

The Chapel Hill Weekly

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Cases of Negligence

The tales of death on the front page of your newspaper—of death in automobile and airplane accidents, in ship and train wrecks, in cave-ins and bridge and building collapses, in hurricanes and floods, from fire, from drowning, from the murderous acts of vicious and irresponsible men and women—all these, frightful as they are, follow so steadily upon one another, become such routine in our reading, that after a moment of horror we pass on to other parts of the paper or to absorption in our own tasks and pastimes. Nobody is to be blamed for this; it is not in human nature to be deeply grief-stricken about the troubles of people who are strangers and far away. But now and then one of these chronicles has in it an element of tragedy, a poignancy, that makes it linger in the mind.

Such was the article about the honeymooning couple, Mr. and Mrs. Oren A. Pruitt, who were going from Charlotte to Asheville last Wednesday by airplane to visit the bride's parents. Married in South Carolina the day before, they had planned to go by bus, but had missed the bus and bought tickets on a plane. Then they had transferred from their first-chosen plane to another that would get them to Asheville sooner.

About twenty minutes out of Charlotte Pruitt got up and went to the rear of the plane to get his wife a drink of water. She never saw him again. What happened was that he opened the door into the open air when he thought he was opening the door into the men's room. He fell 6,000 feet and his body was found near the Zion Church cemetery six miles north of Shelby.

At her parents' home in Asheville the heartbroken bride said: "We were having the time of our lives. New lives and starting all over. We'd been laughing and I know everybody knew we'd just been married. Oren said he'd be back in a minute. I heard a swoosh, the wind screaming in. Somebody said the door had blown off. I was afraid to look back there. A stewardess came to my seat and sat down beside me. I knew then."

Considering all that airlines do for the safety of passengers, it seems incredible that any line could fail to take such an obvious precaution as to mark a dangerous door so as to distinguish it from a safe door. Such marking to protect people's lives has been required by law at exit doors in theatres for generations. Surely nothing could be simpler than to put a red light on a door leading to the open air and beside or under the light some such warning as DANGER—DO NOT OPEN. If Pruitt's death was due to failure to do this, I call it criminal negligence.

The day after I read about this fatal fall from a plane I read about the killing of six children by a cave-in in an excavation of an expressway. It occurred in a crowded section of Brooklyn, and the cries of the children who barely escaped brought a crowd of people, including parents, brothers and sisters, and friends, running to the scene. The police estimated at 5,000 the number of spectators around the rim of the excavation and on the roofs of the surrounding buildings. Policemen and firemen worked for hours to get to the children. The use of machinery would have been dangerous, so all the digging had to be done by hand. The attempts at rescue went on for hours.

Police orders put the excavation off-limits for children immediately after work on it began several weeks ago, and policemen chased children away again and again, but there are many holes in the enclosing fence and the ramp for

About the Choice of Books

(By Sidney Swaim Robins)

An unforgettable piece of advice from Horace Williams, long teacher of philosophy at the Hill and a philosopher in person to hear many people tell it, was "to deal at first hand with great men." This advice has come to seem increasingly appropriate in all the recent years since the swelling spate of new books from the press has been on.

"Don't read books about Shakespeare; read Shakespeare. Don't read histories of philosophy; read Plato, Aristotle, Hegel. Don't read aspiring biographies of Washington, Franklin, Jefferson until after you have consulted the original sources of light and leading in person. Have confidence in your own mind and don't play around with the second-hand men. Go to the very power-house itself, put your head in where the lightning has been flashing a long time, and see if you don't get a spark yourself!" That is the way Old Horace would talk to his class.

Sometimes, by talking endlessly about a biography such as Morley's "Gladstone" or Beveridge's "John Marshall," or Allen's "Phillips Brooks," he did get his students all worked up to read what you might call "second-hand" books. But perhaps he thought of John Morley, Senator Beveridge and Alexander V. G. Allen as great men themselves.

One thing is certain: if the various kinds of Books of the Month, and all the familiar ways of choosing our reading for us, out of books just come pattering off the press, had been as developed in his day as in ours, they would have been objects of the most withering scorn he could command. He would have said: "Why let somebody else prescribe reading for you? You ought to be able to find the right books to read for yourself better than some commercial agent. And why not read books that you know are first-line material for the human race? If you think you have a mind, you can at least treat it half respectfully."

No doubt the Old Man's view on some books representing new fields in science, or new kinds of poetry or literature, and on their authors, would have been too narrow. Horace was a man of many prejudices, even if they were the salient and arresting kind that kept his words from getting past your ears. As soon as you could free yourself from him, you would be prepared to think. The real question about his advice, provided we do any general reading at all and have not succumbed to television or some other spoon-feeding agent of intellectual fodder, is whether we incline to just follow fashions and try to "keep up with the Joneses" in what we read.

Hail to those makers of "pocket-books" who are beginning to reprint the classics! They are widening everybody's choice beyond the range of the best-seller lists. And deep respects to the cult of the Hundred Great Books! They seem to bring an atmosphere of silence with them, causing the noise of those rolling presses to retire into the distance.

I know two villages where local groups, speared by recent college graduates, struggle through the winters with a set of The Hundred Great Books that has been made available in neat packet. One town is Old Plymouth, of the Pilgrims; and the other is Con-way where we now live. How many do you know? I wonder if they have to read the Hundred in a prescribed order?

The other day I walked into a real estate office and hailed a young woman who is a leader in the local group. Asked how they had been getting along through the months of snow and cold, she said the going was rather terrible. Books were over heads. Minds were getting snarled.

I risked quipping that was the way it ought to be, unless maybe there was a question of which famous book to read first. The musicians and artists are all calling for toll on the part of those who want to appreciate music and art just a little. Shall our minds demand themes and arguments that we do not have to live with a while before we get a clue or they begin to come unsnarled? Shall we read only what we can understand?

While the policemen and firemen were digging away with shovels and with their bare hands, people shouted the question: "Where was the watchman?"

There was no delay in starting an investigation; the Brooklyn prosecuting attorney was prompt to arrive with

Bob Ruark's Tribute to O. J. Coffin and Phillips Russell

Robert Ruark, the famous novelist and newspaper columnist, studied under O. J. Coffin and Phillips Russell as a journalism student at the University here. When he heard that Mr. Coffin and Mr. Russell had retired this summer from the University faculty he used them as a subject in one of his syndicated columns. He sent a carbon of his manuscript to his old friend, Walter Spearman, also a member of the faculty of the University's School of Journalism, along with a note asking Mr. Spearman to have it published in the Chapel Hill papers.

In his note Mr. Ruark, who lives in Palamos, Spain, said, in part, "I just found out about Coffin and Russell retiring, and hastened this piece into print. I enclose a carbon, and it would give me great pleasure if you could get it printed in Chapel Hill as some sort of a goodbye present. I feel such a debt to these old boys that I want them to know about it. They had more class as teachers than half the editors going."

Mr. Ruark's column follows: It was 22 years ago this week when I was shoved, a ruffled fledgling, from the cory nest of learning into a world which evinced no particular interest in how I intended to eat. Enough to say, I missed very few meals early on, and for some time have fed high on the hog.

I take no credit; the credit is due to two gentlemen who were formally pastured last week by the University of North Carolina, after about a hundred years of combined service. The names are Oscar Coffin, known as Skipper, who ran the Journalism School, and Phillips Russell, who looked after creative writing. If you think this is going to be an un sentimental piece, stop here.

What Chapel Hill and the writing trade will do without these two I couldn't say. Coffin, an old-time practical newspaper hand who used to write the soundest column I ever read — "Shucks and Nubbins" — knew more about the prime principles of journalism than any city editor I ever met—and this could be extended to include the higher brass.

Phil Russell, a fine biographer in his own right, taught writing for the love of it. Peering out from under the tangled tangle of his eyebrows, he dispensed an evaluation of words which was as fantastic as the one major hair that stretched from eyebrow to mustache. He was in love with words, and imparted the romance to his kids.

Possibly the new educators don't have what the old ones had, a sense of fellowship with their students. Coffin and Russell had a magnificent ability to bestow knowledge without patronage. Coffin was the clearing house for newspaper jobs in the Carolinas and Virginia. Russell honed down the raw material to where Coffin found it smooth enough to put handies on, and sell it. Neither was a fugitive from commercial work, seeking an ivory tower. Both were highly successful at their various trades, but were infected with an itch to teach. Between them they probably turned out more competent pros than any living mentors of anything.

Coffin, eyeglassed, hawk-nosed, sardonic, used to evaluate his new students with an order to write their own version of certain Biblical passages, just to see if the raw writer had any sense of the dramatic. I remember a rough time with Abraham and Isaac, as a news story, and on other excursions, have never been

quite certain whether somebody sold a birthright for a mess of potash or porridge or pottage.

Oscar used to read the stuff you wrote aloud, and the sarcasm that he could infuse into a rendition would have earned him an easy living on the stage. The Skipper was rough. Phil Russell was gentle. They both managed to achieve the same thing—a sense of responsibility.

Coffin made us cover courts and crime. Russell made us read before we wrote. Both knew what was wrong with what we wrote, and told us, one tough, the other softly. They worked in cahoots, in a benevolent conspiracy against stupidity.

The Skip got me my first job over a hooker of bootleg corn at a final dance, my senior year. "There's the awfulest job in the world in a horrible place called Hamlet, N. C.," he said. "It don't pay any money to speak of, and is altogether impossible. You're the only one I've got that's ornery enough to survive it. It starts Monday. Pass the jug." And so I went to work.

They were a fantastic team, together with Wallace Caldwell, who could make ancient history breath-taking, and Chick Harland—an archeology professor whose wit and lectures were so brilliant that I actually couldn't rest until I found him a new pyramid, which I did, just to pay him off.

They're education synthesized, in its best and truest sense, and I do hope the editors let this run long. It is so seldom a man gets a chance to make public thank-you to men who provide the nation with the best product they can produce from really awful raw material. Happy pasture, gentlemen, with all thanks and much love.

I Like Chapel Hill

By Billy Arthur

Add things I would have liked to have done: Call Bill Cherry while he was vacationing in Nassau and tell him HIS account was overdrawn.

Sol Lipman came into the Coffee Shop the other morning looking for his brother Jack who had just come up from Carolina Beach.

"Have you seen the 'Big Fisherman' today?" Sol asked.

Joe Robbins tells why he hasn't had a vacation in more than 40 years.

"When I first went to work," Joe said, "I took a man's place who had gone on vacation. When he got back, they put him on another job and let me keep his. Then, another man went on vacation, and I got his job for good. In 14 months, I had 11 promotions to better jobs, all because folks went on vacation. And I made up my mind I was never going to take one, because someone might come in and while I was away do a better job than I, and keep it. So I don't want to go away and take that chance."

We went in Danziger's the day Erwin was to get married. Dad E. B. Danziger was all dressed up, and we kidded him about it.

"First time in my life I ever changed clothes three times a day," he replied. "And all because I'm getting rid of a son. Looks like he could go on away without my having to change clothes, doesn't it?"

Noel Houston has been putting a prime coat of paint on his house preparatory to giving it a real going over.

"Hard job?" he asked, repeating my question. "No, not half as bad as I thought it was going to be. It's only twice as hard."

Joe Jones and I got to wondering the other day why girls no longer—well, not so often as in the old days—were named Prudence, Charity, Blessing, Mercy, Virtue, and so on. Can anyone help us with an answer?

twenty assistants. After examining the 25-foot-deep, 200-foot-square excavation, the site of which was composed of "shifting" soil made up mostly of clay and sand, he said: "This is not just negligence—it is criminal."

The children who were killed, all under ten years old, had been digging at a little cave. Other children had been playing an exciting game of cops and robbers just outside. Suddenly a chunk of wall about 25 feet wide buckled, covering the children in the cave with, according to the police estimate, "25 tons of dirt, rock, debris, and sand."

Whether crime was involved in either of these two tragedies, one in North Carolina and the other in New York—the answer to this question will have to await the outcome of legal processes. Even then it may be answered only in a strictly legal sense. We may all be sure that plenty of excuses will be made by company officials and plenty of plausible pleas in avoidance will be offered by their attorneys. If

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peal is based on misspelling deserve that scornful judgment. Naive, a word highly favored nowadays, as a term of disapproval, would undoubtedly be applied by literary critics to scores of these selections made by Mark Twain. I feel sure very few of the pieces in this book, if written today and offered to the New Yorker for publication, would be accepted. I suspect that a majority of Mark Twain's own twenty pieces would be turned down by the New Yorker.

When there is talk of the difficulty a foreigner has in learning to speak and understand English, a favorite illustrative case is the varied pronunciation of the combined vowels, ou.

Here are five words in which they have five different sounds: though, through, tough, sound, ought. Word experts in the University faculty could probably add to the list.

Strangers to our language are puzzled by hundreds, or thousands, of its irregularities and inconsistencies, and sometimes they are puzzled by misunderstandings that they create for themselves. The funniest of these that I ever heard of was one that Mrs. Mary Patterson Fisher told me that George E. Cutten told her about.

A foreigner—I don't remember where he came from: France? Spain? Italy?—once said to Mr. Cutten: "I don't want to cockroach on your time." When Mr. Cutten explained to him that the word was not cockroach but encroach, he threw up his hands in a gesture of helplessness and exclaimed: "Cockroach! henroach! I can never remember which it is!"

A woman in the midst of divorce proceedings was complaining about the legal red tape. "Oh," said her friend, "don't talk to me about lawyers. I've had so much trouble over my property that sometimes I wish my husband hadn't died."—Ike London in Rockingham Post-Dispatch.

The average man's arm is 28 inches long. The average woman's waist is 28 inches. It just goes to show that Nature thinks of everything.—Ike London in Rockingham Post-Dispatch.

The Weekly Congratulates...

The Weekly congratulates Lloyd Senter of Carrboro, who will become district governor of Lions International on July 1.

A native of Raleigh, Mr. Senter has been residing in Carrboro almost all his life. He helped his father in Senter Drug Store, attended and was graduated from Chapel Hill High School and the University here. A registered pharmacist, he is now associated with his father in the store.

Mr. Senter long has been generous of his time and labors for his community, his club, and his family. His accomplishments, activities, offices, and services are numerous and outstanding. 'Tis no wonder North Carolina Lions recognized him and entrusted the leadership of their organization to him.

... and The Weekly Asks

Frank Blocksidge and Harvey Bennett think this probably happened to Y. Z. Cannon. We'll let our readers decide for themselves.

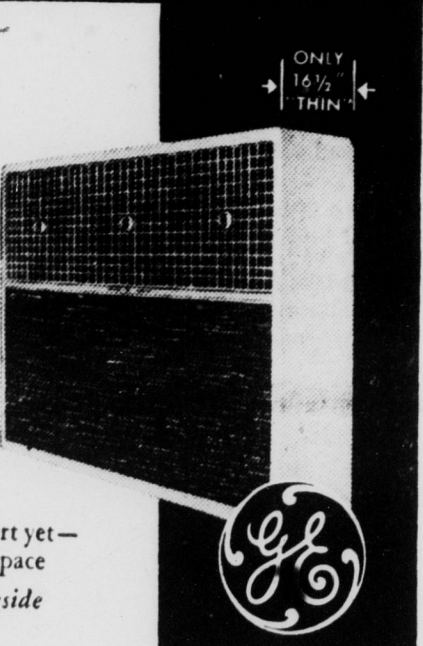
A man who went to have his thinning hair cut with Y. Z. was urged by Mr. Cannon to have his hair singed—at double the price. "Each hair is a tiny tube that sort of bleeds at the cut end," Y. Z. said, "so it gets weaker every time your hair is cut. But singeing seals the end, and the hair keeps its vigor."

"Then can you explain why the hair on my chin is growing stronger all the time, though each hair has been cut off every morning for 25 years?"

"No trouble at all," answered Y. Z. "You just ain't the kind of feller that story was made up to tell to."

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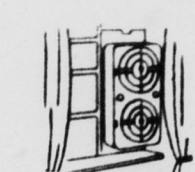

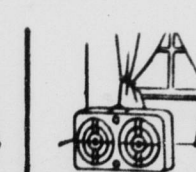
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