

A BAY LEAF

BY HUMBERT WOLFE

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(*Pierrot Loq.*)

I GIVE you back the bay leaf, Shelley's leaf,
That is not mine to wear but yours, who found it.
For, though I stole your beauty, let a thief
Confess 't was you, and not his song, that crowned it.

Let me return the bay, as, if I could,
I would return all else — the days I stole,
And the moon's intercepted maidenhood
As silver and as silent as your soul.

Let me return the bay — not as a token
That song has left me, but as knowing that
No verse of mine, but words you have not spoken
Alone can decorate love's laureate.

Take the bay back. I will reclaim it when
Life sets your music to my minor key,
So that we hear, when it is played again,
The undertones of immortality.

I will not wear the bays for less, nor you
For less than this would have them on my brow.
But I will wear them, when that tune breaks through.
Take back the bays — I will not wear them now.

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

American Humor Appraised

To be forced to treat certain Americans as humorists when our whole country provides so many laughs is one of the more painful duties of the English critic. This year has witnessed the introduction of Ring Lardner to the British public. Sir James Barrie has pronounced him 'the real thing,' and some years ago Virginia Woolf chanted the praises of his ball-player's diary, *You Know Me, Al*. This book has not yet been published over there, and, to judge from the reception accorded *Gullible's Travels* and *How to Write Short Stories*, Lardner will never enjoy the vogue abroad that he has at home. The slang, so often derived from baseball, is the chief barrier, but even when that is left out he somehow fails to take. The characters are evidently too local, and only the critic whose sympathies are wide can feel the human quality that so many of them possess. Gerald Gould, writing in the *Observer*, says that Lardner does not exaggerate unduly. He finds him versatile and effective, and ranks him in the company of Mark Twain and Artemus Ward. But most critics pronounce him flat and incomprehensible.

This is by no means the case with Miss Anita Loos, whose *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has duplicated its American success. It is compared by nearly every reviewer to *The Young Visitors*, and its peculiar lingo seems to withhold no mysteries even from British intelligence. Indeed, the style of this admirable little volume is so infectious that Mr. P. C. Kennedy,

writing in the *New Statesman*, found himself running on as follows: —

I mean it is very difficult for gentlemen like I to review a book like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. I mean it is quite true that gentlemen do prefer blondes. So I mean gentlemen like I are just the same as other gentlemen, and would like to go shopping with blondes, but it seems as if blondes would rather go shopping with gentlemen who have got money than go shopping with gentlemen like I who have got brains. So I mean it seems as if there was a limit to almost everything.

In spite of Mr. Mencken's faith in Cabell's prose, the British still seem to find some of his periods exasperating. *The Silver Stallion* has, for the most part, been obscurely praised, though Mr. Gould cannot find much to say in its defense. Under the general title, 'Some American Humorists,' he hands Mr. Cabell this little bouquet: —

As for *The Silver Stallion*, it simply makes me wonder afresh where, how, and why Mr. Cabell attained the reputation he certainly possesses. It has a tremendous apparatus of Rabelaisian mediævalism; but its wit is thin, its cynicism obvious, and its pretentiousness intolerable. Whence comes the belief that a shallow joke becomes profound by being surrounded with such names and titles as Gonfal of Naimes, Margrave of Aradol, and Kerin of Nointel, Syndic and Castellan of Basardra? Is that sort of thing amusing, or beautiful, or even very clever! Then Mr. Cabell is oh, so naughty and daring! He writes, for instance, about 'the leering, high-nosed strumpet at Asch, who was reported to be rivaling even that poor Kerin's widow, Saraïde, in the great number of her copartners in lectual exercise.' To say 'lectual' is 'intellectual,' I suppose; but somehow it does n't seem so to me.