mucking in Arizona, and to the ways of callow exuberance. This romance in the rough-neck Southwest-Mexican border tradition boils over with familiar ingredients of the genre insofar as action, intrigue, landscape, love, and flashy types are concerned. The old overplus of pictorial description reappears and the narrator's viewpoint is unduly magnified. Bobolink McCarty, through whom Hallet speaks, is a cut out of Conrad from two angles. First, the inexhaustible confidant, plucking at the reader's sleeve, chin jutting close to one's face, talking, talking, breathlessly, plaintively, urging, demanding, and suddenly the direct, disturbing question. Second, the irrevocable romantic youth with his repetitive assertions of *The Dream*: "With me it was the case of youth, glorious, wide-ranging youth, chasing wild geese and oats, experiencing delicate idyls and strange fantasies, heady visions. A man in that predicament lives ten lives in one I wanted to feel the jolt and jar of the salt sea coming up against the sides of some hell-bent old hooker. I used to dream of clinging to the wheel of the belabored sea wagon, a grim figure, running water in buckets, and staring ahead at the shiver of the black yards; murk overhead, all the earmarks of a dirty night, too; that banshee scream in the rigging, a knocking together of iron parts, a bellow aloft of wild sail, perchance the death rattle of the plunging ship." His picaresque ideal is just such a daredevil who has "frozen in the far south, dangled off yard-arms, hammered ice . . . trekked and swagged and tramped, eaten sour dough and bannock and damper and poor man's bread, and been flooded out of mines and river valleys and [smoked out of] ships' holds."

Although Hallet culls a multitude of details from his own experience (several sections of this novel are reproduced with only scantling adjustments in his autobiography, *The Rolling World*), he gives freer rein to his daydreaming propensity than heretofore or hereafter. McCarty, who quickly earns the sobriquet *El Romantico*, declares unequivocally: "Realities were only the springboards from which I launched myself in long dives through the mellow ether of fancy." In the final analysis, one lays this book down with the nagging suspicion that it is a

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gigantic hornswoggle. The ambience is one of satirical inflation. The tone of rakish overstatement, the doughty poses, the ominous previsions, the exaggerated adjectives and sentiments endorse the impression that Hallet is indulging some jocular travesty of his own sensibilities.

Heyday at the Post

By 1924 Hallet was back in the Lorimer sunroom. For the next dozen years he appeared almost exclusively in the *Saturday Evening Post*, approximately fifty times. This represents his climb to glory, through the medium he felt most at home in — the short story. He had by now, consciously and intuitively, worked out a credo and a craftsmanship best suited to his gifts. That these also suited George Lorimer and his enormous constituency of readers during the *Post's* golden era is a happy convergence of appetites.

From the mid-Twenties through the mid-Thirties Hallet begot a trim, satisfying succession of short narratives. Several characteristics infiltrate all of them, some of the properties emerge and mature in a predictable cycle, but variety and a surpassing sense of the quixotic in human experience stamp these as capital instances of the storyteller's art.

The first subdivision of stories may be called encounters by the sea, uncoilings of events in an atmosphere of schooners and islands, rogue ships and the all-encompassing ocean. There is talk of silver mines in Patagonia, of India, and Chinese chop dollars, but they are incidental to the nearer dramas on board. Description serves stronger effects than mere picturism — the creation of mood or the substantive backing of action and character. A calm of composition reigns in both verbal expressiveness and narrative evolution. A more remarkable transformation, however, becomes manifest: the arena in which these actions transpire is no longer one of sparkling, devil-may-care masculinity but one of normal community interchange in which women are present as a matter of course and manage to preside by exercise of their natural sagacity. Most often, adventure is the foreground tincture, and resolution of an embroiled courtship the overtone. Important too is the emergence of a saltwater Solon, usually an aged captain who has roamed all the seas and continents, and who saves the impulsive young from their follies.

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The first in this brightest epoch of Hallet's career is "The Gulf Stream," which won O'Brien's tribute of three asterisks in *The Best Short Stories of 1924*. Others in this bracket are "A Streak of the Mule," "The Horoscope," and "The Cloud Shooter." Acute readers responded most vocally to "Gambler's Gold," wherein the hero blithely climbs ships' masts and swims a mile with \$20,000 worth of gold dust snugged around his waist. One metallurgist gravely informed Hallet that such an encumbrance would weigh something like a hundred pounds. Hallet's only recourse was Herbert Spencer's rueful assertion that the greatest tragedy in nature occurs when a theory is slain by a fact.

The largest in number and most ample in substance are Hallet's score of stories about the Maine seacoast and its natives. No actual, and few fictive names are assigned to the shore hamlets, yet the aura of wharfs, ketches, gulls, bridgehouses, coves, town meetings, checker games, fish aprons, and corncob pipes is inevasibly Maine. The Inlet recurs as a generic focalizing feature, as do the waterside kitchen and the church dance. Plot consists of adagio movements rather than hectic enterprises; actions indicate personality rather than being merely theatric. Violence is not totally eliminated; it more frequently happens offstage, and its reverberations bear less crucially upon the key issues. Authentic parlance meaningfully augments characterization, and there is no discursive narrator-persona. Disclosures of small mysteries or disentanglement of misunderstandings come about at the close with seeming inadvertence and with a shrug of good-humored chagrin.

These Maine stories are ritualistic courtship comedies enacted toward the consummation of a female-oriented domesticity. Men bluster, toss orders, and behave like masters of their fate, while women hold their peace, their tongues, and gain the final victories. Male reluctance or rebellion is of negligible avail; the result is unvaryingly the same: the female of the species, with a Gioconda smile, envelops the male in silken webbing. Hallet's titles are slyly metaphoric: "The Kitchen Democrat," "Tame Crow," "The Winter Kill," "Husband in the Dark," "Tick-A-Lock; Iron Bars," "A Bad Washing." "Foot-Loose" is perhaps the most exquisitely artful. Inch by inch and irrevocably, the cocksure seafarer is meshed in matrimonial bonds.

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"Bottomless Pond" is an extended analogy of the unfathomable depths of a woman's mind — at least to a rational man. In this story Hallet touches fleetingly on a theme endemic in local-color fiction: the contrast of natives and outlanders. In "March Hill" he rings up its correlative: the return of a sophisticated native. "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt" is one of the rare occasions in which Hallet utilizes his knowledge of the law to present a full-blown trial scene.

In March 1928 Hallet was invited by the Secretary of the Navy to observe the western fleet in its Pacific maneuvers. He boarded the *California* at San Francisco and for the next three months shared the official ventures and made shift with a few of his own among the Hawaiians and Japanese. He had intended to write a comprehensive report of the trip but so many prohibitions were imposed on publication that he canceled his plan. Among these resplendent isles and titillating people, however, his addiction to the romantic was once more awakened. On his return in June he retreated to a log cabin on a hilltop overlooking the Harbor and blocked out a dozen stories around the character of Captain Arad Wilkins, sending him on the good ship *Water Witch* from Salem to such parts as Honolulu, China, the Fiji Islands, Sumatra, the Caribbean, Chile, Manila, Morocco, and Zanzibar. Wilkins, a resourceful Yankee of the early nineteenth century, broke many a lance in the trade for pepper, horses, sandalwood, and birds' nests; tiffed with pirates, headhunters, convicts, slavers, opium dealers, revolutionaries; and dallied with not a few dusky beauties. "Trader's Risks" was the first of this series to appear. The *mise en scène* glistens in every case, and actions boil over in these days of iron men and wooden ships. Yet the telling is restrained, the Captain is primary, and mirth flickers never too far below surface. An air of genial confidence disperses any doubts about the probability of Captain Wilkins' exploits. "Misfortune's Isle," which revolves around a sensuous woman and a upas tree with lethal capacities, was corralled by Blanche Colton Williams for the *O. Henry Memorial Prize Stories of 1930*, and by another prominent anthology of contemporary short stories.

What promised to be another series in this current is the pair of stories — "Railroad Speed" and "The Earthquake" — about Eddie Rodd, a sailor grown wise through his grapplings with the

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marvels of the world in Guatemala, Chile, Papua, China, Kajeli, *et alis*. His role of taciturn mentor to headstrong youth is solidly set, but Hallet did not see fit to develop him further. He turned instead to the real, larger-than-life-size John L. Sullivan, idol of his college years. Around certain incidents in the life of pugilism's first world-known heavyweight champion, Hallet wove a sheaf of stories, three of which were published in the *Post*. By a method which may be called fictionalized factuality, Hallet revived the Sullivan-Corbett bout, and intricately the popular ballad "Throw Him Down, McCloskey" with one of Sullivan's early brawls. Best of the three, and Hallet's favorite among all his short stories, is "The Devil Takes Care of His Own," founded on Oscar Wilde's visit to Boston and his advocacy of a destitute resident sculptor, John Donoghue. In his lecture at the Music Hall — replete with sunflower in buttonhole — Wilde fulminated: "In young Dennis O'Shaughnessy [Hallet's pseudonym], of whom you know nothing yet, you have a man who can whip up the horses of the sun and yet know how to curb them. You have a man whose idlest thoughts are unborn bronzes, a man whose delicate fingers are brains, yet you prefer to adulate a brute whose brains are his fists." A committee of abashed civic-minded art lovers was formed, raised sufficient funds, and awarded Donoghue a *carte blanche* commission. The Homeric (and utterly true) irony is that Donoghue chose to do a statue of — John L. Sullivan. Despite their high status on Hallet's personal roster, these stories did bring him some obloquy. Readers thumped him roundly for two anachronisms: a young lady saying to her male admirer, "You are pulling my leg," a three-letter word inconceivable in polite conversation in those gaslit days; and the referee counting over the prone body of Sullivan in the ring at New Orleans.

In the early Thirties Hallet reverted nostalgically to locales he had know in his green years: "The Golden Horseshoe," about gold fever in Australia; three tales about Cuba during the revolution, one of which featured a hot Marxian theorist who prognosticated (better than he knew!) that Cuba would be "the first Soviet of the West"; and two stories about trapping and prospecting for gold in Canada. In the second of these, "Bushed," Hallet committed the nonpareil of his literary bloopers. He laughs as he relates that this attracted more mail from indignant

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and amused readers than anything meritorious he has ever written. The fatal passage, in which he innocently wrote "termagant" instead of "ptarmigan," surges steadily upward to a crest of unconscious hilarity: "Moccasin Tom had the luck to shoot a termagant for his own supper, but he had nothing for the dogs. Then, when he went to make a fire, he found the cruiser's ax missing from the case at his hip 'How did I come to be so careless?' he asked himself He cracked willow shoots with his hands and made his fire; then plucked, cooked or half cooked the termagant and ate it. It was bitter as gall, but he was hungry. The dogs were hungry too From having eaten termagant, he was racked with pain . . . [but] he wasn't in the least hallucinated, he told himself." One merciful reader urged Hallet not to despair, for Galsworthy had yet to live down his description of "the crescent moon rising over the Eastern tree-tops."

From local color to historical romance is a logical step many American writers have taken. Hallet's final stories in the *Post* are of the latter tradition. Major General Andrew Jackson, Washington Irving, and Jefferson figure in one; Daniel Webster in another; a third, "The Crowbar," introduces Michael Beam and the bitter question of sovereignty which afflicted state and federal banks in the early 1800s, a character and controversy Hallet expanded to novel length three years later. In all of these historical cameos the amorous turmoils of a young couple provide the thematic axis.

The genesis of "The Path Master," last of Hallet's short stories in the *Post*, sprang from an anecdote he read in Ida M. Tarbell's *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*. Young Abe daydreamed of eloping with a girl who had caught his fancy, twice setting out with her at night on horseback, each time the horse circling back to the same place they had started from. "I always meant to write that story out and publish it, and I began once; but I concluded that it was not much of a story." Hallet picked up the clue where Lincoln dropped it and improvised an adroit mutation. Irony lurks in the fact that this story denoted the symbolic closing of a circle for Hallet himself.

Modus Operandi

From the lengthy questionnaire which Hallet diligently filled

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out for Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, editor of *Fiction Writers on Fiction Writing*, from Henry Goodman's *Creating the Short Story* and Thomas Page Smith's *Cordially Yours*, from numerous remarks quoted in newspaper articles, and from comments made in personal interviews, a reliable diagram of Hallet's literary ways and means may be drawn.

He loved to write, did not write easily, but cannot think of anything else he would rather have done. He usually started at eight in the morning and stayed with it for five hours, more when he was going well. He composed in longhand on legal-size yellow sheets, then typed a first draft. Thereafter began the painstaking job of revision, "three or four times, often next door to complete rewriting." He averaged two thousand words a day. Before initiating a story he would research the materials meticulously; for *Michael Beam* he accumulated two reams of notes before setting down the first word.

Authorship, Hallet discovered, requires: 1) a perceptive eye, the ability to spot details and use them tellingly; 2) an empathetic heart, the power of suffering and exulting with one's characters; 3) an organizing brain, the skill to bring together and relate the elements of narrative in a satisfying pattern. To become a good writer, Hallet decided, one must travel extensively — and must also remain at home. "I remember that once I went to the Crossroads of the World after an idea, and then came back and found it in Salem. But if I had gone to Salem in the first place, I wouldn't have found it there."

He is in consonance with the view of Poe and T. S. Eliot that the act of creation should carry you out of yourself, make you "forget for a time the 'everlasting, tormenting' ego." One should read the classics for inspiration and guidance, and be on guard against his contemporaries, for the tendency is to simulate those you admire most — "I dogged Conrad nearly to my undoing." Hallet sought to please himself foremost in the development of effects, yet he considered the potential reactions of his audience, for "stepping out of your own skin and into the skin of a reader" constitutes a valuable transaction in self-criticism.

Although Hallet deferred to the formularies of his craft in a course on writing short stories which he gave at Bowdoin College in the winter of 1935-1936, he distrusted the implications of technique. Unavoidably, cultivation of particularized forms and

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methods leads to dehydration of natural expression and a surfeit of subtleties and complexities. In his estimation, technique ruined Henry James and debased the later efforts of Conrad and Kipling. To the aspiring writer Hallet offers this axiom: "A little technique is as good as a lot."

Prior to the writing of a story he mapped out a fairly definite sequence of events and a denouement. He found that the first person point of view made for smoother narrative flow but for greater difficulty in compounding plot. Nonetheless, plot was not his cardinal concern; he utilized it to illustrate and intensify character. Indeed, plot often unfurled from character, as in "Foot-Loose," where the old man who predominates in the beginning practically disappears as the younger protagonists come to the fore. "A plot," says Hallet, "attracts facts and characters as a magnet attracts iron filings." Characters and action contribute reciprocally to the plot, quickening the pace and deepening the theme. To achieve optimum impact in a short story "it should be picked up like a puppy, a little bit ahead of the middle."

Writing is essentially a lonely business, as Hallet himself often attests. Twice, however, he acquiesced to collaboration on the premise that two heads are better than one. In the first instance he was to learn that "two heads may get at loggerheads." Thames Williamson, author of *The Woods Colt* and *Hunky* among other highly regarded novels, approached Hallet with the suggestion that they join forces on some "quickies." It was his scheme that he would turn out a story a day, Hallet would take another day to brace and furbish it, they would sell at top prices, and retire in jig time. This extrapolation worked, uncertainly, exactly once. Williamson dashed off a Mississippi River story entitled "Easy-Going Ed" in the prescribed twenty-four hours. Hallet immediately realized that they operated on different frequencies. He rewrote for the next four days, retaining only the title and the river. Williamson balked at these drastic eliminations but eventually consented. They sold the script to *Collier's* where, at an editor's conference, the title was changed to "The River's Gift." Totally bereft, Williamson adopted a philosophic attitude. They split the fee and the partnership, whereupon Hallet's dreams of instant affluence once again went slithering down the drain. Mark Reed, author of the long-run comedy

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Yes, My Darling Daughter, proved to be less meteoric and more compatible. Notwithstanding, the drama of Maine life upon which they combined their talents failed to attain public performance.

Slaphappy Hollywood

In 1923 *The Canyon of the Fools* was purchased, filmed, and released in movie houses throughout the country. Featuring Harry Carey and Ethel Clayton, not inconsiderable stars of that time, it enjoyed a modest success at the box offices. Thereafter producers perused *The House of Craigsides*, "The Harbor Master," "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt," "The Figurehead," and "Gambler's Gold" for motion picture possibilities and, with elaborate unanimity, rejected every one. Not the least daunted, Hallet set out for California in November 1933 to hawk a scenario on the life of John L. Sullivan. He took up residence in Pasadena and received favorable publicity in the local and Los Angeles press. He called on studio after studio in the Celluloid City and made absolutely no headway against the impervious ranks of subordinates who prevented his dealing directly with key personages. So he tried other tacks.

Hallet tells two antic stories about his machinations. One of his scripts had been submitted to Darryl Zanuck. After an interval without news, Hallet implored his agent, "Let me have a talk with him personally." The agent shook his head morosely. "Zanuck doesn't see people." Nevertheless he did arrange through a friend of a friend to waylay Zanuck at a polo game. When the climactic moment arrived, the friend of a friend — captain of Zanuck's team — "was boiled to the whites of his eyes. Zanuck was not ten feet away but he might as well have been on the planet Mars."

On another occasion a well-placed director informed Hallet that "Zimbolaci's Daughter," with its voluptuous, black-eyed desert houri, would make a perfect vehicle for Pola Negri. "She's upstairs right now. I'll go and tell her the story." "I'll go with you," Hallet interposed. "It's my story, better let me tell it." The director frowned. "No, your presence might be harmful — she's temperamental. I can give her a sales talk." Soon he came back shaking his head. "You want her to wear a lion skin and

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she won't do it. She's just come from Europe with twenty trunks full of Parisian clothes, and she won't listen to anything but a comedy of manners." "Well," argued Hallet, "this is a comedy of manners in a lion skin." "That's bad manners," the director rejoined. And that ended the interview.

Hallet was also a party to Hollywood's supreme fatuity — buying scripts at inordinate prices and never filming them. Paramount Pictures had acquired "Souls at Sea," a gusty drama about the tribulations of immigrants who came to America during the 1840s in windjammers. Hallet was paid a strapping sum to tailor the scenario into ten 1000-word installments for newspaper circulation. George Raft and Gary Cooper were designated the leads with the customary fanfare. And that was the last Hallet ever heard about it.

Home Base

After Lorimer's retirement from the *Post* at the end of 1936, editorial policies and preferences underwent rather rapid change. The standard *Post* favorites developed by Lorimer over the past quarter-century found entry to the magazine less and less regularly. One by one they shifted to other sources or took up new mediums. Hallet began to free-lance close to home. In 1937 he sold several features to the Portland *Press Herald*. "Windjammer," recollections of square-rigger days drawn from his journey on the *Juteopolis*, ran in ten consecutive issues from April 19. His tingling vocabulary, jaunty point of view, fetching anecdotes, and lucid exposition created a general demand for more. Before long he was engaged full time by the Gannett newspapers in Portland to write editorials and special features for the *Press Herald* and the *Sunday Telegram*.

Hallet plunged into his assignment with typical vigor and versatility. His editorials nipped at the state legislature for its action or lack of action on highway construction, industry, education, civic improvement, development of airfields and shipyards; he analyzed state politics, upheld Maine ships and shipbuilders, examined innovations at the four major Maine colleges, and re-evaluated the state's natural resources of lumber, potatoes, granite, lobsters, mineral deposits (aluminum, asbestos, gold), fish, game, and the tides at Passamaquoddy. He expatiated on finance, reviewed books, interviewed Fritz

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Kreisler and Gene Tunney, and revived forgotten fragments of Maine history, legend, and lore. He wrote about Walt Disney, about the filming in Maine of novels by Mainers, and about the native movie director John Ford; he scrutinized the career and works of Maine authors John Neal, Jacob Abbott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Laura E. Richards, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Booth Tarkington, Kenneth Roberts, Ben Ames Williams, Gladys Hasty Carroll, Mary Ellen Chase, E. B. White, and John Gould. For a time his daily column appeared under the catchall title of "Maine Tide Rips," later discarded for more pertinent captions. However, for some ten years he retained "Tide Rips" as the signature for his weekly half-hour broadcasts over the Gannett radio station in Portland, during which he described special events and held palavers with celebrities in sports, politics, and the arts.

In 1938 Houghton Mifflin issued Hallet's autobiography *The Rolling World*, distillation of at least one hundred notebooks he had compiled on the run and of his unrecorded mercurial memories. In a panoramic, though not necessarily chronological unrollment of episodes, he reanimates his most lustrous moments at Mayflower Grove, in Canada, Australia, England, Hawaii, the American Mid- and Southwest, on the Atlantic in wartime, in France, and at the port of maximum sanctuary, Boothbay Harbor. With fire and love and sly self-deprecation, he retraces his circumambulations of the globe with dappled companions casually met. Max Miller said, "There is a lot of Joseph Conrad in Hallet, and a little of Jack London." Others collated him with Ulysses, Sinbad, Marco Polo, Davy Crockett, Mike Fink, Daniel Boone, Homer, Horace, Gauguin. No one mentioned Munchausen for, while Hallet stretches credulity now and again, he roguishly offers affidavits for every yarn recounted.

Of all the recommended worthies, Conrad and Ulysses bear closest affinity to the Hallet of this book. The fury that ejaculated him from the static parish of a law office into the vortex of the world was the same that goaded young Marlow: desperate realization that he must snatch his chance, for to every man fate vouchsafes "Only a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour — of youth!" And, like Tennyson's wayfarer, the compulsion that kept Hallet going lay in his iron resolve "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

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The book takes off at a spanking pace but slows to a ruminative pause every time Hallet returns to the Harbor. While in transit he avidly subjects his bookish preconceptions to the rasps of experience and howls gleefully as one disillusionment succeeds another. Immobile in Maine, he meditates the ethics and intricacies of authorship, instructive, exploratory, profound without being ponderous. If this autobiography is sometimes intoxicated and sometimes parched, so is Hallet's life as he led it; so indeed is life.

In 1933 *Anthony Adverse*, a mastodon of a novel by Hervey Allen, signaled the arrival of a new era of popularity for historical fiction which had been foreshadowed several years before by James Boyd's sterling *Drums*. In short order Stark Young's *So Red the Rose*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, Walter D. Edmonds' *Drums Along the Mohawk*, Kenneth Roberts' *Northwest Passage*, and Conrad Richter's *Sea of Grass* set enviable standards for modern treatment of novelized history: credible characters functioning within bona fide environments, events solidly based on fact, outlandish talk and costumes subordinated to social or philosophic themes, and the whole executed with a hard, clear realism unknown to this genre at the turn of the century.

Richard Hallet's response to this activation was *Michael Beam*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1939. Although Hallet considers himself more capable in the short story form, he rates this novel as the best work he has done. True to his fashion, he amassed a thousand pages of notes before writing a page of text. The extent and precision of his research is perceptible in every detail of his place names, topography, flora, fauna, speech rhythms, descriptions of dress, artifacts, occupations, amusements, and in his grasp of prevalent ideas and attitudes. Upon these he overlays long intimacy with the outdoors, his knowledge of Indians, camping, hunting, trading, cruising, of the customs, the rough relationships, and the strategies of survival. And yet, for all this amalgam of lore and wisdom, he would have spawned another egregious blunder had it not been for his thirteen-year-old son. Hallet promised to help him build a cabin in the pine grove adjoining the house in Boothbay Harbor if the youngster would listen to him "talk out" the novel. Between the sawing and the hammering, this pact was sacra-

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mentally observed. At one exigent point in the plot Dick junior remonstrated: "What, they only had *one* axe in the block-house?" Dick senior gulped and inserted a mitigatory paragraph.

Michael Beam is a diorama of the American frontier's surge westward to the upper Illinois River; a hopeful epic of the founding of towns, the establishment of religion and the press; a bloody report on the subjugation of Indians; a tartan of stressful loves and loyalties. Michael — tough and tender, passionate and principled — is outlawed when he "takes a crowbar to the Constitution," smashing the door of the United States Bank at Chillicothe in defiance of Justice John Marshall's decree that no state bank may tax a federal bank. This is the act that triggers Beam's flight to the wilderness and the frenetic complications of love and war that ensue from his presence there.

After Beam saves the life of Red Bloom, an enticing Indian girl, the states' rights issue recedes and is supplanted by a webwork of conflicts — racial, societal, familial, and personal. To the intransigence or resolution of these dissensions Hallet steadfastly bends his attention, while keeping the adventure at full tilt. The racial friction between white man and red man is demonstrated in their homicidal relations along the borderlands, and less ferociously in the contrast between Red Bloom's aboriginal attire and Charlessie Carteret's red morocco shoes, lace frills, and India combs. White Cloud, a white boy captured and brought up as an Indian, is psychologically the victim of both sides in the racial strife. Implicit in the behavior of Red Bloom and Charlessie — and several other paired characters — is a balancing of values between life in nature and life in town.

Beam nurtures secret resentment against his father, who has cravenly misdirected his devotion; and Michael is unwillingly forced into a Capulet-Montagu situation with Charlessie's uncle, manager of the assaulted U. S. Bank. Beam's love of the patrician Charlessie incenses his plebeian father. Charlessie strives to reconstruct Beam in the image of her own social class but is checked by Beam's visions of her room with mahogany furniture, velvet canopies, and feather bed as against his father's cabin with handhewn bed, cross-poles supporting cords, and elm-bark bottom; by Charlessie's fare of finest viands, chocolates, and macaroons as against the burnt-crust coffee and hog-and-hominy diet at the Beam household.

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Withal, the most malign divisions exist within Michael himself, contentions between savagery and civilization, between instinct and tradition. He loves Red Bloom and becomes father of her child, yet cannot banish the attraction of Charlessie whom he marries; he is ripped by his father's prejudices, yet supports his doctrines; he fights the Indians scalp for scalp, yet is kin by blood and is initiated into the breed; about Red Bloom he remains of two minds, never injecting her into his white world. Beam's dichotomy appears headed for reconciliation in the symbolic scene where Red Bloom gathers Charlessie within the folds of her blanket, Indian preserving white despite awareness that they are competing for the same man. It is thematically significant, however, that in the end Red Bloom and her son are exterminated, Michael and Charlessie join hands for the greater glory of American settlements in the West, and Michael indeterminately faces backward and forward at the same time, racked by a sense of betrayal, spurred by a dream of the future.

One agrees with Hallet that this book is the sum of his best writing. In fibrous and fitting diction he delineates a virginal setting, populates it with characters devoid of quaintness, and engages them in actions well within their compass. The tempo is consistently brisk, the author entirely inconspicuous. Individual scenes rise superbly above the surface narrative, the most beautifully textured being Michael's first meeting with Red Bloom. His process of thawing her out anticipates by one year Hemingway's use of the sleeping bag in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and the counterpoint of Calvinist morality and beckoning carnality in Michael's mind is a *tour de force* of artistic integration. Against a backdrop of full-bodied trappers, soldiers, Indians, flatboatmen, homesteaders, itinerant preachers, intellectuals, and scoundrels which honorably recalls Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, Hallet actuates a set of characters distinctive and believable: Michael's father and sister, White Cloud, Mother Handsome, Dan Bourasser, Willie Hieronymus. Red Bloom is more deeply plumbed than Charlessie, and the most achieved portrait is Michael, who is described objectively, indulges in introspection, reveals himself through speech and action, and is discussed by other characters.

Kenneth Roberts called Hallet "an artist in everything he does." Bernard DeVoto and Phil Stong bestowed notes of

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applause, and Ben Ames Williams paid the maximal compliment: "*Michael Beam* is a book to be read a sentence at a time." Six major studios evinced interest in the story but Hallet's Hollywood bugaboo held out. *Michael Beam* was never filmed.

Pro Bono Publico

In the years precluding United States entry into World War II Hallet campaigned dynamically in the Gannett newspapers for vocational training in secondary schools, for physical fitness, civil defense, and other aspects of preparedness. For his zealotry he was appointed to the Maine Port Authority, to the Maine State Defense Committee, and Chairman of the Maine State Salvage Committee. His most durable contribution, however, was to point up the imperious need of an institute in Maine for the training of merchant marine. He secured the cooperation of Representative Ralph A. Leavitt of Portland, who introduced a bill in the Legislature for the establishment of such an institute in Castine, and so the Maine Maritime Academy came into being. Hallet was nominated 2nd Vice-President and served on the Board of Trustees for a decade.

In the interstices between civic obligations he kept his hand in with stories about John L. Sullivan in the *Boston Sunday Herald* and *American Legion*, an essay in *Writer's Digest*, five in the *Christian Science Monitor Weekly Magazine Section*, half a dozen in *Technology Review*, and one in *Science Digest*. Following publication of *The Rolling World* he was invited to participate in the Boston *Herald* Book Fair, and again in 1940 in company with A. Hamilton Gibbs, Kenneth Roberts, and Ben Ames Williams. On this occasion the authors stood in the center of a boxing ring at the Boston Garden and answered queries from all sides. Hallet remembers someone asking Roberts what he had eaten for breakfast. He demurred at first, then snapped: "Three prunes and a piece of toast." In the 1938-1939 season Hallet went on a lecture tour for the W. Colston Leigh agency. He had several formal speeches prepared, "but mostly I wound up just yarn-spinning." One of his auditors wrote appreciatively of the "racy drawl, native mother wit, and acid scraps of philosophy." The University of Maine conferred upon Hallet in 1940 the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters in recognition of his "splendid achievements as an author who is closely identified with the State of Maine."

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After the United States drifted irresistibly into war Hallet was accredited a correspondent with Admiral Nimitz's Pacific fleet. From April to August 1945 he sent back daily dispatches to the *Portland Press Herald* and the *Kennebec Journal* from Honolulu, Pearl Harbor, Kwajalein, Okinawa, Guam, Iwo Jima, the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, a number of infinitesimal atolls, and the cryptic "Somewhere in - - - - ." He described as much of naval operations as he was permitted, but the bulk of his reportage had to do with the condition, thoughts, and messages home of individual Maine men stationed in these areas. While on this tour Hallet made particular pilgrimage to Ujae, a tiny island in the Marshalls sacred in his mind as the site of Uncle Will Jackson's legendary shipwreck. On her maiden voyage in 1883 the Bath ship *Ranier* struck an uncharted reef and went to pieces in a riotous sea. Under a blistering sun — using breadfruit trees as the frame, with planking and spikes from the ruined ship's decks — the redoubtable Jackson and his mates built a new ship, all the while ringed by naked cannibals whose king superintended the work with an empty Prussian needle-gun under his arm. Hallet's return to this site was memorialized in his final appearance in the *Saturday Evening Post*, "My Uncle's Footprints" (March 30, 1946), and variantly in *Down East*, "The Wreck of the *Ranier*" (October 1954).

Apart from this cruise Hallet bore down at home on the war effort and, after VJ-Day, on reclamation of civilian values. He espoused Greek war relief, and proposed unceasing attention to the training, guidance, and employment of American veterans. He received certificates of merit for patriotism and diligence in connection with the salvage drives, WAC recruitment, and improvement of the merchant seamen force. For his editorial in the *Press Herald* of October 17, 1946, which advised the National Maritime Union "to slow down the pace of their demands and to clean their house of the creeping Communist influence" — which on both counts required more courage to say then than now — Hallet was awarded second prize in a national newspaper competition.

Earthbound

Hallet published just two magazine fictions during the war — "The Trail of Bambi" in *Collier's* and "Dark Kingdom" in

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Argosy. His only other imaginative work was his last novel, *Foothold of Earth*, a teeming canvas of Maine spirit in the early war years. Into this book he poured the stored apperceptions of a full and kinetic lifetime. His protagonist, Jason Ripple, leads us through three separate but coexistent areas: the harborside, the farm, the high seas. Hallet was of course thoroughly steeped in all three levels, and his exposition of their figurations and influences is expert. While avoiding the clichés of local-color vogueism, he endows Roger's Inlet with a prodigal complement of physical details and inhabitants.

We are immediately acclimated among rotting ships, doves hopping on roof shingles, humped footbridges, and the smell of sour oak; indoors, the aromas of gingerbread, apples, and frying eggs, or the pungency of sulphur, damp carpet, and shriveled flowers. We are inducted into the mazy schottische of small-town interrelationships, in which even juvenile speaking contests are fraught with the politics of inherited spite. Felicitously, Hallet sketches in all the specialties of color, sound, odor, speech, and costume to imbue his place with vitality and uniqueness. He is as replete in this rendering as are the brothers Brueghel. Through Sam and Adam Treat, two near-mythic figures of earth, Hallet portrays the meaning of the soil to the immemorial Maine farmer who watches wars come and go, and remains dispassionately rooted in his element. And Jason's tour with the convoy brings home vivid realizations of the anatomy of crisis at sea in wartime.

The ambit of characters takes in extremes of stalwarts like Sadie Ripple, the fond, no-nonsense mother of Jason, and eccentrics like Bill Queer, who hears voices and does their bidding. In between are the captains and spinsters and poolplayers who make up the spine of the community, and the more memorable blind Klondike Willie, living like a spider at the hub of a web of wires, pranky Jigs Taverner the local Huck, and the Targletons, man and wife who have occupied the same house for twenty years with never a word spoken between them. The talk and actions of everyone in Roger's Inlet are governed by generations of traditional response, every phrase and movement long adumbrated. Through their vernacular—which elders speak purely and youths accommodate to newer rhythms—and through their unanimous observance of age-old patterns of be-

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havior, Hallet has preserved a sense of the ceremonial past, an indestructible link between Mainers of the twentieth and the eighteenth centuries.

The scaffolding of this narrative traces that of *Michael Beam*: a Romeo-Juliet family feud which is only one of a mare's nest of conflicts. Jason Ripple returns home after his ship is torpedoed at sea to find that the Redfern shipyards are encroaching more deeply into his ancestral properties. His foothold of earth threatened, he resorts to imposture to offset this advance. The entire town is sucked into this renewal of ancient hostilities, of which the divided Targleton house is an analogue in miniature. The Inlet philosophy of "pull and haul" is typified by the grandfathers Ripple and Redfern, Puritan potentates who served as deacons in the same church while sincerely hating each other. Like a black umbrella shadowing all these pettier dissensions looms the war. Hallet lets Jason tie the categorical knot: "I am for peace. If there's war at home there'll be war everywhere." So the story blooms into a Christian parable, with universal love — Jason and Nina Redfern unite in the end — broached as a remedy for the greeds and intrigues of the world. Overall the book suffers from irresolution of emphasis. Neither the local color, nor the local wars, nor the global war achieves primacy of impact, and the consequence of this equality is not balance but diffusion. In the oscillations from one to another of these aspects, the milling sensibility of Jason Ripple is edged out of focus.

After his return from the Pacific hitch, and for several succeeding years, Hallet's by-line graced the magazine section of the *Portland Sunday Telegram* over vivacious stories about tug-boating, iron horses, Maine authors, civic prospects of Portland, native birds and fish, industry, spring, lobsters, and legends. He wrote a series in the *Press Herald* on the histories of Maine rivers, and from November 1949 to June 1950 a daily installment of "The Story of Maine," a title he chose in order to elude the dull connotation of a formal history. Planned as a text for school children, it conjures interest through its pulsing characters and momentous encounters—"the blood and bone and skin and hair" of history, not its dreary dates and diplomacies. Yet there is no manhandling of facts; Hallet submits two years of research as warrant of its accuracy. Another encyclopedic

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project in the *Press Herald* was his "Men of Maine," a gallery of 130 biographical vignettes which ran from November 1951 to May 1952. Each segment of some five hundred words is enlivened by sprightly quotations and humanizing anecdotes about such Mainers as William King, General Henry Knox, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Elijah Parish Lovejoy, Artemus Ward, Chief Samoset, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Neal Dow, Count Rumford, Ferdinando Gorges, and Jeremiah Chaplin, Colby's first president.

In 1951 arthritis began incapacitating Hallet to the extent that he retired from the Gannett newspapers within a year. He composed thereafter four articles for *Yankee* but reserved his major labors for *Down East*. Beginning with the first issue of this magazine in September 1954 he contributed thirty-four essays on the subjects of a gold hoax, destroyers, Bill Nye, Hannibal Hamlin, Kenneth Roberts and his water dower, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, and another great Maine lady, Emma Eames, the last in August 1963. This seemed to mark the close of Richard Hallet's active career as a writer. But, like his own "man of many bells," he rang out plangently in May 1967 with an article on Sir William Pepperrell, also a Mainer and also indefeasible.

Afterglow

Although Hallet made the long artistic ascent from escape fiction to cogitation of subtler realities, the enticement of romantic adventurism never completely freed its grip on him. Even in his last substantial story there is wistful reference to Chinese pirates, Fiji women, and the Japan Sea. The Dream, the fugacious Dream persisted: "A good yarn carries you out of yourself. It's a red wishing-carpet," he averred. Still, he perceived the psychic duality that lies at the heart of the mystery of life — on one side the neverending quest after unattainable visions, and on the other "concealment . . . concealment of the poverty of [one's] essential self." Thoughtfully, Hallet abstracted the title of his autobiography from Alexander Smith's emblematic lines:

The soul of man is like the rolling world,
One half in day, the other dipt in night;
The one has music and the flying cloud,
The other, silence and the wakeful stars.

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Until the terminal sentence of *The Rolling World* Hallet wrestled with the riddle of identity. "Are they facts, or only shadows of my dream of living? . . . Is the past a treasury of facts, or only the cradle of a dream? Who am I that sit writing of my battle with the facts? . . . [the] flame-thrower . . . [or] the cuttlefish that squirts ink to throw a cloud round him and baffle his pursuers Nobody can answer that." Nobody. Least of all one's self.

AT ROAD'S END on Spruce Point in the after-light of an autumn day, greying air settles elegiacally over the book-filled room. Echoes slide along the walls and expire in cushioned nooks. Momentarily the large man with blue eyes, now deepened to black, sits silent in an eddy of retrospection. Remembering red shacks at Canberra, John L. Sullivan, Canada, the belly of the Orvieto, Ujae, Lorimer, a monochrome law office, Arizona, Cambridge, a second-hand bookstall, and Joseph Conrad in Youth: "A flick of sunshine upon a strange shore, the time to remember, the time for a sigh, — and good-bye! — Night — Good-bye . . ."

