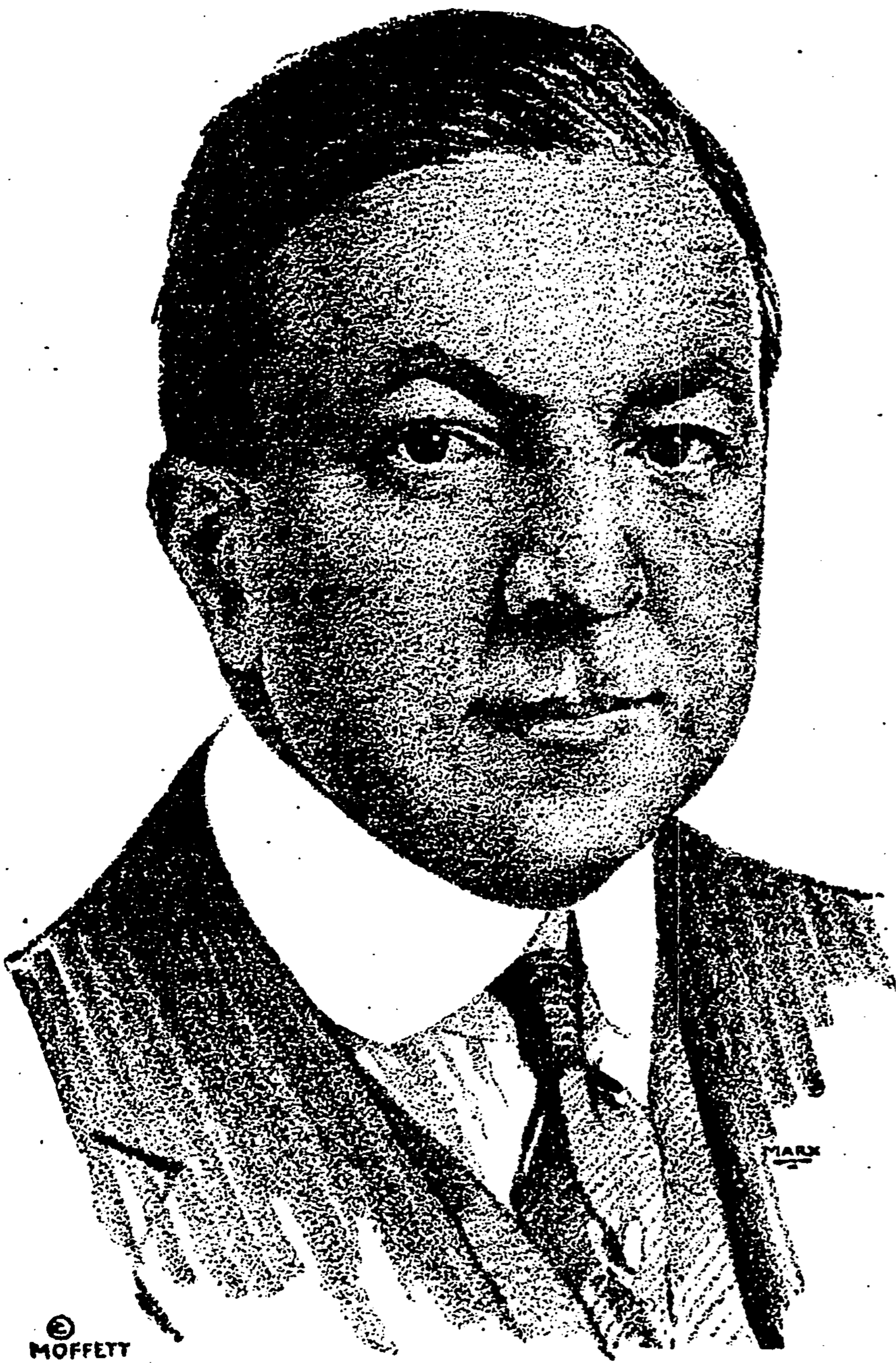


Captain Rupert Hughes Calls Authors to War

In a Talk About the Work Done by Men Who Write Country's Popular Books He Praises the New York National Guard



Rupert Hughes

military resources of New York. Mr. Sears of Appleton's is chief of our Division of Information. He is giving up to this work all his time except two days a week which he keeps for his business. The Vigilantes, a society of writers and artists, is doing good work.

"The hard thing is to get men who will shoulder a rifle. Many people spend their time making ferocious attacks on this country for being unprepared, but they are unwilling to do their obvious duty in preparing—that is, to enlist. We have got unaccustomed to war; we are unaccustomed to uniforms. Our officers and enlisted men only wear a uniform when absolutely necessary. It is because we are so unaccustomed to war that conscription is so necessary.

"The first thing for any one to do who wants to help in the war is to enlist, of course. We need all sorts of civilian aid, but we chiefly need men to carry rifles. But now that conscription is coming, this matter will be settled for us. One thing seems to be sure now—the National Guard will be recruited up to war strength. Governor Whitman obtained the power to draft a year ago. It is interesting to see that New York State has been two steps ahead of the rest of the country in preparedness right along. On the border the New York National Guard had the largest division ever under the command of one American officer. For a regular army officer to have command of a whole regiment is exceptional. And a man must have a large body of men to drill in order to know how to do it. A man who has been drilling a hundred men will not be at his ease with a hundred thousand men. The field order for moving a brigade is a piece of literature in itself.

"They make fun of the National Guard, but we can return the compliment. The National Guard is the protest of American business men against unpreparedness. Of course, the National Guard isn't the ideal military organ-

ization. The man in civilian clothes carrying a broomstick isn't the ideal policeman. But the man in civilian dress carrying a broomstick is a good deal better policeman than the man in pajamas not carrying anything. So if I have any message for authors who want to help their country, it is, Enlist in the National Guard!"

Rupert Hughes is no great upholder of the virtue of brevity in fiction.

"To cut a story," he said, "in which every paragraph and every word mean something, in which character has been gradually and surely developed, is not like cutting the history of Rome. An often quoted story has to do with the newspaper editor who told the verbose reporter that in the Bible the account of the creation of light took only ten words. The reporter might have replied that the story of Ruth—a plain little rural short story -- took twenty-five thousand words."

"What," Mr. Hughes was asked, "seems to you the most important thing in the composition of a story?"

"Selection," he replied. "Out of a hundred things the writer can use only one. Now, he must select that one which will suggest the other ninety-nine. Just by a little slip of the pen he may cause the reader to be annoyed by the absence of the ninety-nine. It is all a matter of selection."

"Differences in character depend upon minute things. You can't put into a story all that a character does or says; you must select. So a character study is really an anthology of a character. In an anthology of poems you can't include every poet—you put in Herrick, perhaps, and leave out Donne. Some one reads the anthology and says that Donne should be included. Well, in his anthology there would be no Herrick—that is all there is to say about it. It is the selective instinct, and according to the quality of his selective instinct a writer fails or succeeds."

RUPERT HUGHES—that is to say, Captain Hughes, Assistant to the Adjutant General—has an interesting and novel plan by which authors may assist the United States in the present crisis. The plan is to enlist.

The author of "What Will People Say?" "We Can't Have Everything," and other popular novels of contemporary American life is now stationed at Albany. There, dressed in the uniform of an officer in the National Guard, he recently interrupted his work long enough to be interviewed, but he had little to say about the subject concerning which he is probably better informed than any other American author—the participation of our nation and especially of New York State in the war. He said, quite simply, that it was the duty of every author of proper age to enlist, without waiting for conscription. And he spoke of certain literary problems directly related to the war. But for the most part he talked as Rupert Hughes, novelist, rather than as Captain Rupert Hughes of the Sixty-ninth.

What Rupert Hughes said about the war's effect on literature had to do with its tendency to make writers, as well as other people, more keenly aware of the great primitive emotions.

"War destroys generalizations," he said. "War brings things down to cases and gives writers a sense of actuality. It is hard to say just what the war's effect will be. It has given us Rupert Brooke's sonnets and 'Mr. Britling Sees It Through'—but it hasn't hurt Charley Chaplin. I think it helps us chiefly by sweeping away foolishness and giving us a concrete pride in something definite.

"The process is interesting. A mother gives up her son—this act is observed and celebrated by the popular songwriter. The resulting 'mother-song' is trite and banal, and only buffoons sing

it. Then suddenly it comes to us that what the song says really is important—that the tears of mothers and the cries of the wounded are tremendous things, the stuff of literature. The things that the 'mother-song' says ought not to be tiresome, the trouble is with the way in which they are said in the song. We see that the writer's task is to find a new way of saying these things. We see that writers have been afraid to be heroic, but that now they must be heroic, must write of the great elemental and immortal passions."

Rupert Hughes takes his subject from the life around him and has little respect for the theory that a writer should deal with periods which he can regard with the advantage of perspective.

"What is perspective?" he asked. "Is it not an artificial distortion of things in order to make them graphic? And what business has a novelist with artificial distortion? A novelist's concern is with the truth. Perspective makes a railroad track look like a triangle."

"A novelist must keep the rails of the track parallel. I want to do human life as Audubon did birds, I paint it before the color fades and changes to other tints entirely. When I have finished my series of novels on contemporary life, I know that whatever it may be worth, it will give as truthful a picture of the background of this country as I can make."

Here Mr. Hughes became Captain Hughes to attend to some official business—to talk to some men who came to offer their services in some branch of the mobilization of the resources of the State. This brought the conversation around to the subject of the war again.

"Many authors and publishers," he said, "are making great sacrifices to serve the country. Adjutant General Stotesbury is building up a wonderful organization for mobilizing the entire