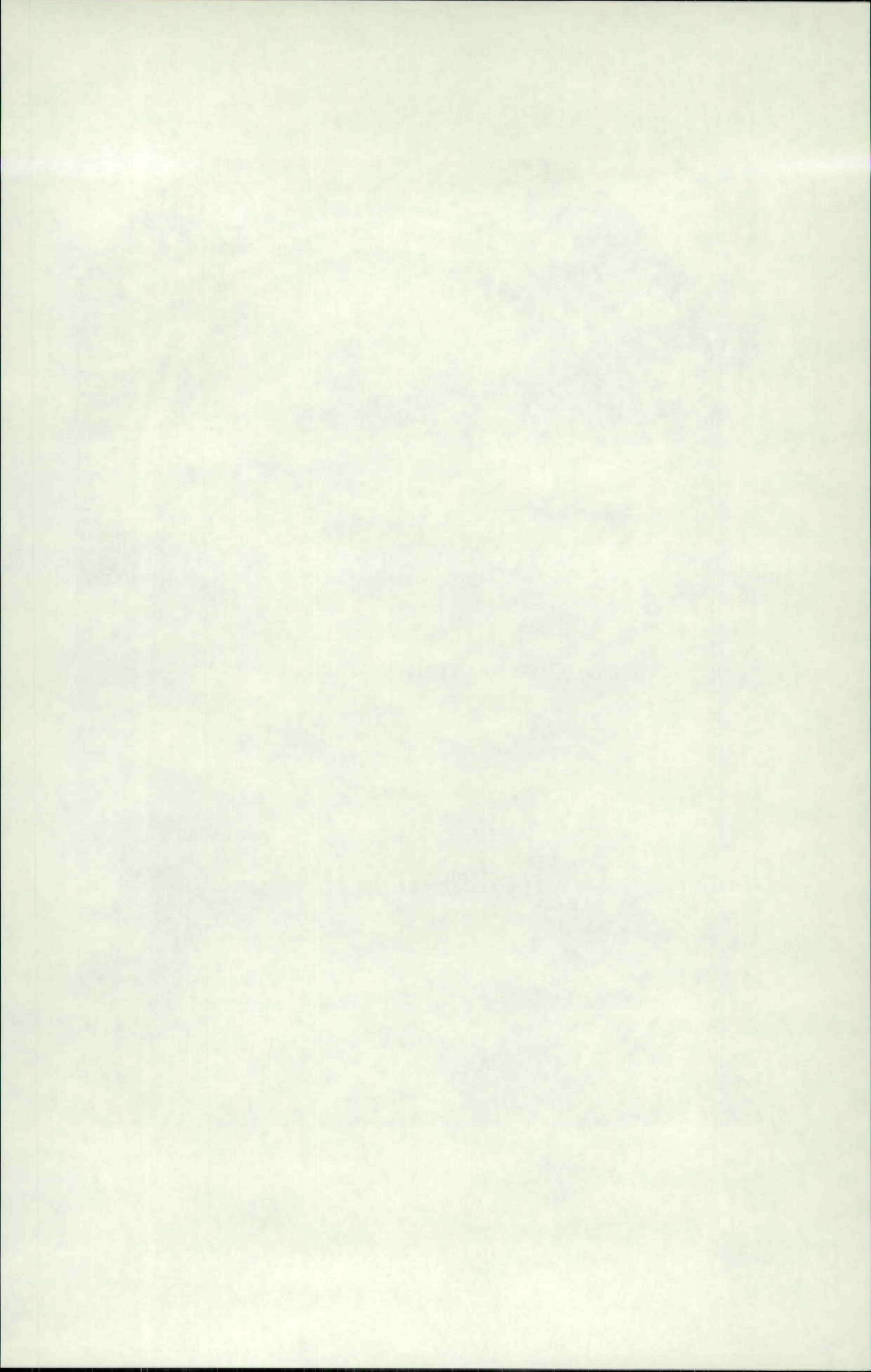


library continues and our incomparable Miss Clarke has this year finished classifying the pre-1821 hymnology collection, booksellers' catalogues and is now hard in the morass of publications of the various tract societies. Mrs. Robbins manages to catalogue current accessions, although little is being done at present to reduce the bulk of uncatalogued, mid-nineteenth century pamphlets.

We are also faced with a bindery problem. We have a very large number of leather bindings, many of them important examples of this American craft, in desperate need of repair before total disintegration takes place. A program should be initiated to adequately care for this area of our collections, but an early solution is complicated by our present bindery staff, which in skill and dispatch is inadequate. Mr. Shipton has reported on steps which are being made to rectify the bindery problem, at least in part.

Respectfully submitted,  
Marcus A. McCorison



C P  
CHARLES SEALSFIELD

geboren den 3. März 1795

gestorben den 26. May 1864

Psalin 143. And enter us into  
judgement with thy servants and for in thy  
sight shall no man living be justified.

Psalin 51. Have mercy upon me my  
God according to thy loving kindness  
according to the multitude of thy tender  
mercies blot out my transgressions.

*Charles Sealsfield,*  
“*The Greatest American Author*”

BY KARL J. R. ARNDT

THE title of my paper is by no means original. It was first used by Professor Theodor Mundt in a series of lectures at the University of Berlin and then printed in Berlin in a volume continuing Friedrich von Schlegel's *History of Literature*. In this form it attracted the attention of the editor of the *Boston Daily Advertiser* who wrote an article so entitled in the March 29, 1844, issue of his paper. The article started a national, yes an international controversy about the author so complimented as well as a search for the writer bearing that name. Most newspapers and literary journals from Maine to Mexico and New York to St. Louis participated in the controversy and search at one time or another. Hawthorne, Longfellow, Poe and other American writers became interested in it, but the mystery of the elusive author was not solved until some time after a recluse had been laid to rest in Solothurn, Switzerland, and his grave covered with a huge stone slab bearing the inscription: Charles Sealsfield, Bürger von Nord Amerika. There was another stone fixed at the head of the grave bearing other inscriptions to which I shall return later because they unite in death the two lives of the author and give us the key to a literary mystery and tragedy as well. Since there were two periods in the life of this man when he was a highly praised and widely read American author, not only in our country but in all Europe, it seems proper that we concern ourselves, one hundred years after his death in 1864, with that period of his life when he actually was a best seller in this country.

Before continuing, read the Boston article which started it all: THE GREATEST AMERICAN AUTHOR. We should not attempt to offer to our readers a critical analysis of our young national literature, or to name for them any one writer as a confessed leader in its ranks; but finding the question of superiority already decided in a high quarter, we cannot hesitate a moment in laying the decision before the public, and asking its assistance in investigating the remaining point of research—the

question where this laurelled hero is concealed. We find the announcement to which we allude in a German work on the history of Literature, by an eminent writer and critic, published something more than a year since at Berlin, under the title of "A History of Modern Literature, by Theodore Mundt, being a continuation of Fred. Von Schlegel's History of Literature." In this book the author in speaking of works of fiction, after commenting in terms of high praise upon those of Cooper and Irving, goes on as follows:

"While speaking of transatlantic authors, we are desirous of mentioning one who, though he does not strictly come under this head of literature (the authors of fiction) may be classed under it from the subjects and tendency of his writings. This writer is SEATSFIELD, the author of "Verey", "The Legitimate", "Sketches of life from both Hemispheres", and lastly "The Cabin Book." This great painter of the characteristics of his native land, has unfolded the poetry of American life and its various relations yet better than those we have just named (Cooper and Irving). The mystery that for a long time hung over the person of this author, and does so partially as yet, was not affected as matter of literary coquetry or through a money making concealment, as was the case with the incognito of the "great unknown" Walter Scott. Our author has too much simplicity and honesty for this, being a man of weight of mind rather than of showy action, to whom his subject matter is the thing of the only importance. Thus we see him in all his works overlooking the form and engrossed in the subject alone, indifferent whether he produces a novel, a history, or a journal of travels. He shows in all of them an exhausting thoroughness, as imposing as his subjects are colossal. In his descriptions of American scenery, of the uncontrolled vegetation of his country, and the "poetry of wilderness" which he has had the power to conjure up in all its details as well as in its boundless extent—he has reached the climax of sublimity, while he, at the same time, paints with the simplest colors. Not less remarkable is his psychological *standpoint*, from which he is able to draw in the characters he presents the national peculiarities blended with the characteristics of man everywhere. He often gives a glimpse of the transatlantic social relations in contrast with those of his own country, and thus shows himself an acute observer of the state of things in Europe, which in many points he places behind the American manners in naturalness and morality. The easy and unartificial style and structure of his writings only help to give them a stronger appearance of being the direct transcript of that which he has seen and experienced.

Such is the account given of the "greatest American writer of fiction," by a foreign author of deserved reputation and general accuracy. His critical opinion is one that will be taken implicitly on this subject by half Europe, and no American authority, at least, will be sufficient to gainsay it. We have, therefore, taking shame to ourselves for our past ignorance, made all reasonable inquiries in this matter. We have applied at the principal bookstores and libraries in the neighborhood, but to

our surprise neither books or author have as yet been heard of. The Athenaeum, Burnham, Little & Brown, and Redding & Co. are all in ignorance. We have applied to all literary circles to which the humble conductors of diurnal publications have the entree, but a hearty laugh has been the only answer to our anxious queries.

We are yet unwilling to let this sin of ingratitude rest upon American readers. We call upon the public to assist us and solve the question, "where is Seatsfield?" and absolve our country from the shame of ignoring an author, who has been crowned with the laurels of transatlantic criticism. We trust that the subject may seem as important to the public as to ourselves, and that if, as seems probable, some publisher who lives by stealing the brains of foreign authors has added to his crimes by incarcerating in the dungeons of Cliff Street, or Ann Street, or Water Street, this hero of our literature, let that public or the "American Copy-right Club" have him disinterred immediately.

Three days after this article had appeared the *Boston Courier* replied to it with a long and bitterly critical article on the state of literary criticism in this country concluding as follows about Mundt's evaluation of Seatsfield:

How it found its way into the book of this learned critic, is another question. As we never knew a German to be guilty, intentionally, of any thing like fun, we must take it for granted that Mr. Theodore Mundt has been most stupendously hoaxed; and that some wicked Yankee way is at the bottom of the business. The rogue will deserve to be trounced for his audacity, in the opinion of all who cannot relish a joke; but we must allow that it is one of the cleverest mystifications ever perpetrated. "Seatsfield" will not soon be forgotten; he will take his place in that celebrated biographical dictionary of "all the famous men that never were heard of."

*The Boston Courier* followed up the matter in this tone with reviews of works by Jonah Seatsfield dealing with "Three Months Among the Mackerel" published at Hull by Obadiah Herring & Co., 77 Lobster Alley. In a more serious tone the *Washington Daily National Intelligencer* on April 10, 1844, commented in part: Now who this Seatsfield can be, to win such praise from a fastidious German, is something of a problem. We might imagine there was a mistake in the insertion of the name, were the titles of the books not given, which it seems were never heard of this side the water. Has some American just published a work in Germany which is literally "astonishing the natives", or has some Englishman been fathered on us? At all events, we have an author whose praises are sung in Germany before his name has ever been mentioned in his own country. We certainly want more newspapers to care for the fame of our men of genius. Cannot the National Institute throw some light on this matter? Or will the "great unknown" reveal

himself without being further called on? Something must be done, or we shall have thousands claiming the baptism. Mr. Seatsfield can now say, wherever he may be, "the past is at least secure." But, seriously, this is a curious mistake to find its way into so grave a thing as the history of literature.

Two weeks after its original publication the *Boston Daily Advertiser* produced further evidence about Sealsfield's greatness in Germany and Switzerland by publishing a full report of an unnamed correspondent supporting Mundt's evaluation of Sealsfield and testifying to the fact that

all classes, both in the North and South of Germany, read them (S's works) with avidity; they are current books in all their circulating libraries; they have contributed not a little to the reputation of American literature in that critical land; and it is not a little amusing, it might be thought a capital subject for sarcasm against us, that all America knows nothing of them, and that some Americans consider the whole thing, books and author, to be a pleasant invention of Theodore Mundt; or a *quiz*, successfully practised upon one who knows enough about modern literature, to be competent to write its history.

*The Boston Courier* replied to this report the following day in a carefully written but very critical article concluding: "There is certainly fraud, hoaxing, and imposture somewhere; and various knowing-ones have been 'taken in' or have conspired to take in others. We have no good evidence as yet, that Seatsfield has any more real existence than Prester John." The *Courier* followed up a day later with a report from one "Piscator" saying that Hull and Heidelberg contend for the honor of having produced this great man. "Homer was claimed by seven cities after his death, Seatsfield by two before it. Let us hope the Hullonians will not find the eel too slippery to hold."

While the *Boston Daily Advertiser* was seriously engaged in a further defence of Sealsfield's title a great blow to Sealsfield came from a most unexpected quarter. On the 12th of April the *New York Sun* proclaimed these headlines: EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY. THE GREATEST AMERICAN AUTHOR. THE BOSTON DAILY ADVERTISER HAS CREATED NO SMALL STIR AMONG THE WISE MEN OF THE EAST BY THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE. This is followed by a reprinting of the original article about Sealsfield with this conclusion added: "The very mischief is to play down east. The old libraries of New England are being overhauled and ransacked

for one of Sealsfield's books. Who has one?" The *New York Sun* at this particular time had special reasons to view the claims for Sealsfield with great skepticism for it was on the following day that this paper brought out the extra edition of the *Sun* publishing Poe's astounding report of Monck Mason's Flying Machine with the detailed illustrated report that the steering balloon "Victoria" had crossed the Atlantic in seventy-five hours. Here was a carefully documented report that outhoaxed anything the *Boston Daily Advertiser* might be attempting, and the *New York Sun* did not want to be caught supporting a literary hoax from Boston. The tremendous excitement caused by the report of the Atlantic crossing completely overshadowed the article in the *New York Mirror* appearing on the same day which concluded about Sealsfield with these words: "He is (to give the devil his due) a good writer, and while in this country contributed some excellent articles to the old *Mirror*."

After the excitement about the Balloon's crossing of the Atlantic had been quieted by the cold reporting of the hoaxed facts events took a positive turn for Sealsfield. The *New York Tribune* thought of calling upon the German Department of Columbia College in New York City and there actually found some of the works of the mysterious American which had been brought over only that past winter by Professor Tellkamp, L.L.D., Professor of German at Columbia. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* reprinted the *Tribune* report with the comment: "We do not yet hear of any body who has seen *him*, and are still not without a lingering suspicion of his 'dualism'". The *Tribune* report of its interview with Professor Tellkamp stated:

Conversing with him last evening on the subject he said this author had long caused a great sensation in Germany, but that he was not aware his name was Sealsfield—indeed, last Fall his name was not known at all among the literary men of Germany. The edition of Mundt we saw was printed in 1841, and if the name had been rightly given it would have long before this been generally known in Germany. Dr. Tellkamp told us that every effort has been made to track him out through his manuscripts sold to German publishers. As near as can be ascertained, he has resided for some time past in Switzerland, and is now in the North of Italy. His works are all written in German; and Dr. T. informs us that many of them are equal to the prose of Göthe. He is supposed to



be an American, because his scenes are laid here, and his descriptions of low life in all its phases indicate a personal acquaintance with it. Our slang phrases are often introduced, and then translated into German. Indeed, he shows a greater familiarity with the habits and language of the American people than most Americans themselves. But the best work of all is his "Transatlantische Skizzen"—Transatlantic Sketches. These sketches are of common life. A "Courting Scene" hits off the flirting propensities of our ladies admirably. The marriage of a clumsy German to a quick-witted Irish girl, is true to the life. An "Election Scene" is the sketch of an eye witness. "A Husking," which not one out of twenty of our own citizens knows anything about, furnishes the subject of another capital sketch. In this last those peculiar phrases heard nowhere but in the back country, are introduced and then translated. Dr. T. informs us that he has a power over the German language that few Germans themselves possess. His works have caused a great sensation throughout Germany. He must be a curious genius to bury himself in the centre of Europe, and become master of a foreign language before he begins to write, and then excell the best living writers in that language.

Since copies of the works had now been located in America the shrewd editors of the *New World* in New York City without bothering further to find the human being Sealsfield persuaded Professor Tellkamp to loan them his copies for further study and translation. The motto of this literary journal was "large sales, small profits, and quick returns". In closing the eighth semi-annual volume of their journal—the one which brought Sealsfield to the mass of American readers in editions above 10,000 copies—they reminded their readers of the above motto stating: "it is by adherence to this principle that we have been enabled to bring about so important a revolution in the American publishing system with the last few years." The further success of the *New World* depended upon continuation of cheap mailing rates and in ignoring the amenities of international copyright. The works of Charles Sealsfield were perfectly suited for their columns. He was an American, his works described the American scene, and these works had won what most American writers of the time then sought: critical approval and fame in Europe. A corps of translators was immediately put to work and the readers of their journal prepared for Sealsfield's works by the publication of scenes from his works. On April 20, 1844, they launched their campaign with a long article on SEATSFIELD giving a preview of things to come:

The real designation and whereabouts of Seatsfield is a mystery compared with which the obscurity that wraps the "Man of the Iron Mask," or of the "claret-colored coat," is as palpable as day. If a comet unknown and unannounced by astronomers should dance athwart our system, or a meteor explode in our atmosphere, scattering its fragments into our dwellings, the sensation of wonder and surprise could not be stronger than this literary amphibial has produced. Who is Seatsfield? A man that gives the slang of our backwoodsmen descriptions of our "Sleigh-Rides," "Huskings" and "Elections," in a German diction as pure as Goethe. Where is Seatsfield? His books are sent to Leipsic from Switzerland, but whether this is not one of the stratagems by which the jack-o'-lantern contrives to mystify the world, we most candidly confess our utter and absolute ignorance. Where is Seatsfield? here, there, everywhere; a mysterious and ubiquitous being wearing an invisible cloak, who can circumgirate the earth in a second.

By April 28 publisher J. Winchester and the *New World* were ready. They advertised the coming editions of Seatsfield's works in other newspapers of New York City. Here is the text of the advertisement in the *New York Atlas* of April 28:

HUZZA! HUZZA! FOR THE GREAT UNKNOWN! TOMORROW, At 12 o'clock precisely, will be ready at the New World Office, 30 Ann street, PART I.—PRICE 12½ CENTS, OF LIFE IN THE NEW WORLD! OR SKETCHES OF AMERICAN SOCIETY; containing THE COURTSHIP OF GEORGE HOWARD, ESQ., BY SEATSFIELD, The Great and Popular American Author. Translated from the German BY GUSTAVUS C. HEBBE, L.L.D., AND JAMES MACKAY, M.A The sketches are drawn to the life. They fully justify the extraordinary eulogy bestowed upon Seatsfield by Schlegel, the great German critic, that he "extracts from language its very beauty and tone, as the wind the song of the tree-harp-beautifully, naturally. Without exertion, you glide through his descriptions with the ease of a canoe upon some lost streamlet, whose shores are fringed with flowers, and whose air is fragrance."

"In the description of American scenery," says the world renowned Mundt, "and of its huge vegetation—in the poetry of the wilderness, which he, in all its loveliness and fruitful vastness, knows how to paint before the eye—he has exhibited his unrivalled powers." PRICE 12½ cents; \$8 per hundred. Early orders solicited. The entire works of this great author are in the hands of a corps of translators, and will be issued in rapid succession.

But, in spite of all this evidence skepticism continued. The *St. Louis Evening Gazette* concluded a report on the developments with the words: "We do not yet feel certain that the whole matter is not a well-devised Aprilism." The suspicions of the St. Louis newspapers suddenly found strong support from a most unex-

pected and distant city. Way up in Edinburg, Scotland, a father-son team by the name of Hardmann was making a living by exploiting the international copyright chaos. Like the editors of the *New World* in New York they had, almost a year earlier, found the anonymously published work of the second Great Unknown just the thing to provide an extended income for themselves and as most desirable material to fill the pages of *Blackwood's Magazine* for months to come, but they translated from Sealsfield without mentioning any name. Since *Blackwood's* was extensively read in this country American readers inevitably noticed the similarity of stories in *Blackwood's* and the *New World*, and the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* took up the battle immediately asking for a writ of inquiry. They found it high praise on Sealsfield to be robbed by *Blackwood's* and suggested:

First let it be inquired if there be any such physical existence in human shape as Sealsfield; if there be, then if he is a "sure enough" American. Then pursue the inquisition into the right of authorship to "Norden und Süden", said to be Sealsfield's, and if it be found that it belong to him, why then perhaps we will give in, and erasing such names as Irving's, Cooper's, Channing's or Prescott's from the place they now occupy on the scroll of literary excellence, insert in their places that of *Sealsfield, the Greatest American Author*.

There is another angle to this which I discovered only recently. Because I had been using my own Edinburg copy of *Blackwood's*, I had not compared my copy of *Blackwood's* with the one in the Society's library. I found that the Society's copies were reprints pirated from Scotland by the *New World*. This means that the *New World* in pirating *Blackwood's* had unknowingly introduced parts of Sealsfield to American readers anonymously almost a year before they began translating him directly from the copies of his work obtained later from Professor Tellkamp of Columbia College.

Space does not permit to follow the fortunes of Sealsfield further after the publication of his work through the *New World* in America and *Blackwood's* in Scotland. Let me merely state that Sealsfield became a best selling author in America and England; that Longfellow called him his favorite and used some of his material for *Evangeline*; that the *Revue Britannique* published his works in French both in a Brussels and Paris edition; and that

the French translations from the English were retranslated into German and thus came to Sealsfield's attention in Switzerland. He had not received a cent of royalty from all his international fame, but it did force him for the first time to publish his works in a collected edition which for the first time also identified the author's name as Charles Sealsfield. In the introduction to this edition of his works he expressed the hope that in future the sacred rights of an author would be respected and that further plagiarism at his expense would cease. When in 1857 Sealsfield again came to America New Yorkers wanted to celebrate him and Appleton's wanted to get his approval for publishing a complete edition of his works in English. He refused permission and stated that if his presence were publicised he would immediately disappear from New York, which he then soon did. He left for Louisiana, where he was much at home.

How can this conduct be explained? We find the key in the inscriptions on the headstone over his grave. Inscribed there are the initials "C. P." Then Charles Sealsfield, with correct dates of birth and death of Charles Sealsfield, given in German, followed by two verses from the Bible in English:

Psalm 143: And enter not into judgement with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Psalm 51: Have mercy upon me my God, according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

In his writings Sealsfield once stated that if you want to know yourself you need only run for public office in America. Your entire past, in case you have forgotten it, will be brought to your full attention. Sealsfield was not running for public office but he was in a public position probably even more sensitive for he had a past which he could not and would not reveal. The C. P. on the headstone of his grave stood for his real name, Carl Postl, and the two verses from the Bible there he remembered from a prayer in his Catholic prayer book prescribed for a man in direst distress. Carl Postl had in youth become a Roman Catholic priest to please his pious mother who had used undue pressure to have him conform to her wishes. He was a very conscientious servant of the

church and soon rose to high position in the Order of the Knights of the Cross at Prague. It was the time of Metternich's firm rule, but Postl was born with a love for liberty. In 1824 he vanished from Prague and all attempts of the police to find him were unsuccessful. Kind-hearted Masons supposedly helped him escape to America. One of his first published works then appeared anonymously in London with the title "Austria as it is". It was translated into other languages and was internationally acclaimed, but this book put him on Austria's list of wanted men. Other early works were translated into Spanish, French, Swedish, Hungarian and German. Postl had remained true to his priestly vows as long as Carl Postl lived, but in 1824 Postl the priest died and the man was reincarnated in this country as Charles Sealsfield. Because the religious climate at the time did not favor coexistence with his past way of life, he could not have survived being exposed to his zealous readers as a former Catholic priest, even though he had become a Protestant of strongest Biblical convictions. In spite of all this, however, he could not refrain from bringing his two lives together in death by inscribing the initials of his first name on the headstone of his grave and protecting himself and his heirs from the prosecution of the Austrian State and Church by covering his grave with a stone slab proclaiming his American citizenship to the world. His testament repeated this claim to keep his property safe for his heirs and prevent its confiscation.

Sealsfield's erratic course was well summarized by the French *Revue Britannique* after the New York *New World's* pirated translations had reached France. The *Revue Britannique* has just completed its own long series of French Sealsfield translations pirated from the British pirated Sealsfield translations, which in turn were to result in German translations pirated from the French, American, and British pirated translations. The *Revue Britannique* thus concludes: "What a fantastic fate of books! America, ungrateful mother, greets her disguised son as a great man, the British magazines adapt the books of the great unknown German, and he laughs at his old critics and as an American citizen throws his real name into their face."

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