

**NOAH'S ARK: A NOVEL;
SELWYN AND BLOUND'S
AUTUMN BOOKS**

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Noah's ark: a novel; Selwyn and Blound's Autumn books by Sydney Walter Powell

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SYDNEY WALTER POWELL

**NOAH'S ARK: A NOVEL;
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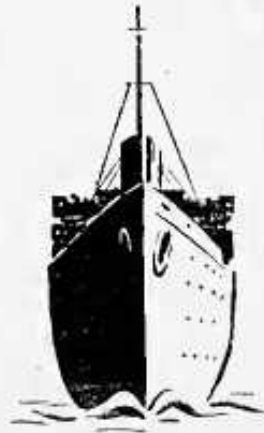
The scene of

N O A H ' S A R K

is a modern liner. Far too many novels have had a similar setting, but we do not know of one which approaches the same realism of atmosphere, or which penetrates so deeply into the odd relationships which sea-voyages establish between members of the human race.

The story in this book is unimportant. One of our readers made this a point of criticism in her report. But the indistinct impression which remains at the end is not very different from the impression left at the end of all sea-voyages.

In the book there is drama. The drama of men and women in love ; of men and women who have grown tired ; of men and women stripped of pretence. There is humour too, pathos, tragedy and little sad incidents which touch the heart.



Also by

S. W. POWELL

A Trader's Tale

May and December

The Adventures of a Wanderer

One-Way Street & Other Poems

Autobiography of a Rascal

etc.

NOAH'S ARK

A novel by
S. W. POWELL

Decorated by
BIP PARES

London
SELWYN & BLOUNT



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C H A P T E R O N E

THE BLUE PETER WAS FLYING ABOVE THE "DIDO." IT was scarcely necessary, for her approaching departure was obvious.

She lay beside a wharf in Woolloomooloo Bay, and the wharf was thronged with people. The blue sky of Sydney arched the scene. Cranes, whose actions were like the intelligent actions of humans, were picking up nets full of luggage and placing them in the hold. Not always neatly or gently, and so again displaying a human character. Photographers had their cameras levelled, hawkers were selling reels of coloured streamers; women were smiling fixedly; men were stolid. On ship and on shore many were wearying, for long-drawn farewells are a tiring business. At length a coloured reel was thrown aboard. That, thank God, was the beginning of the end!

The boatswain was standing idly by a companion-ladder connecting the promenade deck with the after well-deck. He was a well-grown man of audacious appearance, of slack, careless carriage, but nautically graceful. "A blade" a woman in the steerage had already privately called him. He was clothed in an emphatic masculinity which no woman could miss.

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He was the sailor who has a wife in every port and a mistress in every ship.

The fourth officer joined him.

"Seen anything you fancy, bos'n?" he asked, quizzically.

"Swell little piece over there, sir," the boatswain answered, nodding at a girl who was standing at the ship's side with other passengers. "A shiner. But she's no good. I caught her eye. She wasn't having any."

A practical amorist and shrewd, the boatswain could tell at a glance what was game and what was not. He had very little conceit and no illusions.

His eye continued to rove over the people on the well-deck and poop, which, with part of the lower promenade deck, comprised the third-class deck space. It rested upon a young woman, and she looked round. Her gaze for a moment was considerative. She seemed to be estimating the boatswain, body and soul. Then she smiled and looked away.

"Clicked!" said the boatswain softly, and with a satisfied air. His search was ended. The voyage had started well.

The fourth officer laughed and made a quick run down the companion-ladder. He had business on the poop. The boatswain too had business to do shortly, and without another look at the quarry he had marked he ambled forward. No more fear of failure entered his mind than enters the mind of the expert elephant-hunter who has chosen his next kill. The affair was one of routine.

A bank of coloured streamers dipped from the rails of the ship to the crowded wharf. The gangway was not

out yet. Smiles were wilting. At last the ship vibrated, the ditch of green water slowly began to widen, the streamers to lengthen and break. One remained, seemingly of elastic. It snapped, fluttered despairingly, dragged in the water, was dropped, and the ship was free. Another end had merged in a new beginning. The passengers sighed with relief. Then they looked at one another with interest for the first time. These people, this herd of rather repellent strangers, were to be their associates for six weeks. Disquieting thought. Depressing.

That was the general feeling. There were exceptions, of course. For example, there were the children, all of whom were in a state of happy excitement. Two, a boy and a girl, came running up to a man and woman on the poop.

"Oh, dad!" said the boy. "There's our Sunday-school teacher, Miss Bodle, down below there!"

"There's our Sunday-school teacher, Miss Bodle, down below there, mum!" repeated the girl, not to be robbed of the pleasure of giving the news.

"Is there?" said the father, in a rising tone.

The mother's tone was flat. "Is there? Well, you meet all sorts of people on a ship like this."

The little girl turned to her father. She was not going to be dashed by this dull comment on a startling piece of intelligence.

"Isn't it wonderful, dad? Miss Bodle, our Sunday-school teacher!"

"Sure it's her?" he said. He had a rather melancholy face, dark eyes and a drooping dark moustache. He was dressed like a prosperous workman, which he was. The mother was stout. She might have been