

Sam Average

BY PERCY MACKAYE

Percy Mackaye, who was born in New York City in 1875, is one of the few Americans whose interest has been almost wholly in the theatre. As a lecturer, writer, and champion of real art in drama, he has had few if any equals. He inherited his interest in drama from his father, Steele Mackaye, author of *Hazel Kirke*. He was educated at Harvard, where he studied under Professor George Pierce Baker, and at Leipzig. He has travelled extensively in Europe and at various times has resided in Rome, Switzerland, and London. In 1914 Dartmouth conferred upon him the honorary Master of Arts degree. At present he holds a fellowship in dramatic literature in Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Mr. Mackaye's efforts in the dramatic field have been varied. Masques, pageants, operas, and plays are to his credit. *The Canterbury Pilgrims*, *The Scarecrow*, *Jeanne D'Arc*, *Mater*, *Anti-Matrimony*, *Sanctuary*, *Saint Louis Masque*, and *Caliban* are among his better-known works.

In 1912 appeared his *Yankee Fantasies*, of which *Sam Average* and *Gettysburg* are the more noteworthy.

In all of Mr. Mackaye's work he possesses what many dramatists lack—a definite ideal. He aims at an artistic and literary effect. His *Sam Average* is a real contribution to American patriotic drama.

CHARACTERS

ANDREW JOEL ELLEN SAM AVERAGE

SAM AVERAGE[D]

*An intrenchment in Canada, near Niagara Falls, in the year 1814.
Night, shortly before dawn.*

On the right, the dull glow of a smouldering wood fire ruddies the earthen embankment, the low-stretched outline of which forms, with darkness, the scenic background.

Near the centre, left, against the dark, a flag with stars floats from its standard.

Beside the fire, ANDREW, reclined, gazes at a small frame in his hand; near him is a knapsack, with contents emptied beside it.

On the embankment, JOEL, with a gun, paces back and forth, a blanket thrown about his shoulders.

JOEL. [*With a singing call.*] Four o'clock!--All's well!

[*Jumping down from the embankment, he approaches the fire.*

ANDREW. By God, Joel, it's bitter.

JOEL. [*Rubbing his hands over the coals.*] A mite sharpish.

ANDREW. [*Looks up eagerly.*] What?

JOEL. Cuts sharp, for Thanksgivin'.

ANDREW. [*Sinks back, gloomily.*] Oh! [*A pause.*] I wondered you should agree with me. You meant the weather. I meant--[*A pause again.*

JOEL. Well, Andy, what'd you mean?

ANDREW. Life.

JOEL. Shucks!

ANDREW. [*To himself.*] Living!

JOEL. [*Sauntering over left, listens.*] Hear a rooster crow?

ANDREW. No. What are you doing?

JOEL. Tiltin' the flag over crooked in the dirt. That's our signal.

ANDREW. Nothing could be more appropriate, unless we buried it--buried it in the dirt!

JOEL. She's to find us where the flag's turned down. I fixed that with the sergeant all right. The rooster crowin' 's *her* watchword for us.

ANDREW. An eagle screaming, Joel: that would have been better. [*Rising.*] Ah! [*He laughs painfully.*]

JOEL. Hush up, Andy! The nearest men ain't two rods away. You'll wake 'em. Pitch it low.

ANDREW. Don't be alarmed. I'm coward enough.

JOEL. 'Course, though, there ain't much danger. I'm sentinel this end, and the sergeant has the tip at t'other. Besides, you may call it the reg'lar thing. There's been two thousand deserters already in this tuppenny-ha'penny war, and none on 'em the worse off. When a man don't get his pay for nine months--well, he ups and takes his vacation. Why not? When Nell joins us, we'll hike up the Niagara, cross over to Tonawanda, and take our breakfast in Buffalo. By that time the boys here will be marchin' away toward Lundy's Lane.

ANDREW. [*Walks back and forth, shivering.*] I'm afraid.

JOEL. 'Fraid? Bosh!

ANDREW. I'm afraid to face----

JOEL. Face what? We won't get caught.

ANDREW. Your sister--my wife.

JOEL. Nell! Why, ain't she comin' here just a-purpose to get you? Ain't there reason enough, Lord knows? Ain't you made up your mind to light out home anyhow?

ANDREW. Yes. That's just what she'll never forgive me for. In her heart she'll never think of me the same. For she knows as well as I what pledge I'll be breaking--what sacred pledge.

JOEL. What you mean?

ANDREW. No matter, no matter; this is gush.

[He returns to the fire and begins to fumble over the contents of his knapsack. JOEL watches him idly.]

JOEL. One of *her* curls?

ANDREW. *[Looking at a lock of hair in the firelight.]* No; the baby's, little Andy's. Some day they'll tell him how his father---- *[He winces, and puts the lock away.]*

JOEL. *[Going toward the embankment.]* Listen!

ANDREW. *[Ties up the package, muttering.]* Son of a traitor!

JOEL. *[Tiptoeing back.]* It's crowded--that's her.

[Leaping to his feet, ANDREW stares toward the embankment where the flag is dipped; then turns his back to it, closing his eyes and gripping his hands.]

[After a pause, silently the figure of a young woman emerges from the dark and stands on the embankment. She is bareheaded and ill clad.]

[JOEL touches ANDREW, who turns and looks toward her. Silently she steals down to him and they embrace.]

ANDREW. My Nell!

ELLEN. Nearly a year----

ANDREW. Now, at last!

ELLEN. Hold me close, Andy.

ANDREW. You're better?

ELLEN. Let's forget--just for now.

ANDREW. Is he grown much?

ELLEN. Grown? You should see him! But so ill! What could I do?
You see----

ANDREW. I know, I know.

ELLEN. The money was all gone. They turned me out at the old
place, and then----

ANDREW. I know, dear.

ELLEN. I got sewing, but when the smallpox----

ANDREW. I have all your letters, Nell. Come, help me to pack.

ELLEN. What! You're really decided----

JOEL. [*Approaching.*] Hello, Sis!

ELLEN. [*Absently.*] Ah, Joel; that you? [*Eagerly, following
ANDREW to the knapsack.*] But, my dear----

ANDREW. Just these few things, and we're off.

ELLEN. [*Agitated.*] Wait, wait! You don't know yet why I've come--
instead of writing.

ANDREW. I can guess.

ELLEN. But you can't; that's--what's so hard! I have to tell you
something, and then---- [*Slowly.*] I must know from your own eyes,
from yourself, that you wish to do this, Andrew; that you think it is
right.

ANDREW. [*Gently.*] I guessed that.

ELLEN. This is what I must tell you. It's not just the sickness, it's not only the baby, not the money gone--and all that; it's--it's----

ANDREW. [*Murmurs.*] My God!

ELLEN. It's what all that brings--the helplessness. I've been insulted. Andy--[*Her voice breaks.*] I want a protector.

ANDREW. [*Taking her in his arms, where she sobs.*] There, dear!

ELLEN. [*With a low moan.*] You know.

ANDREW. I know. Come, now; we'll go.

ELLEN. [*Her face lighting up.*] Oh! and you *dare!* It's *right?*

ANDREW. [*Moving from her, with a hoarse laugh.*] *Dare?* Dare I be damned by God and all his angels? Ha! Come, we're slow.

JOEL. Time enough.

ELLEN. [*Sinking upon JOEL'S knapsack as a seat, leans her head on her hands, and looks strangely at ANDREW.*] I'd better have written, I'm afraid.

ANDREW. [*Controlling his emotion.*] Now, don't take it that way. I've considered it all.

ELLEN. [*With deep quiet.*] Blasphemously?

ANDREW. Reasonably, my brave wife. When I enlisted, I did so in a dream. I dreamed I was called to love and serve our country. But that dream is shattered. This sordid war, this political murder, has not one single principle of humanity to excuse its bloody sacrilege. It doesn't deserve my loyalty--our loyalty.

ELLEN. Are you saying this--for my sake? What of "God and his angels"?

ANDREW. [*Not looking at her.*] If we had a just cause--a cause of liberty like that in Seventy-six; if to serve one's country meant to serve God and his angels--then, yes; a man might put away wife and child. He might say: "I will not be a husband, a father; I will be a patriot." But now--like this--tangled in a web of spiders--caught in a grab-net of politicians--and you, you and our baby-boy, like this--hell let in on our home--no, Country be cursed!

ELLEN. [*Slowly.*] So, then, when little Andy grows up----

ANDREW. [*Groaning.*] I say that the only thing----

ELLEN. I am to tell him----

ANDREW. [*Defiantly.*] Tell him his father deserted his country, and thanked God for the chance. [*Looking about him passionately.*] Here! [*He tears a part of the flag from its standard, and reaches it toward her.*] You're cold; put this round you.

[As he is putting the strip of colored silk about her shoulders, there rises, faint yet close by, a sound of fifes and flutes, playing the merry march-strains of "Yankee Doodle."

[At the same time there enters along the embankment, dimly, enveloped in a great cloak, a tall FIGURE, which pauses beside the standard of the torn flag, silhouetted against the first pale streaks of the dawn.

ELLEN. [*Gazing at ANDREW.*] What's the matter?

ANDREW. [*Listening.*] Who are they? Where is it?

JOEL. [*Starts, alertly.*] He hears something.

ANDREW. Why should they play before daybreak?

ELLEN. Andy----

JOEL. [*Whispers.*] Ssh! Look out! We're spied on!

[*He points to the embankment. ANDREW and ELLEN draw back.*

THE FIGURE. [*Straightening the flag-standard, and leaning on it.*] Desartin'?

ANDREW. [*Puts ELLEN behind him.*] Who's there? The watchword!

THE FIGURE. God save the smart folks!

JOEL. [*To ANDREW.*] He's on to us. Pickle him quiet, or it's court martial! [*Showing a long knife.*] Shall I give him this?

ANDREW. [*Taking it from him.*] No. *I* will.

ELLEN. [*Seizing his arm.*] Andrew!

ANDREW. Let go.

[*THE FIGURE, descending into the intrenchment, approaches with face muffled. JOEL draws ELLEN away. ANDREW moves toward THE FIGURE slowly. They meet and pause.*

ANDREW. You're a spy!

[*With a quick flash, ANDREW raises the knife to strike, but pauses, staring. THE FIGURE, throwing up one arm to ward the blow, reveals--through the parted cloak--a glint of stars in the firelight.*][E]

THE FIGURE. Steady, boys; I'm one of ye. The sergeant told me to drop round.

JOEL. Oh, the sergeant! That's all right, then.

ANDREW. [*Dropping the knife.*] Who are you?

THE FIGURE. Who be *I*? My name, ye mean? My name's Average--Sam Average. Univarsal Sam, some o' my prophetic friends calls me.

ANDREW. What are you doing here--now?

THE FIGURE. Oh, tendin' to business.

JOEL. Tendin' to *other* folks' business, eh?

THE FIGURE. [*With a touch of weariness.*] Ye-es; reckon that *is* my business. Some other folks is me.

JOEL. [*Grimacing to ELLEN.*] Cracked!

THE FIGURE. [*To ANDREW.*] You're a mite back'ard in wages, ain't ye?

ANDREW. Nine months. What of that?

THE FIGURE. That's what I dropped round for. Seems like when a man's endoored and fit, like you have, for his country, and calc'lates he'll quit, he ought to be takin' a little suthin' hom' for Thanksgivin'. So I fetched round your pay.

ANDREW. My pay! You?

THE FIGURE. Yes; I'm the paymaster.

ELLEN. [*Coming forward, eagerly.*] Andy! The money, is it?

THE FIGURE. [*Bows with a grave, old-fashioned stateliness.*] Your sarvent, ma'am!

ANDREW. [*Speaking low.*] Keep back, Nell. [*To THE FIGURE.*] You--you were saying----

THE FIGURE. I were about to say how gold bein' scarce down to the Treasury, I fetched ye some s'curities instead; some national I.O.U.'s, as ye might say. [*He takes out an old powder-horn, and rattles it quietly.*] That's them. [*Pouring from the horn into his palm some glistening, golden grains.*] Here they be.

ELLEN. [*Peering, with JOEL.*] Gold, Andy!

JOEL. [*With a snigger.*] Gold--nothin'! That's corn--just Injun corn.
Ha!

THE FIGURE. [*Bowing gravely.*] It's the quality, ma'am, what counts,
as ye might say.

JOEL. [*Behind his hand.*] His top-loft leaks!

THE FIGURE. These here karnels, now, were give' me down
Plymouth way, in Massachusetts, the fust Thanksgivin' seems like I
can remember. 'Twa'n't long after the famine we had thar. Me bein'
some hungry, the red-folks fetched a hull-lot o' this round, with the
compliments of their captin'--what were his name now?--Massasoit.
This here's the last handful on't left. Thought ye might like some, bein'
Thanksgivin'.

JOEL. [*In a low voice, to ELLEN.*] His screws are droppin' out. Come
and pack. We've got to mark time and skip.

THE FIGURE. [*Without looking at JOEL.*] Eight or ten minutes still
to spare, boys. The sergeant said--wait till ye hear his jew's-harp
playin' of that new war tune, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Then ye'll
know the coast's clear.

JOEL. Gad, that's right, I remember now.

[*He draws ELLEN away to the knapsack, which they begin to pack.*
ANDREW has never removed his eyes from the tall form in the cloak.

[*Now, as THE FIGURE pours back the yellow grains from his palm
into the powder-horn, he speaks, hesitatingly.*

ANDREW. I think--I'd like some.

THE FIGURE. Some o' what?

ANDREW. Those--my pay.

THE FIGURE. [*Cheerfully.*] So. *Would ye?* [*Handing him the horn.*]
Reckon that's enough?

ANDREW. [*Not taking it.*] That's what I want to make sure of--first.

THE FIGURE. Oh! So ye're hesitatin'!

ANDREW. Yes; but I want you to help me decide. Pardon me, sir. You're a stranger, yet somehow I feel I may ask your help. You've come just in time.

THE FIGURE. Queer I should a-dropped round jest now, wa'n't it? S'posin' we take a turn.

[*Together they walk toward the embankment. By the knapsack ELLEN finds the little frame.*]

ELLEN. [*To herself.*] My picture!

[*She looks toward ANDREW affectionately. JOEL, lifting the knapsack, beckons to her.*]

JOEL. There's more stuff over here.

[*He goes off, right; ELLEN follows him.*]

ANDREW. [*To THE FIGURE.*] I should like the judgment of your experience, sir. I can't quite see your face, yet you appear to be one who has had a great deal of experience.

THE FIGURE. Why, consid'able some.

ANDREW. Did you--happen to fight in the late war for independence?

THE FIGURE. Happen to? [*Laughing quietly.*] N-no, not fight; ye see--I was paymaster.

ANDREW. But you went through the war?

THE FIGURE. Ye-es, oh, yes; I went through it. I took out my fust reg'lar papers down to Philadelphie, in '76, seems like 'twas the fourth day o' July. But I was paymaster afore that.

ANDREW. Tell me: I've heard it said there were deserters even in those days, even from the roll-call of Washington. Is it true?

THE FIGURE. True, boy? Have ye ever watched a prairie-fire rollin' toward ye, billowin' with flame and smoke, and seed all the midget cowerin' prairie-dogs scootin' for their holes? Wall, that's the way I watched Howe's army sweepin' crosst the Jarsey marshes, and seed the desartin' little patriots, with their chins over their shoulders, skedaddlin' home'ards.

ANDREW. What--the Americans!

THE FIGURE. All but a handful on 'em--them as weren't canines, ye might say, but men. *They* set a back-fire goin' at Valley Forge. Most on 'em burnt their toes and fingers off, lightin' on't thar in the white frost, but they stuck it through and saved--wall, the prairie-dogs.

ANDREW. But they--those others. What reason did they give to God and their own souls for deserting?

THE FIGURE. To who?

ANDREW. To their consciences. What was their reason? It must have been a noble one in '76. *Their* reason *then*; don't you see, I must have it. I must know what reason real heroes gave for their acts. You were there. You can tell me.

THE FIGURE. *Real* heroes, eh? Look around ye, then. To-day's the heroic age, and the true brand o' hero is al'ays in the market. Look around ye!

ANDREW. What, here--in this war of jobsters, this petty campaign of monstrous boodle?

THE FIGURE. Thar we be!

ANDREW. Why, here are only a lot of cowardly half-men, like me--lovers of their own folks--their wives and babies at home. They'll make sacrifices for them. But real men like our fathers in '76: they looked in the beautiful face of Liberty, and sacrificed to *her*!

THE FIGURE. Our fathers, my boy, was jest as fond o' poetry as you be. They talked about the beautiful face o' Liberty same's you; but when the hom'made eyes and cheeks of their sweethearts and young uns took to cryin', they deserted their beautiful goddess and skun out hom'.

ANDREW. But there were some----

THE FIGURE. Thar was some as didn't--yes; and thar's some as don't to-day. Those be the folks on my pay-roll. Why, look a-here: I calc'late I wouldn't fetch much on the beauty counter. My talk ain't rhyme stuff, nor the Muse o' Grammar wa'n't my schoolma'am. Th' ain't painter nor clay-sculptor would pictur' me jest like I stand. For the axe has hewed me, and the plough has furrered; and the arnin' of gold by my own elbow-grease has give' me the shrewd eye at a bargain. I manure my crops this side o' Jordan, and as for t'other shore, I'd ruther swap jokes with the Lord than listen to his sarmons. And yet for the likes o' me, jest for to arn my wages--ha, the many, many boys and gals that's gone to their grave-beds, and when I a-closed their eyes, the love-light was shinin' thar.

ANDREW. [*Who has listened with awe.*] What *are* you? What *are* you?

THE FIGURE. Me? I'm the paymaster.

ANDREW. I want to serve you--like those others.

THE FIGURE. Slow, slow, boy! Nobody sarves *me*.

ANDREW. But they died for you--the others.

THE FIGURE. No, 'twa'n't for me; 'twas for him as pays the wages; the one as works through me--the one higher up. I'm only the paymaster; kind of a needful makeshift--his obedient sarvant.

ANDREW. [*With increasing curiosity, seeks to peer in THE FIGURE'S face.*] But the one up higher--who is he?

THE FIGURE. [*Turning his head away.*] Would ye sarve him, think, if ye heerd his voice?

ANDREW. [*Ardently, drawing closer.*] And saw his face!

[*Drawing his cowl lower and taking ANDREW'S arm, THE FIGURE leads him up on the embankment, where they stand together.*

THE FIGURE. Hark a-yonder!

ANDREW. [*Listening.*] Is it thunder?

THE FIGURE. Have ye forgot?

ANDREW. The voice! I remember now--Niagara!

[*With awe, ANDREW looks toward THE FIGURE, who stands shrouded and still, facing the dawn. From far off comes a sound as of falling waters, and with that--a deep murmurous voice, which seems to issue from THE FIGURE'S cowl.*

THE VOICE. I am the Voice that was heard of your fathers, and your fathers' fathers. Mightier--mightier, I shall be heard of your sons. I am the Million in whom the one is lost, and I am the One in whom the millions are saved. Their ears shall be shut to my thunders, their eyes to my blinding stars. In shallow streams they shall tap my life-blood for gold. With dregs of coal and of copper they shall pollute me. In the mystery of my mountains they shall assail me; in the majesty of my forests, strike me down; with engine and derrick and millstone, bind me their slave. Some for a lust, some for a love, shall desert me. One and one, for his own, shall fall away. Yet one and one and one shall return to me for life; the deserter and the destroyer shall re-create me. Primeval, their life-blood is mine. My pouring waters are passion, my lightnings are laughter of man. I am the One in whom the millions are saved, and I am the Million in whom the one is lost.

ANDREW. [*Yearningly, to THE FIGURE.*] Your face!

[*THE FIGURE turns majestically away. ANDREW clings to him.*

ANDREW. Your face!

[*In the shadow of the flag THE FIGURE unmuffles for an instant.*

[*Peering, dazzled, ANDREW staggers back, with a low cry, and, covering his eyes, falls upon the embankment.*

[*From away, left, the thrumming of a jew's-harp is heard, playing "The Star-Spangled Banner."*

[*From the right enter JOEL and ELLEN.*

[*Descending from the embankment, THE FIGURE stands apart.*

JOEL. Well, Colonel Average, time's up.

ELLEN. [*Seeing ANDREW'S prostrate form, hastens to him.*] Andy! What's happened?

ANDREW. [*Rising slowly.*] Come here. I'll whisper it.

[*He leads her beside the embankment, beyond which the dawn is beginning to redden.*

JOEL. Yonder's the sergeant's jew's-harp. That's our signal, Nell. So long, colonel.

THE FIGURE. [*Nodding.*] So long, sonny.

ANDREW. [*Holding ELLEN'S hands, passionately.*] You understand? You *do*?

ELLEN. [*Looking in his eyes.*] I understand, dear.

[*They kiss each other.*

JOEL. [*Calls low.*] Come, you married turtles. The road's clear. Follow me now. Sneak.

[*Carrying his knapsack, JOEL climbs over the embankment and disappears.*

[*The thrumming of the jew's-harp continues.*

[ELLEN, *taking the strip of silk flag from her shoulders, ties it to the standard.*

ANDREW. [*Faintly.*] God bless you!

ELLEN. [*As they part hands.*] Good-by!

[THE FIGURE *has remounted the embankment, where--in the distincter glow of the red dawn--the gray folds of his cloak, hanging from his shoulders, resemble the half-closed wings of an eagle, the beaked cowl falling, as a kind of visor, before his face, concealing it.*

THE FIGURE. Come, little gal.

[ELLEN *goes to him, and hides her face in the great cloak. As she does so, he draws from it a paper, writes on it, and hands it to ANDREW, with the powder-horn.*

THE FIGURE. By the by, Andy, here's that s'curity. Them here's my initials; they're all what's needful. Jest file this in the right pigeonhole, and you'll draw your pay. Keep your upper lip, boy. I'll meet ye later, mebbe, at Lundy's Lane.

ANDREW. [*Wistfully.*] You'll take her home?

THE FIGURE. Yes; reckon she'll housekeep for your uncle till you get back; won't ye, Nellie? Come, don't cry, little gal. We'll soon git 'quainted. 'Tain't the fust time sweethearts has called me *Uncle*.

[*Flinging back his great cloak, he throws one wing of it, with his arm, about her shoulders, thus with half its reverse side draping her with shining stripes and stars. By the same action his own figure is made*

partly visible--the legs clad in the tight, instep-strapped trousers (blue and white) of the Napoleonic era. Holding the girl gently to him--while her face turns back toward ANDREW--he leads her, silhouetted against the sunrise, along the embankment, and disappears.

[Meantime, the thrumming twang of the jew's-harp grows sweeter, mellower, modulated with harmonies that, filling now the air with elusive strains of the American war-hymn, mingle with the faint dawn-twitterings of birds.

[ANDREW stares silently after the departed forms; then, slowly coming down into the intrenchment, lifts from the ground his gun and ramrod, leans on the gun, and--reading the paper in his hand by the growing light--mutters it aloud:

U. S. A.

[Smiling sternly, he crumples the paper in his fist, makes a wad of it, and rams it into his gun-barrel.]