

PEN NOTES: REVIEW

Inglis Fletcher of Bandon Plantation

To seeke new worlds, for golde, for prayse, for glory
to try desire, to try love severed farr
when I was gonn shee sent her memory
more strange than weare ten thousand ships of warr

Sir Walter Raleigh: *The Ocean to Scinthia*

North Carolina librarians, with book club programs and high school book report requests always on their minds, will welcome Richard Walser's *Inglis Fletcher of Bandon Plantation*, recently published by the Extension Department of the University of North Carolina Library (Chapel Hill. 79pp. Paper-bound \$.75, clothbound \$2.00). This is the fourth volume in a series of biographical sketches, written to meet constant requests sent to the Extension Department for information on Tar Heel writers. The earlier books, Agatha Boyd Adams' studies of John Charles McNeill, Paul Green, and Thomas Wolfe, have found a large and enthusiastic public. Mr. Walser's portrait of the first woman to achieve this literary roster is a worthy addition to the list.

To people who have seen Mrs. Fletcher on the lecture platform, or as the guest of honor at a literary tea, it will come as something of a shock to learn that this beautifully dressed, elaborately hatted woman lived as a bride in western mining camps, where the scenery was superb but the living conditions painfully primitive. Here she did her first writing for pay, a story synopsis that was bought by a small motion picture company and filmed with a long-forgotten star of the early Westerns, Neil Hart, as hero.

On a prospecting trip to Alaska, where only payroll personnel were allowed, Mrs. Fletcher signed on as cook. Her struggles to pick the feathers from a ptarmigan became a standing joke in the camp. But the experiences of those early years among men who were struggling to conquer the land, far away from home and the centers of civilization, helped her later to interpret the settlers of another place and an earlier day.

In 1928 Inglis Fletcher took a long-dreamed-of trip to Africa, where for five months she travelled through the Lower River country of Nyasaland, studying native customs, and visiting the plantation homes of European settlers as well as the tribal villages of jungle and veldt. It was on this trip that she gathered material for *The White Leopard*, a 1931 Junior Literary Guild selection that is still in print and still extremely popular with Junior High School boys. And it was on her way from Africa, during her brief stay in London, that the idea of writing a novel on early days in the Carolinas first crossed her mind.

Inglis Clark Fletcher, who was born and grew up in Illinois and who spent most of her adult life in the West, is a direct descendant of the Chapmans of Devonshire. Members of this family followed their famous cousin, Sir Walter Raleigh, to the New World; John and Alice Chapman were members of the Lost Colony; Richard came down from the James River area in the Albemarle region, and a later Alice married the Cromwellian governor of Virginia. In Mrs. Fletcher's family tree there are other familiar North Carolina names, such as Davenport, Caswell and Spruill, and perhaps it was the pull of racial memory that inspired her when she settled down at last to her real life's work, the recreation of Carolina history from the first attempt at colonization in 1585 through the years of the Revolution.

In addition to the biographical study Mr. Walser, who is a professor of English at North Carolina State College and a frequent contributor to *North Carolina Libraries*, gives a full resumé of Mrs. Fletcher's novels, and discusses her researches in the historical background of each book. A bibliography of Inglis Fletcher's books and other writings, and of material about her is a useful addition to this most useful little volume.

—Mary Cutler Hopkins, Current Affairs Librarian,
University of North Carolina Library,
Chapel Hill, N. C.