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March 1983

One Dollar

The Book-Mart

A Monthly Journal For Buyers, Sellers & Collectors

America's
Winston
Churchill

André
Norton
on
Susan
Warner

Philatelic
History

The
Ashendene
Press

New
Series:
'I Collect'



Scribbling women:

Susan Warner

The conclusion of

TEARS, BUSY TEARS

By ANDRE NORTON

Editor's Note: Andre Norton certainly needs no introduction to readers of fantasy fiction; for she is one of the legendary names in that field the world over; nor does she need an intro to Book-Mart readers, for this installment marks the seventh appearance by her in our pages which we are delighted and honored to bring you. It is the sixth of her Scribbling Women series, which began in Book-Mart #49, and the fourth and final part of her Susan Warner profile, which began in #57 and continued in #58 and #61. (Further articles from Ms. Norton's pen are in issues #51 and #55.)

"The Wide, Wide World" continued to bring in the checks which were slowly pulling the Warners out of debt and into the security Susan craved. The good days, however, did not last. There was another panic in 1857 and the Warner sisters had to surrender their small savings to retain title to the island. Again shadows gathered and the girls worked with energetic grimness.

They did everything to raise money, wrote--children's books, novels, articles--corrected compositions for a boarding school, made up dictation papers for a teacher, went without all but bare necessities and made their own clothes. No more trips to New York and pleasant evenings in the box room with the red flannel drapes. Instead they remained on the island during the winter of 1858-1859 and wrote jointly on "Say and Seal".

And the winter days followed the almost military mold of those lived by the cadets at West Point, if not more severe. For the



Susan Warner.

sisters arose before five a.m. and were already hard at work when gun and reveille turned out the corps across the river.

The night before they prepared bread and butter, saw that the kindling basket was full and the tea-kettle ready on the hearth in the Revolutionary period room which was their study. Anne got up at four-thirty, and had the fire burning, the kettle near boiling, a tray of cups and saucers set out, and the green shaded student lamp burning. They ate together and then settled to work amid the sleeping household, sure of no interruptions for several hours.

Steady application brought results. But they were never free of the fear of poverty. Their pleasures were limited and almost pitiful in their narrowness. In January 1860 Susan received a New Year's gift from Anne, a stereoscope and six views. And being on a visit to New York she made the stupendous discovery that one of the shops offered a dozen views for a dollar, to be chosen from any on a large table. The sisters went to work with their customary careful thoroughness and were a whole morning considering and selecting, coming away with the scenes they could never hope to see in life, Melrose, the Castle of Edinburgh, Egypt, Wales--Susan studied these eagerly, using them to piece out her research reading for her books to come.

This was the second winter they had in town and they spent most of their working hours at the Astor Library where Dr. Cogswell set

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Warner

aside a special corner and a table for their convenience.

But again the good times did not last. The outbreak of war put an end to wide book buying. And on August 14, 1861, Susan notes in her journal that they could not afford the three dollars and fifty cents a piece which would mean new summer dresses.

Books did not sell well; they would have to find other means of support. In January, 1861, they worked out a prospectus for a child's magazine. And they were able to start with three hundred subscribers. This venture lasted two years until the rising prices brought on by war wiped it out. They lost nothing on it, however. And the books they had written for it as serials were published in hard covers: Melbourne House, Daisy, The Old Helmet.

Susan also wrote a series of Bible stories for children, compiling all the known material on manners and customs, geography and exploration of Biblical lands. Intent upon exact research she used her slender funds to import source material. In contrast to this Biblical research she also began a series of short stories intended for older readers and based upon strange family histories and legends of the surrounding Hudson Valley. Many of these she retailed to close friends before writing them out, and all were dramatic and largely tragic, a large number dealing with trouble arising from misdirected or lost letters.

"Ellen Montgomery's Bookshelf" comprised a series of short juvenile narratives separately bound and intended for sale to Sunday School libraries. The grind of turning out this stream of material must have worn down Susan's none too steady nerves but fear of their income not matching their yearly needs was the whip under which both sisters worked.

This same pressure kept Susan from retaining the copyright of her later works as she dared not wait for the slower return of royalties but sold each manuscript as it was finished.

After her father's death in 1875 her health steadily declined and

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Warner spoiled

she died, worn out by work and the fear of insecurity, in 1885, having given most of her life to the support of a family of four and the maintenance of the Island home which was a constant drain upon their funds.

She was buried at West Point as her contacts with the academy and the cadets were close. For many years she had conducted a Bible class on Sunday afternoons for the cadets, who considered it a high privilege to be invited to attend these informal gatherings in the orchard on the island. After graduation many of these boys continued to correspond from far away army posts.

Anne Warner was the last survivor of the family and upon her death it was discovered that the Island had been willed, by the wish of both sisters, to West Point. It remains a possession of the Academy to this day.

What did this nervous, driven, never truly happy woman have to offer which made her novels household treasures for two generations and gave her a secure place in the minor reaches of American literature?

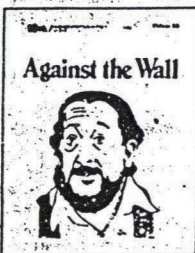
She was an innovator in several fields. Had it not been for "The Wide, Wide World" we might not have had "Little Women". For she was the first writer to combine—for girls and their mothers—American characters and a natural background. She introduced the "Sunday School" book, a narrative in which fervid evangelism was coupled with a home atmosphere and an interesting plot. Her books can still be read with profit by social historians who wish a picture of manners, customs, and country society as it existed a hundred years ago.

Critics on such magazines as the North American Review said of her books:

"As a matter of pure judgment, we must place their pictures of American country life and character above all their other merits since we know not where, in any language, we shall find their

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If you've seen one



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Warner

graphic truth excelled."

While another criticism is just as apt but would not be considered in the least complimentary today:

"No living writer, not even Mrs. Stowe, knows better how to open the fountain of tears, or goes more directly to the heart of the reader."

Nowadays an author has no desire to open fountains of tears, and would rather appeal to the head than the heart. But in her day Susan Warner gave the public exactly what they wanted and produced the first American best seller.

A CHECKLIST OF SUSAN WARNER'S COMPLETE WORKS

Bread and Oranges

The Broken Walls of Jerusalem and the Rebuilding of Them

The Christmas Stocking

Daisy

Diana

The End of a Coil

The Flag of France

The Gold of Chickasee (with her sister Anne)

Haimworts

The Hills of the Shadtemuc

The House in Town

The House of Israel

The Kingdom of Judah

The Law and the Testimony

The Letter of Credit

The Little Camp On Eagle Hill

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A Red Wallflower

Say and Seal

Sceptres and Crowns

Rebuilding of Them

Stephen

Trading

Den Vide, vide Verden

Walks From Eden

"What She Could"

The Wide, Wide World

Willow Brook

Wych Hazel



Susan Warner

Churchill

American, however, had resigned his own Naval commission three months after leaving the Academy, when he decided that fiction, rather than the sea, was his line of work. Being well enough off that he did not have to earn his living by doing hackwork, he was able to afford to experiment a great deal with his prose before he even attempted to publish it. He was ambitious to write the very best he could, and rented an office for his writing to which he went as regularly as any businessman. His second published book, *Carvel*, was re-written by him at least 5 times, but went on to become the most popular book of its day in the U.S., selling over 500,000 copies in its first year in the original Macmillan edition, and 2,000,000 more in Macmillan's Pocket Classics and the Grossett &

(Continued on page 32)