

THE SILVER STALLION

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL
ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK C. PAPÉ



A NOTE UPON POICTESME

§ 1

NOW that I come to preface this illustrated edition of *The Silver Stallion*, I find myself in the position, not altogether unexampled to human experience, of noting that affairs in this inexplicable world of ours, sometimes fall out a bit quaintly. For I regard these soul-contenting pictures which Mr. Papé has just completed, at his home in Tunbridge Wells, to adorn the pages of this the latest written, and the last, of all the stories of Poictesme. I recall the yet earlier illustrations — in *Jurgen*, and in *Figures of Earth*, and in *The High Place*, and in *The Cream of the Jest*, — which have been coming, now for nine years, from Mr. Papé's studio, on St. John's Road in Tunbridge Wells, to represent Poictesme as a land of such never-failing loveliness and drollery as I have found but too often to be humiliatingly absent from the accompanying text. And I recall, too, how my own less scintillant province, the Poictesme of the text, came out of this same Tunbridge Wells as long ago as 1905.

§ 2

Nobody need believe in the coincidence. I do not quite believe in it myself. None the less, I well remember how when I was writing *Gallantry* the characters perforce all went to Tunbridge Wells and spent the earlier half of my book there, and thus landed me

— who then had not ever visited this watering place, — in endless difficulties. Maps and histories are all very well; but they do not comfortably suffice in dealing with a town which you have never seen, and which still endures to confute you. . . . Meanwhile to every side problems arose. Upon which of the hills would Lady Allonby have lodged in 1750? just where would Captain Audaine have fought his duels? what was, in 1750, the dubious quarter of the town to which a profligate nobleman would abduct an heiress? into what suburbs would Vanringham most naturally have eloped with his Marchioness? and at what inn would the great Duke of Ormskirk have sought accommodations when he came down from London to dispose of the Jacobite conspiracy? Such were but five of the hundred or so niggling problems which fretted my imaginary stay in Tunbridge Wells; which made mere maps and histories inadequate; and which caused me to resolve for the remainder of the book, and indeed for the remainder of my auctorial career, to deal with a geography less prodigally adorned with doubts and pitfalls.

Never again, when any possible option is at hand, I said, will I lay the scene of any story in a real place. . . .

§ 3

So when Ormskirk had finished with his English imbroglios, and when he quitted the Wells, to our shared relief, and when he went into France to visit incognito his betrothed wife, then Mr. Bulmer's first meeting with Mademoiselle de Puyange occurred in a

byway of Louis Quinze's kingdom thitherto unknown to cartographers. For it was at this time, in the final months of 1905, that Poictesme was born — of an illicit union between Poictiers and Angoulesme, — and that a rejuvenescent John Bulmer discovered this province. It was then that the château of Bellegarde was erected, and the Forest of Acaire was planted, to suit the needs of John Bulmer's story. Upon the horizon the Taunenfels arose, to afford Achille Cazaio an appropriate residence; the Duardenez river flowed coyly just into sight; and somewhere in the background, too, as I gathered from the conversation of the people whom John Bulmer met in Poictesme, were Manneville and Des Roches and Beauséant.

This much alone of Poictesme then came into being, this tiniest snippet of the land then sprouted, as it were, out of my trouble with Tunbridge Wells; and this much of the province served me at this period, quite adequately, throughout the episode called *In the Second April*.

And Poictesme availed me yet again as I went on with *Gallantry*, and wrote, in 1906, the episode of *The Scapegoats*, which a bit more definitely established the existence of the town of Manneville. . . . But by this time I was caught. No author lately escaped from all that trouble in Tunbridge Wells could resist the attractions of a land so courteous in providing out of hand for its historian's least need in the way of inns and cities and forests, and not even boggling over the instant erection of a mountain range wherever it would come in most serviceably. So the town in which Nelchen Thorn had just been murdered by Monsieur

de Gâtinais was immediately visited by Prince Edward Longshanks and Ellinor of Castile, — which couple conducted a tenson in this same Manneville, as is duly recorded in *Chivalry*; and already two of my books dealt with Poictesme.

§ 4

There Poictesme rested until 1910, when *Domnei* was started. And then, with this obliging province standing ready, with this whole realm at hand wherein no blunders in any point of fact or in any geographical detail were humanly possible, then quite inevitably the story of *Domnei* began in Poictesme; and yet further civic additions were made, in Montors and Fomor. A little later Felix Kennaston explored this so convenient nook of old-world France, during the composition of *The Cream of the Jest* in 1914; and it was he who first heard of Naimes and Bovion and Perdigon and Lisuarte, and who came as a pioneer to the castle of Storisende.

But far more important, to me at least, was this Felix Kennaston's discovery that Poictesme was "a land wherein human nature kept its first dignity and strength, and wherein human passions were never in a poor way to find expression with adequate speech and action." For that discovery — again, to me at least, — touched upon what I have since found to be the special feature of Poictesme: it is a land wherein almost anything is rather more than likely to happen save one thing only; it is not permissible in Poictesme for anybody to cease, for one moment, from remaining a human being or ever to deviate from human

sanity. . . . I mean, in other words, very much what Mr. Gilbert Chesterton once observed:

“The problem of these fairy tales is — what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is — what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tales the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos.”

So, then, did Poictesme continue to sprout out of the trouble which Tunbridge Wells had caused me. . . .

Thereafter I followed Jurgen's adventuring, throughout the greater part of 1918: and the lay of Poictesme was now sufficiently known for a map to be made of it, although *Figures of Earth* and *The High Place* and *Straws and Prayer-Books* and *The Silver Stallion* were yet to add here and there to the land's physical features, until finally, in 1925, in the pages of this same *Silver Stallion*, the very last settlement was effected, at St. Didol. Meanwhile the history of Poictesme, between the years 1234 and 1750, had been revealed to me: and the land, so far as I can judge, had become real.

§ 5

Never again, I had said, will I lay the scene of any story in a real place. So I invented Poictesme: and thereupon — for such, again, was the quaint fashion in which affairs fell out, — Poictesme rebelliously became a real place. . . .

At least it seems to me a real place, nowadays, by every known rule of logic. I find Poictesme is duly listed in modern dictionaries and similar books of reference. A reliable map of it exists. Its longitude is now definitely known to have been just four degrees east, although its latitude, to be sure, has been disputed, as too largely moral. Each one of its leading personages has been commemorated in a biography, and the land's history is upon public record; its laws and legends have been summarized; a considerable section of its literature has been preserved; in at least one symphony its music endures; and its relics in the way of drawings and paintings and mural decorations and sculpture are fairly numerous.

As for the bibliography of Poictesme, it rivals in bulk, if it does not excel, that of any other French province. You have but to compare Poictesme, for example, with Chalosse, or with Amont, or with Gravaudan, or with Quercy, or with Velay, to see at once how much more numerous are all logical proofs of the existence of Poictesme. For these other provinces have found but partial and infrequent historians, in publications not ever very widely known: whereas a host of notable and diverse savants — such as Gottfried Johannes Bülg, and Carl Van Doren, and John Frederick Lewistam, and H. L. Mencken, and Paul Verville, and John S. Sumner, and many others, — have year by year increased the bibliography of Poictesme, from every conceivable point of view.

So is it that, when once you have ventured into logic, the evidence for the reality of even such famous

realms as Sumeria and Carthage, and of Philistia itself, appears to me less multifariously established than is the reality of Poictesme. So is it that when, in Pliny, let us say, I read of such once notable places as Tacompsos (by some called Thaticê), and of Gloploa, and of Rhodata, where a golden cat was worshipped as a god, and of the pleasant island kingdom of Hora, and of Orambis (so curiously situated upon a stream of bitumen), and of Molum, which the Greeks, as you will remember, called Hypaton, — that I then, of course, believe in the reality of every one of these places as vouched for by Roman science, but that, even so, upon the whole, I think the proofs to be more numerous and more clear, to-day, for the existence of Poictesme.

Nor do I find here any need to dwell upon the claims which Poictesme may advance, to-day, to be believed in as an actual place, as compared with the claims of lands for whose existence we have even the irrefutable warrant of Scripture. It may, of course, be that I reason hastily. But to me, in any event, this land of Poictesme appears as real and as readily accessible a country as the land of Temani, or as the land of Erez, or as the land of Shinar, — wherein, as every Sunday-schoolboy knows, the great Emperor Nimrod ruled over Accad and Erech and Babel and yet other dependencies. . . . In fine, I have come to believe in the family-tree of the Counts of Poictesme as completely as I do in that of the Dukes of Edom. And that Bellegarde and Montors and Storisende were once real cities in this actual land standing midway between Montpellier and Castries seems to me

as thoroughly demonstrated as that Reheboth and Nineveh and Resen once stood midway between Calneh and Calah.

And I find it droll enough to reflect that all these things were created not as the Ænseis create, but, rather, as though these things had sprouted, a little by a little, out of the trouble which Tunbridge Wells once caused me. For I gratefully recognize that, for twenty-odd years now, Poictesme has been to me a never-failing source of diversion and, at times, of active delight. Without any such sure elation, I recognize also that, for twenty-odd years now, I have lived in Poictesme, as go all practical and serious intents, with occasional brief trips abroad to visit my family and other merely physical intimates.

§ 6

In any case, this is the last of all the stories of Poictesme. And, as I said at outset, it seems queer, now that I appraise the last batch of Mr. Papé's pictures which has come out of Tunbridge Wells to establish yet more clearly the existence of Poictesme, — yes, it seems very queer, to reflect how prodigally Tunbridge Wells has, in the end, atoned for all the trouble which Tunbridge Wells once caused me.

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