

AUTHORS MUST POSSESS REAL LOCAL COLOR

(Chicago News)

"If a man is going to write a book about sailors, he should go down to the sea in ships," observed the old bookseller. "Last night I was reading a story treating of life and adventures in the far north. I threw it at the cat after wading through a hundred pages. The author is an excellent writer, but every page of the book demonstrated that he had never been in the far north. I doubt whether he'd know a snowdrift from a railway accident."

"There ought to be a law compelling writers to familiarize themselves with the countries and things they write about. It is impossible to produce a good book otherwise. A man who has spent his life running an adding machine in a bank can't write a good story of ranch life."

"It depends on the man, I figure it," said the librarian. "I'd rather read a story of ranch life, written by a bank clerk, if he knows how to write, than to tackle one by a ranchman who doesn't know how to write."

"Of course it is desirable for authors to load up with local color in a general way, but in literary matter no wise man ever tries to establish a hard and fast rule. No sooner does he get his nice little rule in working order than somebody comes along and knocks a hole through it with a historical truth."

"One of the greatest books ever written was 'Robinson Crusoe.' There isn't another romance in the world that has its evergreen qualities. Geniuses come and write and die and fashions in literature rise and decay and generation after generation comes to the weary old earth and 'Robinson Crusoe' goes on forever."

"It is the story of a castaway on a little island, and the man who wrote it."

"There was a man named Alexander Selkirk, who had all the local color. He was loaded down with it. He lived several years on an island and when he finally returned to civilization he wrote an account of his adventures and experiences. It was about as interesting as a bulletin issued by the fourth assistant secretary of agriculture. But Defoe who hadn't any local color and didn't want any at any price happened to run across Alexander's dry as dust narrative, and he sat down and produced the greatest island story in the world. He sent it forth as a pot-boiler, I have read. He was engaged at the time on a work of real importance, a political pamphlet, and he just dashed off 'Robinson Crusoe' because his wife or landlady or somebody was clamoring for corned beef and cabbage."

"I am not arguing against the value of local color. I am talking about this thing of handing down decrees, as though one were Sir Oracle and defied any dog to bark. Swift wrote a great story about the travels of Gulliver. It has fallen off in popularity in later years, but will never drop out entirely. It was so realistic that most people who read it when it was new believed it to be a record of actual experiences."

"I am convinced that Swift never visited the countries he describes so well. I don't suppose he ever was within a hundred miles of Brobdingnag or Lilliput. He had to fake all his local color, but—"

"Run along," exclaimed the bookseller. "I want to close the store."

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THE NEWS PRINT CONTROVERSY

Ottawa, Nov. 15.—A day's fight by paper mill counsel against the examination of government accountant G. T. Clarkson, in the news print appeal case came to a close this morning, when the paper control tribunal permitted newspaper counsel to call him. A feature of his evidence was his announcement that Commissioner Pringle, since fixing the price of news print in September, has ordered him to further examine costs in six paper mills, following the lines laid down in the newspaper enquiry of September.

"OFFICERS' MESS"

Hugh Gibson, who was secretary to the American legation in Belgium when the war broke out, can pack wit and irony into a single paragraph and still keep it short. He visited a Belgian house that German officers had occupied and later evacuated when their army retired. "Over the door," he writes, "was the inscription 'Officers' Mess.' It was certainly the most complete mess that I ever saw. Until then I had regarded the expression, 'An officer and a gentleman as redundant. I no longer think so.'"

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