

THOMAS B. COSTAIN
50 RIVERSIDE DRIVE
NEW YORK CITY

October 11th
1962

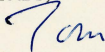
Dear Tom:

George Nelson has just returned to Toronto after an overnight trip down to sit in on a conference about the program for yours truly. I had several ideas in mind and I wanted to find out how they felt about each of them at the office. The decision was to go ahead first with a three generation story about the opening up of the Canadian north and to follow that, God willing, with an American story built around Benjamin Franklin. I also had an autobiography in my mind but there is no chance of that now.

George mentioned to me, quite confidentially, that you have something in mind about the Marie Celeste. What a grand idea! It seems to me that by building a story back of it you would have a remarkably fine book.

Are you going to be at the Ottawa Conference by any chance? I am not going up because I seem to lack the energy for traveling these days.

Yours,



TBC/mj

Mr. Thomas H. Raddall
Liverpool, Nova Scotia

Ms. Mrs. Costain
50 Riverside Drive
New York

October 16th, 1962

Dear Tom,

It was good to hear from you again, and to know that you are still going strong with work and plans. But why do you say there is no chance of an autobiography? Your own life has been as fascinating as any told in recent years, and far more so than many of the memoirs put before the public. Do think it over.

I'm still searching for a novel theme that has to do with Nova Scotia. Amongst other things, as George Nelson mentioned to you, I've dug up the whole story of the "Mary Celeste" from the time she was built until she was wrecked on a Haitian reef, many years after the famous episode of her abandonment off the Azores.

As you know, many people have written about the mystery of that affair; few or none have even touched upon the rest of her story. I found that she was a hoodoo ship from the time she was launched. However, it would be impossible to write a novel dealing with the whole life of the ship; and to write one about the disappearance of her skipper and crew in the North Atlantic would merely add to the welter of books on that subject.

Amongst other interesting subjects, not touched upon by any author to my knowledge, I came upon the mystery of the barque Herbert Fuller, which put into Halifax in the summer of 1896. She was towing, in a boat astern, the bodies of her captain, the captain's wife, and the second mate. All had been killed with an axe, at night. Investigation at Halifax, and later in an exciting court trial in Boston, proved that only two men could have done it, the helmsman, and the mate Thomas Bram.

Each accused the other. Eventually Bram was convicted and given a life sentence. In 1913 he was paroled by President Taft, on grounds that his chief accuser, the helmsman, had a criminal record. In 1919 President Wilson gave him a complete pardon. So who killed the three others? A first class mystery. The crew were an amazing collection of dolts and cowards, except for the Negro steward; and the only passenger was a young Harvard student, on a voyage for his health. In fact the whole cast of characters, as brought out in the trial, was like something from the mind of Eugene O'Neill.

Sincerely,
Tom

THOMAS B. COSTAIN
50 RIVERSIDE DRIVE
NEW YORK CITY

October 28th,
1962

Dear Tom:

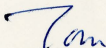
I was very much interested in your note but I still find that I am a bit stubborn about the Marie Celeste episode. It was such a pure mystery, if such a word can be applied to anything of the kind, that it has continued to live in men's memories; and I think it will always do so. The alternative stories that you suggest would undoubtedly have a lot of suspense but they are ordinary in comparison and pretty sanguinary.

If the story of the Marie Celeste ever came to be written, with the technical knowledge that you possess, it should end with the discovery of the abandoned ship. Whatever story needed to be built around it could be woven into the earlier parts. What is more, it doesn't need to be a long novel. I think the publishers could get a brisk sale, even if it did not run to any greater length than that of a novelette.

Think of it some more, at any rate. It should be written.

I think I told you that I had finished my Napoleonic story. I am probably going to swing now into a rather ambitious effort which will have Benjamin Franklin as its main character. Let's hope I can finish it.

Yours,



Thomas B. Costain

TBC?mj

Mr. Thomas H. Raddall
Liverpool, Nova Scotia
Canada

New Year's Day, 1965.

My dear Tom:

Now that the Yuletide distractions are past I want to tell you how much Edith and I enjoyed the CBC's TV rendition of "Chord of Steel".

We certainly could not say that for "Son of a Hundred Kings" nor my own "Wings of Night", taken as a whole. In both of these the casting, the choice of location, the photography and the direction were all excellent; but the stories were so badly hacked up as to be hardly intelligible to anyone who had not read the books.

I don't know if it was entirely the fault of the TV script writers, trying to telescope the stories in too much of a hurry -- the endemic disease of TV writers -- or if it was the result of too much of a hurry and a haphazard job in the cutting room. In the case of "Wings of Night", where the climax of the whole book was in the courtroom, too much footage was given to trivialities that had little to do with the main plot, and then at the end, the trial was flicked through in a series of jerky shots that hardly made sense at all.

Maybe the CBC learned something from all this.

At any rate the story of Bell and his struggles to success in telephony and in love came through clearly and with marvellous taste and flair -- emphatically the best thing the CBC's photoplay department has done in a long time.

I don't know if you were able to watch it or not; but if you were, you must have felt a satisfaction that a writer seldom experiences when movie or TV people "interpret" his book.

Best wishes to Ida and yourself.

Sincerely,

Mr. Thomas B. Costain,
50 Riverside Drive,
New York City.