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"AFTER

the style of

MAURICE HEWLETT"



"It is a tale of love and lovers which they tell, saying that in the hill-country of Toulouse is to be found the walled city of Ventadorn with its castle and long church. Sir Simon was lord of it, a vavasour of good Count Raimon's in the days before his fall."

The opening of a newly discovered tale by James Branch Cabell? No, despite its clear echoes of JURGEN, DOMNEI, and other Cabellian romances, this passage is actually the beginning of "The Heart's Key," one of the novelettes comprising *Fond Adventures: Tales of the Youth of the World* by Maurice Hewlett, published in 1905. Coincidence? Or was there some connection between Hewlett and Cabell? And who, for that matter, was Maurice Hewlett?

The name turns up with some frequency in Cabell's writings. In BETWEEN FRIENDS we find him saying in a 1918 letter to Guy Holt, "I have been shocked to find that Maurice Hewlett has written another good book, in *Thorgils*," and a few days later he adds, "I shall repeat my former advice: read *Thorgils*, and read reverently. I suspect that this is Hewlett's truest book. That, sir, is life." BETWEEN FRIENDS also contains (page 225) an account of Hewlett's hostile critique of FIGURES OF EARTH and Cabell's rejoinder in *The Literary Review*.

Hewlett, in fact, was a sore point with Cabell. As the comments on *Thorgils* suggest and SOME OF US bears out (in the essay on Joseph Hergesheimer), Cabell had high regard for Hewlett's early work but felt he had slipped badly in later years. His esteem for Hewlett's "deep-rooted sense of form and . . . glowing

vocabulary" and especially for his "strong necromancies" in bringing the past to life is expressed in rhapsodic prose. But when Hewlett turned to writing about the present, said Cabell, he "wrote balderdash mincingly." As the recommendation of *Thorgils* proves, however, Cabell was ready to concede merit even to Hewlett's later work. In 1952, in QUIET, PLEASE, he expressed gratitude for the pleasure Hewlett had given him "even in his later maunderings."

It was an especially sharp blow, then, when Hewlett attacked Cabell, and JBC's *ad hominem* rebuttal seems to have reflected something of the bitterness of an adult assailed by Santa Claus. In the Epilogue to THE LINEAGE OF LICHFIELD, still reacting to the FIGURES OF EARTH review, he catalogues Hewlett's areas of ignorance and apparently refers to him in speaking of "gray Narcissus" who "bleats angry pieties." Oddly, he also is sarcastic about Hewlett's Icelandic novels, which include *Thorgils*—a further indication of the depth of the depth of his pain.

Maurice Hewlett (1861-1923) was a British novelist, short story writer, poet, playwright, and essayist. A lawyer by training, an amateur historian by enthusiasm, he won literary fame with an historical romance, *The Forest Lovers* (1898). Others followed, notably the novels *Richard Yea-and-Nay* (about Richard the Lion-Hearted) and *The Queen's Quair* (Mary of Scotland) and such short-story collections as *The New Canterbury Tales*, *Little Novels of Italy*,

and *Brazenhead the Great*. Later works with recent and contemporary settings were less well received, and Hewlett was charged with purveying second-hand George Meredith. He then turned to novelizations of Icelandic sagas—*The Outlaw*, *A Lover's Tale*, *Thorgils*, and others—but without regaining his earlier popularity.

Even a partial reading of his work reveals much that recurs with slight or no modification in Cabell. Perhaps the most important aspect consists of subtle ways of phrasing that are hard to pinpoint, a pervasive flavor that makes much of *Richard Yea-and-Nay*, for example, seem almost interchangeable in manner with the early, romantic Cabell of *Chivalry* or *Domnei*. But some specifics may be cited.

Cabell's practice of labeling each of his novels "A Comedy of" this or that began with *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck* (1915); but Hewlett's *Halfway House* (1908) is "A Comedy of Degrees," his *Rest Harrow* (1910) is "A Comedy of Resolution," *Mrs. Launcelot* (1912) is "A Comedy of Assumptions." *Open Country* (1909) is subtitled, in a phrase especially appropriate to Cabell, "A Comedy With a Sting." Hewlett apparently got this device from George Meredith's *The Egoist* ("A Comedy in Narrative"). Perhaps Cabell did also, but his strong interest in Hewlett suggests the latter as his source.

It was probably from Hewlett, too, that Cabell got the device of ending each book with "Explicit." His first use of "Explicit" is in *The Line of Love* (1905); Hewlett used it in *The Forest Lovers* (1898) and *Richard Yea-and-Nay* (1900). ("Explicit," by the way—pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, and with a hard *c*—is from the Latin for "unrolled." It was anciently used as the name of a statement at the end of a book or manuscript, indicating authorship or place and date of copying. The reference presumably was to the unrolling of a scroll).

In *THE SOUL OF MELICENT* (1913; revised as *DOMNEI*) Perion's ship is named the *Tranchemer*. In Hewlett, *Richard Yea-and-Nay's* galley is the

Trenchemer. He also has Richard and Bertran de Born contend in a song—a "tenzon"—as Cabell has Perion matched against Demetrios in a "tension." Another item in this volume is suggestive in the light of Cabell's use of such chapter-titles as "Economics of Horvendile" and "Economics of Morvyth": Hewlett has a chapter called "Oeconomic Reflections of the Old Man of Musse."

Cabell's love of elaborate, often archaically phrased introductions and afterpieces is paralleled in such Hewlettisms as the "Invocation to the Muse, and Exordial Matter" preceding *Brazenhead the Great* and, and, in *Richard Yea-and-Nay*, the "Exordium" of the Abbot Milo (whose role is very similar to that of Cabell's Nicholas de Caen).

And Hewlett anticipated Cabell's fondness for invented authorities. Compare the following from *Brazenhead the Great* with the Forewords to *JURGEN* and *FIGURES OF EARTH*:

The profound Pilsenbierius, in his thesis for the doctor's degree of his University, states in these words the result of his enquiry into the early history of my hero. He says, "After a prolonged study of the sources, preserved at the Public Record Office and Guildhall Library in London, I am clearly of opinion that the mythus of the Seventh-Born is not to be supported, but is, in fact, an accretion of later and less vigorous more literary ages. Probably solar in its origin—for the name of Brazenhead not inaptly describes the Sun, burning centre of our system, and the seventh-born must almost certainly indicate the Sun of the Seventh Day, or Saturday, the Sabbath of the Jews (*cf.* the praenomen Salomon, invariably used by the hero, who is thus connected with Judas Maccabaeus and other Hebrew Captains of antiquity, and therefore with Joshua who made the Sun to stand still) . . .

That Cabell got from Hewlett his trick of sliding back and forth between the past tense and the historical present is suggested by various passages, such as

this in *Richard Yea-and-Nay*:

Presently a little window-casement opened above him; Gaston of Bearn poked out his head.

'Beau sire,' he says, 'what entertainment is this for the Count your son?'

'No son of mine, by the Face!' cried the King. 'Let that woman I have caged at home answer for him, who defies me for ever. Let me in, thou sickly dog.'

Gaston said, 'Beau sire, you shall come in if you will, and if you come in peace.'

Says the King, 'I will come in, by God, and as I will.'

'Foul request, King,' said Gaston, and shut the window.

How far can one legitimately go in such sleuthing? Was the Cabellian saw "A thing done has an end" indebted to Hewlett's refrain "A thing done is done with," in *Fond Adventures*? Did *Freydis*, in *FIGURES OF EARTH* (1921), owe her name to the Freydis of Hewlett's *Gudrid the Fair* (1918), and was the Thordis mentioned in *THE WAY OF ECBEN* (1929) similarly indebted to the Thordis of *The Outlaw* (1920)? Or did Cabell get the names directly from the same Icelandic sagas that Hewlett drew upon? What relation is there, if any, between the jigsaw-

puzzle structure of the Biography and Hewlett's practice of using a minor character in one book as the central figure of another, or vice versa (e.g. Captain Salomon Brazenhead in *The New Canterbury Tales* and *Brazenhead the Great* or Prosper le Gai in *The Forest Lovers* and *The Song of Renny*)?

Certainly the Cabell/Hewlett relationship can be exaggerated. There is, in fact, small similarity between Hewlett's works and those of the mature Cabell. Hewlett does not venture into fantasy or allegory, and the slightly wry humor threaded through some of his tales has none of Cabell's acidity. His style, though musical and pungently phrased, has a relatively conventional elegance far removed from the almost compulsive precision and quirky individuality of the ripe Cabell.

The similarities are in superficial trademarks and in a sophisticated romanticism that Hewlett's early works share with the early works of Cabell. The study of Hewlett is rewarding both for the substantial charm of the books themselves and for a kinship between Hewlett's viewpoint and tastes and those of the youthful Cabell. But the Brooklyn *Standard-Union's* reviewer of *CHIVALRY* was correct, in a sense, when he said Cabell's work was "after the style of Maurice Hewlett, though, it must be confessed, a considerable distance after."

—PAUL SPENCER

Source Notes



Did Cabell Use the Tarot Deck?

Cabell's interest in the arcane, the grotesque, and the bizarre has been repeatedly emphasized by our literary detectives, but we do not recall that anyone has investigated Cabell's possible debt to the Tarot deck, a storehouse of traditional symbolism. A few years ago, Professor Bode pointed out the similarity between the major characters of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* and some of the better-known Tarot cards. With the recent revival of interest in the



esoteric, various studies of the Tarot are now available, and one of these, by Eden Gray, called *The Tarot Revealed*, acknowledges a debt to E.A. Waite and his explanation of the Rider pack (one of the variants of the Tarot). Cabell may well have been familiar with Waite's book, but since his study is not readily available at the present time, the following remarks depend on Gray's version.*

The cards of the Major Arcana are of the first interest. Card nineteen of this series is called "The