

September 2015

Richard Matthews Hallet Correspondence

Richard Matthews Hallet 1887-1967

Henry Ernest Dunnack 1867-1938

Maine State Library

Hilda McLeod

Maine State Library

Oliver Leigh Hall 1870-1946

Maine State Library

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HALLET, RICHARD MATTHEWS

BATH, 1887 - Sept. 13, 1967

RICHARD M. HALLET
BOOTHBAY HARBOR, MAINE

Dec 3, 1931

Dear Mr. Lamyack

Herewith, a copy of my "Canyon
of the Fools", which I am proud to think
you find worthy of a place in your Maine
Corner. Maine is not the background for
the Canyon, which I began - in my spare time -
two thousand feet down, - at the bottom of
a copper mine in Arizona. But the book was
written in Maine, because I was born in Maine,
and because, though I have looked into a good
many odd corners of the earth, my heart is never
far from Maine, and has always managed to
keep my riving body back.

It may well be the only ground on
which I qualify for your Corner in Maine -
but on this ground at least I do qualify,
Sincerely yours,
Richard M. Hallett

AN AUTHOR'S SAGA

By Dorothy G. Wayman

This sketch of Richard Matthews Hallett, whose sea stories appear frequently in the Saturday Evening Post, has especial interest for Cape Cod people since Hallett has been a frequent visitor here. His father, the late Andrews Hallett, was treasurer of the Barnstable County Health Association, making his home for a number of years at the Barnstable County Sanatorium, where he was greatly beloved by patients and staff alike.

There is a girl down in Maine who is the most interesting part of this story. We don't know her name; we don't know the color of her eyes. All we know is that because it was foggy one morning she eventually married the kind of a man that anyone could have told her never settled down;—a man like Kipling's tramp:

"From job to job I've moved along;
Pay couldn't hold me when my
time was done,

For something in my 'ead upset
me all

Till I had dropped whatever 'twas
for good

And out to sea beheld the dock-
lights die

And met me mate,—the wind that
tramps the world."

She married a man who when he was in staid old Harvard got a kick out of being a sandwich man, walking the streets with great boards fore 'n 'aft advertising things; a man who floated down a river in Australia in a boat whose cabin was made from a filched tin whiskey sign-board; a man who left a big law office to ship before the mast on an old square-rigger; who fired ore-freighters on the Great Lakes; went timber-cruising in Canada; gold-mining in Arizona with a Swedish butcher.

He was broke most of the time,—stony broke in Australia, in London, in Chicago and Arizona;—and he was happy all the time. He was thirty when she married him; and they've been married twelve years; and he still looks happy. There isn't a bitter line in his face; he has a home and two children; and he has become not only successful but a valid author of worth-while fiction. There's a story we will never know,—how she does it. Does she miraculously leave him, alone, or does she manage him with consummate cleverness?

The man she married is Richard Matthews Hallett. He is big-six feet or so, with solid beef built up by firing in the hot holds of liners, and all the jobs of casual labor he has turned his hand in the course of his tramping.

He is of pure Anglo-Saxon derivation, bred from an old, old Cape Cod family. There are Halletts by the hundred, from Barnstable down to the tip of the Cape. Dick Hallett was born in Bath, Maine, but that was more or less of a geographical incident; the family moved away when he was five years old.

His eyes are blue, set wide apart, with sea-faring crows-feet radiating from them; and a square jaw below a wide, straight, generous mouth; and he was born with an instinct for the dramatic and the humorous in everything. He would have made a gorgeous jongleur in the Middle Ages; or a rollicking companion for Homer in Old Greece, because he has the knack of making a thrilling tale out of the merest conversation.

He walked into our Cape Cod parlor and smoked a cigar and lazily told a saga of his years of wanderlust and all the time he was telling it, he kept swimming out of the focus of our vision and we kept seeing visions of those same blue eyes and square head in costumes of long ago centuries,—dropping in an a Roman legion and spinning hem yarns; wandering into an encampment of mailed Crusaders in Palestine to tell adventures; roaming through the twilight to the campfire of Napoleon's grenadiers to earn a supper by a good tale. He is undated, is Dick Hallett. When old Charon ferries him over the Styx, it's a foregone conclusion that Marco Polo and Francois Villon and Richard Burton will give three loud cheers to hail him as a blood-brother. To quote Kipling's Tramp again:

"But must get 'hence, the same as
I 'ave done
And go observing matters till they
die."

He tells how he began writing one Sunday afternoon while a sophomore at Harvard—in 1906. He wrote a story called "The Handkerchief," completed in the one afternoon and mailed it to the old Cosmopolitan.

"Three weeks later I had a letter that said Willie Hearst would be glad to pay me \$65 for the story; and I wrote right back I would be glad to accept \$65. Willie Hearst printed an advertisement, showing a skeleton hand protruding between velvet curtains, holding a lace handkerchief, with the caption "This is the kind of story that made Guy de Maupassant famous." It was grand. I said to myself 'How simple. I shall make \$65 every Sunday afternoon.'

"But I didn't. I wrote a lot more stories but nobody paid \$65 for them; so I gave up literature and

studied law and got a job in New York in Judge Learned Hand's office. I had it for a year and then the judge told me was going to Europe for two months. I thought I would go to Europe, too; so I went down to 26 Broadway and asked about shipping on a Standard Oil vessel.

"I got a berth on the old steel square-rigger Juteopolis, but she was bound to Sidney instead of Europe. I shipped as a seaman in the crew of thirty, and I wasn't an A. B. either. I was the lowest thing on board except the bugs and the biscuits. She was four months on the voyage and when she reached Melbourne a chum and I skipped her and put out for the back blocks of Australia.

"He was a big ex-Navy man, with a palm tree tattooed all over his back and a Gibson Girl tattooed on his arm, and a great black beard. Frank and I tramped through Australia. We dug out rabbits for a bounty; we followed a traction engine in wheat fields; we swung a fourteen-pound hammer on a mountain top chipping out stone for a giant cistern; we sheared sheep. Finally we got sick of it, and built a flat-bottomed boat with an elegant cabin made by bending a tin whiskey sign in a half-hoop. It was handsome, dark blue field with a big white horse.

"We floated down the river to Sidney and had five shillings left between us. Frank spoke of getting a job. 'Listen,' I told him, 'We're journalists. We don't have to work. I'll write something.'

"So we got our lodgings at a sailor's hang-out run by a widow who parked the sailors in an old car-barn and fed them steak and kidney pie at a little restaurant across from the car barn.

"We went down-town and rented a typewriter and carried it home to the car-barn; but the deposit required our total capital of five shillings and we had no paper. So we went to call on the editor of the Herald and told him we would write him a story and give him an option on it if he would let us have a hundred sheets of typewriting paper. Which he did.

"So I sat down in the car-barn and began writing a thing I called "On the Wallaby", the Australian slang for tramping. Frank meanwhile went cruising around and one day brought home the bo'sun of our old ship, who had just been let out of jail. We had no money and he had no money; but we had credit with the widow who had not yet found out we had no money. I kept on typing away in the car-

barn filled with drunks, and the bo'sun sat beside me on the cot; and when Frank and I went to the restaurant to eat, we brought home his meals in our pocket.

"This went on for a week, and the widow began looking at us suspiciously, but I had the hundred pages filled, so Frank and I went down to see the editor. He said he would let us know at five o'clock the next night whether he wanted the manuscript. We dared not go back to face the widow, so we spent the night on the wharves of Sidney. We abandoned the bo'sun, marooned him in the car-barn. The next day we figured the best hide-out till five o'clock was the Public Library. I spent the day reading "Gulliver's Travels" in an alcove on an empty stomach while Frank dozed and grumbled; and at five o'clock we went back to the editor. We owed the widow two pound ten and had made up our minds to stick out for three pound from the editor. He gave us thirty pounds!

"We went and got the bo'sun, who was still sitting morosely on a cot in the car-barn; filled him up with steak and kidney pudding and paid up the widow. Frank was sure the editor had made a mistake and that they would be looking for us soon,—so he and I shipped out for London, firing on the Royal Mail liner Orvieto—35 days to England.

"We landed in England just after the Titanic had been sunk and I said to Frank, ~~This is our chance.~~ No one else knows how it feels to be a firemen in the bowels of the ship at such time. I will write an article and sell it for more money.' So I wrote again, and Frank cruised around; and when it was done, and we were broke, the editor of the London Times would not buy my article.

"Frank said, 'Probably it's no good. I could write a better one.' And he pecked out something and went down to the London Times, and by God, he came back full of pride with two guineas! He said he removed by force one man who tried to shunt him to a waiting room, and crashed in to see the editor and the editor gave him a cigar and talked to him for an hour and gave him two guineas.

"That disgusted me with my own writing. I had mailed my rejected manuscript to the Saturday Evening Post, but I didn't care now whether I sold it or not. The London Times had turned me down and paid two guineas to a tattooed, black-bearded sailor. I decided it was time to go back to the law, and I shipped on a boat for New York. Frank wanted to go to

France and I wanted to go to New York; and I've never see or heard of him since.

"I landed in New York and got a job at \$15 a week in a law office, but asked for a week before I started to go home and see my people. Waiting for me at home was a letter from the Saturday Evening Post accepting "The Black Squad."

"It had the same effect as Willie Hearst accepting my first story. I was back in the old optimism 'Sixty five dollars every Sunday afternoon' and I never went down to my job in the law office. That was the pivotal point in my career. If I had not sold "The Black Squad" I should have been a lawyer because tattooed Frank was paid two guineas by the London Times after they turned me down."

However the tale of the Green Oilcloth Packet is as good as that of the Bo'sun Abandoned in the Car Barn or Two Guineas to the Tattooed Sailor.

As usual Dick Hallett was broke. He had been gold-mining in the Canon del Oro, Arizona, with a Swedish butcher named Axel and a burro that had no name but toted fifty pounds of dynamite and some food. Hallett and Axel put down a fifty-foot shaft through solid rock and found never a trace of gold and ate up all the food and used up all the dynamite. In their peregrinations Hallett had been working on his first book-length fiction, writing it on scraps of paper which he kept wrapped up in a piece of green oil cloth salvaged from somebody's ash-barrel. They struck Globe, Arizona, and Hallett went to the bank.

"Here is a manuscript worth two thousand dollars" he told the banker, "on which I should like to borrow \$50 to get to the coast."

The banker said that in his experience he had never found it practical to consider fiction as collateral, but he would introduce him to a Harvard Law man who would help him to get a job. They got him a job in the Old Dominion copper mine, where he made \$4 a day and it cost him more than that to live, and Dick Hallett says he thought he was stuck there for life, to end up like one of the old blind mules that worked in the mine. However, he saw in the drug store one night a copy of the book he had published, "Trial by Fire", based on his experiences stoking on the steamers, and he told the editor of the local paper, who looked him up promptly and gave him a job nights on the newspaper, which put him back in the atmosphere of type-

writers and printer's ink, and Hallett began writing in earnest again. He finished up the manuscript in the green oil cloth packet, sent it to the Saturday Evening Post and got his \$2,000 for it, to his great satisfaction and the banker's amazement. It was published as "The House of Craigsinside."

To go back to the foggy morning that resulted in this gypsy settling down: Dick Hallett and his father went on a little vacation one summer, back to Maine where Dick was born. They took a steamer for Pemmaquid, but the fog came in so thick that there was no scenery, and they got off at Boothbay Harbor. There was something about the place that satisfied Dick Hallett. He said "I could write here", and he used to go up for three or four months at a time when he had money ahead, and write in Boothbay Harbor. In 1917 he married a Boothbay Harbor girl. During the war, he served as third officer in the merchant marine transport service, and since then he has lived in Boothbay Harbor. Apparently he is meant to live there. Once he got restless and started for Yucatan in a small sloop, but he only got as far as Bridgeport when the cruise blew up owing to his ship-mate being so ill he had to be taken to the hospital. So Hallett went back to Boothbay Harbor, and there he is.

He writes sea stories,—built his name on sea stories; but of late he is working into a new vein, based perhaps on some atavistic impulse from his Cape Cod ancestry, weaving a series of tales around the personality and adventures of a Yankee clipper-ship captain a hundred years ago in strange lands with odd people.

Cape Cod Enterprise
clipping undated
when received.

April 7, 1937

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

An amazing and not (to us) very complimentary fact has been discovered: Who's Who in America lists five books which you have written, while we have for the Maine Author Collection only one!

We will not try to give any reasons for our negligence. You undoubtedly can appreciate our feelings about such an omission.

We have CANYON OF THE FOOLS. Is it possible to secure THE LADY AFT, TRIAL BY FIRE, THE HOUSE OF CRAIGENSIDE, and TICKLISH WATERS? Though they might well be out of print, we do hope they are still available, for we would like to feel that our representation of your writing is as complete as possible.

Is there anything that can be done? You may be sure that if you are able to assist us, we will deeply appreciate the kindness.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hm

SECRETARY

Boothbay Harbor Me.

April 12, 1937...

Dear Miss LeLead,

As for those four books of mine, which you can't track, but which are listed in Who's Who in America, I am sorry to say that they are out of print long since, and even I who wrote them, couldn't lay my hands on a copy.

But, to be quite candid, they were the indiscretions of my youth, and did their part in teaching me that short stories were my trade. Of late years I have kept away from writing books altogether.

Thank you so much for your kind interest in my work. I am thinking of writing a sort of autobiography, and if I do, I'll not forget to send you a copy for the Maine corner, if you think it worthy of that place.

Sincerely

Richard W. Hall

April 13, 1937

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

Thank you for the information regarding your four early books. We regret that we cannot include them in the Maine Author Collection, but we are somewhat compensated by learning of your plans to write "a sort of autobiography."

Indeed we do consider it worthy of inclusion in the collection, and we will eagerly anticipate its materialization. Thank you for your generous promise of a copy.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

lm

SECRETARY

July 2, 1938

Dear Dick

I notice that your new book, THE ROLLING WORLD, is off the press, and I am writing to suggest to you that it would be a gracious act to present an autographed copy for our collection of Maine authors at the State library.

We shall gladly purchase copies for the library from Houghton Mifflin, but we do seek a gift autographed copy from all our distinguished writers.

I hope that you and Mrs. Hallet are enjoying health and happiness, and that the new book will bring wealth to complete the trio.

Sincerely yours

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine
OLH.m

Boothbay Harbor, Me.

July 5, 1938

Dear Mr. Hall,

Most certainly there will be an autographed copy of 'The Rolling World' for your corner of Maine authors. I had hoped that you might want to find a place for it there. The copies now circulating are only advance publicity copies, and the book itself is not due to issue until July 26.

Thank you for your kind interest in it, and I can only hope that you will find that the book in some way may justify its place among writers so much more widely known. And my warmest thanks too for your kind good wishes for its success.

On my side, let me take this occasion to wish the very best of luck to your administration of the State Library, which I know you are qualified to keep up to the high mark set by your distinguished predecessor the late Henry Dunnack.

Sincerely
Heck Hallett.

November 3, 1938

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Dick:

I am writing because I am somewhat worried about your health, as I recall that when you were in some three or four weeks ago, you told me that you would the next day mail us an inscribed copy of THE ROLLING WORLD. As the book has not arrived, I have been fearful that you were suffering from astigmatism of the wrist, or some such disorder.

I hope you will have an early recovery, and I will realize that you are yourself again upon receipt of THE ROLLING WORLD.

Yours very sincerely,

OLH.m

State Librarian

Boothbay Harbor, Me.

Nov 13, 1938

Dear Oliver Hall

Here she is, 'The Rolling World' coming to you under separate cover, just as she has been any time this last four weeks; only this time she's in the flesh. And many thanks for thinking me worthy of being included in that ~~Corner~~ Corner.

How did that foot-ball game suit you?...We should really have left at the end of the first half.

I'll be looking in on you soon to make sure that you really do put me in the Corner. I really should be penalized for my delay.

Sincerely yours,

Lucas Hall

November 16, 1938

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Dick:

First let me congratulate you upon your recovery! Second let me thank you for the book, THE ROLLING WORLD. I am glad to place it in the Maine Author Collection; and you shan't be penalized, because I shall be so proud to point it out to visitors as the work of a Maine man.

It's a great book, and, as I think I told you, has been very popular with the library patrons since we got it.

I am looking forward to your call, and hope you will make it soon.

Sincerely

OLH/hm

State Librarian

July 11, 1939

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

Boothbay Harbor has probably offered weather more conducive to the requisite concentration attendant upon authorship than has Augusta in recent days.

We look forward to the publication of your new opus, although we realize that it will not make its debut immediately. Perhaps in one of your few leisure moments, you will be so kind as to give us some idea of the scope and scene of the novel. We know it is laid in Illinois; we do not request a synopsis; but if you could add a few details, we would appreciate it.

With best wishes for a satisfactory progress and a successful completion of the book.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
By

hm
Encl--1

SECRETARY

Boothbay Harbor, Me.

July 12, 1939

Miss Hilda McLeod
Maine State Library
Augusta, Me.

Dear Miss McLeod:

Boothbay Harbor weather has been all right, but I'm not sure there's a connection between weather and authorship.

I have been writing a book, it's true, about Illinois during the days of the Black Hawk war and a little earlier, but it's not time yet to say anything about it. I don't even know if it will find a publisher. Houghton Mifflin Company have seen and approved the first half, but no body has seen the last half, and there 's no telling about that yet. As soon as there is some indication that the thing will actually be printed, I'll tell you all about it.

Thank you for your kind interest. Certainly the State Library has been of the greatest service to me all along.

Sincerely yours

Richard Hallett.

October 31, 1939

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

Congratulations upon the publication of
MICHAEL BEAM, which we are happy to notice is
receiving most favorable attention from readers
and reviewers.

We have not yet seen a copy, although the
book has been ordered for our traveling library
department, and we are anticipating with pleasure
its arrival.

Will the Maine Author Collection continue to
merit your interest and generosity? We do hope so,
for we want to include an inscribed copy of MICHAEL
BEAM. We share vicariously, you know, in its
glory, since the author is a Maine man!

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
By

hm

SECRETARY

Boothbay Harbor, Me.

Nov 3, 1939

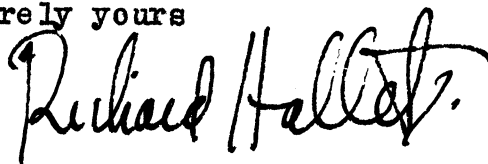
Miss Hilda McLeod
Maine State Library
Augusta, Me.

Dear Miss McLeod;

Certainly I shall be very glad to inscribe a copy of 'Michael Beam' to the Maine Author Collection. This magnum opus owes a great deal to the services and books of the Maine State Library, and by including me in the Maine Author corner you are merely adding to my debt.

But before you talk about sharing in its glory, let's see what its glory comes to. Just now it is a pig in a poke.

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard Hallett". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Richard Hallett".

November 10, 1939

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

The very delightful modesty which you display regarding MICHAEL BEAM is not shared by the State Library! We think it's a grand book, and we're all reading it enthusiastically. We repeat our congratulations, and to them are now added our most sincere thanks for the gift copy which you have added to the Maine Author Collection.

Our best wishes to our newest literary hero and his creator.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
By

hm

SECRETARY

Boothbay Harbor, Me.

Nov 11, 1939

Dear Miss MaeLeod:

Thank you indeed for your good opinion of Michael Beam, and for your good wishes for his success. I'll come one day and take a peep at him in his Corner. There's nowhere I'd rather see him.

Sincerely yours,

Richard Hallett

October 5, 1944

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Portland Press Herald
Portland, Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

It is good, as well as surprising, news that we may expect a new novel by you. We anticipate pleasant hours with FOOTHOLD OF EARTH, and wish it a long and successful life.

Our order for traveling library copies will be placed through a book dealer, but we write now in behalf of the Maine Author collection, which boasts inscribed copies of your earlier books. May we hope that your generous interest will extend to FOOTHOLD OF EARTH? It would be a fine addition to the collection.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary



PRESS HERALD - EXPRESS

Portland Evening Express

Portland Sunday Telegram

Portland Press Herald

PORTLAND, MAINE

October 13, 1944

Mrs. F. W. Jacob
Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

I am delighted to hear that you are going to have copies of my new book for your traveling libraries, and I will certainly see to it that Doubleday Doran sends an inscribed copy of *FOOTHOLD OF EARTH* for the collection of Maine authors.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard M. Hallett". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Richard M. Hallett

RMH:L

November 18, 1944

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Boothbay Harbor
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

What shall we do? Our order for FOOTHOLD
OF EARTH for our traveling libraries was received;
but the Maine Author Collection copy has not yet
come. We tell you of this lack, because you
very kindly promised an inscribed copy for the
collection. Good luck to the book.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

March 2, 1945

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Portland Press Herald
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

It was a good book, and it was written by one of our favorite Maine authors. It is in our traveling libraries, but it is not in the Maine Author Collection: we hang our heads in sorrow. Do you think you could do anything about the regrettable lack?

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

March 9, 1945

Mr. Richard Matthews Hallet
Portland Press Herald
Maine

Dear Mr. Hallet:

Having said so much previously, we think perhaps there is only one thing to say now: Thank you! Thank you for the most kind inscription, for the gift of FOOTHOLD OF EARTH to the Maine Author Collection, and for giving readers such an enjoyable, authentically Maine novel. And here's to diminishing waits between your books!

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary