

Hugh Walpole

Returns to America

A Note on the English Novelist's Visit

LITERARY genius in England now being demobilized, Hugh Walpole, the novelist, is visiting America for a period of six months. Some people may not recall the novelist's earlier appearance. It was in the early nineties when, wearing Etons and carrying a cricket bat, he arrived with his father, now the Bishop of Edinburgh, who had come to occupy the chair of Dogmatic Theology at the New York Theological Seminary.

There are already eleven books by Hugh Walpole afloat; and there is a large and impatient public waiting for other barques which the author may be building. It is an active record, in view of the fact that Mr. Walpole is only thirty-five years old; that his first book, "The Wooden Horse," appeared in 1909, and that his last five years have been claimed by the war.

Like many English men of letters, Mr. Walpole—who is a direct descendant of Sir Robert Walpole, Prime Minister to George I—had the path to the Church paternally pointed out to him, when he left Cambridge. But he preferred to make romance his rostrum. For evidence of his vision in this matter there is, already, "The Duchess of Wrexe"—last of the grandes dames!—and "The Gods and Mr. Perrin" (the English title is "Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill") and "The Green Mirror," "The Dark Forest," "Fortitude," and "Maradic at Forty." There are also those wholly charming books about children—"The Golden Scarecrow?" and "Jeremy"—and, lastly, there is "The Secret City," which is the most recent evidence in the case.

IN "The Secret City," as in "The Dark Forest," the author handles very special material at first hand. Mr. Walpole served in the Russian Army during the first year of the war, returning later to Petrograd for the British Government. He was in Russia all through the Revolution. "The Secret City" is real Russia (even Russians admit this), sombre, tragic, idealistic, half-maddened by the virus of revolt, yet, through it all, imposing upon one a quality at once presaging and splendid.

It is in "The Secret City" type of characterization, the conjuring up of the actual scene, peopling it with flesh-and-blood men and women and enveloping the drama in *atmosphere* that Walpole's witchery lies. The reader may never have trod Piccadilly, nor sniffed Cornish air, nor been an English under-graduate, nor known a family like the terrible Trenchards—in whose drawing room hung the malevolent green mirror until it got smashed!—yet Walpole makes the reader know these worlds as well as his own. And the fun of it is, that in his novels, old acquaintances—the sort one would like to meet again—are always turning up. The author manages extremely well the Balzac-Dumas-Thackeray-Trollope trick of bringing familiar friends, and fresh ones, together again in different books.

Because of his "group pictures" Walpole some day will be ranked as one of the Old Masters—British School. "The Duchess of Wrexe," and "The Green Mirror," are just as true portraits of English family life, as any of Trollope's. He knows the Court; he knows the Foreign Office; he knows the Secret Service; he knows London society; he knows Parliament; he knows the slums. He will know America, too, when he has finished his trip in the United States, where he is lecturing with very great success. However this acquaintance between Walpole and America may develop, it is certain to help forward the gallant Anglo-American offensive towards mutual understanding.

WALPOLE is a keen patron of boxing—and of sport. He is a member of the National Sporting Club and doesn't miss the Monday night match if he can help it. He brings the same ardour to the Russian Ballet—one sees him there almost as often as one sees Arthur Symons—and he is one of the greatest admirers of Grock, the French clown. It is a catholic and creditable light ballast: books, boxing, ballets, buffoons.

An interesting literary association is the novelist's friendship with Joseph Conrad, treated of elsewhere in this magazine. His biography of this matchless artist (in the English "Men of Letters" series) is a text book for Conradians. Whenever his work permits, he motors down, from his rooms in St. James', to Conrad's place in Kent where, among old trees, open spaces and primroses there is perfect comradeship.