

**AN ENGINEER'S  
NOTE BOOK: ESSAYS  
ON LIFE AND LETTERS**

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An Engineer's Note Book: Essays on Life and Letters by William McFee

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**WILLIAM MCFEE**

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## **An Engineer's Note Book**

*By* WILLIAM McFEE

CASUALS OF THE SEA

ALIENS

AN OCEAN TRAMP

HARBOURS OF MEMORY

A PORT SAID MISCELLANY

THE SIX-HOUR SHIFT

# AN ENGINEER'S NOTE BOOK

*Essays on Life and Letters*

By WILLIAM McFEE



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## A Wayfarer from Britain

THAT EVENING, early in November, as the car climbed the last ridges hiding the lake, the conversation had been concerned mainly with walking and the possibility of popularizing an apparently obsolete pastime in a country containing so many automobiles.

"At one time," I remarked, "I was fond of saying that walking tours were impossible in the United States because there weren't, in any universal sense, roads to walk on. I had been told that in many sections the railroad ties were the only means of footing it to the next town. However, that doesn't hold good if a flivver can go clear across to Seattle, Washington. And these Jersey roads we have come over are quite all right."

Some one muttered that once you got off the pike you never knew what sort of horrible fate was in store for you.

"True anywhere." I argued. "That's one of the fine reasons for quitting the pike. You cease to be merely one of a continuous stream of automobiles all trying to tear past each other and dwelling forever in one another's dust."

"But does anybody walk nowadays?" asked another member of the party as yet unspoiled by foreign travel.

"Indeed they do." was the immediate reply. "Without including mountaineers, who are votaries of a specialized form of walking, and tramps, who are reputed to walk, though I have never caught them

at it, many people in Europe before the war used to walk for pleasure. I myself," I added, "have walked much in Italy, where the roads are magnificent. I recall one twenty-mile jaunt along the Flaminian Way, from Ancona, through Falconara to Loreto, where you may visit the most wonderful shrine in the world. That's another thing about walking in Europe, I admit." I concluded, "There is something to see at the end of your journey."

It was at this moment that the car topped the rise, and we saw the Wayfarer, while beyond him, with its islands and deeply wooded shores, lay Hop-atcong. And just as we reached him, and without any ulterior design save to enjoy the view, we stopped the car. He turned and examined us.

He was about thirty, I should say, with straight pleasant features and short brown mustache. He had a stout stick in his hand, he wore a Harris tweed norfolk suit with knickerbockers, heavy cordovan shoes, and on his back was strapped a serviceable knapsack of water-proofed webbing. Rather a remarkable apparition for Jersey, we decided mentally, but gave him good evening, and, after a gesture of reticent surprise, very common among his countrymen when accosted, he returned the greeting in a pleasant English voice.

"A lift?" he repeated, when one of us had absently suggested his joining us. "Well, you see, I'm on a walking tour, and lifts are not allowed, you know. All the same," he added, taking out a pipe, "if you are going in the direction of a hotel, I would appreciate a leg up. These roads round the lake are rather confusing."

And eventually he joined us. We were bound, after seeing the lake at the eventide, for a hotel some miles away, and as we whizzed along through the dusk, we posted him upon our previous conversation and his apposite appearance on the crest of the hill.

"Yes," he assented, "I noticed my appearance excited a certain amount of what one might call comment. It struck me at the time, for in England, Scotland or Wales, on on the Continent, a tourist with a knapsack is quite a common sight, and the peasants regard him as the source of a good deal of their prosperity."

**T**HE WORD PEASANTS struck our untravelled companion in a humorous way, and she said it did not fit, somehow, the people of the New Jersey countryside. No indeed, we muttered, and the Wayfarer laughed.

"All the same," he said, "I believe the peasants are there. Up these little roads, you know," and he waved his hand vaguely, "hiding away behind willows and hickory copses. Which reminds me," he went on, "that today I had a curious adventure. Most curious. I am sorry it happened, because I am going back to Europe, and it will be a long time in my memory. I was passing across a field with a fairly worn foot path and was just about to emerge upon the road, when a man who was sorting an immense heap of rotten tomatoes stood up and walked up the path. I was just asking him if the road led straight through to Morristown when he blocked the path. Keeping his eyes on the ground he told me I could not pass.

"But why?" I asked, looking round.

"This here is my land," he told me, still without looking at me. "This is my house. I own it, and I tell you you shan't pass. Do you hear me, you shan't pass!" And his voice rose.

"Well," I said, "I believe you, of course, but will you say why you are so particular about the last ten yards of your land?"

"No business of yours," he snarled. "You shan't pass. No Englishman will ever go over my land." And he stood there, eyes cast down and fists doubled