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CLARK, Walter Van Tilburg
Born at Toddy Pond, near Buckport, Maine,
August 3, 1909.
The Author of the February Book
Writes about Himself

I was born August 3, 1909, in a cabin on Toddy Pond, the largest of a chain of little wilderness lakes behind Blue Hill, near Buckport, Maine. My father was then a teacher in the College of the City of New York. We spent the summers in Maine, and the winters in a small apartment in the city. Of the Maine time I still have innumerable memories, ranging from the nasturtium bed by the side door to loons and herons and the ocean; but of the city I remember distinctly now, saving minor personal tribulations, only the frequent passage of the magnificent horse-drawn fire engines, which I used to get out of bed at night to watch. I could hear them coming on the cobblestones blocks away. I was four or five when the growing family—there were four children finally—led my father to buy a farm at West Nyack, up the Hudson. That was a good life for a small child, and there we lived until I was eight, when my father went to Nevada, as president of the university.

There I went through school and all my undergraduate college work save one summer session at Stanford, and there also added a year of graduate work in English. Most of the summers we spent at a place in southern California which had a wonderful two-mile strip of ocean beach, at that time very nearly deserted. One year between high school and college I worked—not very well, I'm afraid—at house-painting and truck-driving in southern California; and one summer, following my sophomore year in college, I covered twenty thousand miles of America in a Ford. During both these active and relatively bookless periods I enjoyed intense mental growing pains, and it seems to me now that only one other period in my life was worth so much to me. I should have had more of both.

Then, because I received a fellowship, and was now interested chiefly in finding time to write, I spent two more years in philosophy and literature at the University of Vermont, with summers in Maine and the Adirondacks. During the second year, I married Barbara Morse, whom I had met in Reno, and the following year we spent together in her father's farmhouse on the New York side of Lake Champlain, shoveling snow, drawing water, splitting wood, and writing. It was the other great year, but the writing didn't bring in anything. I taught one summer session at C.C.N.Y., but I didn't like the city. For five years we lived in Cazenovia, in the central New York farming country, where I taught school and did some coaching in sports and dramatics.
On the strength of *The Ox-Bow Incident*, I have taken this
eyear off from teaching. With my wife and two children I have
settled in for the year at the Indian Springs Ranch, in southern
Nevada, where I am now well into the first draft of another book.
The ranch was once a water-hole on the Las Vegas-Beatty Trail,
and then a stopping place, for grass and water, for stock and borax
teams out of Death Valley, and then a dude ranch. It is now a sort
of community home for a group of acquainted artists and writers,
and one herpetologist, with their families.

Evening dinner together at the main ranch house, separate
cottages and studios around the irrigation pond, and a log-raftered
adobe music-house where we get together, usually on Saturday
night, to play records and talk, make it a fine place to work. The
valley below us (we are against a small outcrop of the Charleston
Mountains) is big and has little real winter. The mountains all
around us are bare and sharply sculptured, and amazingly strong
and beautiful things happen to them at dawn and sunset. Except
on cloudy days, they seem to diminish and become much more
dull and uniform in full day—a thing true of all desert mountains.
We are close to many fascinating places, and range into them: the
Grand Canyon, the Valley of Fire, Death Valley, the Charleston
Park and Hidden Forest—the last an unbelievable Alpine cup in
mountains which appear wholly desolate from outside. We seem
almost shamefully away from the world’s agony at present, though
the sound of it comes to us, of course. We have radios and the
newspapers.

We walk and ride in the mountains, and in the spring will swim
daily in the pond again. There are plenty of children, dogs, horses,
cows, pigs, and cats about. For the children we finally managed to
procure, after long quests in this once burro-ridden country—
cleaned out a few years ago, largely for the movies—a small jenny
burro. She has become as attached as a dog, but sometimes in the
nights she still feels the sorrows of the past of her desert race, and
after a rusty start brays with hair-raising, melancholy loudness.

At intervals we break work with a trip into some part of the
state, seeing the big central ranching valleys and the working,
ghost, and near-ghost mining towns. Already notes from these
journeys, though I never look at them, of course, are finding their
places in the new book, which is largely set in Nevada. I hope to
finish at least the first draft of the new book by spring. It will end
much closer to our immediate present than *The Ox-Bow Inci-
dent*, though not touching directly the present conflict, save by
implication, as *The Ox-Bow Incident* does.

Next fall I go back to school teaching, and, queer as it may
photographed during the ideal winter he and his bride spent together in an Adirondack farmhouse. “There,” he says, “I had the best time I ever had—just splitting wood, shoveling snow, drawing water, and writing.”

seem, with no great dread either. I have become sensitive to references about schoolteachers; people seem so frequently to take it for granted that no one would teach who could escape it, and that teaching is somehow an indication of at least dullness and also, probably, of a love of petty dictatorship, an infantile set of tastes, and even a sort of sadistic delight in tormenting the helpless young. Actually, at least so far as my acquaintance goes, these accusations are not often true—not nearly so often as in most other occupations.

Anyhow, I set myself down: I like teaching, I like school-age children and find them always more alive, and far too often more interesting, than their elders are—even their only slightly elders. With schoolteaching, the only question is how long you can take it. School kids don’t care for fakes. I think I can take it for a while yet. It may be the remnant of a New England conscience which I cannot uproot entirely, even intellectually, or it may be part of a newer and better kind of conscience (I hope it is). Yet, though I do hope, finally, to do nothing but write, I think I should always have felt a little guilty if I had not had some years of other work, and I count myself lucky that that work is one so richly alive as teaching.
A Note from the Author to Our Members

I'd like to be able to make a dramatic little note on how The Ox-Bow Incident was written, how I saw a man hanging from the branch of a cottonwood tree, and suddenly the tale was there. Unfortunately that wasn't the case. It probably came together slowly through a number of small influences I never noticed. I can't even say now—except for the image of the day-moon over the mountains which is in the opening—just what was in my mind when I began writing. I can mention with certainty only a few major impulses that, somewhere before or during the writing, became important. For one thing, I was suffering mildly from a kind of territorial nostalgia for Nevada, kept thinking about the wind, the Sierras, the big valleys with few people, and wanted to get a little of that down. For another thing, I'd been thinking—and who hasn't?—about the desire for justice as an abstract quality—as inherent in man (at least social man) as the desire to live—and of the violence mass-movements were doing that desire at present.

Then, too, there were some trickier notions present, at least after I started writing. I have always been irked that the Wild West, that era of more or less extra-social living which came between the settlement of the real pioneers and the beginning of an actual settled period, which had all the elements of true drama, should have become so universally linked with dime thrillers. And I'll admit I deliberately took all the stock ingredients of such a story—they're legitimate enough—and tried to make something more real of them.

Davies, and the responsibility of the individual in matters of justice, grew on me as I went along, and out of that grew my most dangerous experiment—which probably I oughtn't to mention—the attempt, in the persons of Davies and Art Croft, the narrator, to carry what was to me the real climax of the book—call it moral, spiritual, or whatever you will—beyond the action climax and play it out without action at all.

The story was written during the Christmas and Easter holidays of one school year, reworked during the next summer, and thrown into the back of my closet, where I forgot it until the next spring. Then, in a rage of cleaning out stuff I'd written, I came across it and a short story about a hawk, "Hook," and liked them better than the rest and sent them off. The Atlantic Monthly took "Hook," and I remember I was called out of class and heard over the phone from New York that Random House had taken Ox-Bow, and I had my mind so full of other things that I probably didn't even seem appreciative. Anyway, they did, and so
I'm out here, and appreciative enough about it all now.

To tell the truth, I was similarly very little moved when Bennett Cerf wired me about The Readers Club taking The Ox-Bow Incident. I was too full of the new book. Also, I guess I'm too green to know what it means. I showed the wire to my wife, and said something to the effect that that was pretty fine, wasn't it, and that was about the size of it. But the idea of The Readers Club printing has grown on me since, too. I'm very glad the book was chosen, of course, and still feel largely indebted to Mr. Fadiman and his review of the first edition. Yet now that I get it, I think I'm chiefly a little frightened at the thought of so large an audience as The Readers Club sitting down all over the country with The Ox-Bow Incident in their hands.

WALTER VAN TILBURG CLARK
May 1, 1942

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
c/o Random House, Inc.
20 East 57th Street
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Clark:

It was not until recently, when the astute Readers Club brought your unusual book to its members, that we realized that you were born in Maine, and that, thereby, you are a Maine author.

THE OX-BOW INCIDENT is a remarkable book, for its writing, characters and theme; and those who have it in their personal library are fortunate.

We write at this time particularly with regard to the Maine Author Collection. It is possible that you know of this exhibit, which now includes over a thousand volumes, inscribed and presented for this purpose by the authors, who are claimed as Maine authors through birth or residence.

We also gather all available information on our writers: biographical, critical and photographic; and we preserve correspondence. You can undoubtedly understand the permanent and increasing value of such a project, and we hope that you will want to inscribe a copy of THE OX-BOW INCIDENT for the collection.

Our best wishes for an ever-widening circle of friends for your fine book.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY

SECRETARY

hmj
Encl--1
Indian Springs Ranch
Las Vegas, Nevada
May 13, 1942

Mrs. F.H. Jacob, Secretary,
Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

I would be pleased to have The Ox Bow Incident
appear as one of your collection by Maine writers, and am sending your, under separate cover,
an inscribed copy of the Academic Club edition.
My best wishes for the long continuance, with many new additions, of your writing projects.

Sincerely yours,

Walter E. Clark
June 1, 1942

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
Indian Springs Ranch
Las Vegas, Nevada

Dear Mr. Clark:

Your generous gift and delightful inscription in the Maine Author Collection copy of THE OX-BOW INCIDENT pleases us greatly, and we are appreciative of your kind words and interest.

It is an unusual book, and we only hope that an increasing number of thoughtful readers will find and enjoy it, and that the underlying truths may contribute to a more general stability of public mind, as well as help to portray another aspect and significance of the "Wild West."

We congratulate you again; and send best wishes for the next book, together with our sincere thanks for your presentation copy of THE OX-BOW INCIDENT.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY

SECRETARY

Encl--6¢ postal refund
March 12, 1945

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
C/o Random House, Inc.
20 East 57th Street
New York 22, New York

Dear Mr. Clark:

Some method should be devised for keeping in unobtrusive touch with our Maine writers—so that we should know, for instance, whether you are still at Indian Springs Ranch, or back teaching school somewhere in the east. You are so successful at silencing news of your whereabouts that we write in care of your publishers.

That these publishers are, in less than three months, to bring us THE CITY OF TREMBLING LEAVES, is indeed good news; and advance notices promise a most enjoyable and worth-while novel. It will be ordered for our traveling libraries through a regular book dealer; but we write to you now about the Maine Author Collection.

You may recall that three years ago, you generously made it possible for the collection to boast an inscribed copy of THE OX-BOW INCIDENT, which connoisseurs remember with discriminating pleasure. We hope that your interest will continue, and that we may look forward to including an inscribed presentation copy of the new novel. Our very good wishes to it.

Sincerely yours

Secretary
Cazenovia, New York
March 21

Dear Mrs. Jacob—

I am sorry to say that circumstances and numbers make it impossible for me to donate copies of my new book, same to a very few personal friends.

If the library would care to include a purchased copy in their collection, and would forward it to me, I would be glad to sign it and return it.

I am back at the teaching again, and likely to stay so for a while yet, I guess. And thanks very much for your good wishes.

Sincerely,

Walter V.T. Clark

Walter V.T. Clark
March 23, 1945

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
31 Fenner Street
Cazenovia, New York

Dear Mr. Clark:

Thank you for your friendly candor about gift books. We hope we haven't seemed avaricious in our aim to include all the books of all Maine authors in the exhibit. It is true that our slender budget could not sustain the expense of buying the output of all Maine authors; but, because the writers themselves have in general showed such spontaneous and generous interest in contributing their work, we have been encouraged in the building of the collection.

We shall ask Campbell's Book Store, of Portland, Maine, to send you a copy of THE CITY OF TREMBLING LEAVES immediately upon publication. Your kindness in inscribing it and returning it to us under the enclosed label will be appreciated.

Perhaps we should congratulate you almost as much upon your return to teaching as upon publication of the new novel. We remember that you once said you found young people fully as interesting and stimulating as their elders; and with the appalling desertion from teaching ranks of many fine and capable minds, it is good to know of a few who are still at it, and enjoying it!

Our good wishes continue undiminished.

Sincerely yours

hmj
Secretary

Encl--1
May 24, 1945

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
31 Fenner Street
Cazenovia, New York

Dear Mr. Clark:

- CITY OF TREMBLING LEAVES has been sent to you by Campbell's Book Store, and we shall greatly appreciate your kindness in inscribing the book for the Maine Author Collection, as we wrote on March 23. We look forward with eagerness to seeing the book, and wish it unlimited success.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
June 6, 1945

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
31 Fenner Street
Cazenovia, New York

Dear Mr. Clark:

The inscribed copy of CITY OF TREMBLING LEAVES for the Maine Author Collection has reached us, and we are of course delighted to add it to the exhibit.

There seems no doubt that this latest novel will enhance your reputation as a novelist skilled in the creation of characters, and in the expression of their conflict with and adjustment to life; skilled also in the art of conveying your readers to the scene of your books by sympathetic portrayal of the background.

This latest novel spurs anticipation for your next, especially because of the versatility you have shown in THW OX-BOW INCIDENT and THE CITY OF TREMBLING LEAVES, and because of your undeniable gift for the metier of the novel. The best of fortune to your latest, and may the next come soon!

Sincerely yours

hmj
Encl--5
postal refund

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
October 11, 1950

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
c/o Random House, Inc
20 East 57th Street
New York City 22

Dear Mr. Clark:

With pleasure we learned of the publication of THE WATCHFUL GODS, and we shall want one in the Maine Author Collection, of course. Because it has been several years since we wrote to you, we thought perhaps we should make certain of your present address before sending a book to you.

Will you be so kind as to let us know your correct address? We hope you are agreeable to inscribing a copy for the exhibit.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

hmj
Encl--1
Dear Mr. Jacob—

Yes, of course, I'd be glad to sign a copy for the library collection. My address is just that above. Needs no street or box. Just a long plane now. Virginia City.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Halden E. L. Clark
October 26, 1950

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
Virginia City
Nevada

Dear Mr. Clark:

Thank you for the permission to secure your inscription in THE WATCHFUL GODS for the Maine Author Collection. A copy of the book should reach you soon from Campbell's Book Store in Portland, Maine.

We enclose postage and a return label for your convenience.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

Encls.
Virginia City, Nevada
November 25

Dear dear Jacob—

I’ve had your note enclosing postage, etc., in mailing you the signed copy of \underline{The Watchful Gods} for a month now, and still no book has come. I thought maybe you’d want to check with the bookstore.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Wallace I. Clark
December 1, 1950

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
Virginia City
Nevada

Dear Mr. Clark:

Thank you very much for letting us know that the book has not reached you. We have reported it to Campbell's Book Store, which will know the date the volume was mailed, and whether or not it is time to place a tracer on it. We earnestly hope it weathers the dangers of parcel post, and arrives safely at last.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
Virginia City, Nevada
December 5, 1950

Dear Mr. Campbell,—

I don’t know what was holding up the copy of *The Watchful God* you sent, but, whatever, it came a couple of days after I’d written to ask about it, and I am now on its way back to the State library. Sorry to have bothered you, but I thought it must have gone astray somewhere.

Sincerely yours,

[B. J. Clark]
December 12, 1950

Mr. Walter Van Tilburg Clark
Virginia City
Nevada

Dear Mr. Clark:

It is a relief to have the inscribed copy of THE WATCHFUL GODS safely in the Maine Author Collection! Thank you very much for your trouble in the matter, and for your kindness in adding the distinctive touch of the inscription for this exhibit copy.

We are pleased to be able to include this outstanding collection among the Maine author volumes.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of

hmj
Maine Author Collection