Scott Fitzgerald’s Prep-School Writings
Several Newly-Discovered Additions to the Canon of His Published Works

BY HENRY DAN PIPER ’39

When the writer published a comprehensive check list of Scott Fitzgerald’s published writings some years back (Chronicle, XII, No. 4 [Summer, 1951], 196-208), there was an unavoidable gap for the period 1911-1915. These were the two years that Fitzgerald was attending the Newman School, then located at Hackensack, New Jersey, in preparation for Princeton. It was known that he had written for the Newman News and, during his last year, had been associate editor (chief editor that year was Charles W. Donohoe, Princeton ’17, later one of Fitzgerald’s Princeton classmates; the other associate editor was Herbert Agar, g ’22). No known copies existed, however, of Fitzgerald’s Newman School writings. Efforts to obtain back copies of the News from his former classmates were fruitless. The Newman School itself, after moving from Hackensack to Lakewood, New Jersey, ceased operations during World War II. Its library and administrative records were finally tracked down to a storage warehouse in Hoboken, but screening this voluminous material for Fitzgeraldiana was much too formidable an undertaking at that time. (It is possible that material relating to Fitzgerald’s Newman career is still preserved among those files.)

It seemed very strange that Fitzgerald had kept no copies of these early prep-school pieces somewhere among his extensive papers, since he clung so assiduously to every scrap that related in any remote way to his writing career. His contributions
Beginning with his first appearance in print in 1909 at the age of thirteen, and ending with his last "Nassau Lit" contribution (mailed from officers' training camp in 1918), Fitzgerald published during this nine-year period a total of sixteen short stories, ten poems, five book reviews, and a dozen or so miscellaneous humorous pieces in The Princeton Tiger. During this time he also wrote, directed, and acted in three of his own full-length plays, and collaborated on the writing and production of three Princeton Triangle shows.

The next thing to be noted about this early work is that in Fitzgerald's talent was much better suited to the short story than to any of the other literary forms he attempted. As a dramatist he could be clever and amusing, but his plays lack the variety and range of his short fiction. His occasional flights into verse taught him quite a bit about the use of imagery, just as his plays and Triangle shows gave him good practice in the handling of dialogue. But his poetry, at best, is conventional and undistinguished. His early book reviews (like his later ones) lack both the learning and detachment necessary for good literary criticism. They tell us much more about Fitzgerald himself than about the books he is supposed to be reviewing. But his short stories grew better and better.

In other words, This Side of Paradise, the novel which Fitzgerald began to write during his senior year at Princeton, did not owe its later spectacular success with the public just to a lucky historical accident. Behind it lay ten years of serious apprenticeship in the difficult craft of fiction.

The short stories of these apprentice years, for which the canon has now been finally established, cluster around two distinct periods. The first group consists of the seven prep-school pieces which Fitzgerald published in literary magazines at Saint Paul Academy and the Newman School between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, 1909-1915. Next came three years as a Princeton undergraduate, 1913-1916, during which he concentrated on writing and producing his own plays and three successful Triangle shows. This career as a theatrical impresario came abruptly to a halt midway in junior year, however, when he was obliged to withdraw from the University for academic reasons. The second and most prolific period of short story writing occurred after his return to Princeton to begin junior year over again in September, 1916, and lasted until his departure from Princeton in October, 1917, a year later.

4. [Election night], Newman News, p. 18 (1912). A 300-word untitled article about a recent school election.

Now that we have a complete record of everything that Fitzgerald published before he joined the ranks of professional writers at the age of twenty-two with the publication of This Side of Paradise, what can we say about the importance of this early apprenticeship? The first thing that strikes us about it is its extent.

Most of Fitzgerald's scrapbook clippings do not show page, date, or volume number; his typed table of contents, however, gives the year of publication. I am indebted to Edward M. Kenn, Headmaster of Saint Paul Academy, Saint Paul, Minnesota, for the full citation of the Now and Then item.

According to a note for March, 1911, in Fitzgerald's manuscript autobiography, he mailed a poem called "Paris, the Night and the Lure of the Dark," to The Smart Set magazine at this time. No copy of it exists, however, nor does it seem to have been published. The only two unpublished manuscripts that Fitzgerald preserved from this apprentice period were his diary "Thoughtbook," and the script of his play "The Captured Shadow." According to a letter he wrote to Morton, August 9, 1916 (Fitzgerald Papers, Princeton University Library), his mother destroyed "all but two" of his early unpublished manuscripts.
to the Nassau Literary Magazine as a Princeton undergraduate, for
instance, were all carefully pasted into a special scrapbook. But
now the gap has been filled by the recent discovery of a second scrap-
book, which bears on its cover the title "Other Contributions of
Scott Fitzgerald To School and College Magazines 1909-1919." The
typed title-page inside reads, "Published Juvenilia of F. Scott Fitz-
gerald 1909-1917. Written between the ages of eleven and twenty-
one." In it Fitzgerald pasted tear sheets of the four short stories
he published in the Saint Paul Academy Now and Then (all listed
in the earlier Chronicle check list) as well as one previously un-
identified Now and Then item; and three short stories, a poem,
and two short articles from the Newmann News. The following is a
description of all items contained in this scrapbook that have not
been hitherto recorded:*

and Then, 5:2:7 (Dec., 1910). A 400-word news article about
recent Academy alumni.

2. Football, Newmann News, p. 19 (1911). A 36-line Kiplingesque
poem about a football game.

3. A Luckless Santa Claus, Newmann News, 9:1:7 (Christmas,

4. [Election night], Newmann News, p. 18 (1912). A 400-word un-
titled article about a recent school election.

5. Pain and the Scientist, Newmann News, pp. 5-10 (1913). A short
story.

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7. [A school dance], Newmann News, p. 18 (1913). A 100-word un-
titled paragraph commenting on a forthcoming school dance.

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The most striking thing about Fitzgerald's seven prep-school short stories is their virtuosity. Naturally, there are the inevitable gaucheries of the teen-age amateur. It is easy to see that he has been writing them with a copy of the latest issue of *The Smart Set or Cosmopolitan* open at his elbow. But what a lot he has already learned about the tricks of writing popular magazine fiction. Each of the seven stories is a conscientious imitation of a well-established model, and they are all different. Moreover, his plots and themes become increasingly more complex and ambitious. "The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage," his first published story, is a descendant of the Sherlock Holmes mystery. "Reade, Substitute Right Half" is a dramatic account of the last minutes of an exciting prep-school football game. "The Room With the Green Blinds" is a ghost story that depends for its effect on its atmosphere of terror. "A Debt of Honor" is a historical narrative based on one of his father's Civil War anecdotes. "A Luckless Santa Claus," the first of Fitzgerald's Newman School stories, turns around the ironic idea that it is difficult to give away money in a nation of individualists like the United States. The hero, at the request of his fiancée (a sentimental "do-gooder"), tries to hand out twenty-five dollars as charity to passers-by on the streets of New York but only gets insulted and beaten up for his pains. "Pain and the Scientist," the least successful of all these early stories, is a farcical satire aimed at the foibles of Christian Scientists; its humor is too strained and exaggerated, though, to be very effective. "The Trail of the Duke" is a fantastic and rather incredible story of young love in Manhattan in which Fitzgerald makes use for the first time of the O. Henry surprise ending, a device that he would fall back on again and again in his later commercial fiction.

Even though the greater part of this schoolboy writing is no more than clever imitation, every now and then the reader comes across something that reveals the presence of a fresh and already accomplished talent. For example, Fitzgerald begins his first published story, "The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage," as follows:

When I first saw John Syrel of the New York Daily News, he was standing before an open window of my house gazing out on the city. It was about six o'clock and the lights were just going on. All down Thirty-third street was a long line of gaily illuminated buildings.

Here in the last two sentences is evidence already of that talent for evoking the special quality of a particular time of day by means of precise images that stamps this passage unmistakably as Fitzgerald's. In these early stories we also find evidence of an already well developed dramatic sense that seems to have been instinctive with Fitzgerald. We know from the manuscript "Thoughtbook" which he kept during these years that he wrote naturally by ear; most of this diary consists of transcribed conversations. This sense of the dramatic as well as his familiarity with realistic dialogue stood him in good stead when he started writing short stories. They helped him to begin in *medias res* and to keep his attention properly centered on his characters and their actions. From the very beginning of his career, in other words, we find Fitzgerald writing naturally in a style that such later admirers as Ernest Hemingway would develop into a highly conscious technique of fiction.

"Hold! Hold! Hold!" [he begins "Reade, Substitute Right Half."] The slogan thundered up the field to where the battered, crimson warriors trottled wearily into their places again. The blues' attack this time came straight at center and was good for a gain of seven yards. "Second down, three," yelled the referee. . . .

Another story, "A Debt of Honor," opens with a dramatic army roll-call:

"Prayle!"
"Here."
"Martin!"
"Absent."
"Sanderson!"
"Here."
"Carlton, for sentry duty!"
"Sick."
"Any volunteers to take his place?"
"Me, me," said Jack Sanderson, eagerly.

Another notable thing about this early fiction is the way in which Fitzgerald's Midwestern imagination has already been fascinated by the glamor of New York City. Four of his seven stories have that famous Babylon on the Hudson as their setting, although it should be added that Fitzgerald's knowledge of Manhattan is restricted geographically to Fifth Avenue and often seems to have been filtered through a particularly thick copy of *Town*
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arrival at the school in the autumn of 1911. Once again he hopefully had gone out for football, only to be embarrassed in exactly the same way he had been back home at Saint Paul Academy. During an important match, he missed a pass at a crucial moment and the opposing team scored. "I remember the desolate ride back to school," he still recalled twenty-five years later, "with everybody thinking I had been yellow." But, as had also been the case two years before, shame inspired him to redeem himself by means of his literary talent, and he "wrote a poem for the school paper which made as big a hit with my father as if I had become a football hero. So when I went home that Christmas vacation it was in my mind that if you weren't able to function in action, you might as least be able to tell about it because you felt the same intensity—it was a back door way out of facing reality."

Since both "Football" and "Reade, Substitute Right Half" were inspired by the same emotions, a comparison of them is particularly illuminating. It emphasizes how much more at home Fitzgerald's talent was in the medium of prose than in poetry. His short story is sturdily built on concrete, intensely felt details, and has been pruned down to the most transparent kind of statement. The poem, on the other hand, even though written when Fitzgerald was two years older, is much more artificial an exercise in every way. The necessity of tailoring his feelings to his rollicking Kipling-esque meters has obliged him to conventionalize them; the result is a very undistinguished example of schoolboy verse.

Except for "Reade, Substitute Right Half," Fitzgerald's early fiction was written more out of a desire to impress and divert his classmates than from any deeper inner compulsion. Writing, compared with social and physical action, seemed only "a back door" to reality. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him gradually gravitating from the narrow confines of the printed page to the larger, more public arena of the stage and, finally, ceasing to write fiction altogether. During his last year at Newman he starred in a school play, won an elocution prize, and spent both of his summer vacations from school (as well as the vacation of his freshman year at Princeton) writing, directing, and acting in three of his own full-length plays. They were given successful performances before fashionable audiences and raised considerable money for local charity, earning their precocious author headlines on the front pages of the Saint Paul newspapers as well.

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*The American Magazine, XXIV (Sept., 1928), 106.*
The fashionable hero of "The Trail of the Duke," for instance, is described as follows:

In his house on upper Fifth Avenue, young Dodson Garland lay on a divan in the billiard room and consumed oceans of mint juleps, as he grumbled at the polo that had kept him in town, the cigarettes, the butter, and occasionally breaking the Second Commandment. The butler ran back and forth with large consignments of juleps and soda. . . .

Fitzgerald's ignorance of East Coast geography is often just as funny. "The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage" has an express train in it that commutes directly between Princeton and Cornell.

In general, most of this schoolboy fiction is important only as it served to initiate its teen-age author into the trade of the popular "magazinist." It is no wonder that he was a well-established Saturday Evening Post short story writer by the time he was twenty-three. But the greater part of it, like so much of his later slick magazine fiction, is rarely more than clever and accomplished; most of the time he seems to be merely writing off the top of his mind.

The single exception, the only one of Fitzgerald's seven prep-school stories that shows signs of having been written with his viscera and his heart, as well as his head, is a short piece called "Reade, Substitute Right Half," which he published in the Saint Paul Academy Now and Then when he was thirteen. It tells of a "light haired stripeling," closely resembling its youthful author, who, in spite of his small size and inexperience, is sent into a school football game at the last moment, and who heroically scores and saves the day. It is, of course, a typical case of wish-fulfillment. Fitzgerald had gone out repeatedly for the Saint Paul Academy eleven, always without success. He was much too small and fragile to make any kind of a showing. In one practice scrimmage an accidental bump cracked three of his ribs; another time an inexpert fumble on his part allowed the other side to score. These were humiliations that ranked in him for years. "Reade, Substitute Right Half" was written out of a deep inner compulsion; Fitzgerald has lived every moment of it so intensely and reported his feelings so accurately that every word has been made to count. It communicates directly with a force and an economy unequaled by any of the other stories of this period.

The only other piece of work comparable to it is a poem, "Football," which he published in the Newman News soon after his arrival at the school in the autumn of 1911. Once again he hopefully had gone out for football, only to be embarrassed in exactly the same way he had been back home at Saint Paul Academy. During an important match, he missed a pass at a crucial moment and the opposing team scored. "I remember the desolate ride back to school," he still recalled twenty-five years later, "with everybody thinking I had been yellow." But, as had also been the case two years before, shame inspired him to redeem himself by means of his literary talent, and he "wrote a poem for the school paper which made as big a hit with my father as if I had become a football hero. So when I went home that Christmas vacation it was in my mind that if you weren't able to function in action, you might as least be able to tell about it because you felt the same intensity —it was a back door way out of facing reality."

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gerald devoted himself almost exclusively to writing for the stage. Like Amory Blaine, his hero in *This Side of Paradise*, he soon discovered that “writing for the *Nassau Literary Magazine* would get him nothing.” Instead he provided the lyrics and collaborated on the books for three successful Triangle shows, which he also acted in and helped produce. He also published a flock of nonsense jokes and parodies in the *Tiger*. By the beginning of junior year this strategy had paid off handsomely. The unpopular schoolboy of several years earlier, who had failed so miserably on the football gridiron, was now a prominent campus leader. He had been elected to the fashionable eating club of his choice, was an officer of both the *Tiger* and Triangle, and, according to rumor, was the probable next president of Triangle. Many of his friends now also predicted a spectacular career for him on Broadway. Newspaper critics had rated his Triangle show lyrics with Tin Pan Alley’s best. Several Times Square producers had already offered him lucrative contracts. His mail now contained requests for autographed photographs from unknown girls as well as engraved invitations from equally unknown débutantes who requested the pleasure of his company at their balls and parties. Most exciting and glamorous of all these honors was the wealthy, beautiful, and popular Chicago débutante with whom he had fallen head-over-heels in love. This triumph, too, was largely due to his precocious literary talent; she was fascinated, at least temporarily, by the romantic poems and letters with which he deluged her daily.

Then abruptly mid-way in his junior year every one of these precious honors and trophies was snatched away from him. He had neglected his studies so long that it was inevitable he should be declared ineligible for further extra-curricular activities and dropped back into the sophomore class. To Fitzgerald, though, it seemed the vengeful act of some malicious fate. His starring role in the Christmas Triangle show was taken from him; his chances of being elected president of Triangle evaporated overnight; moreover, after having produced three of his shows in a row, Triangle now brusquely turned down his project for a fourth. Hardest blow of all, he lost his girl.

It was a chastened Fitzgerald who returned to Princeton in September, 1916, to begin junior year all over again. Instead of writ-

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4 *This Side of Paradise*, New York, 1919, p. 49.
5 Clipping from *Louisville Post* (see also clippings from Baltimore, Saint Paul, and other newspapers) in Fitzgerald’s Princeton scrapbooks.
6 Letters from New York theatrical agents and producers and from feminine admirers are included among the Fitzgerald Papers at Princeton.
Scott Fitzgerald, Jr.'s 'Gatsby' in his group, The Caedman, Saint Paul, '11-12
ing for Triangle and the Tiger, he now turned to the more serious pages of the Nassau Literary Magazine. There was at least a story, and a poem or a book review, in every issue. It was the stories, especially, which announced the emergence of a new and impressive talent. Prominent critics like Katharine Fullerton Gerould and William Rose Benét, for instance, singled out Fitzgerald's fiction for special praise in the reviews of Lit issues they wrote for The Daily Princetonian. Moreover, when Fitzgerald sent one of his stories to H. L. Mencken, editor of The Smart Set magazine, Mencken wrote back enthusiastically asking to see more of his works. The quality of his six Nassau Lit stories written during this year can be gauged from the fact that three were later bought and reprinted by The Smart Set, three others were reprinted by Fitzgerald himself in two later volumes of short stories, and three were included in This Side of Paradise.

Most significant of all this acclaim, however, was the response his Nassau Lit stories elicited from his own contemporaries. Editors of literary magazines on other Eastern college campuses discovered his stories with the shock of recognition and praised them vigorously in their editorial columns. Here as early as 1917 is evidence already of Fitzgerald's special gift for voicing the feelings and attitudes of his own generation then just coming of age—a gift which by 1920 would be nationally famous. He carefully clipped out all this comment and pasted it into his already bulging scrapbooks.

Like "Read, Substitute Right Hall," the best Nassau Lit stories of this later Princeton period were also written directly out of Fitzgerald's own emotions and experience. During his first three years in college he had contributed only two stories to the Lit (in contrast to the six he now wrote during junior year). Both of these earlier pieces also touched on personal problems. "Shadow Laurels" reflected his ambiguous relationship with his father, whom he both was ashamed of and admired. "The Ordeal" (later revised and reprinted under the title "Benediction") was inspired by his widening separation from the Catholic church. Both of these early Princeton stories were weakened by his desire to make something clever out of them; the first is spoiled by its fake Paris setting, the second by its plot.

The scars of the year before were still very fresh, however, when Fitzgerald began writing seriously for the Lit in the autumn of

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*Mencken to Fitzgerald, June 3, 1918, Princeton University Library. For the comments of Mrs. Gerould and Mr. Benét, see the Princetonian clippings for 1917 in Fitzgerald scrapbooks, which also contain the editorial comments from other college literary magazines.
1916. The best stories of this period were written out of the need
to come to terms with these bitter disappointments. "Babes in the
Woods" and "The Debutante," for example, explored the implicat-
ions of his blasted love affair; in "The Spire and the Gargoyle"
he is trying to get on record his mixed feelings about the Princeton
system of education. It was natural that he should make these
stories important chapters in This Side of Paradise, which, in a
sense, is only a more extended account of his ambiguous relation-
ship to both of these experiences.

In stories like these Fitzgerald had come a long way from the
early fiction which, as an unpopular Saint Paul schoolboy, he had
written chiefly to amuse and impress his classmates. It was only
when he was deeply and unexpectedly hurt by life—in his football
dreams, or in his relations with his parents, his girl, his university
—that he was driven to treat the concrete material of his own feel-
ings with the imaginative skill and care that he gave to his more
lucrative and more popular, but also more superficial, fiction. Out
of the need to purge himself of some inner conflict through the
disciplining order of art came his finest work, at the beginning of
as well as throughout his career. Naturally, early stories like
"Reade, Substitute Right Half" and "Babes in the Woods" fall
far short of Fitzgerald's more mature and more complex later
fiction. Still, the best of this early work has an excellence that sets
it quite apart from Fitzgerald's other apprentice writing, and that
qualitatively links it with such later things as "The Rich Boy,"
"Babylon Revisited," and The Great Gatsby.

Reade, Substitute Right Half*

BY F. SCOTT FITZGERALD '17

HOLD! HOLD! HOLD!" The slogan thundered up the field to
where the battered, crimson warriors trotted wearily into
their places again. The blues' attack this time came straight at
center and was good for a gain of seven yards. "Second down,
three," yelled the referee, and again the attack came straight at
center. This time there was no withstanding the rush and the huge
Hilton full-back crushed through the crimson line again and shak-
ing off his many tacklers, staggered on toward the Warrentown
goal.

The midget Warrentown quarter-back ran nimbly up the field
and, dodging the interference, shot in straight at the full-back's
knees throwing him to the ground. The teams sprang back into
line again, but Hearst, the crimson right tackle, lay still upon the
ground. The right half was shifted to tackle and Berl, the captain,
trotted over to the sidelines to ask the advice of the coach.

"Who have we got for half, sir?" he inquired of the head coach.

"Suppose you try Reade," answered the coach, and calling to
one of the figures on the pile of straw, which served as a seat for
the substitutes, he beckoned to him. Pulling off his sweater, a light
haired stripling trotted over to the coach.

"Pretty light," said Berl as he surveyed the form before him.

"I guess that's all we have, though," answered the coach. Reade
was plainly nervous as he shifted his weight from one foot to the
other and fidgeted with the end of his jersey.

"Oh, I guess he'll do," said Berl. "Come on kid," and they
trotted off on the field.

The teams quickly lined up and the Hilton quarter gave the
signal "6-0-G." The play came between guard and tackle, but
before the full-back could get started a little form shot out from
the Warrentown line and brought him heavily to the ground.
"Good work, Reade," said Berl, as Reade trotted back into his
place, and blushing at the compliment he crouched low in the
line and waited for the play. The center snapped the ball to

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