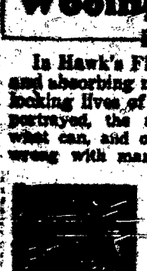
Library Signpost

Wooing, Wedding, Weeping

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

In Hawk's Flight, Helen Hull gives us a very competent and absorbing novel of American married life. In the interlocking lives of four young couples, interesting people well portrayed, the author shows what can, and often does, go wrong with many marriages even when they do not flounder in the divorce court. Give the author credit that in this day and age, divorce is not even hinted at as an alternative in any of the four marriages: in fact, I cannot recall that the word "divorce" even occurs anywhere in the whole book. Most of the novel's dramatic themselves inseparably bound to one another, no matter what comes along.



REV. EHMANN

* * *

Do not be deterred by the leisurely pace and quiet tone of the opening chapter. It introduces you, perhaps a little too casually, to the people and the locale. The scene is that part of Connecticut known as the Ridge. The husbands are commuters from New York where they work, one as a doctor, another as a broker, the third as an economics professor, and the fourth as a building designer. But it is the wives' story, and the focus of attention is kept on the tragedy of their insufficiency to make a success of their marriages, even with good intentions. After the stage is set, the tempo of the story is startling, and the pacing of its narrative is expertly managed.

* * *

Though all the characters are well drawn, it is the four wives who are the clearest and most vivid. The most fascinating of them is Ellen Hunter, headstrong and ambitious to unload as much as possible into her marriage: a home, children, a career, and social prestige with its demanding activities. But her house of cards tumbles when her husband commits suicide. The most likable is Adelaide Bucknall, motherly as a hen, devoted to her husband, but unintentionally disloyal and meddlesome in an acute crisis of their affairs. Carey Moore, though she is the narrator of much of the story, is strangely enough less appealing than the other two, subordinating the idea of a home and family to the following of a professional writing career. She comes to a complete nervous breakdown, childless, and in the end a widow, without even the satisfaction of having been near her husband at the operation which unexpectedly took his life. And Genevieve Willetts, domesticated, possessive, and occupied with her self and her ailments, is the least sympathetic of them all: you are not surprised, though you are shocked, when Dexter, her husband, takes up with a mistress.

* * *

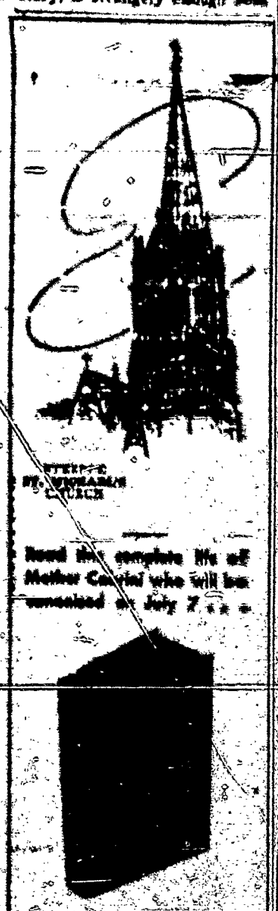
Outside of Adelaide, none of these wives brought to her marriage what it needed to make it successful. Here is the way it comes to you near the end of the book. It is Adelaide telling something that Carey's husband, the best of the four husbands, had earlier said to her:

"... He said he'd just discovered something, he'd found out what marriage was. It was a stereoscope. It sounds silly to you, Carey, but he made me see it. You know, two ordinary photographs, quite flat, and then look peeks through the glass and something happens, you get one picture, only it isn't flat, you look right into it, it's like a real street with real people. Nothing looks the same to any two people, he said. Maybe one of them tries to make the other look through his eyeglass. If they work to see things together, each from his own angle, they make this ... vision. I've never forgotten the way he said it. Then he joked about it. Maybe what the world needed was more and better stereoscopes, he said. An increasing range of blended vision until whole groups of men will see their lives with this new depth, this reality, instead of each man and his flat little picture. ..."

* * *

From the Catholic Ritual, the priest reads to the bride and the groom: "Henceforth you will belong entirely to each other; you will be one in mind, one in heart and one in affection." But that oneness is a process in duality, neither one cancelling out the other, each attempting to impose his own individuality. As they are to be "two in one flesh", each the complement of the other so are they to be "one in one love," each the complement of the other. Here is deep wisdom indeed about marriage, and Hawk's Flight shows graphically how difficult it is to attain it. The novel offers no method of attaining it, other than adjusting the point of view and trying harder to live up to it. But it ventures to protest that this is easier proposed than done. Only in Christian marriage, as Sigrid Undset so profoundly teaches it in her Stages on the Road, in that remarkable last chapter which is entitled "Letter to a Parish Priest," will people find an adequate purgation of their own selfishness and a permanent magnetism of loyalty to their partner, since the Sacrament gives assurance that the Christlife in either will provide both.

We think adult Christian readers will not be misled by by two or three remarks of some of the wives which imply an acceptance of contraception. The maturity of the theme and the occasional vivid imagery will limit the reconsiderations of this novel to adults, but on the whole the book shows a fine restraint and dignity in the handling of its delicate theme.



STEEPLE OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

Read the complete life of Mother Cabrini who will be canonized on July 7 * * *

TOO SMALL A WORLD

By Theodore Maynard

The thirteenth century shade of the venerable mother of our own time, Mother Cabrini, who on July 7 will become the first citizen of the United States to be elevated to the "altars" (solemn ceremony of canonization), Frank Fullerton in this new biography ... the work of a master in short literature. Illustrated in the Spanish style. Maynard has impressively captured in "Too Small A World."—Chicago Sun Book. $3.00

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Two Books Due On Communism

Milwaukee — (NC) — "The Challenge of World Communism," by Hamilton Fish, and "After Hitler Stalin?" by Robert Ingrim, two books which throw further light upon the nature and scope of communist activities in America and Europe, are being brought out currently by the Bruce Publishing Company here.

Written by the former representative from New York who for 15 years was chairman of a special House committee to investigate the workings of communists within the United States, "The Challenge of World Communism" presents, in easily comprehensible fashion, the most pertinent of the documents the author was able to obtain, plus the knowledge and opinion of foreign affairs experts.

"After Hitler Stalin?" is the product of an Austrian journalist and foreign correspondent, Dr. Franz Kleh, who writes under the name of Robert Ingrim. It is an evaluation of European politics, written by a man who was expelled from both Berlin and Rome for his prewar anti-Nazi writings.

Calendar of Feast Days

Sunday, July 7 — St. Pantaenus, Father of the Church, lived in the second century. Converted to the Faith he was placed at the head of the Christian school in Alexandria. Later he went to preach the Gospel to the Eastern nations. He died in 216.

Monday, July 8 — St. Elizabeth of Portugal. At the age of 12 she was given in marriage to the King of Portugal. After her husband's death she took the habit of the Third Order of St. Francis and spent the rest of her life in austerities and alms-giving.

Tuesday, July 9 — St. Veronica Virgin, was a Capuchin nun in Italy. Remarkably favored during her religious life with heavenly visions and other supernatural gifts. She died in 1740.

Wednesday, July 10 — The Seven Brothers and St. Felicitas, their mother, because of their refusal to sacrifice to the pagan gods, were subjected to torture and put to death during the reign of the Emperor Antoninus.

Thursday, July 11 — St. James, a native of Mesopotamia, chose the highest mountain for his abode, sheltering himself in a cave in the winter, and the rest of the year living in the woods. Many asked for his prayers and spiritual advice.

Friday, July 12 — St. John Gaulbert was born at Florence. After becoming reconciled with a relative with whom he had carried on a feud, he abondoned the world and entered religious life. He established the monastery St. Salvi and died in 1073.

Saturday, July 13 — St. Eugenius, Bishop of Carthage, refused to obey the order of King Hunneric that he exclude the Vandals, some of whom were Catholics, from the Church. This led to a persecution of the Catholics. Eugenius was banished but was recalled by Hunneric's successor. Later he was again banished and died in exile in 505.

'Sign' Marks Jubilee

Union City, N.J. — (NC) — With the July issue The Sign magazine completes its 25th year of publication. The magazine was founded and edited for 18 years by the Rev. Harold Purcell, C.P. The publication's present editor is the Rev. Ralph Gorman, C.P.

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I Chose Freedom

By Victor Kravchenko

This seventh installment of "I Chose Freedom" by Victor Kravchenko, former Soviet official, today tells more about his life under Stalin's police state.

CHAPTER XII

Torture After Midnight

One night, a few weeks later, I was aroused from sleep. I was wanted on the telephone, in the lobby below. I got dressed and went down. It was Gershgorn. He ordered me to come to the N.K.V.D. at once.

Again I sat in his surgeon-like office. I envied the fresh, healthy flush on his face. If only I had my old physical vitality. . . . Acute insomnia, worry, the hopeless chaos in the factory were draining my strength, leaving me weak and nauseous.

"Well, let's get on with our little chat," Gershgorn exclaimed, flaunting his health, his energy. "And I do hope you will be more sensible, more cooperative, this time."

"What do you want from me?"

Gershgorn banked the table. Then he shook his hand in my face.

"Here we ask the questions!" he shouted. "All you do is answer them! Do you understand?"

"I understand. . . . Only I'm still not under arrest. I'm still a Party man in good standing. . . ."

"That doesn't concern us here. To us you're a saboteur. I ask you again, what do you know of the sabotaging activities of Ivan Chenkin? You've had time enough to think it over."

"I know nothing."

"Look here, Kravchenko, it will be better for you, and will save me a lot of trouble, if you start talking. We have ways and means to make people talk. We make them soft as silk and yielding as butter. Do you understand?"

"I'm speaking honestly. I can't tell you things that I don't know or that aren't so."

"So you don't want to talk?"

At that point the telephone rang. He was wanted by Dero Kan, Gershgorn said. "Would I please wait for him — in the corridor. We stepped out of the room together and I was turned over to a uniformed Chekist.

"Have this citizen wait for me," he said.

Four or five men were already standing in the corridor, their faces turned to the wall, their hands clasped behind their backs.

N.K.V.D. Torture

"Citizen, go over there, take the same position," the Chekist said, shoving me toward them.

"But I'm not arrested. I'm here just at Comrade Gershgorn's request."

"Shut up! Do what you're told! Face the wall, hand behind your back, and don't dare turn around. And don't rest your head on the wall either."

I took my place near the other men. We could not see each other, in the dim corridor light, nor could we see what was happening behind our backs. In the course of the four hours I was kept standing there, other men joined the line-up. I had heard of this form of torture, one of the mildest in the N.K.V.D. book; now I was suffering it in my own flesh.

No one who has not been forced to stand in one position, facing nothingness, hour after hour, can never be made to understand what it's like. Your hands, your arms, your feet become heavier, more leaden, by the minute. You begin to feel every part of your body, each finger, each joint of the finger, as a separate weight . . . tons and tons of crushing weariness. You know you can't endure it, yet you endure. . . .

Heart-rending shrieks came from the rooms along the corridor; shrieks and curses, the sound of blows and the dull thud of bodies hitting the floor. People were being questioned, beaten, threatened.

"Well, come along Kravchenko. Sorry to have kept you waiting. There's so much work, so much work. . . ."

It was Gershgorn talking, in a fresh cheerful voice. I turned around. I followed him through a blur. Sitting in his office, I felt no sense of relief. It was as if I were still standing, still pinned down by tons and tons of fatigue. Gershgorn asked questions but I caught only single words. They made no sense to me.

"All right, go home, get some sleep. You'll need it. I'll call you again . . . soon. And by the way, these little talks are nobody's business but yours and mine. Our little secret. If you babble to anyone, you'll regret it."

Back at the hotel, I washed myself with ice-cold water, then lay sleepless on the unmade bed until it was time to go to work. A message from the N.K.V.D. awaited me. I was to be there again at midnight. . . .

That night Gershgorn was unctuously polite, almost cordial at the outset. He even offered me tea and cookies, which I declined. I was not really being kind and considerate to him, he said. I was obliging him to behave like a beast — keeping me waiting in the corridor, for instance when in fact he was not at all a beast. Did I think his was a pleasant job? Did I think he enjoyed it? But what is a man to do when he was born with a strong sense of duty?

"Tonight you can do us a little favor, Kravchenko," he said. "The N.K.V.D. will appreciate it, the Party will appreciate it. You see, we're not asking much of you. Just your signature, your honest freely-given signature as an engineer, a Soviet director and a loyal Party member. You see, it's about a serious matter. A defense matter. Pipes with impurities have been provided by your factory for the chemical defense works. No fault of yours, of course. You didn't make the metal. Quite clearly it was organized sabotage which began way up High, in Moscow, and percolated down to Kharkov, then to the Zaporozhestal where the director was the enemy of the people."

The idea, I saw at once, was a horrible police fantasy.

"In the first place, Comrade Gershgorn, I'm not at all sure that the impurities and the bad quality were due to sabotage," I said. "Secondly, I should like to read the document you want me to sign."

"By all means. Here it is." He handed me a sheaf of some twenty long closely typed sheets.

The Document

I read slowly, for almost an hour. Waves of heat and of chill swept through me as I read. It was an extraordinary mixture of half-truths and full lies, carefully, ingeniously fused together to make a predetermined melodramatic pattern.

"I can't sign such a document," I announced when I had completed reading. "I made pipes with the steel sent to me. Sometimes the steel contained impurities. That's all I know and that's all I could possibly sign to."

"Very well. Why then did some of our most eminent professors and industrial managers sign it? Do you set yourself up as a greater expert than all of them?"

The document, in truth, was signed by outstanding Soviet scientists and distinguished engineers. Their collective verdict was "sabotage." I could readily imagine how those signatures had been extracted. But in this place I could scarcely reject that. I would confirm nothing of which I had no personal knowledge.

I was silent. Gershgorn argued with me, screamed at me, until dawn. He read passages to me and pointed out how "obvious" the wrecking intentions had been. The only thing obvious to me — even in my trance of fatigue — was that the Nikopol N.K.V.D. had been ordered to obtain what was in effect my indirect confession. It was a missing link in the chain of fantastic hypotheses. Once I consented to provide the link, I would be strangled with the same chain. I was not being heroic in refusing to sign; it was perfectly clear to me that the signature would be tantamount to my own death warrant. Finally I was dismissed, with a string of curses and a pointed warning to think it over.

CHAPTER XIII

The Happy Socialist Life

Night after night for many months I was summoned to headquarters, interrogated, threatened, cajoled. The ordeal of sleeplessness was calculated to wear me down. All day I worked; I could not afford to relax in my new post, because my error or failure would be construed as additional "evidence" of wrecking. And most of the night I was tormented.

The Americans

One night, after I had been kept standing in the corridor, face to wall, for four or five hours, Gershgorn sent me home without questioning. Sorry, he said, but he couldn't spare the time for further "chatting." The following night, however, he sprang a brand-new accusation.

"Kravchenko, you had two Americans living with you, didn't you?"

"Yes. They were helping us operate some American machinery."

"Tell me, did you ever complain about the Soviet regime to these foreigners?"

"No, of course not. They're still in the U.S.S.R. You can check up."

"Don't tell me what I can do. I'm getting tired of your insolence."

Interrogation about the Americans took up several hours. Suddenly the door opened. The hulking Dorogan, savage with anger, stamped in. His fleshy lips were twisted into an ugly grimace. Gershgorn stood up respectfully.

"Gershgorn, how long will you let this wrecker twist you around his little finger? Are you a Chekist or a dirty rag? Too bad we didn't arrest him a year ago instead of letting the City Committee mess with him."

He went out, slamming the door. When Gershgorn released me, an hour or so later, I decided to talk to Dorogan. I wanted the ordeal wound up, one way or another. Outside his office, I gave my name to the guard. I was allowed to enter.

"Well, what do you want?" Dorogan yelled.

"I wanted to ask what you want of me. I've been tortured so long. I ask you as a Communist—"

"As a Communist!" he shouted and rushed at me, like an infuriated bull. He slapped me with an open palm, first on one cheek, then on the other. He seized me by the throat and began to choke me, at the same time shaking me violently from side to side. He was a powerful man, his hands were shackles of iron being pulled tighter, tighter. Everything began to go black. . . .

"Get out before I kill you!" I heard him yell as he shoved me through his door.

I staggered against the wall and remained there for a few minutes, until the iron ring around my neck relaxed. I hardly know how I managed to get back to the hotel. Painfully I climbed the stairs. I threw myself on the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

In the first week of January Gershgorn put a new document before me. It was my "voluntary deposition," in effect a confession. A long and devious statement it was, full of ambiguities and oblique admissions. The crimes of my friends, my superiors, my subordinates were outlined boldly; my own share of responsibility was treated lightly, almost casually.

"Please understand," Gershgorn said as I read page after page of the technical fairy tale, "this is the absolute minimum which the N.K.V.D. expects from you. There's no room for bargaining. Will you sign with a pen or pencil?"

"With neither. The things I know in these assertions are not true . . . the rest I don't know. I have made no such admissions as you put into my mouth here."

Gershgorn sprang up in sudden fury and rushed at me, screaming, "Saboteur, wrecker, rascal! Take this — and this!" His huge fists were crashing into my face like a couple of pistons run amok. Blood spurted from my nose. Blood filled my mouth with a warm briny nausea. "Now will you sign?"

The Happy Life!

I heard Dorogan stride into the room. He, too, began to pound me with his fists. I fell to the floor and rolled into a ball, as if crawling deeper into my own skin, while four heavy cruel booted feet stamped and kicked me. I moaned with pain. Gershgorn must have rung for the guards, who were picking me up.

"Take the rascal away! Throw him out!" Dorogan bellowed.

As I was dragged through the door I felt his fist crash once more into the back of my neck. The guards led me into a small room, where I was left to nurse my wounds. I sat there for an hour, perhaps two hours. Then Gershgorn came in.

"Well, have you thought it over or do you want some more persuasion? We have much better arguments than you've tasted tonight."

"No, I won't sign. You may kill me but I won't sign."

"I'm giving you three days to think it over. Now get out!"

And so I left — but my Party card was still in my pocket. . . .

I found myself in the street, stumbling through a bitter snowstorm. I crawled to the hotel. In the lobby my mind took in, mechanically, the words on a large placard, left over from the elections: "Rally around Stalin for the Happy Socialist Life!"

Next week: A Talk with Hacendoda — Kravchenko goes to Moscow and obtains a new job.

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Bible Savant

Dr. William Foxwell Albright, professor at Johns Hopkins university, Baltimore, internationally known excavator of Biblical Sites and author of numerous volumes on Biblical Archeology, who is on the faculty of the Bible Institute of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, to be held at Niagara University, August 19-28, 1946.

Neumann Author Died Under Nazis

Milwaukee — (NC) — Friedrich Ritter von Lama, chronicler of the events in the life of Stigmatist Therese Neumann of Konnersreuth, died a victim of the Gestapo on February 9, 1944, it was learned here in a letter from von Lama's widow, Christa. The letter was received by Frank Bruce, Sr., publisher of von Lama's books on the stigmatist.

The letter revealed that von Lama had been imprisoned on three different occasions, the first time in 1933, then in 1940, and finally in 1944 when he died. His only son, a Viennese journalist, was sent to Dachau in 1939 and died shortly before arrival of the Allied armies, the letter reveals.

Mrs. von Lama reports that interest is growing in the Stigmatist, especially since wartime conditions no longer affect travel. Last Good Friday, 800 Americans visited Konnersreuth, she writes.

The Literary Cavalcade

American Voices—II

By John O'Connor

(This is the second in a series aimed at the materialism and pragmatism that is so evident in American publications today.)

I am the digest magazine.

I am tiny. I am portable. I am easy to carry. I am light of weight.

People who do not take time to read an article, read my printed version of it. My circulation is not in the hundreds of thousands. It is in the millions. I am the prime example of the superstition of literacy. I care not what people read — as long as they pretend to read. I am attached to circulation as though by the lash of Yggdrasill.

I do not have to worry about manuscripts. I pick the bones and the brains of the regular magazines and the few remaining papers of distinction such as the Baltimore Sun or The New York Times. I "digest" those articles which have been carefully written and the part of which are fitted to my prejudices, measure to my format, and suit the taste of my readers.

General Chatter

I appeal to those readers who are poorly informed but who like to think of themselves as well-informed just because they are talking about the same things other people are talking about. I pull the strings of selection and the minds dance.

I receive the solicited or unsolicited support of publicity-wise educators. I have no editorial opinion. I prefer to let my economic, social, moral and religious views be expressed through the talent and efforts of others. My sacred mission, I firmly believe, is to bring these "planted" or selected opinions to others.

I break down biographies and novels and works of our day to postage-stamp size. I feel secure in this operation as the author, whoever he or she might be, will seldom object to the size of my check — especially when the additional honorarium is something that did not figure in his plans.

I frequently buy magazine articles outright. I send them to magazines of my choice and with whom there are — let us call them "understandings." I used to discover these articles with a sequeal of delight. Today I announce them with a solemnity that would shame a Crown pronouncement. I print them as my special contribution to the common good.

Thinks for People

I save people the trouble of thinking. I even think for them. I tell them how to stay married. I tell them how to become a perfect speller in thirty minutes. I tell them how to win prize contests. I tell them how to make money at home with potted plants. I use titles that would shame the caption writers on the old yellow journals or the new radical papers.

One-third of my contents consist of amusing anecdotes, selected in the lottery manner . . . a three cent stamp and your story may bring you $200. These stories may come straight from life. They may be from a joke book that has been rotting in the attic for years. But I try to give the millions a feeling of personal interest and consideration.

I promote sensation. I do not analyze or carry ideas. I aim but to please. I preach improvement but my version of that can easily be covered under the heading of hygiene or thrift. I solemnly bring the obvious to the unconscious and the hurried. I am the by-product or packaging. I am the offspring of the quest for convenience and the drive for ease — even ease of thinking.

I am the invader of the schools. These institutions, once bulwarks of thought and discipline, admit me within their portals. I have started to teach the young to depend on my tid-bits rather than the nourishing steaks of, abounding reading and the roughage of intellectual work. I am their contact with the publishing world. I have capitalized as has no printed thing on the weakness of people to seek ease when they know no higher goals.

I am the instrument of suicide in the death of better magazines. I am the vial of lethargy that is poisoning American thought. I am the vulture of the printed page. I am the cancer on the brain of American writings. But I have circulation.

"I" am the digest magazine.

Book on Chinese Who Became Priest

Paris — (RNS) — An autobiography by Dom Pierre Celestin, one-time Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister, who became a member of the Benedictine Order, has been published here under the title, Thoughts and Memories. The first part of the book deals with the author's diplomatic career, and the second with his religious life.

Father Celestin — formerly Dr. Lou Tseng-tsiang, of Peking — led the Chinese delegation at the 1919 Peace Conference, having previously married a young Belgian girl while Chinese secretary in Brussels. After the death of his wife, he took orders in the Benedictine Abbey at Lophem les Bruges. His family was converted to Catholicism several generations ago.

Catholic Theater Convention Set for '47

Detroit — (NC) — The first post-war national convention of the National Catholic Theatre Conference will be held in June of 1947, it was announced following a meeting of the conference's executive board here. Site and other details of the meeting are being arranged.

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