

BOOK REVIEW

SINCE LEAVING HOME. By *Albert Wehde*. 575 pages; 54 illustrations from photographs. Chicago: Tremonia Publishing Company. \$3.00.

Albert Wehde wrote his autobiography in prison. He was then fifty-three years old, and though his life had been highly adventurous, it had never before occurred to him that he had a story to tell the world. But in prison he found time to think, to get a perspective on his past, in its relation to the evolution of society as a whole, and to the United States, which had revealed itself to him as a nation vastly different from that extolled in the school books.

Military bands had played in the Chicago streets while Wehde was tried in Judge Landis' court; and Landis had sent Wehde to Leavenworth, a sacrifice to appease the mob. Though long an American citizen, Wehde was German-born, and he had endeavored in Asiatic waters to transport arms to East Indian revolutionists. All this was before the United States entered the war; yet Wehde was convicted.

There is no such thing as hard labor in prison, this man declares; prisoners suffer bodily and mentally for lack of tangible occupation; but Wehde kept fit, did not wreck himself with brooding. Because of his skill in photography, the officials placed him in the photographic laboratory, where pictures and fingerprints of convicted men are developed. Laboratory work encourages introspection, and Wehde found zest in reliving his early days, in reweighing values.

In his cell at night, he began writing of his venturings. Thus was born the book, *Since Leaving Home*, an undeniable contribution to our social history. At first glance, the volume is deceiving; the chapter heads breathe romance. And romance is in the narrative; but the text is sound, honest, and informative; the style artless, but glowing.

Wehde emigrated to the United States at sixteen, knowing no trade, blissfully confident that anybody willing to work could make a living anywhere. In St. Louis a stern grand-uncle turned him into the street, and he fell among thieves, but was saved from them. Then, while employed as translator for a newspaper at three dollars a week, he inspired the writing of the song, "Where Did You Get That Hat?" subsequently sung from coast to coast.

He and a cousin started down the Mississippi in a rowboat. Terrible days and nights followed, with mosquitoes, hunger and malaria scourging them. Near Arkansas City the cousin took the rowboat and deserted. Unconscious from fever, young Wehde was picked up by kindly Samaritans, and nursed back to health. In Texas he fought a duel with a bad man, and killed him. He acted

in medicine shows, rode freight trains, was imperilled by mobs, and finally stowed away on a steamer for Central America.

Years of wandering, danger, and hardship ensued. Wehde hunted gold and found it; was menaced by savages; became lost in the jungle and was haunted by the specter of another who had gone mad in a similar plight; was near death when his boat sank under him in shark-infested waters; fought in revolutions, was sentenced to die, and escaped.

When his people came to the States twenty-five years ago, Wehde joined them in Milwaukee, and settled down; attended school, qualified as a jewelry engraver, won art prizes. War's opening found him with a studio in Chicago. The call of the blood sounded, and he volunteered to serve the German cause. He was sent to the Far East, where he chartered a 100-ton schooner for munition-running to India, which under international law was then legal.

Here Wehde became the quarry of Allied ships, faced innumerable dangers, and at every turn was hampered by United States consular officers, who manifestly were favoring the British. Once when held in a harbor by a Japanese man-of-war, Wehde borrowed gasoline from that vessel (in exchange for a promise of vegetables), and made a 500-mile dash in a small motorboat to Manila, to obtain parts for the schooner's engine.

He will excite many a laugh with his recital of blunders by the Allies, especially the British and Japanese. In Japan, when buying transportation, he displayed a preposterous passport—signed by King Cole the First of the Kingdom of Missouri, and countersigned by Fiddlerstree, Secretary of State. This was accepted as an adequate voucher for Wehde's integrity.

One fine touch in Wehde's book is the dedication: "There were men I met along the way, in the jungle, on the rivers and the seas, who gave more than I can tell. They asked nothing for themselves except the chance to serve. They ventured into the uncharted places for a shining dream, and few came back. To them, and to those who follow them, this book is dedicated."