

# HALLIDAY SUTHERLAND'S BEST-SELLER

## *The Author Describes How He Wrote It*

To write a best-seller, such as "*Arches of the Years*," requires hard work far more than inspiration, in the opinion of the author, Halliday Sutherland, who is here interviewed by "*The Listener*." Next week Dr. Sutherland will write a special article for us on Finland, a country which he knows well.

AT school, Halliday Sutherland won every essay prize going. But the idea of looking for success in general literary work did not occur to him. As a medical man he wrote medical books. His literary idols had been headed by Marie Corelli, who still has a place in his heart, although he no longer can read her work. "I realise now," he says, "that the trouble when I was young was that my reading was not guided."

So it was hard work when the big idea finally came to him.

He knew a literary agent in London, Frank Betts. One day Betts telephoned him and suggested that he should read Axel Munthe's *Story of San Michele*. "Why?" he asked. "If you do not know why when you have finished the book, no harm will be done," came the reply. "But read it."

He read the story of San Michele and realised that it had shown him a new way of writing autobiography. He determined to write about the outstanding facts of his own life.

### "Arches of the Years"

For two years he worked at *Arches of the Years*. He had all his experience on which to draw. It was interesting work, he told *The Listener*, but it was also hard work. Four times was the book written and rewritten. Finally the literary agent was satisfied that it was a good job of work. But who would publish it?

No fewer than twelve publishers refused. These were disappointments after so much effort. Five times the typescript crossed and re-crossed the Atlantic. At last it was accepted by Bles in London and Morrow in New York.

Overnight it became a best-seller. Soon it was translated into six European languages. It is still selling, Dr. Sutherland says, almost as well as at first. "This seems to me to be a clear indication," he confessed, "of the workings of Providence in human affairs. If those two publishers had not seen something in the book the others had missed, it would never have seen the light of day."

### Hard Work Required

After his first experience he became certain that a book was only as good as the amount of work put into it by its author.

Occasionally a writer would write from inspiration, forgetting time, and place in the concentration of spontaneous work. But this did not happen every day. When it did, no doubt the best work was done; but on the other days it was hard work that told the tale. Quite definitely he would say that this was a hard and fast rule for successful authorship.

Recently he had seen that sort of sustained effort in writing well rewarded. The publishers had sent him a copy of *Keep Off*



Spencer Digby, photograph

HALLIDAY SUTHERLAND  
... San Michele showed the way

*Death*, by Elizabeth Echlin, before it had been published. He read it from cover to cover without putting it down, and told the publishers it was the finest book he had read written by a patient about doctors and nurses. It was a story of great physical and moral courage, and had the charm of being entirely lacking in egotism. Since then he had been gratified to find that Sir Hugh Walpole had endorsed this opinion, and that the Book Society had commended the book.

### More Fortunate Than Some

"I am fortunate. I have had the reward. Others are not so fortunate." He recalled the story of Mary Webb, whose *Precious Bane*, in his opinion, was in the class of *Wuthering Heights*. Success came to her book only after the author was dead.

After *Arches of the Years* came *A Time to Keep*, and *In My Path*; but "it is impossible to keep on writing autobiography for ever. I turned to travel books." Then came *Lapland Journey*, and *Hebridean Journey*. He wrote these, he says, not by keeping a careful record of experiences. Diary writing, he believes, except for such as Pepys, is the worst and dullest kind of writing imaginable.

He possesses a good auditory memory, and believes that impressions of a journey, looking back when it is over, are the impressions the mind has singled out as the most interesting impressions. These he puts on paper, believing that what has most interested him will interest other people.

### Sister in New Zealand

Last year he toured all Australia, and has been in the North Island of New Zealand for a month. He stayed near Cambridge with his sister, Mrs. Douglas Alison; and visited the Chamberlins at their home on Ponui Island, in Auckland Harbour.

Often, he says, he has felt that here in New Zealand he might be at home in Scotland. Auckland Harbour by night might well have been some sea loch on the Western Coast of Scotland. By day, of course, the climate spoiled the suggestion, and the semi-tropical bush took the place of the heather.

At the beginning of this month he went to the South Island, looking forward mainly to walking the Milford Track. He will be able to compare the southern sounds and their steep forest walls, with the Norwegian Fiords, and will be interested in the "open spaces" scenery of the eastern slopes of the Southern Alps. He will look up at the mountains from the valleys. "Not for me this looking down a thousand feet."

Perhaps a book will appear when he has time to take stock of all he has seen in the southern Dominions.

### Comparison With Australia

Dr. Sutherland is impressed by the physique English, Scots, and Irish stocks have developed since their migration last century. In Australia, particularly, at gatherings like the Melbourne Cup meeting, he noticed the height of the men. New Zealanders he found entirely different in temperament. The Australian was gregarious, care-free. The New Zealander, he thought, had remained closer to the original type. After all, the New Zealand climate corresponded much more closely to the climate of the British Isles. Australians, too, in their particular environment, had developed a strong local accent in speech. Although he had been told that something of the sort had also happened in New Zealand, he had not yet detected any specially different standard.

### Quarter-Acre of Beer Bottles!

In Australia he flew with a flying doctor. What a boon these men were to the isolated settlers in the great inland spaces! He saw the smallest town he'd ever seen — on the site of Burke's last camp. There was a police station (the constable had a beat of 60,000 square miles and had not yet covered it all, although he maintained that the people were law-abiding). And there was a hospital, and a pub. "Near the pub I saw something else I'd never seen before. It does not pay them to send back the empty beer bottles, so they just pile them up. They have a quarter-acre piled up to a height of six feet."

As he talked, Dr. Sutherland, who is not very tall, but strongly built, paced restlessly back and forward. He would be silent for a while, then make some carefully worded observation.

"Well," he said, smiling for the first time, "how will that do? I hope you've got something from that."

There it is. . . .