Atlantic monthly

Boston : Atlantic Monthly Co., -[c1932]

https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39076000049481

how to view things, and *can express* himself with remarkable command of words. He now needs to *study* with great attention the *mode of making himself compactly impressive to the public.*" The underscoring is my own. I may have smoked three pipes in succession over that patronizing epistle.

Thereafter I gave up my pen for eight months, and took to speculating in pigs. It was a new business, and had a flavor about it peculiarly recreative to a dead-beat author. There was a wild, gorgeous poetry in the statement (founded on figures that cannot lie, please remember) made me by my instigator to the porcine adventure. He — I mean the instigator, — lived in a fine rooting country, six hundred miles off to the south. I had nothing to do but plan, administer, forward checks, and count my profits four months ahead. He was to act, execute, buy, and perhaps share my profits. If I could not be famous in letters, I would at least be rich in hogs. Alas, there are figures that, as has been said here and elsewhere perhaps, cannot lie, and there is hog cholera! — worse, far worse than editors and publishers. Write, write, if you will, young man, but for Heaven's sake do not attempt the pig business. The latter, I know, requires more genius, but like all real labors of genius it will not pay. Its end is to make hashed sausage meat of you. What happened to me is of little consequence, except in the result, — that I took up my pen again. It was heavier now, and worked greasily, but I had learned boldness. My first act was to send off the rejected MS. of nearly a year ago to the *other* editor of the same magazine. He was summering by the sea-side, separated from his junior. In forty-eight hours I received the following lines: "I accept with great pleasure your ——. It is a study of extraordinary force and vividness, and, I take it, must be from life. I wish you would do some more things like it." I have other confidences to make, but not now, to men who may have literary ambition, and may be, as I, "to fortune and to fame unknown."

— Apropos of the notice contained in The Contributors' Club for February of the reappearance on the scene, fresh as ever, of our old acquaintance the hero of The Wide, Wide World, I am reminded of a story told to me last September by friends who had just returned from Europe. It will be seen that that book has been setting fashions for us on the other side of the water without our being aware of the honor. My friends were spending several days last summer at the residence of an English gentleman. At dinner on the first day, I think with the joint, something dark in a little cup was passed to my friend's wife by the servant in waiting. She glanced at it, but could not make out what it was; thought it might be some mysterious English form of beef tea, or a sauce; concluded on the whole it would be safer to decline, and did so. Same pantomime gone through with the husband, who, also mystified, declined. Servant disappears with the cup, of which no one else is invited to partake, and dinner proceeds. But their kind hostess is evidently disturbed; at last she remarks, "Perhaps it was not strong enough; or was it too weak?" And then it appears that the dark liquid was tea, and that they "supposed you always drank tea with your dinner in America." "Where could you have obtained that impression?" said my friend. "From The Wide, Wide World," was the innocent answer. The simple country folk in that bucolic book are, it will be remembered, always pictured as drinking "tea" with their dinner; and if this little incident had not intervened that English family would have forever supposed that all Americans did the same!

— There is nothing so majestic and slow-moving to-day in all our quick America as an old South Carolina gentleman, for instance, making a few remarks to you in your parlor, or on the Charleston Battery. His words, his periods, his very thoughts, are all old English. There is no use in trying to hurry him, and much loss. For, if you will only lay aside your modern impatience, and listen, your ears will soon be charmed by the very language of

Johnson and Addison. He never says "Mrs.," but always "Mistress;" his lips never syllable a contraction, but roll out their "do not," "can not," and "shall not" with slow precision; no chance expression of the day is aught to him. This stately, unhurrying way of talking is particularly apparent when you hear it from the sweet voices of the Southern ladies; their voices are much softer and richer than those of our Northern women, and modulated on a lower key. What gives an oddly contrasting local color to this dignified speech is the pronunciation of certain words, — a pronunciation probably caught in childhood from negro nurses. Almost all words in *ar* and *ere* have a *y* in them, or rather it is like this: *garden* is *gee-ar-den*, with the first two syllables run together; they tell you to take the *street kee-ars;* and *here* is *yere* or *h-yere*. The abbreviations of *mother* and *father*, that is, the words *ma* and *pa*, I defy any Northerner to imitate successfully; they might serve as a shibboleth for carpet-baggers. Hawthorne says somewhere that it is a good lesson for one who has dreamed of literary fame to step aside out of the narrow circle in which his claims are recognized, and see how utterly devoid of significance beyond that circle is all that he achieves and all that he aims at; and *I* advise the Northern writer of to-day, if he wishes this sort of lesson in its fullest strength, to go South! No matter who he is, no matter how honored in the circle, for instance, around The Atlantic, he will there find himself unknown. Not that Southerners of the best class are unliterary; in one way they are more literary than we are, for they have the old English essayists, dramatists, and poets at their tongues' end, and quote voluminously and well. But they seem never to have come down farther than about the middle of the last century; there they stop with their quotations. But the bewildered Atlantic man would not mind that so much if they would but stop entirely, — short off, as it were; with a little rubbing-up, he knows the old authors, too. Instead of that, however, these Southerners have made a chain, from the leg of Addison, say, down to to-day, consisting of a succession of writers whose names he has hardly even heard, — he, a man of wide-open eyes, accurate memory, and the most catholic choice in reading. He is told of an essayist, "now living," whose work equals "anything in The Spectator;" of a novelist, "at present dying," whose power is "superior to Fielding;" of a poetess, "just dead," who was "the inspired soul of the century." All this with sincerest belief and earnestness, and said by intelligent persons. Books are put into his hands (generally badly printed), and there in type these productions face him; they are not, then, the manuscript children from whom great things are expected by friends, but on the contrary they are full-grown, clothed, and in their right minds. He begins to doubt whether he is in his! He turns over the pages in a confused sort of way, and at last mentions perhaps some well-known writer whose fame is in all the magazines; they have never heard of him. He then brings forward another, whose volumes are, as he supposes, distinctly recognized as among the best of the day; they do not know his name. He now drops America, flees to England, and holds up George Eliot and Charles Reade; they *have* heard these names, but vaguely. They begin a discussion upon Richardson and Miss Austen, and close with allusions to the latest tale by some "daughter of Georgia," or "child of the Southland." It must not be supposed that I am making fun; these titles are used and bestowed with both pride and affection by the people and the writers themselves. I have heard them, and others like them, many times. The number of these Southern writers is to-day larger than any one would dream who has not studied the subject; and the Atlantic man might well be proud of so ardent and loyal a following as many of them possess. Their own people believe in them heartily, — if no one else does. I have recently looked through a volume containing short biographies of Southern writers, and, out of two hundred and fifty names, recog-

nized about twenty! Of course I except, in these remarks, a few authors with whose works we are all acquainted; there are exceptions always. But I think no one who has lived for any length of time at the South will dispute the truth of what I have said. The Southerners have finer and costlier *old*-fashioned books than we have. The library at Charleston is piled to the ceiling with venerable mahogany-colored English bindings, which look as though they had been "through the wars," as they have. The handsome young librarian says, — but not apologetically; the Charlestonians never apologize, — "We have but few new books." He does not know how delightful and new it is to see nothing but old ones! But the quaintest little places are the "neighborhood libraries," in the country; not by any means established for "the people," as with us, for there were no "people," but for the pleasure of the planters' families in that neighborhood. Twice I have had the key of such little buildings, now almost always lonely and forsaken, and have spent hours taking down and looking through the dusty books. Almost all were fine old English editions of fine old English authors, together with some of the most famous Frenchmen, also; on a lower shelf, the "Southland" writers. I call to mind now a courteous, white-haired gentleman of the old school, who had retired to a remote little village with the poor remains of his fortune and his library. On a dry-goods box covered with chintz reposed the few superb old volumes which he had saved; the remainder, he said, were "burned at Columbia, when Major-General Sherman did us the honor to pass through. The soldiers, I am informed, heated their coffee with them." He never touched a newspaper, or saw a modern book; but he used to read aloud to his wife on summer afternoons from these old volumes, and discuss their contents with any one who came in. Sitting there and listening, one almost forgot that there was any present, or any George Eliot, or even any Atlantic, save the ocean.

— In your review of Judge Caton's book on the Antelope and Deer of America, in the March number of The Atlantic, you help to disseminate a grave error into which he has fallen, concerning the area of country over which the black-tailed deer is distributed. Of course the author was misinformed, as, had he *any* personal knowledge on the subject in question, he would not have made such an error when writing as a specialist.

I have lived, since the war, in the States and Territories north of the Arkansas and south of the Yellowstone rivers, and have hunted in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and Dakota; I have found the black-tail in all these States and Territories, and I am reliably informed that it abounds in Idaho and New Mexico; in fact, it is found as widely distributed east of the Sierras as west of them.

As to the antelope shedding their horns yearly, as do the deer, elk, etc., their antlers, it is considered an open question where antelope abound; but as Judge Caton has had an opportunity for careful personal observation on this point, and as it is not probable that any abnormal habit in this respect should obtain when antelope are removed from their native plains and confined as were those observed by Judge Caton, of course he is right.

I have seen buck antelope killed at all seasons of the year, but have never seen any with new horns; in fact, I once observed a tame buck antelope, almost daily, for several years, which showed no sign of shedding its horns. With one exception, all the hunters, trappers, guides, etc., whom I have talked with on this subject deny that the antelope sheds its horns. Bridger, the celebrated guide, hunter, and trapper, knew of but one instance, and that was so remarkable that it will not help to prove the affirmative to skeptics. He was once hunting along the base of a rocky, precipitous mountain, following the only practicable game trail in those parts, when, as he turned the sharp corner of a huge rock, he saw just in front of him, and rapidly approaching, a buck antelope pursued by