

THE CLASSIC BOOKS OF AMERICA

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

WHEN the two articles on books, English and foreign, which I wrote for *The Saturday Evening Post*, appeared, a number of readers expressed the desire that I should now write one on American books. Not without misgiving, I agreed to do the best I could in the matter.

I want to make my position clear. Though in the course of a long life I have read a great many American books—indeed I could not have been more than ten when with gales of laughter I read Artemus Ward and Helen's Babies—I cannot pretend that I have read nearly as widely as any American fond of reading will certainly have done. There is no reason why I should. I have read at random. There are books in every country that have only a local interest, and the native of another country cannot be expected to find in them much to his purpose.

I have not, for example, felt any need to read the works of Jonathan Edwards and I have found the dialect of Uncle Remus a stumbling block too difficult for me to cope with. I claim no authority for any of the opinions I shall here express; I shall state why I hold them; but I freely acknowledge that they are those of an Englishman who has read from his national standpoint and whose opinions thus have a certain bias. I have sought what was most American in American literature and have felt little inclination to concern myself with such writers as found their inspiration in England. To interest me an American book must smack of the soil.

I propose to deal only with those works which may be justly regarded as classic. I shall omit all mention of recent productions, partly from an inadequate knowledge of them and partly because it is too soon to tell what in the immense output of the last fifty years will prove to be of permanent and characteristic value.

Contrary to some critical opinion it is no proof that because a great many people have wanted to read a book and so made it a best seller, it is worthless; *David Copperfield*, *Father Goriot* and *War and Peace* have all been best sellers; but neither is it proof that it is a masterpiece: It may appeal for any one of a dozen reasons, and when those reasons no longer obtain, it may be unreadable. My own plan is never to let myself be persuaded to read a best seller for two or three years after publication; it is astonishing then how many books that have been received with acclamation I find I can, without loss, leave unread.

Where Literature Starts

CONSCIOUS that my knowledge was imperfect, when I prepared to gather the materials for this article, I read two or three standard histories of American literature. I wanted to compare my views with those of the highest authorities and, when I found that they did not agree, consider whether my own should be modified. But I was very much surprised to discover that they were almost exclusively

concerned with matters that I thought had nothing to do with literature.

They enlarged, often in an interesting fashion, and I have no doubt with sound judgment, upon the social conditions which prevailed when such-and-such an author wrote, and upon the political circumstances which influenced his work; they discussed his ideas on the burning questions of the day and examined the philosophical implications of his thought. And what not. But they did not seem to think it worth while to say much about his style; they seemed to take small interest in solidity of construction, ingenuity of invention or originality of characterization. I could find no mention of the fact that their authors' works were very readable. It seemed,

in short, to have entirely escaped the attention of these conscientious gentlemen that a book may be read for delight and that literature is an art.

But literature is an art. It is not philosophy, it is not science, it is not social economy, it is not politics; it is an art. And art is for delight.

There is but one more thing to say before I get down to the business of commenting on the books I have chosen to speak of. It must not be expected that they will make such a show as those I briefly discussed in my previous articles. "Genius" is a word often loosely applied; I would not myself apply it to the author of three or four successful plays or of two or three successful novels; genius, to my mind, is something that arises very

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HERBERT JOHNSON'S CARTOON



OUT FOR KEEPS?

THE CLASSIC BOOKS OF AMERICA

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rarely and I am not sure that I would be comfortable in applying it to any of the authors I shall presently mention. It is well enough to have talent. American literature is not much more than a hundred years old. It is only just to remember that English literature would not be the magnificent monument to the English spirit that it is if you left out of it, to say nothing of Chaucer, Shakespeare and the great poets and prose writers of the seventeenth century, the whole of the eighteenth; if it had no Pope, no Swift, no Fielding, no Doctor Johnson and no Boswell.

Yet it is with a book written in the eighteenth century that I propose to begin. The histories of literature contain few autobiographies; they contain none more consistently entertaining than that of Benjamin Franklin. It is written plainly, as befitted its author, but in pleasant, easy English, for Franklin, as we know, had studied under good masters; and it is interesting not only for its narrative but for the vivid and credible portrait which the author has succeeded in painting of himself.

I cannot understand why, in America, Franklin is often spoken of with depreciation. It is obvious that he was not a romanticist. He was shrewd and industrious. He was a good businessman. He wished the good of his fellow men, but was too clear-sighted to be deceived by them, and he used their failings with pawky humor to achieve the ends, sometimes selfish, it is true, but as often altruistic, that he had in view. He liked the good things of life, but accepted hardship with serenity. He had courage and generosity. He achieved great things for his country, his state and the city in which he dwelt. To my thinking he is as truly the typical American as Doctor Johnson is the typical Englishman, and when I ask myself why it is that his countrymen are apt to grudge him their sympathy, I can only think of one explanation. He was entirely devoid of hokum.

The Scarlet Letter

Now let us come without further delay to the nineteenth century. The outstanding figures are Herman Melville, Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe, and if I were constrained to ascribe genius to three American writers I would unhesitatingly ascribe it to these. But I will not speak of them yet. What I want to trace in this article is the emergence of Americanism in American literature, for that is what chiefly interests me and should, I think, interest you; and so I shall attempt no chronological order.

I may add, to save repetition, that I shall only speak of books which I think are, for one reason or another, eminently readable. No one can afford not to read them; no educated person can fail to receive both profit and pleasure from their perusal.

I am bound to confess, however, that on rereading The Scarlet Letter for my present purpose the profit and pleasure I gained were of a limited character. I see no harm in putting things in their proper place and I must point out to you that the last forty years have seen the rise in America of at least half a dozen much better novelists than Hawthorne ever was. It is only prejudice

and the fact that they are alive and in our midst that can bind us to it. But The Scarlet Letter is a famous romance and it has been read, I suppose, by every American who has read anything at all.

For my part I found the introduction, entitled The Custom House, more interesting than the tale. It has charm, lightness and humor. The first thing you ask of a novel is that you should believe it; if you feel instinctively that the characters do not behave with ordinary common sense the spell is broken and the novelist has lost his hold on you.

Now, Hawthorne, early in his narrative, was faced with a difficulty; there seemed no reason why Hester Prynne, free to go anywhere, should have decided to remain in the place where the humiliation to which she had been exposed made her life intolerable; and he solved it naturally enough by suggesting that her love for Arthur Dimmesdale was so great that she preferred, notwithstanding the attendant shame, to remain where he was. But Hawthorne did not face a much greater difficulty, for if he had he could never have written the story he did: The facts of life were not unknown to the Puritans, who were as practical as they were pious, and no stork brought the baby to a Hester who never conceived that such an event was in prospect. It is incredible that she should not have gone to some distant place to be secretly delivered of it, and if the lovers could not bear to be separated, since on a later occasion they had no difficulty in arranging to sail back to Europe together, it is hard to understand why they should not have adopted such an obvious course when the occasion was so much more urgent. For all they knew, Roger Chillingworth was dead and, like Benjamin Franklin with the respectable Miss Read, a century later, they could have effected a common-law marriage.

Hawthorne did not possess the gift of creating living characters; Roger Chillingworth is merely a bundle of malignancies, not a human being, and Hester is but a fine piece of statuary. The Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale comes to

life only when, the pair having finally decided on flight, he is anxious to know the precise time at which the vessel on which they propose to sail may be expected to depart. He has composed his Election Sermon and is unwilling not to deliver it. That is a nice and human touch.

It is not, then, for its story that I would have you read The Scarlet Letter and, if you have done so already, to read it again, but for the impressive quality of its style. Hawthorne formed his style on the great writers of the eighteenth century. Such a phrase as: "There was never in his heart so much cruelty as would have brushed the down off a butterfly's wing," might well have been written by Sterne and he would have been pleased with it. Hawthorne had a delicate ear and great skill in the construction of an elaborate phrase. He could write a sentence half a page long, rich with subsidiary clauses, that was resonant, balanced and lucid. He could be splendid and various. His prose had the sober opulence of a Gothic tapestry, but so restrained was his taste that it never became turgid or monotonous. His metaphors were significant, his similes apt, and his language fitting to his matter.

Fashions come and go in literature and it may well be that the roughneck prose which is in favor today will, in the future, lose its vogue. It may be that readers will ask for a more formal, a more distinguished way of writing; authors then will be glad to learn from Hawthorne how to manage a sentence of more than half a dozen words, how to combine dignity with lucidity, and how, without pedantry, to please both the eye and the ear.

Since Hawthorne belongs to what historians of literature call the Concord School, of which Emerson and Thoreau were distinguished members, this seems a fitting place to speak of them. The interest of Walden must depend on the taste of the reader. For my part, I read it without boredom, but without exhilaration. It is the kind of work which needs an author of a vigorous personality, with a background of singular experience and a store of out-of-the-way learning; but Thoreau

was a man of a supine character, his experience was narrow, and his reading, though respectable, followed a well-trodden path. I do not think he had the emotional force to make his experiment very important. He discovered that if you limit your wants you can satisfy them at small expense. We knew that.

"It contributes greatly towards a man's moral and intellectual health," says Hawthorne, "to be brought into habits of companionship with individuals unlike himself, who care little for his pursuits, and whose sphere and abilities he must go out of himself to appreciate." This is very true, and none should take it more to heart than the writer of books.

Emerson's Essays

Emerson, of course, is a figure of much greater substance, but I must admit that he has never been a solace to me. I do not wish to speak disrespectfully of a writer in whom his fellow countrymen take pride; I recognize the charm and benignity of his character; when you read his journals you cannot but be impressed by the thoughtfulness which, even when he was no more than a young boy, possessed him, and by the fluency with which he expressed himself; and since he was a lecturer, with the platform in view when he wrote, it may be that his voice and presence added a significance to his discourse which is lost in the printed page; but I can only say that I cannot find much profit or entertainment in his celebrated Essays.

Often he hardly escapes the commonplace by a hair's breadth. He had a gift of the picturesque phrase, but too often it is empty of meaning. He is a nimble skater who cuts elegant and complicated figures, but a surface of frozen platitudes. Perhaps he would have been a better writer if he had not been quite so good a man. But since, in the case of so celebrated an author, one's natural curiosity leads one to want to know what it is that has given him such a position in the world of letters, I should recommend you to read his English Traits. In this book he was bound down to the concrete and so there is less in it of the vague, loose and superficial thinking which in his Essays he was apt to indulge in; it is the most vivid, actual and entertaining of his works. I certainly read it with pleasure.

It may be that the writers of the Concord School have a value to Americans which the foreigner cannot hope to comprehend; he must be content to leave it and pass on. This is not the case with Edgar Allan Poe; indeed he is, I think, more honored in Europe than in the land of his birth, and in France, for example, his influence is still powerful upon his fellow writers. It may be that his moral character and the unsatisfactory nature of his life have caused some Americans to hold him in less esteem than he deserves. But neither an author's character nor his life has anything to do with the reader, who is concerned only with his works.

Poe wrote the most beautiful poetry that has ever been written in America. It is like some of those great pictures of the Venetians, whose sudden loveliness takes your breath away so that, for the moment satisfied by the appeal to your



"Perhaps, dear, he's marrying this other girl just to make you jealous."

senses, you do not care that they can give you no matter for your fancy to work upon. They have nothing but their beauty to offer, but their beauty is overwhelming.

Poe was an acute critic and his analysis of the art of the short story has been effective on the practice of his successors. He wrote brief tales in various manners which have never been excelled. I need hardly remind you that in *The Gold Bug* and the stories in which figures Monsieur Dupin he invented the detective story, which has resulted in the flood of books which we all of us at times are glad to read. The field has been cultivated by great many writers with variety and success, but in essentials no one has added anything to what he at his first attempt accomplished.

It may be that his stories of horror and mystery owe something to Hoffmann and to Balzac, but they wonderfully achieve the end he set himself, for he was the most self-conscious of artists, and they deserve their renown. He wrote in a turgid style, and he was lavish of romantic accessories; his dialogue was as bombastic as his people and his range was narrow; but that you have to put up with. What he has to give us is unique. He wrote very little and almost all he wrote can be read with enjoyment. But there is nothing peculiarly American in him; there is nothing that I can remember either in his prose or in his verse that would not have been written by an Englishman, and if we are looking in American literature for something that has in it a relish of the soil we must certainly seek further.

But before doing this I must speak of an author who turned his back deliberately on the American scene. Henry James was not the greatest writer that America has produced, but surely the most distinguished. His gifts were conspicuous; but there was some defect in his character, one must suppose, that prevented him from making the most of them. He had humor, insight, subtlety, a sense of drama; but a triviality of soul that made the elemental emotions of mankind—love and hatred, the fear of death and the sense of life's mystery—uncomprehensible to him. No one ever plumped the surface of things with a keener setting, but there was no indication that he was ever aware of the depths beneath it.

Henry James' Best Book

He looked upon *The Ambassadors* as his best novel. It read it again the other day and I was appalled by its emptiness. It is tedious to read on account of its convoluted style; no attempt is made to render character by manner of speech and everyone speaks like everyone else, in pure Henry James; the only living person in the book is Mrs. Newsome, who never appears in the book. Sober is a silly, meanly inquisitive old woman. It would be intolerable but for Henry James' great gift—the novelist's essential gift—of carrying the reader on from page to page by the desire to know what is going to happen next and by the wonderful stamper of Paris in spring and summer which no one, to the best of my knowledge, has so exquisitely conveyed.

I much prefer *The American*. It is written with lucidity and elegance, with some pomposity perhaps—people do not go away, they depart; they do not go home, they return to their domiciles; and they do not go to bed, they retire—but that gives it a period flavor

that I do not find displeasing. It is a curious novel in this respect, that it is a love story in which there is no love. The characters are not human beings; the men are stuffed shirts and the women are crinolines. For all that, *The American* is well worth reading. So great is Henry James' skill in telling a story, so rare his sense of suspense and so sure his touch in working up a dramatic situation, that you are held from beginning to end. It is as exciting as a detective story and after all, no more incredible; and you cannot remain unconscious of the charm of contact with the author's distinguished, urbane and cultivated mind. *The American* is not a great book, but it is a very readable one; there are not many novels of which you can say that sixty years after their appearance,

The Stature of Melville

I will speak of a great book now. This is *Moby Dick*. I read Melville's South Sea books, *Omoo* and *Typee*, when I was myself on the islands and I read them with interest and pleasure, but I have never been tempted to read them again, and I have needed the opinion of good critics that Melville went to pieces when he wrote *Pierre* and I have not read it. But *Moby Dick* is enough for any man's reputation.

Some critics have complained of the flamboyance of its style. To my mind it was written in a manner that wonderfully suits the theme. Grandiloquence is an affair of hit or miss; when it comes off you may reach the sublime, when it doesn't you descend to the ridiculous. I will admit that sometimes Melville does so descend, but it is beyond human powers to walk always on the top-most heights and his tumbles may be condoned when you consider how splendidly, with what a noble force, with what a sustained splendor of phrase, he writes his best passages. I will confess that there are a number of chapters, the chapters of nautical lore mugged up in a library, those dealing with the natural history of the whale, which I find tedious; but you have to accept the idiosyncrasies of an author of great parts. Homer sometimes nods and Shakespeare can write passages of empty rhetoric. I fancy that Melville set great store on his second-rate knowledge. But in the scenes at New Bedford; when he describes events, the killing of whales and the incidents on shipboard; when he deals with men, harpooners, mates, and, of course, above all the tremendous Ahab; there is no equal.

There is a throb, a mystery, a foreboding, a passion, a sense of the horror and the terror of life and of the inevitableness of destiny and of the power of evil, which take you by the throat. You are left shattered, but strangely uplifted. And you are a writer you are proud to think that you cultivate an art which is capable of such altitudes and which can work such wonderful effects on the hearts and senses and minds of men.

But though Melville began his story in New Bedford and the action takes place in the northern whaler, I do not find in his book that flavor of the soil which because it is specific is valuable, that I am looking for. His culture was European. His prose gives you the impression of having been founded on that of the great English stylists of the seventeenth century. And though his characters, at least the important ones, are American, they are so by accident; they are a little larger than life size and



HEY! THAT'S "NO FAIR"! Hit the puck, not Jimmy's hand. And as for you, Jimmy; ask mother to treat that skinned knuckle and then to put on a Band-Aid to help protect it. Band-Aid is a ready-made band-

age of gauze and adhesive. So quick and easy to put on! And once on, it stays put. Just the thing for hard-to-stay places. Be sure you get the genuine Band-Aid, with the Red Cross on the box.

they are inhabitants really of no definite country, but native to that thrilling and strange land in which live and torture one another the persons of Dostoevski's novels and the stormy creatures of Wuthering Heights.

It would be difficult in any case, and impossible in the short space at my disposal, to say exactly what I mean by the American tang; it is in literature that characteristic which differentiates a work from any that could possibly have been written in another country and so marks it as the ineluctable product of its environment; but I can point to a very good instance of it. You have it unmistakably in Mark Twain and he gives it to you in all its richness and vigor in Huckleberry Finn.

This book stands head and shoulders above the rest of his work. It is an authentic masterpiece. At one time Mark Twain was somewhat patronized because he was a humorist and the pundits are apt to look askance at contemporary humor, but his death has reassured them and now he is, I think, universally accepted as one of the greatest of American authors.

I need in consequence say little about him. I would only point out one circumstance. When Mark Twain tried to write in a literary manner he produced the *Life of Huckleberry Finn*, but in indifferent "journalism," as in Huckleberry Finn he had the happy idea of writing in the person of his immortal hero and so produced a model of the vernacular style which has served as a foundation for some of the best and most characteristic writers of the present day. He showed us that in this manner of writing is not to be sought in the seventeenth and eighteenth century writers of England, but in the current speech of their own people.

It would be foolish to suppose that the language in which Huck Finn expresses himself is what modern writers call "representational"; no literature small or large could have conceived such neat phrases or made such an apt choice of epithets. Perhaps because he thought it beneath the dignity of literature to write thus colloquially in the first person, Mark Twain, using a literary artifice which

we gladly accept, made believe that these were the actual utterances of his little hero; and in so doing freed American style from the shackles that had so long bound it.

Huckleberry Finn, with its amazing variety of invention, its gusto and life, is in the tradition of that great and celebrated variety of fiction, the picturesque novel; and it holds its place as a masterpiece of the comic novel of the genre, Gil Blas and Tom Jones; in fact, if Mark Twain had not had the unfortunate notion of bringing in that boring little mutt, Hound, Tom Sawyer, to ruin the last few chapters, it would have been faultless.

My space is growing so short that I can do no more than mention The Oregon Trail. Parkman made his journey less than a hundred years ago, and at that time buffaloes ranged the prairie in hundreds of thousands and the danger from hostile Indians was still something to be reckoned with. He was a man of courage, resolution and dry humor; his book is entertaining from cover to cover.

I must also say a few words about Emily Dickinson. I am afraid that I shall offend many persons in America when I confess that to my mind she has been accorded more praise than she deserves. She has been hailed as the great American poet. But poetry has nothing to do with nationality. Nor should our judgment be affected by the circumstances of a poet's life. That Emily Dickinson had an unhappy love affair and lived for many years in seclusion, that Poe tipped her and that she was loved by those who befriended him, neither makes the poetry of the one any better nor that of the other any worse.

Emily Dickinson is best read in anthologies. Then her wit, her poignancy, her simplicity make their utmost effect, and it may be that most anthropologists would be richer if they were less niggardly in their selections; but when you read the whole body of her work you are likely to be disappointed. She is at her best when she allows herself to sing; when her rhythm is modulated and varied, when her language serves her emotion and when

her invention is spontaneous. But she is too rarely at her best.

She had a strain of sophistication which induced her too often to sacrifice lyric beauty to a desire to make a clever point. In the short, epigrammatic poems she wrote, it is a matter of hitting the nail accurately on the head; she was very apt to give it a little tap slightly on one side. She had a gift, and a rare one, of making a convincing case when claims are made on her behalf which there is little in her work to justify. America will produce poets—indeed I am inclined to think it has already done so—which will make the encomiums lavished on Emily Dickinson appear extravagant.

As for the verse of Whitman to speak of, I have kept him to the end, because I think that it is in Leaves of Grass that we at last get, free from European influences, the pure and unadulterated Americanism which in this article we have sought. Leaves of Grass is a work of immense significance, for since I began by reminding you that I would recommend you to read books which, whatever their other merits, were enjoyable, I am constrained to tell you that few great poets have been more uneven than Whitman. I think many books are read which would be better if the critics speak of them as though they had no defects. Perfection is not of this world and generally merits can only be achieved at the cost of shortcomings.

Whitman was a writer of splendid beginnings, but either because he found his way of writing too easy or because he was so much in tune with his own verbosity, often enough he went on and on when he had nothing of significance to add to what he had already said. That you must accept. He wrote his poems partly in the rhythmic language of the Bible, partly in the sort of blank verse that was written in the eighteenth century, and partly in an uncouth pedestrian prose which offends the ear. That you must accept too. These defects are regrettable, but unimportant. It is easy to skip.

Leaves of Grass is a book to open anywhere and read as long as it pleases and then turn the pages and start at

random elsewhere. Whitman could write lines of pure and lovely poetry. He could turn phrases that thrill, and often he hit upon ideas that were wonderfully moving.

He had a vigor and a sense of life, in its manifold variety, in its passion, beauty and exhilaration, which an American may justly and with pride think truly American. He brought to literature a new contentment. He showed that it was not only to be found in moonlight, ruined castles and the pathos of lovesick maidens, but in streets and trains and steamboats, in the labor of the artisan and the humdrum toil of the farmer's wife, in work and ease—in all life, in short, and the whole of it.

Just as Wordsworth showed that you need not use poetic language to make poetry, but could make it out of the common words of our everyday speech, so Whitman showed that its subject matter was not only where the romantics had sought it but was all about you in the most usual circumstances of your daily round. His was not a poetry of escape, but a poetry of acceptance. It would be a dull-spirited American who could read Whitman without receiving a greater apprehension of the vastness of his country, the splendor of its resources and the illimitable hope that is contained in its future. I think, in Whitman, America, in literature, in truth became aware of itself. It is a virile, democratic poetry; it is the authentic battle cry of a new nation and the solid foundation of a national literature.

In European museums you sometimes see the genealogy of the house of Jesse figured as a tree with Adam massively outlined in the trunk and the branches ending in figures of the patriarchs and the Kings of Israel. If such a tree were made to represent the development of our American literature and the branches ended with the figures of O. Henry, Ring Lardner, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, Vachel Lindsay, Eugene O'Neill, and Edwin Arlington Robinson, the trunk would be rough-hewn in the splendid, dauntless and original shape of Walt Whitman.

THE GREAT FRONTIER

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"Okay," Steve said. His voice was shrill and trembling. "I wanted you to come back with the Laird and ferry to the coast to protect Trip Two in the morning. If I have to jump out of the Laird and let it crash, it's going to leave Trip Two uncovered. That'll wreck the line, if I have to." Then he snarled suddenly. "Go home and go to bed where you belong!"

Garretson was on his feet, and his eyes were small and hard. "If there was a chance I'd go," he said. "I know what can be done with an airplane and what can't, and if you start down there now, you're going to kill yourself. Well, kill yourself, and the hell with you."

Steve gave Bat Garretson a level look. "You've been telling me too long what I could do and what I couldn't, and what you'd do and what you wouldn't. I couldn't fire you, because you were so rough and tough and such a hero to the other men, and I had to have you. He snarled. "Boy, what hero you've turned out to be! I won't fire you now, because I'll not give you

a chance to make myself into a martyr, but before I'm done with you, you'll quit!" He whirled while Garretson stood there at Terry's desk, his face white, and went out into the waiting room.

He swung on his parachute and hurried out to the field, bucking his helmet strap. He ran awkwardly to the Laird, where Bat Olson was hoisting the supply bag and parachute into the front cockpit against the wind of the idling propeller.

Steve was easing the throttle open to taxi out across the field, when he heard a shout behind him. He snapped the throttle shut and looked around.

Bat Garretson, in flying suit and helmet, a parachute dangling from his thighs, came up to the cockpit through the snow.

"You're nuts!" he said. "You're absolutely nuts to start out into a mess like this! But if you've got guts enough to try it, I've got guts enough to ride with you. I'll climb into the forward cockpit. The supply bag being bulky, he took that on his lap.

The floodlight bloomed dazzlingly across the snow as Bat, inside the building, turned it on.

Steve gunned the ship and swung around. The floodlight laid a shallow fan of brilliance against the broad white field. Red flags were sentinels guarding him against the deeper drifts.

Steve lined the plane up with a lane of flags, using all the field that he could, and revved his engine carefully and gunned into the take-off, holding his breath. The wheels clattered softly as they rolled through the snow, bumping over the frozen ruts beneath.

The Laird did not get off. And the drags were getting deeper as Steve plunged into the dark. The plane, in deepening snow, slowed down.

Cursing, Steve made a wide, straining circle to reverse his course and go back along the tracks that he had made. He didn't dare cut back the throttle, for fear of nosing over, and for fear of getting stuck. He taxied back along the wheel tracks, turned around and hurried the ship into a second effort to get off.

That time he got a little farther. The acceleration was a little faster. The wheels had beaten down a path. But it was not enough.

Again and again and again he boiled out into the darkness through those wheel ruts, thrusting them each time a little farther, broadening them, packing the snow beneath them.

For the thirteenth time, Steve backed into the corner of the field. He shoved the gun wide open and the ship hurtled at the darkness that lay black beyond that strip of light. He pushed the stick all the way forward, lifting the tail dangerously high, trying to take the last ounce of drag off the wings during the acceleration. At the very end of the ruts, he snatched the stick back, feeling the tail sick bump the ground, feeling the wheels leap off, while the flowing whiteness of the earth melted to a rushing yellow spot beneath each landing light.

But as quickly as it had come off in the stall, the ship began to settle back again. Steve began to settle back again. Steve began to settle back again, and he was afraid to

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