

Joseph Conrad's Tribute to Cicely Fox Smith

The aims of the 'Celebrating Cicely' project on 21 June 2014 were to commemorate, celebrate and acknowledge locally the worth of published author and poet, Cicely Fox Smith, in Bow, Mid-Devon, where she was buried in 1954. The ashes of Margaret Scott Smith, Cicely's close sister and occasional co-author, were subsequently interred in the same grave in 1973 and this was also recognised.

This obituary and subsequent tributes to Cicely Fox Smith were published in *The Times* in April 1954:

<p>MISS C. FOX SMITH</p> <p>THE DAYS OF SAIL</p> <p>Miss Cicely Fox Smith, who died yesterday in a nursing home at the age of 72, celebrated the great days of the sailing ship in prose and verse with a nostalgic charm that was the delight of connoisseurs of this kind of literature.</p> <p>The daughter of a lawyer of Manchester and granddaughter of a Lancashire clergyman she had little or nothing of the sea as her background, but from her earliest days she felt:</p> <p>The beauty and mystery of the ships And the magic of the sea.</p> <p>More than 30 years ago her first book <i>Sailor-town Days</i> appeared and revived the fast-fading memories of the Black Ballers and their equally famous White Star Clippers sailing out of Liverpool on the Atlantic run. She followed this by a book on the great tea and grain clippers, rescuing from oblivion the scattered materials of the history of our merchant service in the shape of old newspaper cuttings, letters, logs, paintings, and photographs. The tale was continued in a long series of volumes, mostly historical in the strict sense of the word, but the series was punctuated by the appearance of collections of shanties and other old verses and by some finished and evocative verse of her own. Her contributions to <i>Punch</i> over the initials C. F. S. were for many years eagerly read.</p> <p>9 April 1954</p>	<p>MISS CICELY FOX SMITH</p> <p>Mr. Percy W. Elkington writes:—</p> <p>The few of us who have survived from the days of sail will half-mast our flags at the announcement of the death of Miss Cicely Fox-Smith, for if we have a mind to dive back into that adventurous past we have to turn to that brilliant lady's writings to capture the intimate spirit of the life led by the crews in those gallant Clipper ships. It must always remain a marvel how the daughter of a lawyer and the granddaughter of a clergyman, without ever having to my knowledge made a voyage in a square-rigged ship, absorbed their every technical and personal detail, the lives, manners, and habits of those hard-encrusted men composing the crews, and conveyed the picture in such crisp and revealing phraseology with a lilt rendering with music the very plunging of those grand ships through the Trades, the Tropics, and the Roaring Forties.</p> <p>Out of what was in cold truth but a brutal life endured with a courage, humour, grumbling, and nonchalance not to be found in any line of labouring life to-day, those incomparable seamen passing on their lawful occasions wove the fabric from which our Empire was largely wrought. Every one of</p>	<p>them contributed, but it is a fact that among them all none ever became so outstanding that his individual monument is preserved. Therefore we must feel satisfaction that their memory is preserved in print—the memory of comradeship engendered among those who sailed with them—above the name of Cicely Fox-Smith.</p> <p>Miss M. Tournour writes:—</p> <p>I wonder if I may add to your obituary notice of C. F. S., who was the most many-sided woman I have known? Wishing to visit a friend evacuated to Hampshire in 1939 I wrote to C. F. S.—knowing her only through her books—and was immediately offered a private sitting room and bed rooms in Soberton House, not only for one occasion but for as often as I could get away from my own work. There I learned the absolute Englishness of both her and her sister. C. F. S. could run her farm and had a deep love of both domestic and wild animals. Her drawing-room was converted into a factory for the making of sailors' collars; she accommodated for a time 30 men training for Radar; went out in the darkness of the Hampshire Downs to help the bombed; could sit at the piano and play and sing sailor songs; was a fund of diverse knowledge and in moments of relaxation did <i>The Times</i> and <i>Torquemada</i> crosswords. Then at night, after a long day's work, it was affecting to see her stand to attention while the National Anthem was played at 9 o'clock. Truly a patriot of very fine type.</p> <p>20 April 1954</p>
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The *Western Times & Gazette* of Thursday April 15, 1954 featured the following articles:

<p>Miss Fox Smith, novelist and poet, dies</p> <p>MISS CECILY FOX SMITH, the noted authoress, whose home was at West Halse, Bow, died last week at a Poltimore nursing home. She was 72.</p> <p>For nearly 40 years she had contributed verse regularly to <i>Punch</i> and in 1949 was awarded a Civil Service pension of £150 a year in recognition of her services to literature.</p> <p>Miss Fox Smith was born in Lancashire and she spent many years travelling, and it was about seven years ago that she settled down at Bow and made her home with her sister, Miss Madge S. Fox Smith, with whom she sometimes collaborated.</p> <p>Their most recent joint work was "Seldom Seen," which was published a few weeks ago.</p> <p>Book of the year</p> <p>Miss Fox Smith began her literary career when she was 16 with the publication of a volume of poems. Later she took an interest in the sea, studied sailing ships and their crews in Western Canada, and then began writing about them. Her success was immediate, and her works were translated into German, Dutch, and Swedish.</p> <p>Four years ago the Boys' Club of America chose her "Ship Aground" as their book of the year.</p>	 <p>Another of her interests was the countryside; she wrote several books with a strong flavour of the soil and, in latter years, about Devonshire; "Seldom Seen" is a novel for girls about farming in Devon. In her spare time she did a considerable amount of work in her three-acre garden at Bow.</p> <p>The funeral took place at Bow Parish Church on Saturday, the Rector (Canon Guy Warmington) officiating.</p>	<p>Author of many children's books</p> <p>MISS CICELY FOX SMITH, of Bow, who died in a nursing home this week, was an authority on sailing ships, and had the gift of communicating her enthusiasm for them in her many adventure stories for children.</p> <p>She not only knew and loved the things of which she wrote, but refused to under-rate the intelligence of her young readers. She detested "comics," with their cheap and sensational presentation of children's stories, and demonstrated that good writing and careful research do not necessarily make dull reading.</p> <p>Joseph Conrad, writing about Miss Fox Smith many years ago, has provided a fitting epitaph: "In her, I verily believe, the quintessence of the collective soul of the latter-day seaman has found its last resting-place, and a poignant voice before taking its flight for ever from earth."</p>
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In further pursuit of this reference to 'Joseph Conrad, writing about Miss Fox Smith many years ago,' I wrote to the Honorary Secretary of the Joseph Conrad Society, Dr Hugh Epstein, whose initial trawl did not yield much to report. However, he wrote again a week later and I quote below from his correspondence, adding illustrations of the works to which he refers. My thanks to Dr Epstein.

16 May 2014

Conrad died on 3rd August 1924. On his desk when he died was an unfinished essay. Conrad's acolyte and general literary 'manager' during his later years was Richard Curle - not his literary agent, who was J.B. Pinker, and afterwards his son Eric Pinker, nor his typist who was Lillian Hallows - and Curle sought to promote Conrad in every way possible. So he rushed this essay into print in the Daily Mail, where it appeared on 15 August 1924, on p.8, under the title '**JOSEPH CONRAD'S LAST ARTICLE**'.

[illegible]

Later this article was collected under the title '*LEGENDS*' in what became '*LAST ESSAYS*', issued in 1926 as the final volume in the Dent Uniform edition of the works of Joseph Conrad. This has been the standard Conrad edition for academic reference until recently.

Now Cambridge University Press is about half way through its definitive edition of the works of JC, but '*LAST ESSAYS*' has already been published, and everything I am telling you is gleaned from this edition (edited by Ray Stevens and John Stape (2010)).

'*LEGENDS*' starts as a sceptical glance at '*The Golden Legend*', a text from the 13th century, and then passes to: '*However the legend I have in my mind has nothing to do with saints ... I have sailors in my mind.*' He then goes on to praise the '*consistent display of manhood*' shown by sailors, and to talk of '*the last days of sailing ships*' which he dates as being 1850-1910.

'That era has however had its historians such as Mr Basil Lubbock for instance ... And there is Miss C. Fox-Smith in whom I verily believe the quintessence of the collective soul of the latter-day seaman has found its last resting place and a poignant voice before taking its flight forever from the earth. Truth itself speaks in her verse - I can safely say since I (surprising thought) have one foot at least in that irrecoverable phase of old sea life for which their piety and their talents have done so much.'

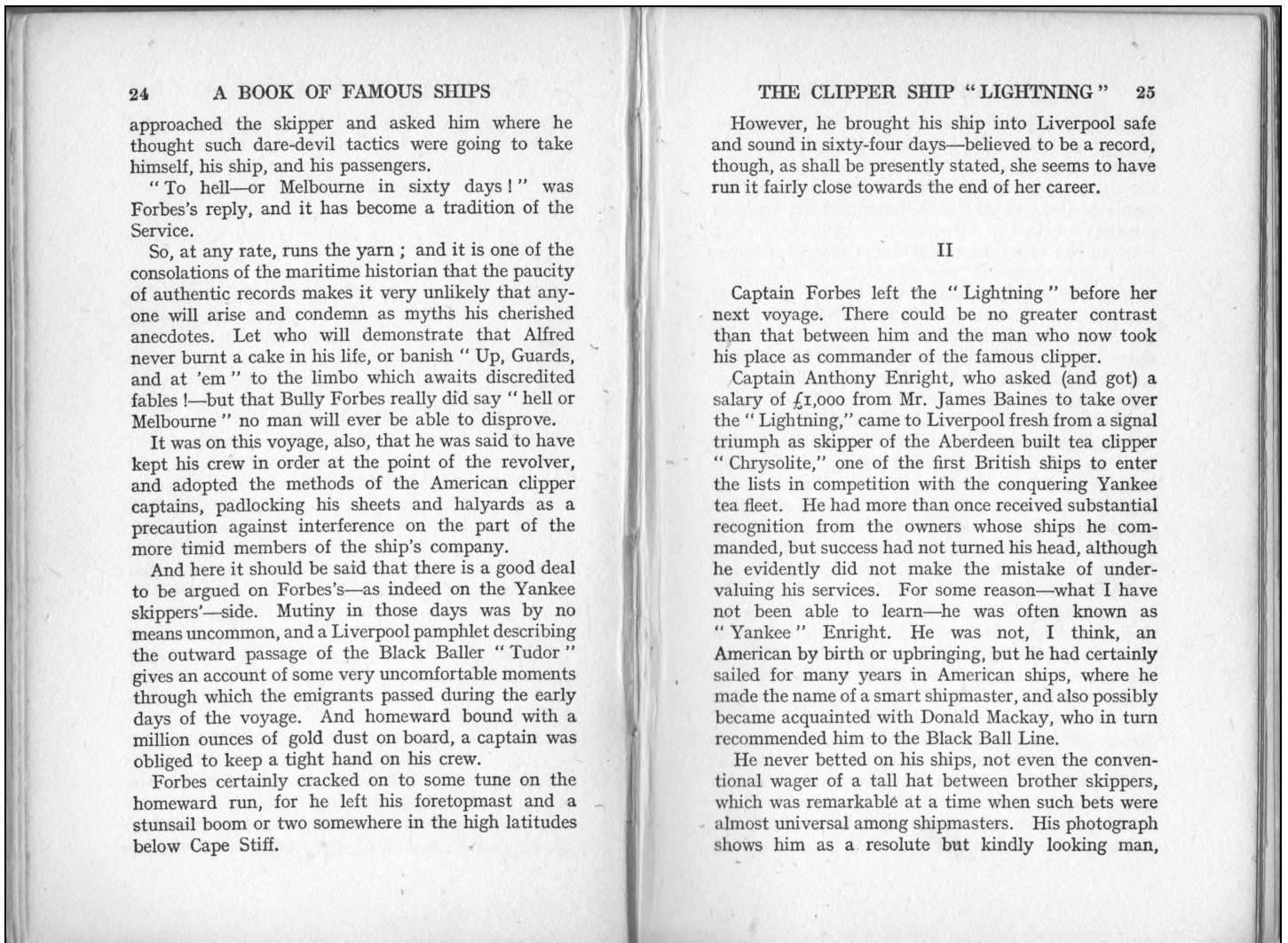
This is how the Cambridge Edition prints it. They have gone back to Conrad's own punctuation - you can see he tended not to use very much!

However, there is one more reference. He goes on to write of the legend connected with Captain James Nicol Forbes, of the *Marco-Polo*.... '*the most fatuous tale that ever cropped up in any legend of the sea.*' The penultimate paragraph of the essay runs:

'As adopted alas! (but the best of us may err) by Mr Basil Lubbock it runs that Forbes used to padlock the sheets of Marco-Polo's sails, one reviewer of Miss C. Fox-Smith's book explaining kindly: "to guard against the timid members of a crew" - a priceless phrase, whatever it may mean. What is a "timid member" and how do you recognise him? Anyhow I am sure he is a fitting person to play his part in that padlock story.'

The explanatory note in the Cambridge Edition quotes

'It was on this voyage, also, that he was said to have ... more timid members of the ship's company': **FOX-SMITH, A BOOK OF FAMOUS SHIPS P.24.**



I have read C F-S's sentence and Conrad's comment several times over and I can't quite see what he is getting at. It's clear he's criticising Lubbock and the reviewer, but whether or not C F-S herself, whom he has lavishly praised for truth only three paragraphs previously, I just can't make out. The essay is unfinished and full of crossings out and revisions, so it probably has not been quite worked into a final form here.

However, what you *can* say, is that the penultimate paragraph of everything that Conrad wrote referred to the work of Cicely Fox-Smith! I hope this puts a little bit of interesting flesh on the quotation that you already knew.

LEGENDS

1924

TO WATCH the growth of a legend is a sad occupation. It is
not so much because legends deal with people and things
5 finished and done with; that they spring as it were from amongst
the bones of dead men. Flowers (as I have seen myself) will do
that too. That's all in the order of nature and both flowers and
legends are upon the whole decorative, which is all to the good. I
have nothing against a legend twining its tendrils fancifully about
10 the facts of history or the tables of statistics (which can be fanciful
too, though they can never be made very decorative). They spring
up from noble soil, they are a form of memory which we all like
to leave behind us, that lingers about the achievement of men
who had their day and the vanished forms of things which have
15 served the needs of their time. One could welcome that fine form
of imaginative recognition of the past with nothing worse than
gentle melancholy which the passage of time brings in its train,
if it were not disfigured by touches of fatuity of which no legend
is wholly free, because I suspect that those who record its tales
20 as picked out on the lips of men are doing it in a spirit of love.
And that is only right and proper. But love is uncritical. It is an
enthusiastic state seeing romance in what may be not true to the
spirit of its subject, so to speak. And thus the false which is often
fatuous also creeps into a worthy or even noble story.

25 Or even into a holy story. *The Golden Legend* itself, the legend
of saints and their miracles, is an awful example of that danger –
as any one who turns over a few pages of it may see. Saintliness
is made absurd by the presentation of the miraculous facts them-
selves. It lacks spirituality in a surprising way.

30 Yes, fatuity lurks in all legends fatally by the effect of our com-
mon credulity. However the legend I have in my mind has nothing
to do with saints – but with beings at first sight infinitely differ-
ent, but whose lives were hard (no saint I take it ever slept on
a bed of roses) if not exactly ascetic, and if not hermit like yet
35 as far removed from the commonest amenities and the simplest

affections which make life sweet, and as much removed from the material interests of this world as the most complete spiritual renunciation could make it. Perhaps nobody would guess from what precedes that I have sailors in my mind. I do not mean to be irreverent if I insist that in a temporal sense there was much that was edifying in their lives. They did not work miracles to be sure but I have seen them repeatedly do all that men can do for their faith – if it was only the faith in their own manhood. And that is something surely. But there was something more in it, something larger – a fidelity to the demands of their calling which I verily believe was for all of them I knew both afloat and ashore vocational quite as much in its way as any spiritual call a man's nature has ever responded to. And all that for no perceptible reward in the praise of men and the favour of gods. I mean the sea-gods, an indigent pitiless lot who had nothing to offer to servants at their shrine but a ward in some hospital on shore or a sudden wedding with death in a great uproar, but with no gilding of fine words about it. *La mort sans phrases.*

In all this there is material for a fine legend if not of saintly virtues then of a consistent display of manhood. And the legend will not be long for the last days of sailing ships were short if one thinks of countless ages since the first sail of leather or rudely woven rushes was displayed to the wind. Stretching the period both ways to the utmost it lasted from 1850 to 1910. Just sixty years. Two generations. The winking of an eye. Hardly the time to drop a prophetic tear. For the pathos of that era lies in the fact that when the sailing ships and the art of sailing them reached their perfection they were already doomed. It was a swift doom, but it is consoling to know that there was no decadence.

That era has however had its historians such as Mr Basil Lubbock for instance whose devotion to the glory of the ships and the merits of the men has the character of one of those romantic passions that last a life-time. He if not of the brotherhood initiated with all the awful ceremonies of a Cape Horn passage speaks with inner knowledge. And there is Miss C. Fox-Smith in whom I verily believe the quintessence of the collective soul of the latter-day seaman has found its last resting place and a poignant voice before taking its flight forever from the earth. Truth itself speaks in her verse – I can safely say since I (surprising thought) have one foot at least in

that irrecoverable phase of old sea life for which their piety and their talents have done so much.

It is on that ground that I would remonstrate with Mr Lubbock against the admission into one of his Books of Sea Chronicles
5 of a tale which would degrade the character of any legend. The facts of a legend need not be literally true. But they ought to be credible and they must be in a sort of fundamental accord with the nature of the life it records that is with the character of its subject-matter. The subject of the Golden Legend is in fact the
10 celebration of a miracle-working holiness and the subject of any sea legend must be the celebration of the era of fair ships sailed with consummate seamanship – an era that seems as distant now as the age of miracles.

The history of the latter days of clipper ships and their men may
15 be said to begin with the *Marco-Polo* and the man who commanded her. His name was Forbes, and he is not a figure to stand at the head of a sea-legend. He lacked balance in his character. Luck alone made him and at the first sign of adversity he collapsed. But without going into the details of his short career I am sure I am
20 doing good service to his memory by trying to purge his record of the most fatuous tale that ever cropped up in any legend of the sea.

As adopted alas! (but the best of us may err) by Mr Basil Lubbock it runs that Forbes used to padlock the sheets of *Marco-Polo's* sails,
25 one reviewer of Miss C. Fox-Smith's book explaining kindly: "to guard against the timid members of a crew" – a priceless phrase, whatever it may mean. What is a "timid member" and how do you recognise him? Anyhow I am sure he is a fitting person to play his part in that padlock story.

30 I wonder who was the man to tell it? He must have been an ironmonger trying for a new outlet for his wares. And to what sort of audience. Personally I would have been afraid to tell it to the Horse-Marines that mysterious corps which is famed for its capacity to swallow anything in the way of a yarn.

Finally, 'LEGENDS' also appeared in the *New York Times Magazine Section*, 7 Sept. 1924 p.1-2, and a substantial extract from the *Daily Mail*, under the title 'CONRAD'S GREAT TRIBUTE TO MISS C. FOX-SMITH', appeared in the fortnightly trade journal *The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record*, 23 August 1924 (pp. 257, 259). (I am quoting Stevens and Stape in the Cambridge Edition).

August 23, 1924

The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record

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upon us as the booksellers to such a great population, the largest homogeneous group that any national book trade ever served. There is, in this, an obligation to the nation, to the writers who would talk to that nation, and to the profession we are in.

All of the visitors felt under obligation to President Denny and Mr. Saxton, of the English Association, who, by their introductions and "benediction," perfected the spirit of what I believe to have been a gathering of future significance as well as of present inspiration. I hope that international contacts between booksellers may increase from year to year, and America, I can safely say, will never fall short in its welcome to visitors.

The Log Book of a Mind

Mr. St. Loe Strachey's New Book,
"The River of Life"

MESSRS. HODDER & STOUGHTON announce for publication in the early autumn "The River of Life: A Diurnal Digression," by J. St. Loe Strachey, Editor of the *Spectator*. Mr. Strachey's new book is, in a sense, a continuation of his autobiographical "The Adventure of Living," published two years ago, but differs markedly from it in construction and in matter. "The River of Life" is written in the form of a diary, and while many entries refer to actual events in the writer's life during the last two years, especially to his travels in Provence and Italy, the book as a whole is rather a daily record of the mind, of reflections and day-dreams, of musing on books and men, than a record of actuality and reality. As in the former book, Mr. Strachey again writes poetry and criticism of poetry. But there are no politics, no economics, and no sociology in "The River of Life," but life itself in plenty, with the stream flowing at its own will.

Messrs. J. M. Ouseley & Son's New Books

In their latest list, Messrs. J. M. Ouseley & Son, Ltd., publishers, 9, John Street, Adelphi, W.C.2, appear an attractive assortment of books, including a volume on "Test Cricket," by Wm. P. H. Sparks, which gives all details of the England v. Australia matches from 1877 to 1921. In the fiction department are several novels worthy of mention. "The Odd Man Out," by Madge S. Thompson, is a vivid drama of village life. It is not what one would call a happy tale, for it concerns largely a country vicar's beautiful wife, who takes to brandy and elopes with a well-known bounder. This situation, however, is relieved by the brighter characters of the doctor and Nell, the vicar's sister. "The Inevitable," by William E. Haines, is a story revolving round a secret invention and the machinations of the various people who are anxious to obtain the plans. Here is a story, with its settings in London and Paris, full of excitement and originality. For those who like a novel devoted to family life we can recommend "Hugh Royston," by Katherine Pearson, rightly called "The History of a Prodigal Son." There is here plenty of rich humour of an original kind. We do not often read of a pair of lovers who are bewitched with dancing fauns lending beauty to the moonlight stillness and romance to lovers'

hearts. It is a pity one of them sniggered, thus proving too much reality. But besides this, there is a pathos from youthful passions and dislike of discipline so common in these days and told with sincerity.

Other items in the list include "The Star of Rome," by José Mora; "A Snake in Eden," by Muloy Ouseley, and "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," by Dickens, completed by W. E. C. There are also interesting miscellaneous and poetical publications, while the "Self-Help Business Books," at prices varying from 1s. to 4s. 6d., need no introduction to our readers.

Messrs. Chapman & Hall's New Imprint Device

MESSRS. CHAPMAN & HALL, LTD., the well-known publishers, announce the award in their ten-guinea prize competition for the best device for an imprint. It will be remembered that the competition was confined to artists connected directly with the book trade. Upwards of 60 designs were sent in, and we reproduce the winning one submitted by Mr. Charles J. Jennings, who is connected with the firm



The Imprint Device designed by Mr. Chas. J. Jennings.

of K. Bensted, of 28, Park Parade, Harlesden, N.W.10. Among other competitors to run the winner close were Mr. F. C. Denham, of Messrs. Morgan Brothers, 42, Cannon Street, E.C.4; Mr. A. F. Brownell, of Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall; Mr. Frank Parker, of Messrs. Sisson & Parker, of Nottingham, and Mr. P. R. Jerrard, of the Bethnal Green Public Library. Messrs. Chapman & Hall propose to use the winning device on all their title pages, and also as a trade mark in connection with advertisements.

A New Title Wanted

MESSRS. JOHN CASTLE, 7, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2, have decided to re-name "Another Alice Book, Please," the attractive children's book by Mr. A. L. Gibson. They are offering a prize of twenty-five guineas to the reader who sends in what, in the opinion of "Uncle Dick" of the *Daily Mirror*, is the best alternative title, while there will be twenty consolation prizes of half-a-guinea to the twenty next best suggestions. To the bookseller who sold the copy of the book to the first prize winner Messrs. John Castle will award ten guineas, and to his assistant (or assistants) five guineas. Full particulars of the scheme will be found in our advertisement pages.

'The Sea: Its History and Romance'

THE above is the title of a new work by Mr. Frank C. Bowen to be published in about twenty monthly parts by Messrs. Halton & Truscott Smith, Ltd., 57, Haymarket, S.W.1. It will be profusely illustrated with nearly a hundred of the illustrations in colour. The first part will be published immediately, while Part 2 will follow in October. The size is 11 by 9 inches, and the price is 2s. 6d. net per part. Messrs. Halton & Truscott Smith have posters and other advertising matter in preparation, and there should be a big demand for what will prove to be, we have no doubt, a very popular publication.

A Correction

By an oversight the price of "The Founding of New England" and "Revolutionary New England," both by James Truslow Adams, in the advertisement of the American Book Supply Co. in last week's PUBLISHERS' CIRCULAR was given as 30s. each. The correct price is 25s. each.

Conrad's Great Tribute to Miss C. Fox-Smith

On Friday, August 15, 1924, the *Daily Mail* published Joseph Conrad's last article entitled "Legends"—a fine tribute to the last days of sailing ships. It is an article which will make that issue of the *Daily Mail* precious in the eyes of Conrad's countless admirers. In it we were glad to see a great tribute to a lady, Miss Cicely Fox-Smith, than whom few men, and no woman, have ever written better about the sea and sailors. With all the more pleasure we read Conrad's tribute as having been her first publisher.

Conrad on the Sailor's Vocation

"Perhaps nobody could guess from what precedes that I have sailors in my mind. I do not mean to be irreverent if I insist that in a temporal sense there was much that was edifying in their lives. They did not work miracles, to be sure, but I have seen them repeatedly do all that men can do for their faith—if it was only the faith in their own manhood. And that is something, surely. But there was something more in it, something larger, a fidelity to the demands of their calling which I verily believe was for all of them I knew, both afloat and ashore, vocational quite as much in its way as any spiritual call a man's nature has ever responded to. And all that for no perceptible reward in the praise of man and the favour of gods—I mean the sea-gods, an indigent, pitiless lot, who had nothing to offer to servants at their shrine but a ward in some hospital on shore or a sudden wedding with death in a great uproar, but with no gilding of fine words about it. *La mort sans phrases*."

"In all this there is material for a fine legend, if not of saintly virtues, then of a consistent display of manhood. And the legend will not be long, for the last days of sailing ships were short if one thinks of the countless ages since the first sail of leather or rudely-woven rushes was displayed to the wind. Stretching the period both ways to the utmost, it lasted from 1850 to 1910. Just sixty years. Two

generations. The winking of an eye. Hardly the time to drop a prophetic tear. For the paths of that era lies in the fact that when the sailing ships and the art of sailing them reached their perfection they were already doomed. It was a swift doom, but it is consoling to know that there was no decadence.

"That era has, however, had its historians, such as Mr. Basil Lubbock, for instance, whose devotion to the glory of the ships and the merits of the men has the character of one of those romantic passions that last a life-time. He is now of the brotherhood initiated with all the awful ceremonies of a Cape Horn passage. He speaks with much knowledge."

"And there is Miss C. Fox-Smith, in whom I verily believe the quintessence of the collective soul of the latter-day seaman has found its last resting-place and a poignant voice before taking its flight for ever from the earth. Truth itself speaks in her verse—I can safely say, since I (surprising thought) have one foot, at least, in that irrecoverable phase of old sea life for which their piety and their talents have done so much."

Conrad's Difficulty with Our Language

It is said, in one or two of his obituaries, that Joseph Conrad took to English as naturally as a duck takes to water, that he quite easily mastered the language in which he had elected to write, and that henceforth he had very little difficulty in expressing himself as fully and freely as his high ideals of style constrained him. That, bluntly was never the case. I remember that after he had published six or seven books he was still puzzled and vexed by certain subtly simple words such as "like" and "as," "who" and "whom," "that" and "which." I spent hours in discussing with him the finer differences between these words, their shades and nuances of meaning, and he wrought upon the examples I quoted or invented in agony and bloody sweat for days on end.

He was then always pressed for money. He envied me my facility, and wanted very much to do the sort of hackwork that I was doing to keep the pot a-boiling. And he could not. He was too great an artist to truckle to popular taste, even in the most legitimate way. His MSS., as I visualise them and as I see them mirrored before me in the stiff, angular calligraphy of his letters, were thick with interlineations and strewn with blanks or starred with French or other foreign words or phrases when he could not hit upon the right English word or phrase.—EDWIN PUGH on "Joseph Conrad"—*T.P.'s and Cassell's Weekly*, August 23.

Reflected Glory

AMERICAN AUTHOR: Hooray! My book has actually been noticed by an English periodical. HIS WIFE: Just what does that mean, dear? "Why, it's the beginning of an American reputation."—*Judge*.

From the University London Press, Ltd.
—"Spiritual Healing," by Harold Anson, M.A. We acknowledge the second impression of this book, which is an able Discussion of the Religious Element in Physical Health.

Book Collecting in England's County Capitals

Some Notes and Comments

BY A BOOK COLLECTOR.

A FEW notes on book hunting in some of the County Capitals of England may be of interest to readers, and are briefly given below. I have been greatly surprised on many occasions at the low prices asked for really good books in county towns, and it is no exaggeration to say that in almost every instance one has to pay four or five times these amounts if such works are purchased in London.

Starting with a county early in the alphabet, namely, Berkshire, its county capital, Reading, needs no introduction to collectors as a book-hunting centre. Books sell rapidly in Reading, as on several occasions I have proved. Although I give Reading catalogues immediate attention, I am very often too late to secure items which I order, as they have been snapped up by other more astute book hunters.

Cambridge, as a county capital, is a paradise for book hunters, as books on every conceivable topic are to be found on the shelves of its shops—in very large numbers, too.

Carlisle, Cumberland's great county capital, I have already praised as a book-hunting centre, and will pass it over now by merely mentioning that it is living up to its reputation in this connection. I am hoping to pay it another visit in a few weeks' time.

Going now south, many people imagine that Devonshire is not a book-hunting county at all. Exeter, however, its county capital, is a book-hunting centre *par excellence*, and it was there that I first started to collect old books many years ago. I have kept in touch with Exeter firms ever since, and not regretted doing so either. I find prices are most reasonable, and the treatment exceedingly prompt and courteous in every way.

With regard to Dorchester, Dorsetshire's county capital, I made a few comments on this in an article which appeared some weeks ago. Needless to say, I am looking forward to my next visit to this place, and hope it will be soon.

Durham is a large county and contains many important towns. Its county capital, as far as I have found it, is not one of the best as a book-hunting centre, but the probability is that I may have to revise my opinion after a further prowl.

Gloucester is another county capital which needs very little introduction to book collectors, as I soon found out. I do not know the city well, but am hoping to become more familiar with it in the near future. Most of my book-hunting business here has been done by post, and I have been very satisfied.

Maidstone, Kent's county capital, is, as already noted, an excellent centre for book hunters. During last winter I was in it on many occasions, and thought that I had visited every book-shop in the place. Since then, I have received some reports of interesting items from firms I did not know about, and on returning to the south, as I hope to do at the end of the

present autumn, I shall look forward to some further prowls round Maidstone.

Lancaster and Leicester are two county capitals giving excellent scope for book hunting. Probably Leicester is the better known as a "booky" place, but personally I have had more items of interest from Lancaster. As I am in the north a good deal during the summer months, I have been able to visit Lancaster on many more occasions than I have Leicester, and I hardly ever go there without carrying a large parcel of books away with me.

With regard to Norwich and Northampton, these county capitals well deserve a visit. Norwich, at first, I was inclined to be disappointed with, but I have since received a number of valuable reports of books from dealers there, and look on it now as a premier centre for book hunting in the eastern counties. With regard to Northampton, one of the biggest book bargains I ever bought came from there, the price being about one-eighth of what one would have had to have paid for the item in London.

Newcastle, Northumberland's county capital, has already been mentioned in earlier articles, and it is certainly living up to its reputation as a first-class centre for book hunting. There is plenty of scope in the city, as there are a good many book-shops, both new and antiquarian. Prices are cheap in Newcastle, and dealers there seem to have a knack of knowing just what one is after on any particular visit, and of getting it for us with very little delay, if they are not able to supply it at the moment.

A whole article might well be written dealing with Oxford as a place for book hunting. Abler pens than mine have praised it, and justifiably, too, since there is no city in the British Isles that can beat it in this respect. Fortunately, I am able to visit it fairly often, as I can arrange in going north to have a few hours in Oxford between my trains. I have never yet visited Oxford without bringing away with me several very interesting items to add to my library.

Suffolk and Sussex each have two county capitals, as the counties are now divided into the east and western halves. I have not had much experience with Ipswich or Bury St. Edmunds, nor with Lewes and Chichester. One of my friends, who is also a collector, tells me that each of these four places is well worth a visit, and I shall hope to descend upon them at the first opportunity.

York is one of the easiest book-hunting centres to reach, as there are through trains to it from almost everywhere. I have had some quite good items from it at various times, and always look forward to my visits. With regard to the county capitals of the three ridings of Yorkshire, Wakefield has so far proved to be the best.

I have not had much experience with dealers in several of the smaller county capitals, such as Bodmin in Cornwall, Brentford in Middlesex, Oakham in Rutland, Taunton in Somerset, and Appleby in Westmoreland, but the probability is, however, that some or all of these will prove excellent centres for collecting, and I am looking forward at the earliest opportunity to making the acquaintance of any dealers who may have books to offer in them.

It will be noticed that in the present

That's what I've come up with - no personal links or letters I am afraid to say - but something, nevertheless.

With best wishes

Hugh

(DR HUGH EPSTEIN, HONORARY SECRETARY, JOSEPH CONRAD SOCIETY)