

## Jeffery Farnol's 1934 Lecture Tour of The United States

In 1934, Jeffery Farnol, accompanied by his secretary, Ernest Vivyan Chandler, travelled to the United States for a ten-week lecture tour. This was his fourth (and last) visit to the U.S. where he had lived for eight years just after the turn of the century. The lecture tour was arranged through a company called W. Colston Leigh Inc., in an agreement dated Sep 24, 1932.

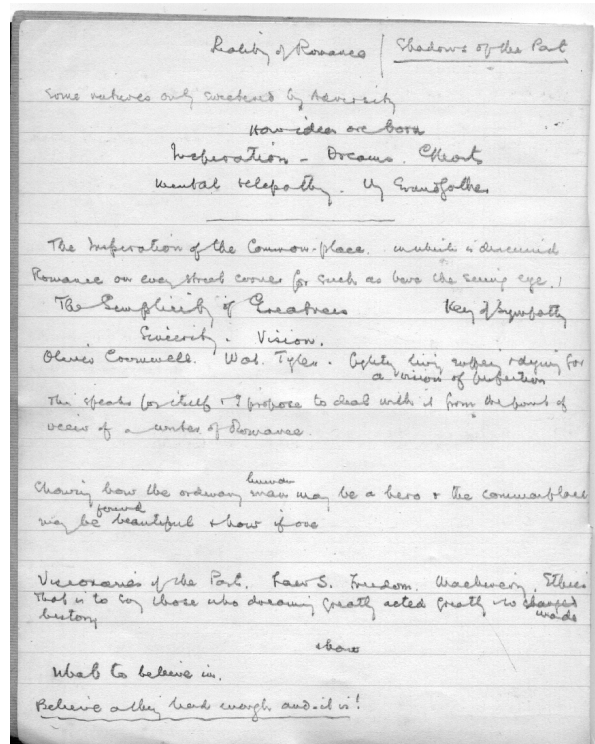
The agreement stipulated that each lecture should be "not less than one hour and not more than 1 1/4 hours....No reading from ms or scripts, although notes may be used..."

Colston Leigh would pay steamship fares for Farnol and his secretary up to a maximum of \$600. They would pay all rail fares for travel in the U.S., providing a lower berth and Pullman chair for JF, and an upper berth and Pullman chair for his secretary.

Farnol was to receive 45% of gross receipts for the tour, with a guarantee of \$3750 for the ten weeks. The tour would start in January 1934.

Lectures took place in New York, Kansas City, Toledo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, St Louis, Lexington, Minneapolis and other points.

When, through the kindness and generosity of Robert Ellenwood, I first obtained the small black school exercise book in which the notes that follow are contained, I found that Farnol had jotted down what appeared to be a jumble of ideas in no particular sequence. When I read further, I realised that he would write using only the right hand pages of his book, then go back using only the left-hand pages. This would have been fine, except that it was a rule he did not invariably follow! It also became obvious that he was planning at least two different lectures, if not more; what follows is my attempt to put the material into a purely arbitrary order. I have tried to transcribe Farnol's script as accurately as possible; where I could not decipher a word, I have used that which seemed to make the most sense to me, but I am not Jeffery Farnol and I hope you will forgive if I err. The material has been broken into paragraphs for greater readability. Any comments or explanations that I felt necessary in the text are included in italics.



A page from the ms.

## ***A Brief Outline of Several Lectures:***

### 1. The Inspiration and Romance of The Commonplace.

A talk describing how & why ordinary things & matter-of-fact people may inspire a romantic novel. With divers brief sketches of incidents & characters in my own experience. In which is discussed Romance on every street corner for such as have the seeing eye. Showing how the ordinary man (human) may be a hero & the commonplace may be found beautiful & how if one....

### 2. Visionaries & Adventurers

A peep at visionaries of the past who, dreaming greatly, have dared to act greatly & so change the course of history as: Wat Tyler, Oliver Cromwell, James Watt, George Stevenson, Fulton (Steamboat), Marconi (Harry Preston's Story), Lincoln. This speaks for itself & I propose to deal with it from the point of view of a writer of Romance.

### 3. The Simplicity of Greatness

Dealing with such books & people as: Aesop's Fables, The Bible, Arabian nights (Narrative), Tristram Shandy by Laurence Sterne, Tom Jones, Walter Scott. Philosophers whose teachings most proudly simple & direct have endured & will endure. Plato, Socrates, Christ.

### 4.

This is why I write Romance. Lastly, stories end happily because... (or not). The Happy Ending. Romance applied to books & life. Belief in our destiny. What to believe in.

Believe a thing hard enough and it is!

***This first complete lecture is untitled, but would appear to follow the brief***

#### ***outline #4 above***

It is with no little diffidence that I make my bow to you this evening because I feel that you most probably expected to behold in the writer of Romances so heroical a large, large man with piercing eyes & a black spade beard — a gigantic fellow who might even have strolled onto the platform with a beautiful damsel in distress beneath each arm.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, I know myself to be a great disappointment to such of my readers who chance to behold me for the first time. Let me give you an instance:

I was standing in the crowded foyer of a theatre waiting for a taxi when I became conscious that eyes were viewing me — the six bright eyes of a comely matron and (as I suppose) her two charming daughters; & as I stood there trying to appear tactfully unconscious, I heard a soft voice murmur in a kind of gentle horror:

“Is that Jeffery Farnol?”

and oh, ladies and gentlemen, the heartbroken disillusionment voiced in that long drawn out, sighful ‘that’ — struck me to the heart, & as I ducked into the taxi, I wondered if the poor, sweet soul would ever read another of poor JF’s books.

However!

Tonight it is not my purpose to make this a lecture in the accepted sense, but rather a gathering of friends to whom I may chat of life & things in general & Romance in particular. So now please try to think yourselves my friends, gathered about my fireside and each and all very welcome. And, first of all - what is Romance?

If we seek the word in Dr Johnson’s Dictionary, we find he answers thus:

Romance: A military fable of the Middle Ages. A tale of wild adventure in love and war. A lie. A fiction.

Romancer: A liar. A forger of tales.

And what do you think of that! For here am I hoping to show that a Romantic tale may be as fundamentally vital and truer than any so-called Realistic Novel ever penned.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, that which we call a Realistic Novel usually deals with subjects distressingly sordid and often extremely unpleasant, though why this should be so I fail to see because purity & happiness are just as real in life, & far more enduring, or this civilisation of ours would end in a ghastly chaos. It is upon the strong virtues of the home, the belief & faith in each other, that the potency of a nation is founded, and it is upon the clean & honourable living of its citizens that empires flourish — & thus, since our civilisation is sound today, it is manifest that Good is proved stronger than evil & Virtue more enduring than Vice be it never so glittering & cynically clever. So it is that I for one make my heroes good, strong men, & my heroines very purely feminine and more or less beautiful of feature.

Yes, ladies & gentlemen, I am bold to say (and chance being mocked as a sentimentalist) that I had rather write of the sweet, simple, wholesome things of life than deal with the morbid, that I had rather describe the abiding & oft recurrent

birth of a glorious sunset or the fresh beauty of early morning than paint the fetid squalor of a slum. And in this I hold my romance is truer than the most painful realism because the wistful sadness of evening & fresh promise of dawn are as real and more enduring than the storm, which is but a phase & will pass away & be forgotten sooner or later, thank God.

For with the rolling years mankind has grown and is growing wiser, gentler, more brotherly & thus making this old world a better place to live in. For instance, little more than 100 years ago, men, and women too, were hanged for theft. (*Personally I should like to see - Girl mother stolen handkerchief 41/2*)

I venture to suggest that we should revise Dr Johnson's definition of a Romancer & instead of Liar & Forger of Tales term him rather a Prophet & kindly seer who paints men & women & the world not perhaps exactly as they are but — as they would be & as they surely will be either in this plane or hereafter.

For, ladies & gentlemen, it has been my experience in a somewhat varied career to find that people, even the worst of them, are always better than they seem— if, ah yes — if we will only trouble ourselves to look for the hidden good in them —

and this naturally brings me to the story of Blacksmith Bill.

It was years ago & I was high vaulting 18 with a yearning to paint pictures & write books — so my poor bereaved sire instantly packed me off to a factory in the city of Birmingham to learn toolmaking. A trade, my boy! Who are you to paint or write books! NO — a trade's the thing. — Well, I went & there commenced for me a time of sordid brutality & misery wholly undreamed of until then. For, ladies & gentlemen, these were the days before Trades Unions or Workmen's Compensation Acts, where workpeople were slaves & were treated worse than horses or dogs, oh yes! And among these brutalized folk I met Bill — a huge fellow more brutal, sullen & foul-mouthed even than his fellows & ever ready to fight & consequently universally shunned. So lonely was he in his brutish ferocity that I determined to make friends with him if possible, which I eventually did by knocking him down. Oh, not at all heroically. You see, I happened to have a big file in my hand, & when he came at me I just dived between his great legs & down he went half stunned & down I kept him with the tang of my file at his eye until he agreed to give me best. Story of Boots—Story (*N.B. This story is one of JF's unpublished gems which appears in my book "The Privilege of The Sex and Other Stories" — pb*)

After this, strangely enough, Bill showed no hard feeling or resentment, & little by little we became so friendly we would walk homewards together.

Ladies & Gentlemen, you may read in history how the gentle St Martine shared his cloak with a beggar, but to my mind Blacksmith Bill was even nobler in that moment of self-denial, giving both his boots. And thus you see, this sullen, brutal-seeming fellow carried deep within him a spark of the divine fire. So God bless him dead or living, say I.

Well this was in Birmingham, England, & now for an example that befell me in New York. The years had rolled & in their course rolled me to America where I was painting scenery for a livelihood & writing desperately between whiles. And this was the day of the open saloons & free lunch counters where for a nickel a hungry soul might drink good beer & eat his fill of wholesome food for a nickel (& if

he knew the bartender)

Behold me then upon a certain morning

(Story.....Man Kicked.....Do it again)

***(N.B. I cannot find this story in any of Farnol's writings or reminiscences — pb)***

Well, ladies & gentlemen, this unlucky fellow took his battering with a spirited fortitude that I for one thought very admirable — & his batterers showed their regret in such generous manly fashion, that could such simple tastes but apply to the misunderstandings of great empires this world would be a better place.

And thus it is that I, having gone about among my fellows with eyes & ears wide open to a ready sympathy, have found them as a general rule so kind & brotherly that when I sit down to write a book, I tell my narrative as it were to a world of friends, feeling that they will at least know me sincere, & hoping that what soever I write may interest & perhaps bring them some meed of comfort or surcease from the carking worries that are our human lot.

Ladies and gentlemen this is a world of give & take if we be ready to bestow friendship & sympathy for their own sakes, these will be given back to us as freely — if we bestow our trust fearlessly seldom will that trust be betrayed.

And lastly I give my romances generally a happy ending because I am persuaded that the ultimate end of every man that was ever born will & must be happiness. For since Science tells us that nothing can be utterly destroyed — then how much less this strange & complex wonder that is the soul. The old, old theory of soul upon the Wheel of Life is, I venture to think, very truth. Thus though it turns away from God and good, yet slowly but surely it must revolve & turn until up & up back it mounts through the ages to find again perfection & its long lost godhead in the infinite mercy of the Great Good.

Well here ends my talk, Ladies & Gentlemen, but I see I am a little before my time so with your permission I will tell you a strange & veritable incident in the life of my long-dead Grandfather, recounted to me very often by a very wonderful old lady, I mean — my grandmother.

“Looky, dear”, she would say, “your dear G. was a very fine man with the handsomest whiskers I ever saw. So black & glossy. And he was born in Cornwall.”

***(Here JF would presumably tell “A Tale of My Grandfather”, which appeared in “A Matter of Business” published in 1940, and subsequently a broadcast by Farnol on the BBC’s ‘Tellers of Tales’, August 6, 1951, a transcript of which I obtained and reprinted in “The Privilege of The Sex and Other Stories” — pb)***

***I think it unlikely that the lecture as written, even allowing for the inclusion of the stories of Blacksmith Bill, the girl/mother/stolen handkerchief, the New York saloon story, and A Tale of My Grandfather, would have added up to an hour, so it is probable that Farnol must have made a number of additions, to avoid shortchanging his audiences. He was undoubtedly a great storyteller; this is why people would come to hear him, and I am sure that he would have obliged them with anecdotes a-plenty.***

***The notes for this next lecture seem to start with the concluding sentence of a missing first part:***

Happy is the man blessed with the eye to see the abiding good hidden at the heart of things & the covert virtues of his fellows, for to such a man the world is a place of hope & all men his brothers. And this brings me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of my talk which I call

## Vision and Adventure

And by Vision I mean not so much the power of seeing with these mortal eyes as with all-potent organ The Eye of The Mind — the Eye of Imagination whose range is infinite — more especially (I find) if these 2 mortal eyes be shut. Some people call this daydreaming, but in the Old Testament you will find they termed it — Being Visited by the Angel of the Lord.

### No.2

I propose talking to you all for a little while tonight on Vision. And by Vision I mean seeing not so much with these mortal eyes as with that far more potent organ, the mind's eye, the Eye of Imagination.

Now with this wonderful eye we can often see clearest that when our two material eyes are tight shut — & some folks call this day dreaming, but in the Old Testament you will find they called it being visited by an Angel. (***This appears to be an alternate start — pb***)

To daydream may be mere waste of time unless when we open our mortal eyes again we contrive soon or late make these visions come true.

Now I propose that we take a peep back through the dusty ages to certain people who, having dreamed wonderfully, dared to make their dream a reality. And, first of all — the Wheel.

Who, I wonder, was the unknown genius who dreamed of and constructed the first wheel? Can you picture him, a great, wild fellow, probably clad in skins, dozing beside a fire in the mouth of some cave that was his home.

He espies a fallen tree — the bole is smooth & round. If he cut off & bore a disc? He speaks of it to his neighbours, they shake their heads & call him mad, of course. He is shunned as dreamy idler. But he perseveres, he cuts his discs, bores them, set them upon an axle & thus in cheerful loneliness the first wheel is made & life revolutionised & ever since.

There have been visionaries who, amid the hardship & subjection of a cruel serfdom dreamed of a better state & laid down their lives to make it real...like poor Wat the Tyler of Dartford Town in England, 900-odd years ago. Let us peep at him one certain afternoon, when great lords went abroad sheathed in steel & lived in impregnable castles & had the right of gut and gallows — that is to say could hang or maim their miserable serfs at will & who, scorning to work themselves, held the workers in iron grip & scorned them in their pride as baser than their battle steeds & hunting dogs. Life was a dreadful business for the poor in those grim & bloody

days.

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Oliver Cromwell, who, daring to dream of a free Parliament, went on to dream of an unconquerable army & inspired by this vision formed & equipped that regiment of Ironsides, breathed into them his own sincere & dauntless spirit, prayed with them, believed them, sang with them — gave for their motto ‘God With Us’ and believing God indeed rode with them, turned despair into triumph, defeat into constant victory — made England the greatest power in Europe and thus saw his dream all but realized.

Pass on a hundred years or so & peep through small latticed window into a cottage where an untidy youth sits dreaming by the fire watching the kettle on the hob. And presently the kettle boils, the lid begins to clatter... The youth watches...hundreds of boiling kettles had clattered their lids ere this but nobody had ever troubled to wonder why. But this idle-seeming youth awoke to action, he sealed up spout & lid, he set the kettle back on the fire & presently blew himself up & the windows out of the cottage. And when his poor mother & frightened neighbours came running to berate this idle fool...James Watt (probably somewhat damaged) stood up — “Mother!” said he, “Oh, folks — I’ve found a giant to move the world” And he had, for Giant Steam has been our servant ever since. A little later was your own Fulton who...

Then came our George Stevenson with his railroad engine, who lived so near our times that I have talked with an aged man who knew and worked with him & from this patriarch heard how poor George worked & slaved & was made a mock of — pawned his furniture — sat up at night with a gun to guard his models from destruction & finally having set his engine going was baited & harassed by Parliament, treated as a public menace whose devilish contraption would blast the countryside with its deadly fumes. As said one M.P. to him when up before the Committee “But, Mr Stevenson, let us suppose your engine in motion & a cow upon your railway — how then, sir?” And of course you all know what poor George answered. “Why then, sir,” answered George, “I should be sorry for the cow”

Then comes the greatest American & loneliest man of all Americans to my mind. I mean, of course, Abraham Lincoln. Was there ever a greater, sincerer dreamer & nobler simple man of action? Newer, I think. Being so great he was, of course, simple & being sincere he was a mighty power. You all know how greatly he dreamed & how triumphantly he made that dream come true to (life). For being truly great he was, as I say, truly simple. And this brings me to the Third Part of my talk, which I call

### The Simplicity of Greatness

Now, ladies & gentlemen: Today Cleverness is become so normal that very few of us are anyway great.

Greatness and that which cannot die embodies some worldwide truth...

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Let us take books. It is not..... the books that have withstood the passage of time with its ?? & events — The Bible. Aesop's Fables. Tom Jones. Tristram Shandy. Shakespeare. To name a few. Not one of these are clever yet each & all ring true & Truth can never die. Of course, there are many, many other books that will be read by generations unborn, and of all books that shall thus endure I venture to think those cast in sincere & simple narrative form may have ever the greatest appeal, for we all love a tale simply & sincerely told, more especially if it embodies some vivid human problem; but it must seem true & be greatly simple because all our deepest & greatest joys are themselves simple & cost us very little.

There is the wind on the heath, brother. There is the sweet, glad promise of dawn. The wistful piping of solitary bird in shady coppice of an evening. The cool, sweet plashing of murmurous brook. The shimmer of moon & stars upon the bosom of placid water.

These are deep & healing joys, simple & unclever as Nature's self & cost us nothing, but in there (*sic*) enjoyment is peace & a very real content.

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Then there were the old philosophers who in a simpler world taught mighty truths as truly & simply as they might, since cleverness was a rarer thing then. To be sure there was Pythagoras who was so slick that to draw the crowd he lectured from behind a curtain & made of himself & teaching a mystery. But who heeds him today, while Plato, Socrates & Aristotle are still read — and then to be sure was the grandest & perhaps simplest of them all — Jesus himself, who, teaching the mightiest truth used ever the simplest illustrations — Suffer little children, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. The Tale of The Prodigal. The Sower — sure never were fables & narrative more simple & more sincere than His, nor more romantic, for that matter.

So here we are back at the Reality & Romance where we began.

*The last of Jeffery Farnol's notes, written on a page apparently torn from a small looseleaf notebook (on the reverse of which is a portion of Chapter VI of "Winds of Chance/Fortune" — a slightly different version from that actually published) is a 51-word sentence in which he describes the reason why his books are the way they are — and, I would suggest, the reason why we still keep his memory alive today.*

**My BOOKS have been written for a purpose  
& that is to attempt to show what a clean, good  
old world there is, if we only trouble to look,  
to show that we poor humans are a great deal  
better than we think we are & this troublesome  
old world...**

*Here the fragment ends.*



