

*Amid
May 11/44*

93 Edward St.
Halifax, N.S.
May 8, 1944.

Mr. Thomas H. Raddall,
Liverpool, N.S.

My dear Mr. Raddall,

At the suggestion of Dr. James Martell, who is an admirer of yours and incidentally a friend of mine, I am taking the liberty of asking you for some information for a radio talk I am scheduled to give on May 26 at 5:18. The subject is "Historical Fiction and the N.S. Archives" and during the course of my remarks I have mentioned in some detail the perfectly fine job I think you have done on "His Majesty's Yankees". This will be a trans-Canada broadcast and I am pleased to be urging the rest of Canada to read this fine historical novel, and doubly pleased to be recommending a Nova Scotian. Would you care to tell me in a letter where the idea for this book came to you and how you hit on the very clever title? This would help to bring in a little personal touch to lighten a serious talk. In addition, in the course of your research in the Archives, did any humorous occurrences crop up that might lend a further light touch to the talk. For instance, Dr. Martell tells me that upon showing the building to an enthusiastic young lady one day, she turned to him and said, "But where do you keep the wild animals?"

In tying up my talk with a timely event, I have mentioned the Governor-General's award, upon which I offer my congratulations. Dr. Martell told me in confidence that Lord Tweedsmuir had written to ask you if he might write the foreword to "The Pied Piper of Dipper Creek". Is there any objection you may have to my using this information in the talk? It's a brilliant preface and pays high tribute

to your story-telling abilities. A great many of my listeners would be interested in the enthusiasm of John Buchan.

One further question: Can I mention your forthcoming novel and if so, when will it be off the press, what is the exact title, and what is the story about? I had meant to visit the Archives last week while you were working there, Jim Martell tells me, but I was laid low with a vile cold. Now I have no other recourse than to ask you to be burdened with a reply to all of my questions. I will be very grateful for anything you feel you can release through me about a writer's feelings when a story idea is growing in him. My talk must be in the hands of the CBC Talks Department by next Monday, so I'm afraid I must ask for a rush reply. I hope you will forgive my temerity in this whole matter.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Allan F. Dill

May 10th, 1944.

Dear Mrs. Bill,

Thanks for your very flattering letter. I'm afraid the story behind "His Majesty's Yankees" is rather too long for the time you have to spare for it, but here it is. In 1930 or thereabouts I discovered from local tales and documents that the true story of events in Nova Scotia during the American Revolution had never been told. I became interested in these matters, perhaps because I had married a Milton girl, a Mayflower descendant like many others of the old Yankee stock in Queens County. For a long time the pursuit of information on the subject was simply a hobby. In 1939 I began a series of Nova Scotia historical tales for Blackwood's Magazine, and in one or two of them I described events in Liverpool during the Revolution, calling the place "Oldport". John Buchan liked the tales and suggested publication in book form when the series was complete. Blackwood agreed, but the war changed all our plans. However in the spring of 1940 I had a letter from Theodore Roosevelt, full of praise for the tales and suggesting that I write a history of Nova Scotia during the Revolutionary period. He is a director of the publishing firm of Doubleday Doran, who immediately offered to publish the history if as and when written. I replied that I was not an historian.

Doubleday Doran then urged a novel based on the facts and giving a true picture of Nova Scotia in the stress of the times. Roosevelt added his persuasion, and so did Kenneth Roberts, who had been reading my Blackwood yarns. I was still doubtful, feeling that the short story was my forte, but finally in 1941 I sat down to write the novel. Research from time to time carried me to the Public Archives in Halifax, where Dr. Harvey gave me every facility; and Jim Martell and Margaret Ellis were a joy, full of ideas and sound knowledge and both very keen to see an honest novel on the subject.

Field research took me to Fort Cumberland in the summer. (Fort Beauséjour, I should say, since the authorities have decided on the old French name for their museum.) I went all over the ground very carefully after preliminary study of the old maps and documents in Fort Beauséjour library, and took photographs of all the approaches and so on; and I covered the surrounding country mentioned in the tale, including an exploration of the Bear's Back. I went back there in November in order to fix in my mind the appearance of the marshes and the countryside generally, since it was in November that the memorable siege of Fort Cumberland took place.

The title suggested itself; the constant reference to "Yankees" and "His Majesty" in the manuscript, I suppose; at any rate I wanted something short which would convey the whole idea of the book, and "His Majesty's Yankees" was the result. The publishers were very much against it, and asked for alternatives. I sent them a list of God-awful things that I knew they wouldn't accept -- "Red Flows the Fundy Tide" and so on -- and they were glad to fall back on "H.M.Y." They admit now that it is perfect.

With regard to the "Pied Piper". Lord Tweedsmuir and ^{George} William Blackwood were old friends who corresponded frequently, and when Blackwood proposed to bring out a dozen of my early tales in book form he mentioned it to Tweedsmuir. I can't remember now which one suggested a foreword; I rather think it was Blackwood. Tweedsmuir had followed the tales as they appeared in Blackwood's Magazine, and early in 1938 had written George

Blackwood asking " who is the admirable man writing Nova Scotia tales for Maga ? " Blackwood gave him my address and thereafter whenever I had written something he liked I received a charming note from him. You can guess what this meant to a struggling writer whose literary future was obscure to say the least. . . I was not the only one he helped, and Canadian letters lost a stout friend when Tweedsmuir died.

My new novel is called "Roger Sudden" and its central character is a young English Jacobite, exiled after the Forty-Five, who comes to Nova Scotia at the founding of Halifax and thereafter proceeds to make a fortune in devious and astonishing ways. The book ends at Louisbourg with the siege of '58, the climax of the decade of rivalry with Halifax, and of course the first step in the conquest of Canada. As you know, Halifax is unique amongst English cities in North America in that it was founded by decree --" springing full-panoplied from the brow of Jove" -- and its first people were not political or religious outcasts nor soldiers discharged after wars but simple townsmen, most of them from London -- the poverty-stricken London of the middle-eighteenth century. This book attempts to describe their struggles and sufferings (one-third died in the first year) and the beginnings of their evolution into self-reliant and thrusting colonists -- which means the beginning of the English march across Canada. And concurrently, in its glimpses of Indian life and the life of Louisbourg, it attempts to describe the failure of French power and influence. I've touched on the causes of the expulsion of the Acadians, but the expulsion itself is treated only briefly -- the subject has been written to death by a host of writers beginning with Longfellow. As far as possible I've avoided the usual things -- the battles between redcoats and whitecoats and so on -- and tried to give a glimpse behind the scenes, the trading practices, the impact of the new country on the Cockney mind, the slowly changing attitude of the Indians, the various other things which so powerfully affected the course of matters military.

The book will be published by Doubleday Doran & Company and will appear on the bookstands next October.

All of which is a very long-winded reply to your questions and much too concerned with "I" for my liking. Believe it or not I don't like to talk about myself -- not from any mere modesty but because I am superstitious on that point. In my brash young days I found that whenever my tongue was pleased with Me, Lady Fortune reached down from the sky and smote Me with a brick. I learned about bragging from 'er !

Sincerely,