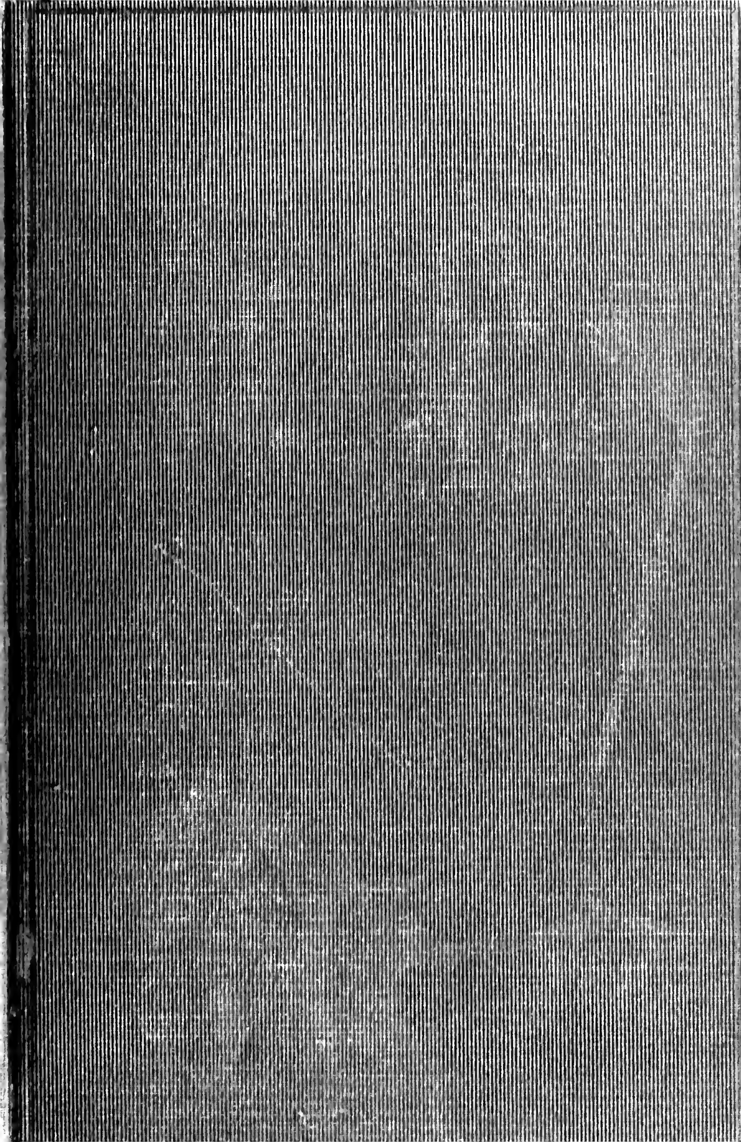

LIBRARY

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

Class

By H. W. Boynton

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE, AND OTHER ESSAYS. 12mo, $1.25, *net*. Postage extra.

WASHINGTON IRVING. In *Riverside Biographical Series*. With Photogravure Portrait. 12mo, 65 cents, *net;* postpaid, 71 cents. *School Edition*, with half-tone portraits, 50 cents, *net*, postpaid.

A READER'S HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE. By Thomas Wentworth Higginson and H. W. Boynton. Illustrated. Crown 8vo, $1.25, *net*, postpaid.

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE

And Other Essays

BY

H. W. BOYNTON

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1904

COPYRIGHT 1904 BY HENRY W. BOYNTON

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Published September, 1904

To J. H. B.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Journalism and Literature	1
Owning Books	25
The Reading Public	37
Pace in Reading	55
"Effusions of Fancy"	67
American Humor	85
"For the Young"	103
Poetry and Commonplace	121
Poetry as Fine Art	131
Poetry and the Stage	143
Literature as a By-Product	157
Intimate Literature	171
Cleverness and Originality	181
The Writing Public	199
Reviewer and Critic	215

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE

It is a pity that we cannot get on without definitions, but there is too much convenience in them, too much safety. They accouter us, they marshal us the way that we are going, they help us along the difficult middle path of argument, they comfort our declining periods. Poor relations, to be sure, and not to be made too much of; but, at least, one ought not to be ashamed of them in company. If there are abstract terms which can safely be employed offhand, the terms of literary criticism are not among them. What wonder? If political economists find it hard to determine the meaning of words like "money" and "property," how shall critics agree in defining such imponderable objects as genius, art, literature? Is literature broadly "the printed word," the whole body of recorded speech? Or is it the product of a conscious and regulated, but not inspired, art? Or

is it, with other products of art, due to that expression of personality through craftsmanship which we call genius? To the final question I should say yes; confessing faith in personal inspiration as the essential force in literature, and in the relative rather than absolute character of such personal inspiration, or genius. I think of literature not as ceasing to exist beyond the confines of poetry and belles-lettres, but as embracing whatever of the printed word presents, in any degree, a personal interpretation of life. What he is and has, — some touch of genius, some property of wisdom, some hold (however partial and unconscious) upon the principles of literary art, — these things enable a writer for interpretative or "creative" work.

I

From this point of view journalism has, strictly, no literary aspect; it has certain contacts with literature, and that is all. The real business of journalism is to record or to comment, not to create or to interpret. In its exercise of the recording function it is a useful trade, and in its

commenting office it takes rank as a profession; but it is never an art. As a trade it may apply rules, as a profession it may enforce conventions; it cannot embody principles of universal truth and beauty as art embodies them. It is essentially impersonal, in spirit and in method. A journalist cannot, as a journalist, speak wholly for himself; he would be like the occasional private citizen who nominates himself for office. A creator of literature is his own candidate, his own caucus, his own argument, and his own elector. It is *aut Cæsar aut nullus* with him, as with the aspirant in any other form of art. This is why an unsuccessful author is so much more conspicuous an object of ridicule than other failures. He has proposed himself for a sort of eminence, and has proved to be no better than a Christian or an ordinary man. He might, perhaps, have been useful in some more practical way, — for instance, in journalism, which offers a respectable maintenance, at least, to the possessor of verbal talent. Its *ex parte* impersonality affords him a surer foothold at the outset. Pure journalism has no need of genius; it is an enterprise, not an

emprise. It records fact, and on the basis of such fact utters the opinion of partisan consensus, of editorial policy, or, at its point of nearest approach to literature, of individual intelligence.

But it happens that pure journalism is hardly more common than pure literature. The "spark of genius" is, one must think, more than a metaphor. If it did not often appear in writers whose principal conscious effort is given to the utilization of talent, there would be no question of anything more than contrast between literature and journalism. There is a mood in which the thoughtful reader or writer is sure to sympathize with a favorite speculation of the late Sir Leslie Stephen's. "I rather doubt," he expressed it at the very end of his busy life, "whether the familiar condemnation of mediocre poetry should not be extended to mediocrity in every branch of literature. . . . The world is the better, no doubt, even for an honest crossing-sweeper. But I often think that the value of second-rate literature is — not small, but — simply zero. . . . If one does not profess to be a genius, is it not best to console one's self with the doctrine that

silence is golden, and take, if possible, to the spade or the pickaxe, leaving the pen to one's betters?"

One's betters, — it is, after all, an indefinite phrase. Are they only the best? Attempts to establish an accurate ranking of genius have proved idle enough. It is not altogether agreed whether the greatest names can be counted on the fingers of one hand or of two; it is fairly well understood that they are worth all the other names "put together." But does it follow that all the other names are, therefore, worth nothing? The foothills have never been quite put to shame by the loftiest summits. I do not see that it is altogether admirable, this instinct which makes men querulous for the best. One may be reasonably credulous as to the average of human ability without perceiving anything mediocre in the next best, or in the next to that. Surely there is nothing trivial in the employment of the least creative faculty, if it does not interfere with more important functions. That *primum mobile*, the question of the major utility, is an ancient battle-ground upon which we shall hardly venture to set

foot. Here are still fought over the eternal issues between commerce and the arts, science and the classics, the practical and the ideal. It is for us to skirt the edge of conflict with the admission that a great talent may be more effective, even more permanently effective, than a small genius; as a Jeffrey has proved to be more effective than a Samuel Rogers. It is, for whatever the fact may be worth, the man of affairs, the man of opinions, rather than the seer or the poet, who determines what the next step of the infant world shall be.

The fact of Sir Leslie Stephen's career yields a sufficient gloss upon the letter of his theory, — if theory is not too serious a word for his half ironical speculation. He had, by his own account, no natural impulse toward production in the forms which are commonly called creative. He was prevented from becoming a poet (as he admits with his usual engaging frankness) by his inability to write verse; and his instinct did not lead him toward imaginative prose. His path to literature lay through a superior kind of journalism. Among his staff colleagues upon the "Satur-

day Review," the "Pall Mall Gazette," and elsewhere, were Mill, Venables, Mark Pattison, Froude, Freeman, Thackeray, and John Morley. He does not think too highly of the profession in which such men were, at least temporarily, engaged. He records, not without malice, the fact that Jeffrey, prince among journalists, complained of Carlyle's being "so desperately in earnest." He speaks with admiration of Carlyle's having himself been successful in resisting "the temptations that most easily beset those who have to make a living by the trade." He permits himself an ironical comment upon Mill's comparison of the modern newspaper press and the Hebrew prophets. "There are not many modern journalists," he remarks with misleading mildness, "who impress one by their likeness to a Jeremiah or a John the Baptist. The man who comes to denounce the world is not likely to find favor with the class which lives by pleasing it." Finally, he thinks it proper to say yet more sharply, "To be on the right side is an irrelevant question in journalism." Sir Leslie's personality was not of the subduable kind, and presently found its proper

expression in the varied labors of a man of letters. His journalistic experience could be only a temporary phase.

II

Those who have approached literature through journalism are legion, but their experience has little bearing upon our present theme. More to the purpose are those writers of power whose permanent and absorbing task is journalism, but whose work is so sound in substance, so pure in contour, so directly informed with personality, as to outrank in literary quality the product of many a literary workshop. Such writers may have been capable of attaining a real, though not a great success in more purely literary forms; yet their achievement leaves us no room for regret. Their business has been to record and to estimate facts and conditions of the moment; their instinct has led them to offer a personal interpretation of these facts and conditions. Our only cause of embarrassment lies in the resultant character of the given product. It is not a little difficult to reduce to a category such writers as Christopher

North, Jeffrey, Steevens, or Godkin. Journalism is concerned with immediate phenomena. Talent, for its empirical method of dealing with the data afforded by such phenomena, finds a safeguard in the impersonal or partisan attitude; it is enabled, at least, to generalize by code to a practical end. A journalist whose impersonal talent, let us say, is unable to subdue his personal genius, feels the inadequacy of this method. He has a hankering for self-expression. He is dissatisfied with this hasty summarizing of facts, this rapid postulating of inferences. He insensibly extends his function, reinforces analysis with insight, and produces literature. He has not been able to confine himself to telling or saying something appropriate to the moment; he has merely taken his cue from the moment, and busied himself with saying what is appropriate to himself and to the truth as he knows it. He has, in short, ceased to be a machine or a mouthpiece, and become a "creative" writer.

Of course the same thing happens in other arts, and in other forms of the printed word. In history, in private or public correspondence, in

the gravest scientific writing, even, one often perceives a sort of literature of inadvertence, a literature in effect, though not in primary intent. There is, indeed, no form of writing except what baldly records, mechanically compiles, or conventionally comments, which may not give expression, however incidental or imperfect, to personality, to the power of interpretation as contrasted with the power of communication.

III

To examine, however cursorily, the two functions of pure journalism, is to observe how easily they transform into the literary or interpretative function. It is plain that little distinction can be made between a piece of journalism and a piece of literature on the ground of external subject-matter alone. A squalid slum incident, a fashionable wedding, the escape of a prisoner, the detection of a forgery, may afford material either for journalism or for the literary art. In one instance the product will be interesting as news, in the other as it bears upon some universal principle or emotion of human life. So it not

seldom happens that a reporter develops extra-journalistic skill in the portrayal of experience or character. Writers of fiction are spawned almost daily by the humbler press. The journalistic use of the word "story" indicates the ease of a transition which is not a wandering from fact to falsity, but an upward shift from the plane of simple registry to the plane of interpretation. Mr. Kipling happens to be the most conspicuous modern instance of the reporting journalist turned story-writer. It seems that his genius has led him to the instinctive development of an art based upon principles to which he professes a certain indifference. There are an indefinite number of ways of inditing tribal lays, he assures us, and every single one of them is right. The speculation has its merits as a tribute to personality; it has obvious demerits in seeming to lay stress upon the virtue of mere oddity or inventive power. Mr. Kipling will eventually rank with a class of writers separated by a whole limbo from the greatest creative spirits; one need not in the least grudge them their immediate effectiveness. Greater writers than Mr. Kipling have been skeptical as to the

value of those lesser forms of art which suggest mere artifice. Carlyle expressed doubt as to the permanent effectiveness of what the Germans call "Kunst:" the conscious application of artistic theories or methods to the expression of truth. Indeed, to take it seriously at all, one must take art to be the expression of a personal creative faculty as distinguished from that of an impersonal producing faculty; the result of a true consciousness of principles, not a mere being aware of them. So far as a record of immediate events manifests such a consciousness, it asserts its right to be considered not as journalism, but as literature.

Nor, further, can any fortune of publication establish a distinction of quality between these two forms of the printed word. Not long ago a popular American writer ventured so far as to advance the theory that it is largely a matter of luck whether a given bit of writing will turn out to be literature or not; unless, indeed, the act of putting it within cloth covers be the final warrant of its quality. The remark was, we may suppose, not intended to be taken very seriously. It is pathetically true that the quality of minor

literature is not determined by the accident of its disappearance or of its preservation in book form. Fortunately, the research of special students and the enthusiasm of amateur explorers succeed in rescuing much of desert from the diluvial flotsam of the past. Much is undoubtedly lost. Its vitality has proved insufficient, overshadowed in its own day, perhaps, by superior vitalities. Such is the fate also of canvases, of statues, of beautiful buildings. Works of art are not ephemeral because they fail to live forever; we must not be unreasonable in demanding long life for all that deserves the name of literature. Granted that the literature of the newspaper report has less chance of permanence than the literature of the magazine or of the publisher's venture: it nevertheless serves its purpose; and perhaps makes itself felt more than the generality suspect. It may happen that a brief sketch of some apparently trivial scene or incident, printed in an obscure journal, actually excels in pure literary quality the more elaborate structures of fiction, with all the dignity that may attend their publication, whether serially or between covers of their own.

It is evident, moreover, that our definition of journalism applies to several large classes of books. There are, for example, books on exploration, physical or other; on anthropological or sociological experiment; books recording special conditions, or commenting impersonally on special events, of the day. The usefulness of such books is obvious; they could not well be dispensed with. Yet it is only in the hands of a Carlyle or an Arnold or a Ruskin that this kind of material becomes literature, — an expression of universal truth in terms of present fact. Wherever in a journal personality emerges and fully expresses itself, literature emerges. Wherever in literary forms the occasional, the conventional, the partisan, the indecisive personality, are felt, journalism is present.

IV

There is another modification of the recording function which has assumed great importance in the popular periodicals of the day. The "special article" represents a development, rather than a transformation, of the newspaper report as it

deals with conditions. A description of proposed buildings for a new World's Fair; a sketch of the relations between Japan and Korea before the outbreak of the Russian war; an account of recent movements in municipal or national politics; a study of a commercial trust: with such articles our magazines are filled. They are a legitimate and useful product of journalism; one should only take care to distinguish them from that personal creative form, the essay. The public demand for such work has given birth to a new race of special reporters, among whom the popular idol appears to be that picturesque adventurer, the war correspondent. Such men do excellent service. They write with vivacity and with a kind of individuality; but their work is unlikely to possess the qualities which give permanence. It is a brilliant hazard of description and comment; it does all that talent and special aptitude can do with the material in hand. Almost inevitably, it lacks the repose, the finality, the beauty, which may eventually belong to a personal or literary treatment of the same material. This is true even of the product of so

vigorous and effective a writer as the late G. W. Steevens. He was somewhat too closely involved in the condition of the moment "to see life steadily and to see it whole." Such men are bound to take sides, and are consequently doomed to half express themselves in wholly uttering a point of view or a phase. Their work will possess individual unction, but hardly the force of personal inspiration. It is naturally overestimated by the public, which is convinced that talent and energy rule the world now, no matter what may be true in the long run; and that to rule the world now is the most important of possible achievements. But, indeed, the value of such work is not small. One cannot doubt that it is more meritorious for a person of moderate ability to fling himself into the press, and to make sure of doing one kind of man's work, than to sit down in a corner and murmur, "Go to: I am about to be a genius." As a matter of fact, most great writers have been active in affairs, in one way or other. "The Divine Comedy," "Hamlet," "Paradise Lost," "Faust," show clear traces of activities far enough from the practice of letters. Nevertheless, Mil-

ton's criticism of life is to be found in his poetry rather than in his controversial prose, and Dante's in his celebration of Beatrice rather than in his recorded services to Florence. The product of such energy is calculable, the influence of such genius altogether incalculable.

Between literature and "the higher journalism" the partition is extremely thin. If I understand the term, the higher journalism means the function of impersonal comment employed at its utmost of breadth and dignity. It gives utterance to individual judgment rather than personal interpretation. It aims to inform and to convince rather than to express. It displays real erudition, it urges admirable specifics, it produces, in fact, printed lectures on practical themes addressed to the practical intelligence. One perceives a close analogy between the functions of the higher journalist and those of the preacher, the lawyer, and the politician. An *ex parte* impersonality is all that can be demanded of any of them, — intellectual independence being a desirable asset, but the thing said being largely determined by a policy, a creed, a precedent, or

a platform. In any of these professions will appear from time to time the literary artist, — the man escaping from preoccupation with specific methods or ends, and expressing his personality by some larger interpretation of life. Hence come our Newmans, our Burkes, and our Macaulays.

So from the "article" of higher journalism literature frequently emerges. The given composition ceases to be a something "written up" for a purpose, and becomes a something written out of the nature of a man. It is not merely an arrangement of data and opinions; it stirs with life, it reaches toward a further end than immediate utility. Under such conditions the journalist does honor to his craft by proving himself superior to it. He has dedicated his powers to a practical service; but he has not been false to his duty in transcending it.

Nevertheless, his simple duty remains the same; all that his office demands of him is official speech. More than talent and conformity belongs to the few who direct the course of journalism; but even their admitted powers are rather for administration than for expression. A man of this kind is

content to embody a theory in an organ or a group of organs, to determine an editorial policy, and to influence public opinion. The genius of a writer like Godkin cannot be denied; it still presides over the admirable journal which owes its prestige to him. But it was a genius allied with a moral sense somewhat too readily moved to indignation. His was a singular instance of the nature which prefers the ardor of prompt service to the ardor of self-utterance. His work lay, accordingly, upon the border regions between literature and journalism.

V

There seems to be no need of seriously discussing the question of superiority between the two forms of verbal activity. Creation is always superior to production, but that is not a fact which ought to trouble honest producers. A journalist is contemptible only when by some falsetto method he attempts to lead the public into fancying that it is getting literature of him. Otherwise he deserves no more than the lawyer or the clergyman to be held in disesteem by men of

letters. Some discredit has doubtless been cast upon the profession by the existence of that forlorn army of writers who would have liked to illumine the world, but have to make the best of amusing it, or even to put up with providing it with information. Since journalism is a trade, a person of reasonable endowment may have better hope of achieving moderate success in it than in literature. But one does not fit himself for journalism by failing in literature, any more than one fits himself for literature by failing in journalism. To have one's weak verse or tolerable fiction printed in a newspaper does not make one a journalist; nor does it turn the newspaper into a literary publication. Literary graces! There are few articles so unpromising of any good, in the great journalistic department shop on which the numerical world now depends for most of its wants.

The popularity of journalism in America has, we are to note elsewhere, reacted upon most of our magazines so strongly that they are distinguished from the better daily journals by exclusion of detail and modification of method rather

than by essential contrast in quality. Upon the character of the daily press, that is, depends the character of our entire periodical product; and this means, in large measure, the character of the public taste. To afford a vast miscellaneous population like ours its only chance of contact with literature entails a responsibility which may well appall even the ready and intrepid champions of the daily press. While, however, the night-fear of the yellow journal is disturbing enough to those who watch for the morning, they will have pleasanter visions, even now not altogether unrealized, of a journalism more responsible, more just, more firmly pursuant of that fine enthusiasm for absolute fitness, for the steady application of worthy means to worthy ends, which is the birthright of literature.

OWNING BOOKS

OWNING BOOKS

It may be only an obstinate fancy of mine that the private library is a less important factor in every-day life than it used to be. The *laudator temporis acti* is seldom aware of his sentimental bias; he imagines himself to be traveling by the sun, when it is the moon over his left shoulder that he is assiduously ogling. He may in this instance cite the authority of a number of sensible persons who civilly winced when prodded with the theory in point; but this may have been due to mere civility, that easiest and most effective of retorts.

It seems to be true that most good, intelligent middle-class persons are quite indifferent to the ownership of books. They would not precisely go out of their way to avoid a book. If you are absent-minded enough to send them a Christmas volume, they will thank you as conscientiously as if you had forwarded the annual symbol in ster-

ling silver. The household will have its case or two, of course, and there will be some good books on the shelves: the Shakespeare and the Milton; Scott, Thackeray, a few one-volume poets, possibly an odd volume or two of essays; the germ, in short, of a good family library. It has not much chance of developing, or even of continuing to live, for about it gathers an inorganic accretion of odds and ends in print: a silt of school-texts, children's books, whether of the Elsie or the post-Elsie type, stray magazines, fustian romances, and other flotsam of the press. A real library is nothing if not animate; it either lives or dies, either grows or decays.

That ingenious commentator, Mr. Andrew Lang, not long ago laid the decrease of serious reading during the past century to the undue toothsomeness of Scott's romances. The taste first legitimately pleased soon learned to put up with an inferior order of tickling. Romantic comfits and the literary cigarette (also paper-bound) have subsequently made the solid joint of our grandfathers gross and flavorless to the popular taste. The man who a generation or two

ago would not have shrunk from a little serious reading is now content with the effortless absorption of journalistic and semi-journalistic ephemera. It is considered a compliment to say of so-and-so that he "keeps up with the books of the day." If he reads the current picture-book magazines, using the text as a gloss to the illustrations, and allows no one to ask twice if he has read "Obed Hannum," or "The Scarlet Princess," he passes for a reading man, not to say a well-read man. As he grows rich he buys horses, furniture, plate — anything but books. Possibly he comes at last even to that extravagance, and purchases a library complete, in uniform bindings. The books no more belong to him than they did in the book-shop; he is as far as ever from being the real owner of a private collection of books.

To buy a few good books, and presently to buy a few more: there are no other rules for the lay collector, and even these must be applied very flexibly. The best hundred books or the best thousand are not to be determined, even approximately, by any man or assortment of men. One does not make friends by code, but by chance

and choice. With books the field of choice is far less confined, and the element of chance comparatively slight. My friends I cannot select from the number of good people who have lived and proved themselves worthy of friendship. Nor, to be sure, can I know Shakespeare as Ben Jonson did; but I can know him as Lamb did, or Keats, or Fitzgerald — or it is my fault.

There are many persons, some of them intelligent, who do not care for Shakespeare; they would not value his companionship. Fortunately, there are plenty of other good books for them; indeed, better books for them, since it is the books one loves that count. That his books should be good of their kind, and that their kind should be congenial and respectable, is all, I am sure, that the reader can demand of himself, so far as the quality of his library is concerned. But these good books must be continually gathering to themselves other good books — perhaps the more gradually the better. A person of fair general intelligence will account complacently for his failure to increase his scanty store, on the ground that he "has n't read all the books he owns yet."

He never will; not that he ever ought to, necessarily. Much as I love the books which have been the companions of years, they lose value sensibly in my eyes if I let a month or two go by without adding to their number. A new book on the shelves, read or unread, sends me back with a keener zest to the old favorites.

But of course no sensible man would care at any time to have read all the books he owns. A book may be profitable and companionable, though you know very little of its contents. Like Lumpkin, you pause at the title, though you would admit that between the covers presumably lies the cream of the correspondence. You have never yet found yourself in just the mood for that book. Yet you know that it is there, that it has given deep pleasure to others, and that probably some day, after due patience on both sides, the actual acquaintance will come about. The volume will have a different feeling as you take it from the shelf; and at the first touch of eye you will recognize a friend. After all, the public hankering for books of amusement is only one remove from the right motive of the reader.

He ought to read for pleasure, and amusement is pleasure's holiday garb. Nevertheless, it is the secular business of living which yields the most enduring satisfactions. The book that cannot be lived with and made a companion of is not the book one cares to own. Cap and bells jingle for a moment pleasantly enough, but heaven cure the mind for which motley is the only wear.

Another common excuse of my persistently bookless friend lies in the existence of the public library. There are certain unhappy persons in every community who really are obliged to make the public library perform, after a fashion, the function which should be taken care of at home. They are, however, fewer and far less pitiable than the well-to-do persons who encourage each other in the notion that it is virtuous for anybody to depend upon the public library for anything.

The public library is at best a cold and impersonal affair; so great in bulk and so shadowy in outline that one might as easily make friends with Milton's Satan or the giant in "Hop-o'-my-Thumb." The public library is an excellent place

for grubbing among card-catalogues and books of reference. It is the place where one naturally consults authorities and sources, and where, moreover, it is possible to get a glimpse of rare or expensive books which are too much to the purse or too little to the taste for private ownership. But it is not the place to choose for the intimate process to which the much-abused term "reading" ought to apply, any more than a great department store is a fit place to meet friends in.

And what is to be said of the mammoth circulating library, an institution so long popular in England and so recently established upon any considerable scale in this country? Of the Booklovers Library, with its elaborately advertised lack of the need of advertising, and its flattering but amenable protestations of exclusiveness? Of the Tabard Inn, hardly less high and mighty or less widely patronized? Or of the People's Library, with its patent swapping drug-shop system, by which the pleased patron is actually enabled to eat his cake and have it too, without recourse even to the familiar ceremony of the slot? Certainly it would not be fair to condemn these

systems on general principles. I doubt if they have much influence upon the buying of good books for private ownership, unless indirectly as they cater to the crude public taste for novelties in print. There are some people who have never bought anything but current books and have now stopped buying those. If the circulating library is responsible for this change I do not know that it greatly matters. For the chances are a thousand to one that the current book will gain no permanent place of value in the home library of such a reader. Probably the worst and the best that can be said of the circulating library as a force for culture is that it is neutral. No reader's soul is likely to be lost or saved by the weekly advent of four clean books in a red box.

For it is only in the delicate privacy of home, and under the slow ripening of acquaintanceship into intimacy, that books become most lovable, and therefore most profitable. Nobody who has really had this experience of naturally acquired companionship can think of his library as an assortment of tools or a bazaar of toys. It has become, on the contrary, a congenial society, the

best in the world; a society in which he has the right to move with a freedom bounded only by those simple courtesies which friends require of themselves and of each other.

THE READING PUBLIC

THE READING PUBLIC

To speak accurately, I suppose there is no such body literate as The Reading Public. It would have existed, if ever, at the golden moment when the Average Man walked abroad in the flesh, and the Typical Character could be depended on to perform by the card. These general terms are a great convenience to us, but they are also capable of becoming a great nuisance. They need to be properly kept under. They are inclined to push into places which belong to specific terms, and we are often thoughtless enough to make them welcome there. This can be managed with a good deal of safety; for no odium attaches to one's sponsorship of such altogether presentable interlopers. "The reading public has again manifested its crass ignorance by neglecting Mr. ——'s remarkable study of 'The Psychology of Tennyson's Prose.'" "The reading public has set its seal of approval on the admirable metrical romance

of Sir —— ——." So the reviewer will pleasantly express himself. Perhaps his remark may be based upon the number of copies sold; or he may really be thinking something like this: "Those stupid and inadequately informed Joneses next door have again manifested," etc.; or "That reliable critic, Judge Robinson, has set his seal of approval," etc., etc. — a method of saying the thing at once less impressive and more actionable.

The fact is, the true-born American has a conviction of his inalienable right to define and interpret as he pleases. There is an inner sense of the reliability of his private judgment which comfortably informs him when the voice of other people is the voice of Heaven and when it is not. Perhaps the phrase in question is used more vaguely than others of the sort. "The music public" and "the art public" are expressions which seem to have retained a fairly distinct meaning of exclusion, of special taste. They do not profess to include everybody who can stand a tune upon a pianola, or live without inconvenience in the same house with a photogravure. "The reading public," on the other hand, may

mean almost anything or almost nothing. Doubtless it came nearest to signifying something in particular before The Public learned to read. Only a few generations ago, books which had pretensions to a recognized literary quality continued to address themselves to a recognized class of readers. The audience for which Dryden and Pope and Johnson and Goldsmith wrote was a "polite" class. It could be counted upon to encourage serious attempts in any of the established forms of polite letters. Poetry and the essay were still in the ascendant; but fiction was, though reluctantly, coming to be admitted as a form in which the creative impulse might conceivably find expression. There was no classical precedent for it, no Muse to look after it, even; "story" had not yet been lopped away from "history." Yet the novel was unmistakably announcing its right to existence as a timely and indigenous literary mode. It was, in fact, to be a principal cause of the dwindling of the old reading public. There is still a small remnant of that public, at least in England, where the influence of the classics is yet great, and where every institution has nine

lives; but it is no longer The Reading Public. Nevertheless, among the numerous constituencies which make up the modern reading world, it has only one superior and no equals.

We cannot here attempt a classification of these constituencies. It must serve our purpose to suggest a few classes of Americans who read for other than practical ends. There are various classes which read for profit; not only the seekers for information and opinion to whom journalism ministers, but those who read for moral or religious edification, those who merely study books (a process which lays an excellent foundation for reading, but is very different in itself), and those who read "standard" works from a sense of duty. It goes without saying that the ranks of those who read for pleasure are frequently recruited from all of these classes. *In esse*, however, they are inconsiderable from the point of view of pure literature, and this is the point of view from which we are taking our casual observations.

Special conditions in America have brought about a greater confusion in matters of taste than

exists in England. We hardly produce more kinds of printed matter, but we are less certain of what it all amounts to. The mere heaping up of books does not change standards; it has, however, a tendency to confuse the general apprehension of them. We have never been oversure of them. Our academic literary class, with a taste founded upon classical learning, was always small; it could not expect to hold its proportion to the rapidly increasing total of American readers. Unfortunately, neither popular education nor journalism nor any development of the democratic idea has been able to substitute a broader or sounder theory of taste. Indeed, the tendency has been away from any theory. Our doctrine of every man his own authority has not restricted itself to the conduct of affairs, public or private; if it has not quite brought us to the point of anarchy as regards the humane arts, we have our sense of humor to thank for stopping us on the brink. No theory or practice of democracy has ever been able to change the law by which nature sets a numerical limit upon superior classes. Our slight prescription of literacy in

connection with the franchise sets a standard of acquisition which the public schools are more than able to meet. But while compulsory common-schooling has immensely increased the number of persons who are able to decipher Roman type, probably no country has contained so few persons in proportion to the sum of nominal literacy who have any understanding of what the canons of good literature amount to. Ignorance may be bliss, but we do not exactly profess to make it the basis of our national happiness. We prefer the foundation of a little learning; in no respect a more dangerous thing than in its habit of giving the little learner a false sense of security in matters of judgment. There are a glorious handful who, touching a hasty lip to that heady brew, are miraculously endowed with new vision, and cannot thereafter go far wrong. But to most of us taste will be a slow achievement toward which every sort of aid must be given by circumstance.

"Shakespeare? Oh, yes, we 'had' that at school."—"Literature? Sure! we 'took' it senior year; it had a green cover." So speaks the honest citizen who must be admitted to represent a con-

siderable class. Endowed with an acute and practical intelligence, he passed through grammar and high school with credit, but without getting the least inkling as to what the enjoyment of literature means. He is a useful man in the community. You may trust his opinion, upon any practical matter at least, as well as your own. He was "up" for the school board last year. He reads the newspapers faithfully, and is inclined to think that the "Spectator" column is probably literature, because he cannot quite make it out. Perhaps he is right as to the fact, for the modern newspaper is not an affair of pure journalism. It contains not only news and talk about news, but here and there a true touch of literature; some little picture of life not only as it is, but as it was and shall be; some record of essential and permanent emotion. Thousands of persons find their only contact with literature in the newspaper. Even the honest citizen, though he turns to his sheet for news, for items of general information, or for practical opinion, can hardly fail to be aware of the shadow, at least, of a more gracious presence. His household probably

boasts one member who is fondly asserted to be "a great hand to read;" who, in fact, takes some kind of interest in printed matter to which the rest of the family is respectfully unresponsive. It may be the last, and flimsiest, historical romance, but how is the household to know that? Is n't it advertised in the trolleys, and did n't the "Daily Megaphone" pronounce it the book of the year? And Mary likes it, and Mary is a great hand to read. The case of the honest citizen is not quite hopeless, even from the literary point of view, for he suspects the existence of a pleasure which is too fine for him.

The largest of our reading constituency is composed of persons who read for the fun of the moment and can imagine nothing better to read for. It looks upon books as a sort of cheap substitute for the cheap theater, and expects of a novel very much what it would expect of a clever vaudeville turn. It is a news-stand constituency, singularly susceptible to posters, and easily unmanned by the bellowing of train-boys. In its younger generation, with the fry of better classes, it feeds avidly upon the dime novel.

Later it makes some figure at the public libraries, and in its solvent moments helps support Booklikers' Inns, and does not a little toward determining what the "best-selling book of the month" shall be. It does not care in the least whether what it reads is literature or not.

The honest citizen's Mary, let us suppose, belongs to a class, mainly feminine, which cares, but does not know. She has had much the same schooling as her father, but she is naturally impressionable, and could not remain unmoved in the presence of Scott. "The Lady of the Lake" had barely converted her to poetry when "Guy Mannering" determined her fate as a reader of romance. She has, therefore, not only "taken" literature, she has been inoculated with it; it has, though mildly, "taken." She can never again be quite indifferent to the idea of it. The act of reading will continue to have a ritual significance for her, and though it may often be a tawdry shrine at which she worships, it is better than none. She hath done what she could; she faithfully expresses her endowment and training: so far she proves her kinship to the honest citi-

zen. A great deal is written for her, and a great deal which is written for higher audiences finds in her approbation a comfortable limbo. The secret of her weakness is that she is theoretically aware of a distinction between amusement and pleasure, but has no actual feeling for it. In school she was under some guidance; matters were judged for her which she could not hope to determine alone; and she felt a general confidence that she was being guided rightly. Once left to herself, aware of some great vague background of "classical" or "standard" literature, she may have tried a little furtive groping among public library catalogues. In the end it would prove easier to read the new books which, the newspaper notices inform her, are all masterpieces. Of course this means the new novels; for not only is fiction the one form of literary art which appeals to all classes of modern readers, to many of them it *is* the literary art. We need not hesitate, therefore, to make it the basis of our little comparison.

There are very many estates in the novel-reading world, and some of the least conspicuous

ones are among the most interesting. Here, for instance, is a constituency numbering tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands which peruses the evangelical novel. It cannot persuade itself far enough away from the Scriptures to taste of confessedly secular fiction; but it can throw itself with light heart and clear conscience into the pursuit of a sensational fiction which deals with themes sufficiently blasphemous. Here again is a public which harbors a suspicion that genuine literary persons do not regard fiction as quite the goal of literary effort. It is given to explaining hurriedly, when caught red-handed, that it is not reading much of anything — only a novel. It has an instinct now and then to brush up on something "standard" — say, "Paradise Lost," or Burke's "Speech on Conciliation." *Noblesse oblige* — it can still recall the opening lines of Cæsar. It keeps on shamefacedly reading nothing but novels.

Less diverting, but equally numerous, is the class which, possessing some acquaintance with a theory of taste, deliberately chooses to disregard its practice. This is an insubordinate class,

largely masculine, and jealous of any appearance of restraint or convention. It insists upon being repelled by everything which authority has pronounced to be admirable. Shakespeare must be dull, or dull persons would not recommend him. The "—— Review" must be nonsense, for only idiots could imaginably spend their time talking about other people's books. Down with the pedants! farther down with the critics! and here's to the good fellow who reads what he pleases! It cannot be said that he has much better luck in his choice than the others of whom we have been speaking. Nor has that numerous group of readers (there are many college-bred men among them) who know what is superior, who have a natural aptitude for it, but who are, according to their account, too much exhausted by business or professional cares to have strength left for anything but what is inferior. This group has an exact parallel in the class of formally educated theater-goers who, with serious drama at their disposal, prefer the nonsense of "musical comedy," as the favorite form of vaudeville is now called. There is no reply to be made to the argu-

ment which these persons urge. It need only be said that when a man has left himself no strength for rational enjoyment, he has ceased to be a normal member of society, and to the critic is as nearly inconsiderable as a fellow being can be.

These are the classes whose patronage principally determines every extraordinary commercial success of a work of fiction. And it would be unfair to say that their total judgment is altogether valueless. If a story can give even a fleeting pleasure to a hundred thousand persons, the chances are that it has some permanent merit. We might suppose, it is true, that one person out of every thousand of our population could be counted on to be on almost any side of any question. But as a matter of fact given enterprises are supported by very much smaller percentages. A novel which "sells" five thousand copies is a reasonably profitable enterprise for the publisher. Even the novel-reading population is relatively small; there are all sorts of chances that any given person may escape from buying contact with any given book. The chances that he will escape reading contact are somewhat less. We

have made it so easy to borrow books, now that the public library has been supplemented by vast circulating services, mainly devoted to the distribution of fiction, that a book which sells by thousands is quite likely to be read by tens of thousands.

It is, no doubt, time to cut short an enumeration of classes to which any one may, on brief reflection, be able to add. I have meant simply to call attention to the fact that there are various distinct reading constituencies surrounding, and in general independent of, the cultivated reading public. This class is, perhaps, not very much larger than it was a century ago, but its cultivation has a much broader foundation. It is grounded upon some acquaintance with the best literature of ancient and modern Europe, and upon a thorough knowledge of English literature. The first object with a reader of this class is to give himself the chance of liking the best things. It is a mistake, certainly, to plough through a book as a task; there are many misguided persons who make a virtue of "doing" books, in precisely the spirit which leads them to

"do" the continental galleries. But it is also a mistake from mere indolence or cocksureness to hang back from the attempt to enjoy in some measure what others have greatly enjoyed. Every reader has his blind spots, of which he need not be either proud or ashamed, though he may properly regret them. It is impossible for one person to get into Dante or for another to make out the charm of "Tom Jones." Yet the ideal is to be able to enjoy every kind of thing and the best of every kind.

This best public prefers to own books rather than to borrow them. It has an eye for promising novelties, but it does not readily mistake promise for achievement. More than any other reading class, including the profusely buying class, it helps determine the absolute value of books which deserve serious appraisal. How large this class is in America it would be hard to estimate; disproportionately fewer than in England, we must suppose. It constitutes, at least, a nucleus of sound acquirement and taste. I suppose we ought to encourage ourselves to look for its steady, though not rapid, increase. Vaudeville and yel-

low journalism to the contrary, there are a hundred influences working toward the elevation of national standards of taste. Criticism is, it may be, one of the least of these influences; it cannot do better, for its part, than to insist upon and to make clear the distinction between what is instructive, what is amusing, and what is capable of giving permanent delight.

PACE IN READING

PACE IN READING

A COMMON and trivial excuse given by those who read little is that they have no time for reading. One may have no time for eating or sleeping, but hardly no time to make love or to read. It is good will, concentration, and the habit of dispatch, not leisure or unlimited opportunity, which have always performed the greatest wonders in both of these useful pursuits. Many persons in mature life are conscious of a gentle and luxurious sentiment in favor of reading, which comes to nothing because they do not know how to read. With all the good will in the world, they lack concentration and the habit of dispatch. The good will was not applied early enough, or not applied at all to any other end than the idle diversion of the moment. This naturally resulted in the formation of the newspaper habit, by which I do not mean simply the habit of reading newspapers, but the habit of mind which makes it

possible for men to spend an evening in going through motions. There is no more reason for spending two hours in reading the newspaper than in having one's boots blacked. Some people never make their way into the great Establishment of Letters farther than the vestibule, where they spend their lives contentedly playing marbles with the hall-boys. Of course we do not call the newspaper worthless simply because some other things are worth more. The best reading is both intensive and extensive; one reads a little of everything, and a great deal of some things. The good reader takes all reading to be his province. Newspapers, periodicals, books new and old, all present themselves to him in their proper perspective; they are all grist to his mill, but they do not go into the same hopper or require the same process. On the contrary, one of the main distinctions of the skilled reader is that without varying as to intensity, he varies almost indefinitely as to pace. This power of reading flexibly comes mainly, of course, with practice. For those who have lacked an early experience of books, the manipulation of them is never likely to be-

come the perfect and instinctive process of adjustment which it should be. People often achieve a certain degree of education and refinement late in life, but seldom, I think, the power of the accomplished reading man. It is simply not to be expected. An adult who takes up the violin may get much amusement and profit from his instrument, but he cannot hope to master it. A certain increase of facility, however, the belated reader may surely expect to gain from some sort of observance of this simple principle of adjustment.

This anxious but unskilled reader is too likely to have a set gait, — so many words to the minute or lines to the hour. An essay, an editorial, a chapter in a novel or in the Bible, a scientific article, a short story, if they contain the same number of words, take up just the same amount of this misguided person's time. No wonder reading becomes an incubus to him, with the appalling monotony of its procession of printed words filing endlessly before him. He really has time enough, if he knew how to make use of it. "Eben Holden" keeps him busy for a week or more; it should be read in a few hours. He plods method-

ically through Sir Walter, and finds him slow; the happy reader who can get Quentin and his Isabelle satisfactorily married in six hours does not. A trained reader readjusts his focus for each objective. Milton may be read in words or lines, Macaulay in sentences, Thackeray in paragraphs, Conan Doyle in pages. The eye, that is, readily gains the power of taking in words in groups instead of separately. How large a group the glance can manage varies with the seriousness of the subject. With the same degree of concentration, eye and mind will take care of a page of the "Prisoner of Zenda" as easily as they can absorb a line of "Macbeth," or one of Fitzgerald's quatrains.

Of course this disposes of the indolent, lolling way of reading, — or rather makes a rare indulgence of it. When one occasionally comes upon the novel of his heart, or the poem he has waited for, he may well afford to consider it at his luxurious leisure, minimizing labor by dilatoriness. But as a rule the widely reading man is not an indolent person. Not that he is to be always keeping his nose in a book. By regulating his pace, he not only covers an astonishing amount of

ground in reading, but makes room for other things. He knows how to get the most for his time, that is all. A bee does not eat his flower to get the honey out of it. The eye of the skilled reader acts like a sixth sense, directing him to the gist of the matter, in whatever form it may appear. Twenty minutes yields all that there is for him in the book which his neighbor, knowing that it would mean a week's spare hours, is careful to avoid.

To observe a proper pace disposes also of indiscriminate reading aloud. There appears to be a generally cherished household belief that reading aloud is of itself a virtuous domestic exercise. It has, no doubt, its value as a social expedient for "keeping the boys at home," or for mitigating the *ennui* of such as must sew or darn of an evening. It affords a practical method of diffusing information among the greater number at the expense of one pair of eyes; as well as of lulling the aged or infirm to that luxurious slumber which is likely to be insured by the assiduous wakefulness of somebody else. That is a charming picture of the united family gathered about

the hearth while paterfamilias reads aloud. It really does not matter, so far as the attractiveness of the group is concerned, what he is reading; it may be "The Rise and Fall of the Dutch Republic," or "Paradise Lost," or "Sherlock Holmes," or the latest number of the "Ladies' Domestic Twaddler." Never mind. The fact remains that father is reading aloud.

Now I do not wish to scoff at any institution, or even at any theory, so venerable. I do wish to suggest, however, that comparatively few books are fit to be read aloud. One may make a reasonable contention to the effect that all literature should have a vocable and audible quality; but the fact remains that outside of poetry there are few forms of literature which are not as well or better off without the interposition of the voice. The reason appears to be that a printed page empowers the ear with a faculty of rapid hearing. The inward ear may receive an impression quite as surely as the outward ear, and far more rapidly. Printed words represent sound rather than form to most people; and this is at first an obstacle to the attainment of pace in reading.

Many persons never lose the sense of literature as printed speech, and consequently read a book aloud almost as fast as they read it to themselves. They would like to read it quite as fast, and their attempt results in that hurrying monotone which is characteristic of most family reading. The voice is not really called upon to exert itself intelligently. It is merely made use of to suggest print; an odd retaliation of the eye. Such reading is nothing better than a labor-saving makeshift. It does not interpret, it only makes a clumsy conveyance. The process is amusingly complicated, if we follow it from the first conception of the author's mind to the final interpretation of the reader. A sentence, we will say, suggests itself to some person's mind as speech. He makes a record of it in writing, which is rendered more legible and available by print. This record the eye is able to reconvert into material for the inward ear to deal with. But the eye acts rapidly, and is all the time urging the inward ear to shake off the sloth of the outward ear, and to get on with the business in hand. Consequently, the inward ear becomes im-

patient of its clumsier fellow, and prefers to rely directly on that brisk official, the eye. The voice is first embarrassed by this impatience, then discouraged. It finds that a rough and hasty appeal to the outward ear serves; thence an impression is communicated to the inward eye, by means of which, in turn, the inward ear is able to make a satisfactorily rapid interpretation of what the original speaker was saying.

I am afraid this sounds a good deal like a bit of amateur psychologizing; but I lean toward the hope that there is common sense in the speculation, notwithstanding. I should draw two deductions from it: the first, that no literature is worth reading aloud which will endure a markedly greater pace than the voice is capable of making intelligible; the second, that only persons who are capable of interpreting literature by means of the voice ought, unless for social or practical purposes, to read aloud at all. Literature has a right to be interpreted, and not merely made vocal.

It is clear that poetry most naturally lends itself to reading aloud; for it is essentially musi-

cal and compact, and so pregnant in substance as to make hurried reading out of the question. Beyond this, the briefer prose forms are most amenable. Whatever is most compact, whatever is most dramatic, or, better, most lyrical, is made for *viva voce* treatment. A letter, an entry or two in some diary, a chapter of autobiography, a few pages of Jane Austen, a humorous short story, a number of the "Autocrat," — these offer the readiest voice-hold to the family interpreter. A half hour of such reading may be one of the happiest of daily episodes. It sets no premium upon mere indolence; it interferes in no serious way with the liberties of the family circle. It does absolutely the best that can be done for the interpretation of the purer forms of literature. It reserves the other forms (and the modern reader has, alas, to concern himself largely with these) for the individual reader, who may profitably decide for himself whether the special instance calls upon him to peruse, to skim, or to skip; and at what pace. The experienced reader, in short, is an artist, and, like other artists, attains his highest powers only when he

has learned what to subordinate, to slight, or to omit. The unhappy person whose conscience will not let him refuse an equally deliberate consideration of every six inches of black and white that comes his way may be an excellent husband and father, a meritorious lawyer or merchant, a model citizen: he is certainly not a good reader.

"EFFUSIONS OF FANCY"

"EFFUSIONS OF FANCY"

"Let us leave it to the Reviewers," wrote Miss Austen something like a century ago, "to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. . . . From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers, and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the 'History of England,' or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the 'Spectator' and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens, there seems a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. 'I am no novel-reader; I seldom look into novels; do not imagine that *I* often read novels; it is really very well for a novel.' Such is the common cant."

If Miss Austen had been born a century later, she would have had less cause for her spirited sally. There are still people who extend the left hand to fiction, and give it, somewhat ostentatiously, a seat below salt; but they are few, and it is noticed that their attention to the high discourse of the upper table is subject to lapses. The present tendency is, indeed, toward the other extreme. A frank arrogance is manifested by the universal guest; he takes the head of the board as by right, and if there is anything which underplaced preachers, historians, politicians, or philosophers can tell him, he would be charmed to know the reason why. No? Then he will himself make shift to expound the world and the fullness thereof. He is at least sure of an audience; and this is the beginning of wisdom.

I

It may be surmised that there would be a whimsical twist to Miss Austen's smiling approbation of this development. Her own work, yes, it had "genius, wit, and taste" to recommend it; but it was not founded upon a theory, it did not aim to

supplant the pulpit, the platform, the laboratory, or the easy-chair; it aimed simply to give delight by interpreting human life as one person saw it.

Now there are many planes upon which life may be interpreted, and many media for the interpreter. When Scott talked of his "big bow-wow" strain in contrast with Miss Austen's work, he was not defining a difference. But his phrase suggests all sorts of differences; in plane, in scale, in atmosphere. No other prose form so nearly approaches the catholicity of poetry in giving expression to all orders, all degrees, of creative power. The very vagueness of its boundaries as to form and content, the fact that its possibilities are as yet hardly defined, does much toward accounting for the richness and variety of what has been the most interesting and characteristic, if not the finest, literary product of the past two centuries.

Much confusion has naturally attended the development of this new form, and our criticism of it. I incline to think that a suggestive classification may be borrowed from poetry. By such terms as lyrical, didactic, and epical, we may at least suggest the contrasting qualities of the novel

of emotion, the novel of intention, and the novel of interpretation, the types which, so far as types are distinguishable, fiction perennially takes. Even Miss Austen's day could produce "The Mysteries of Udolpho," "Caleb Williams," and "Pride and Prejudice."

I am not able, according to the present fashion, to look upon the short story as a distinct mode of fiction. It is now commonly alleged that the short story writer is exempt from many of the requirements laid upon the novelist. A scene, an episode, a rapid series of events, we are told, is all that he can be expected to deal with; and conciseness and saliency are the only qualities we can require in his product. But how is this saliency to be measured? How are we going to distinguish between the taking story and the story of permanent power? In accordance with what principle is the blessed remnant to be chosen by time from among the ten thousand short stories now printed every year? Or will they be chosen for different reasons, and not in accordance with any single principle whatever? As applied to the novel, we do not find it hard to solve the problem after a

fashion. We say that the novel will live or not according to the richness or poverty of its interpretation of human life. A man must have a big view and a round and hearty voice, or he will not be a great novelist; this is our theory. It provides us with an admirable means of judging the massive, epical type of novel. But a story is not necessarily massive because it is long, or insubstantial because it is short. We do not pretend to classify canvases according to their size, or poems according to their length; why should we apply the footrule to works of fiction? No doubt a composition in the grand style is likely to be more effective if the scale is not restricted beyond certain bounds. Yet small things are not always trivial. Not every short story is confined to a scene or an episode; and long stories often achieve intricacy but not mass. It is remarkable that in many short stories so rich an effect should be compassed by means of so few strokes; but there is no doubt that the thing is done. And the truth seems to me to be that breadth of view and method are by no means uncommon in writers of fiction who choose to employ the smaller scale.

The only type of short story which differs in kind from the long story is the tale dealing with some motive so simple as to make brevity the price of saliency. The distinction, in short, to be of use must hang upon quality, not quantity. If such stories as Mr. James's "Broken Wings" are to be properly classed with "The New Arabian Nights," while the "Prisoner of Zenda" is allowed a place beside "Henry Esmond," I do not know how, unless by footrule, the critic can venture to gauge relative values in fiction.

The tale, so far as it is distinguishable from the novel, is inclined to be lyrical rather than epical: the more or less purely emotional presentation of some phase of human experience in contrast with the interpretation of that experience in the large, as discerned by the creative spirit in its loftier and serener mood.

Of lyrical fiction the romance is of course the most popular form; a fact which has afforded critics a possibly unnecessary degree of discontent. "In this age," wrote Walter Bagehot nearly fifty years ago, "the great readers of fiction were young people; the 'addiction' of these

is to romance: and accordingly a kind of novel has become so familiar to us as almost to engross the name, which deals solely with the passion of love; and if it uses other parts of human life for the occasions of its art, it does so only cursorily and occasionally, and with a view of throwing into a stronger or more delicate light those sentimental parts of earthly affairs which are the special objects of delineation."

But indeed we must not be too stern about such matters. Other books beside the greatest are worth reading. One is not always keyed to the highest enjoyment. It is proper that there should be books to fit the holiday mood. As a class they will be light, free, somewhat detached from problems and from passions, a little pleasant, a little commonplace, perhaps. They will not be artificial, and they will not be over-intense. They may be counted upon, as a showman may say, to reach the sympathy without tickling the sensibilities, and to stir the brain agreeably without getting upon the nerves. The things that happen may be, viewed in the light of experience, improbable; but Experience is

a creature of unamiable limitations, and in the nature of things hardly sib to the Muse of romance. It must not be forgotten that the demand for "something light and pleasant" which such books satisfy comes not only from a vast number of over-buoyant (let us not say silly) persons who read nothing except fiction, but from a considerable number of the over-sorry, who expect it of fiction now and then to divert them from the sadness and complexity of actual life by the soothing purr of the romantic ideal. Probably nobody, not even the writer of "realistic" fiction, fails to see the value of romance in performing this office. On the other hand, not even the romancer would restrict the art of fiction to the manipulation of romantic properties. If "The Three Musketeers" and "A Tale of Two Cities" are triumphs, so are "The Scarlet Letter" and "The Rise of Silas Lapham." It is a good thing to be amused, and it is also a good thing to be set thinking and feeling. There is no reason why anybody should read any sort of fiction if he does not care for it, but there is something to regret if he does not care for all sorts.

II

The present writer has several times become aware in the moment of composition that certain books which he had greatly enjoyed, and which he wished to commend to others, were not the kind of thing story-readers as a class can be counted on to enjoy. They did not turn out right; either the people did not marry at all, or they did not marry and live happy ever after. Books in which such a condition of things is permitted cannot very well appeal to a large class. No doubt it is agreeable that books should "turn out right," and that in general people should not only marry, but marry and live happy ever after. Why, one is tempted to ask, should not serious fiction be encouraged to turn out right? Why is it not more wholesome and sane, as well as more comfortable, to cherish the conviction that virtue is rather in the way of being handsomely rewarded for its pains in the end? Why, in order to be serious, is it necessary to be pessimistic and morbid?

The last of these questions, at least, arises

from a prevalent inclination on the part of readers of fiction to identify a sober attitude toward life with that condition of diseased sensibility which is called morbidness. Fiction in its higher forms presents a sincere personal interpretation of human life. That interpretation is not necessarily sickly or untrue (or, as the verdict of the afternoon tea puts it, cynical and pessimistic), because it does not chance to be pretty and agreeable. One gets from the work of Mr. Henry James a sustenance very different from that which is offered by the licensed victualers of romance.

Here we approach dangerously near that Serbonian bog, the question of realism. I must simply confess that to me the significance of a novel consists not in its extraneous theme, but in the interpretation of that theme. There is, for the rest, a certain fitness of things which cannot profitably be disregarded. There are facts the meaning of which does not deserve passionate scrutiny. Not long ago a certain story which shall be nameless was very widely read and praised by devotees of the realistic method. It dealt with the four members of a family isolated upon a Scotch farm.

The son becomes a drunkard, murders the father (who would have deserved to be put out of the way if he had not been clearly insane), and poisons himself; the mother and the daughter, who are afflicted respectively with cancer and phthisis, presently make use of the poison which the son has left — "and then there were none."

> "Can such things be,
> And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
> Without our special wonder ?"

It is amazing, but they can. We read of them often in the newspapers, and without particular emotion ; not, probably, because we have become hardened, but because some reliable instinct assures us that these events are, after all, not tragically real. They have, brutal as the fact seems, no determinable meaning; they are to truth as we know it what nightmares are to waking experience. One of these ugly common nightmares was taken as the theme of this story. Three of the characters are hopelessly weak, and the fourth is a monomaniac. This is not the material of art. It will be useful to the reporter rather than to the story-teller who hopes to have

his work last. The novelist did a clever and ruthless bit of reporting. It should be said that he was promptly hailed as the Scottish Thomas Hardy, and even (not to give too much leeway to posterity) as the Scottish Balzac.

If moral insignificance disqualifies, how far may physical disability be regarded as a tragic motive? In more than one prominent novel of the day, an abnormal physical condition is established at the outset as the basis of the psychological action. More than ordinarily amusing is the case of the hero who turns out to be the owner of a creditable cancer, which is employed at the eleventh hour to draw off the venom of one's contempt for his character. We can certainly put our leisure to far better use by reading "something light and pleasant" than by poring over records of the emotional experiences of "intense" persons whose lamentableness even is not impressive because their characters are insignificant. Let us have our delineations of the average person, by all means, our Laphams and our Kentons; in their society we shall at least be in no danger of confounding character — the real stuff

of personality — with temperament, which is a minor though showy ingredient thereof.

III

Unfortunately our clever writing loves to deal with temperament, especially with the "artistic temperament," whatever that is. Its possessor appears to be a figure particularly to the mind of the feminine novelist. She finds in it, perhaps, a grateful means of accounting for the uncomfortable behavior of the Orsino type of man, with his giddy and unfirm fancies, and his complacent self-absorption. What sort of morality can one expect of a person who threatens to be inspired at any moment? The rougher sex does not share George Eliot's tenderness for Ladislaw, or Mrs. Ward's consideration for Manisty. It chooses to fancy the masculine character an integer, at the cost, if need be, of cleverness. It prefers an Orlando, a John Ridd, or a Micah Clarke, to the shuffling and emotional creatures in masculine garb in which women seem to find some unaccountable fascination. Seriously, is irresponsibility, masculine or feminine, so absorbing a theme

as to deserve its present prominence in fiction? Even Mr. Barrie's Tommy, a sad enough spectacle in all conscience, was not half so dreary as these weak-kneed and limber-souled little gentlemen whom we are now required to hear about.

There is another pit toward which a morbid sentimentalism leads us: that which is reserved for the morally unwholesome. There is a literature of immorality which we know how to take; it bears its character upon its forehead. Not seldom it is able to command, at least, the respect due to outspoken virility. But a literature of strained idealism tinctured with subtle prurience of the imagination is not even virile; Sterne to the contrary, it is not of our race. "Tom Jones" is immoral, let us say; but it is rather among the fine sentiments and boasted pruderies of "Paul et Virginie" that one finds the imagination grown corrupt and emasculate. Such books, rather than those which plainly and simply deal with relations of sex, should be kept from the young person and from the old. That only the conventional and "proper" should be treated in fiction is a tradition which we have for the most part outlived. I

think of a recent book containing "two studies of the strength of New England character." In the first, a man finds happiness in a love outside marriage, of which one cannot help feeling the sacredness; in the second, a woman finds equal happiness in lavishing a perfect devotion upon a poor creature whom she has married for love, and whom she continues to love in spite of his unworthiness till the time comes for her to give her life for his. The man's marriage is outwardly a success, but really a bitter failure, because it is sanctified by love on neither side. The woman's marriage is apparently a pitiful mistake, yet the best of happiness for her because she loves, and is able to die for, a man who, to the best of his nature, loves her in return. These are somber pictures, curiously offset against each other in setting, as well as in theme: on the one hand, that barren and ugly dullness of life in a sand-blown coast village, on the other, that equally barren and ugly excitement of life in a city slum.

Are any "lessons" taught by such stories? All lessons, and none; for the artist does not concern himself primarily with texts and proposi-

tions; he paints, not ideas and forces, but men and women. At opposite extremes of the field of fiction lie realism and romance. Certain arid patches of didacticism blot the rich expanse of interpretative prose writing which lies between.

Human nature, human types, human manners and fortunes — these are the deeper themes for fiction, infinitely deeper than theories, or moralizings, or propaganda of any sort. A great novel, like a great poem, is the product of insight rather than of reasoning or constructive power. Facts and theories, after all, have in themselves very little value for literature or for any other art. They may catch our attention and applause for the moment, but the power of truth in them, the personality behind them, are what we really care for in the end.

AMERICAN HUMOR

AMERICAN HUMOR

So many wise things have been said about American humor, there seems to be little occasion for saying anything else about it, unless humorously. *Absit omen!* that is not within the intention of the present remarks, which aim rather to offer some simple explanation of a familiar phenomenon, the "petering out" of the American humorist, and to point a moral.

I

One difficulty in talking about humor lies in the indeterminate meaning of the word. The trouble is not so much that it has changed as that it has not made a thorough job of changing. We are inclined to give it a sense well-nigh the most profound before it has rid itself of a very trivial one. We brevet it on even terms with "imagination" while it is still trudging in the ranks beside such old irresponsible comrades as "whimsy" and "conceit;" and, worst of all, we too often

allow it to be confounded with that vulgar civilian, "facetiousness." Mr. Budgell, according to Goldsmith, bore "the character of an humorist" — the name of an eccentric fellow. He is not at all a joking kind of man, and might perfectly well, for all this description tells us, lack what we call a "sense of humor." Cranks are notoriously deficient in that sense, and the people who are hitting off Mr. Budgell as "an humorist" mean simply that he is a crank. Now I do not think we have quite outgrown this conception of the word's meaning, though we have added something to it. We like to think that our popular humorists are, first of all, queer fellows. Jesters like Bill Nye have not been slow to recognize this taste in their audience, and the absurd toggery of the clown has been deliberately employed to enhance the relish of their screamingness. In fact, our professional man of humor is a pretty close modern equivalent of the Old World Fool: a creature of motley, who is admitted to have some sense about him, but must appear to have none if he wishes to be taken seriously. More than one of Shakespeare's Fools possess the illuminating kind of

humor; but the jest is what they were valued for. It would not be very hard, perhaps, to show that in America this ideal of the silly-funny man has survived with especial distinctness, and that upon this survival the quality of our alleged American humor really depends.

II

If we apply this supposition to the work of the man who is commonly considered the foremost of American humorists, it will at first seem not to fit at all; for there is a personality so mellow and venerable as to be fairly above its task. That would be a mock-respect, however, which should feign to forget what that task is, or shrink from frankly recognizing it as in itself a respectable rather than venerable task — to perfect and to communicate the American joke.

In his prime Mark Twain was often more than merely funny, but rather against his method than by it. In whatever direction or company he at that time traveled, motley was his only wear. There is a good deal of information and not a little wisdom in "Innocents Abroad," but this is

not what the book was read for; indeed, much of the information and the wisdom therein must have been discounted by uncertainty as to whether or not they were part of the fun. Later, partly, perhaps, because his eminence seemed to him an inferior, if not a bad one, partly because no cruse of jokes can yield indefinitely, he has shown a disposition to adopt a soberer coat. The attempt has not been altogether successful; he has kept on being funny in the familiar way, almost in spite of himself. The anonymity of his historical romance was rendered nominal by the frequency with which his French followers of Jeanne deliver themselves of excellent American jokes, and seem to feel better for it. Since that was written, he has produced a considerable number of essays upon a variety of sober themes. His public has not known quite what to do with them. Its attention, granted respectfully enough, has been conscious of undergoing a sort of teetering process, now inclined to hearken to the sober philosophy of Mr. Clemens, now diverted by the sudden reverberation of some incontinent Mark Twain jest.

There would be nothing disturbing in this situation, or rather the situation would not exist, if the author, writing under whatever name or in whatever mood, were essentially and first of all a humorist. But the humorist in Mark Twain is naturally subordinate to the jester. That he possesses the superior power that epical narrative of "Huckleberry Finn" would abundantly prove. But it has never been dominant; as the smiling interpreter of life his "genius is rebuked" by his superlative quality as a magician of jokes. Ingenuity rather than power is the noticeable characteristic of his later writing. One is irresistibly convinced that most of it can have taken very little hold of the author himself.

In the work of the late Frank Stockton, a much more delicate humorist, a far more skillful artist than Mark Twain, the jocose element was also paramount, though, as it happened, he cultivated the joke of situation rather than of phrase. But his demure manner does not prevent the delicious collocation of shark-proof stockings and Mrs. Aleshine from entering into one's soul with all the poignancy of a well-aimed jest. Nor

can it be denied that some of his later work showed signs of the same uncertainty of tone which we have just noticed in that of Mark Twain. One recognizes in it, however unwillingly, a lack of spontaneity and a tameness which are not easily associated with the author of "Rudder Grange."

A curious question suggests itself here. How does it happen that the later work of these two prominent American humorists should exhibit so marked a deficiency in the larger sort of humor? Are these to be taken as simple instances of decadence, or is there, after all, a screw loose in our vaunted American humor?

III

To answer this question is to state more baldly the fact suggested above: that we have been content to let the reputation of our humor stand or fall by the quality of the American joke. There is no doubt that we like our jokes better than other people's, and there is some excuse for us if we fancy that the gods like them better, though even that audience appears as a rule to

have reserved its inextinguishable laughter for its own jokes. It is because the English type of set jest appears inferior to ours that we have always sneered at English humor, and particularly at its greatest repository, "Punch."

But at its best the verbal joke is not a very high manifestation of humor. Happily the Miller jest-book is now extinct as a literary form, just as drunkenness is extinct as a gentlemanly accomplishment. In one form or other the jest is bound to exist, but in this age it cannot well serve as a staple food for the cultivated sense of humor. This would not be a bad thing for us to bear in mind when we get to comparing our comic papers with "Punch," which is both more and less than a comic paper. We ought to consider the amazing number of genuine contributions to literature which have been made through the columns of "Punch," and to reflect whether our "Life," with its little dabs of Dolly-in-the-Conservatory verse, its stunted though suggestive editorial matter, its not over-brilliant jokes about the mother-in-law and about the fiancée, and the overwhelming prettiness of its illustrations, can

show much of a hand against its sturdy English contemporary. It may not be agreeable to our volatile national mind to concede something to English solidity even in the matter of humor, but it is simple justice. Indeed, it might profitably be allowed to dawn upon us that the testimony of "Fliegende Blätter" is no more trustworthy than "Punch's;" that national taste in jokes may vary, but that humor is much the same everywhere. Cervantes was a Yankee, and so was Heine, and so, it seems, was Shakespeare.

We know very well, when we pause to think of it, that some of the finest humorists have been indifferent jokers. One can hardly imagine Addison setting a table in a roar — or Goldsmith, unless by inadvertence. As for Dr. Holmes, our greatest legitimate humorist, his notion of a set joke was mainly restricted to the manhandling of the disreputable pun.

In the meantime the torch of jocosity is still being carried on by fresh and unpreoccupied hands; and if the line of eager spectators is now mainly at the level of the area windows, that is, perhaps, not the affair of the torch-bearer. A

surprising number of persons above that level, it must be said, appear to take satisfaction in the quasi-humorous work of such "humorists" as Mr. John Kendrick Bangs. It is work which deserves consideration because it represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of "American humor." It consists in a sort of end-man volley of quips, yarns, exaggerations, and paradoxes. A book produced by this method cannot be deeply humorous. It is not the outcome of an abiding sense of comedy value, and naturally bears much the same relation to a veritable work of humor that a bunch of firecrackers in action bears to the sun. The true humorist cannot help concerning himself with some sort of interpretation of life: Mr. Bangs can. His folly is not a stalking-horse under the presentation of which he shoots his wit, but an end in itself. There could be no better illustration of the difference between the jocose and the humorous than a comparison of one of Mr. Bangs's farces with one of Mr. Howells's. The younger writer seems in effect to represent the survival of a school of facetiousness, now happily moribund, which had some standing

during the last century, in England as well as in America. Puns, elaborate ironies, fantastic paradoxes, all manner of facetiæ were good form from the early days of Christopher North to the end of the Dickens vogue. In the England of our own day jocosity has been for the most part remanded to its proper place as the servant and not the divinity of the humorous machine. In our ears the English jest is no better than such as it is; which we do not believe of ours: so that we continue to give literary credit to a function which is merely human. We have a right to use a Mr. Bangs, say, for our private consumption, as a man may choose to smoke a brand of tobacco which he knows to be bad, and cannot recommend to his friends; but we may properly be careful, too, not to confound qualities, not to yield to mere facetiousness the honors which belong to humor.

It must be admitted that in this day of smiles across the sea the boundary line between national methods of joking even is not always indisputable. Jerome K. Jerome, for instance, belongs fairly to our school of jocoseness; and "Three Men in a Boat" was popular with us because he

applied our method to English conditions. The village and seafaring tales of Mr. W. W. Jacobs are more plainly insular in quality, but in the delicious and unlabored absurdity of his plots and the whimsicality of his dialogue he strongly resembles Mr. Stockton among the jesters.

So far as pure humor is concerned, there has never been a shadow of a boundary line between England and America. Different as they are in personality and in the total effect of their work, what radical distinction in mere quality of humor is there between Mr. Cable and Mr. Barrie? Was it not the same genial sense of the delicate alternating currents of the feminine temperament which produced both Jess and Aurore Nancanou? And is not Fielding's humor as much at home in America as Dr. Holmes's in England?

IV

But the domain of humor is not infrequently subdivided on other than national lines. If there is any distinction of sex upon which man prides himself, it is his superior sense of humor. When the matter comes to analysis, it may appear that

the distinction is a somewhat narrow one; that the question of the jest is once more the real question in point. There is a certain sort of verbal nonsense, as there are forms of the practical joke, which induces a masculine hysteria while it commands only tolerance from the other sex. I think men are often unfair when after such experiments, painful enough (for what is more disheartening than to angle for laughter and catch civility), they accuse the woman of not seeing the joke. She does see it, but it does not appeal to her as the funniest thing in the world. She has heard other jokes, and is ignorant of the necessity for all this side-holding and slapping on the back. She therefore finishes her tea in quietude of spirit long before the last reminiscent detonations have ceased to echo in the masculine throat.

But it is a dull and hasty guess to hazard that because of this difference in taste Miss Austen's sex is deficient in humor. There are women nowadays — there have always been, one suspects, since new womanhood is as old as everything else under the sun — who have so far cultivated the

masculine point of view as to have actually come into possession of the masculine sense of the joke. But, as George Marlow says in a very different connection, "they are of us." It is the habit of such women in writing to be especially satirical in dealing with their own sex. A mere man is not sure that he enjoys this humorous exposure of the feminine point of view. He admires the idea of a neat reticence veiling the operations of the feminine mind and heart. It is right for man to blurt, but too free speech in woman connotes a certain boldness, and the glory of a woman is otherwise conditioned. A true woman's sense of humor is ordinarily less spasmodic, probably less acute, than a man's, but (though a man may be a little ashamed of thinking so, as he might be of believing in woman's suffrage) hardly less real or less fruitful. A very large part of the work done in legitimate humor during the past few years by Americans has been done by women.

V

If there is a characteristic form in which the American's sense of humor is inclined to express

itself, it is probably satire, the form which lies closest upon the borderland of wit. And our talent for satire is still further defined by our preference for the method of the interlocutor. The "Biglow Papers" established a sort of canon by which our work in this field will long be judged. We have done nothing of late in satirical verse, to be sure, while much has been done in England — if indeed this impression is not due to the fact that the newspaper provides our only market for such wares. But it can hardly escape notice that in other respects our recent successful experiments in satire have held to the method of Lowell and Artemus Ward: the expression of wisdom in dialect or in the vernacular.

I do not think justice has been done to the literary merit of the Dooley books. This may be due to the copiousness with which the sage of Archey Road has poured forth his opinions; or, again, it may be due to the fact that so clean and acceptable a *vin du pays* has needed no bush. Critics, it may be supposed, are useful in pointing out excellences which most of us are not likely to perceive: but everybody understands

Mr. Dooley. I am not so sure that the latter supposition is true. Much of the Dooley satire seems so good that it must, in part, escape the comprehension of many readers who are convulsed by the Dooley phraseology.

That phraseology in itself is a remarkable thing. Nothing is harder to catch than the Irish idiom, nothing harder to suggest on paper than the Irish brogue. We are only too familiar with the sham bedad and bejabers dialect, of some commercial value to writers of fiction, but not otherwise existent. Some readers will have noticed what painful work has been made of it lately by other popular writers. But Mr. Dooley — one can hardly elsewhere, unless from the mouth of Kipling's Mulvaney, hear so mellow and lilting a Hibernian voice as this. The papers must have been written with care, although they have appeared very often. It is astonishing, in view of the great range of theme involved, and the periodicity of their publication, that there is so little unevenness in them. They are practically monologues, for the occasional introductory word is of the briefest, and the supernumerary

Mr. Hennessey serves simply as the necessary concrete audience. Mr. Dooley's popularity is well earned. One is almost afraid to praise him lest the suspicion that he is approved by literary persons should "queer" him with the populace. With all his pure Irishness, he is pure American, too; and his commentary upon current events, with its alternating simplicity and shrewdness, its avoidance of sentimentality, and its real patriotism, probably represents, very much as Hosea Biglow represented, the sober sense, which is the humorous sense, of the people. This union of individual and representative humor must be the basis of whatever claim can be made for the permanent value of Mr. Dooley.

But this is enough to give his creator a place among the humorists. A vein of jests is soon worked out, but humor is a perennial fount. It is a quality rather than a feat, an atmosphere of comedy rather than a mainspring of farce. The advance of years is too much for the cleverness of the funny man, while the humorist is fruitful to the end, and after.

"FOR THE YOUNG"

"FOR THE YOUNG"

It was only a century ago, as everybody remembers, that literary sucklings were nurtured on the Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress," "Paradise Lost," and "Fox's Book of Martyrs." This was not in all respects an admirable diet for readers of any age, though it had its good points. There is a chance that an imaginative child may be helped toward a taste for good literature by having to amuse himself with that or nothing; he may delight in the rhythm of great poetry or the stately march of great prose before he can get an inkling as to what it is all about. But the situation is hardly imaginable nowadays, since children have plenty of reading to amuse themselves with besides the best. They are no longer required to be seen and not heard, or to put up with the scraps of literature which may fall from the wholesome (that is, tiresome) table of their elders. A much pleasanter bill of fare is being

provided for them, and it is confidently expected that the early courses of sugar-water and lollipop will gently and kindergartenly induce an appetite for the ensuing roast. It seems that our guilt has come home to us. We have not been treating the child properly for the past ten thousand years or so, and we are in a creditable hurry to make it up to him, at the expense of our own rights if necessary; and we do books, among other things, in his honor, by way of propitiating him.

I

Our earlier attempts were pretty clumsy, we must admit. When it occurred to us that the child was a person, we perceived first that he must be worth preaching to. We hastened to provide him with Guides for the Young Christian, and Maiden Monitors, and such; and later, relenting a little, we declined to the secular frivolity of the Rollo books and "Sandford and Merton." One cannot easily forget Rollo's adventure with the woodpile, the famous journey in the carryall, and the gay badinage (*passim*) of Jonas, that hired man without fear and with-

out reproach. There is no doubt that the child, or a considerable part of him, enjoyed this concession, paltry as it now seems; and presently his dutifulness was rewarded by such books as "Water Babies," "Tom Brown at Rugby," and "Alice in Wonderland," which perfectly established his right to be amused as well as instructed. With Rollo, the roundabout, and the pantalet, disappeared a whole school of traditions and conventions about the child. Since then affairs have gone very smoothly for him; the rill of literature for children has grown to a torrent, and there is no saying that it may not soon grow to a deluge. The number and character of current books advertised to be for the young is a little appalling; but there is no use in grumbling about such a condition; probably the wisest course for the observer is to cultivate an attitude of resigned and friendly speculation.

What are collectively known as books for the young appear to be pretty easily classifiable. There are books for urchins and books for striplings, to begin with; there are, further, books about adults for the young, books about the

young for the young, books about the young for adults, and books which, whatever they are about, are equally good for readers of all ages. Most of the best books nominally awarded to childish readers evidently belong to this final class. "Grimm's Fairy Tales," "Robinson Crusoe," the wonder tales of Hans Andersen and Hawthorne, the "Child's Garden of Verses," "Alice in Wonderland," — books like these obviously belong not simply to the nursery, but to literature, and are not made worthless by the addition even of a cubit to the stature of the reader. It must be an object of interest in judging current books for the young to hazard a guess as to their eligibility for this class.

Mr. Kipling's "Just So Stories" is among the few recent original books for children whose standing in this connection appears to be fairly sure. It does for very little children much what the "Jungle Books" did for older ones. It is artfully artless, in its themes, in its repetitions, in its habitual limitation, and occasional abeyance, of adult humor. It strikes a child as the kind of yarn his father or uncle might have spun if he had just happened to think of it; and it

has, like all good fairy-business, a sound core of philosophy. Children might like the book just as well, at first, if it lacked this mellowness of tone, but grown people would not like it at all; and when a book for children bores grown people, its days are numbered. One of the dangerous things about giving children unguided indulgence in child-books is that they are prepared to relish, for the moment, such inferior stuff. A normal child has no difficulty in making what seem to him to be bricks out of the scantiest and mouldiest of straw-heaps. He will listen to some maudlin rambling mammy's tale with the same rapture which a proud father may have fancied could be produced only by his own ingenious and imaginative fictions. All stories are grist to the mill of infancy; but it is true, nevertheless, that very few of them are worth grinding.

II

There is, in short, no separate standard of taste by which to determine the value of books written for children. To be of permanent use, they must possess literary quality; that is, they must

be whole-souled, broad, mature in temper, if not in theme or manner. This truth is not always observed by the fond adult buyer. The given book seems, he admits, rather silly; but he supposes that to be a part of its character as a "juvenile." A theory seems to be building up that the attribute of ripe humor which is wisdom is rather wasted upon a book for children; that a boy knows a parson and recognizes a clown, but is only puzzled by the betwixts and betweens of the class to which most of humanity belongs. It is often asserted that a child's sense of humor is mainly confined to a sense of the ridiculous. That is true of his sense of a joke; but children have never been proved insusceptible to the warmth of true humor, though they may have been quite unconscious of susceptibility. In the meantime, they are ready enough to put up with its absence; and they find at hand a type of fiction built upon an artificial code of sentiment and morals. Children's magazines and libraries are full of stories written according to this code, the beginning and the end of which is the prescription of certain things to do and not to do: never to cheat in examination,

always to be grateful to your parents, never to pretend to have money when you have n't, and always to knock under to authority. By way of making up for all these deprivations, you are (if you are a genuine school hero or heroine) allowed to make precocious love to the prettiest girl or the handsomest boy in school. It cannot be denied that there was something of this in Miss Alcott. Her successors and imitators have, according to the habit of imitators, exaggerated the defects of her method and her work.

It is odd, the name of Miss Alcott reminds us, that we should now have not only books for children and books for grown-ups, but books for boys and books for girls. Why not, by the same token, novels for men and novels for women? The truth is, there is a sad season, between "the codling and the apple," when the interests of youths and maidens do so diverge that they prefer to go, for a time, their several ways. If a boy of twelve, for instance, is going to read about persons of his own age, he wants to hear about interesting persons, — that is, other boys. Moreover, he will wish it understood that they are to be real boys,

— boys' boys. When Miss Alcott wrote "Eight Cousins," she spoiled the whole thing, from the masculine point of view, by making the one girl-cousin the leader of "the bunch." It is pleasant, doubtless, to behold seven able-bodied boys dancing attendance upon one slender red-cheeked girl; but any boy can imagine a hundred pleasanter things than that. What 's the matter with war, or life on the plains, or getting after buried treasure? Those are the things a fellow would like to do, while the red-cheeked girls are playing with their paper dolls and making eyes at each other, for practice.

With this bias lingering in their minds, those who have not been boys too long ago must note with satisfaction that the story of daring adventure and hairbreadth escape continues to be written and read. It is reassuring, moreover, to know that Scott and Cooper are still read by the fireside in spite of the fact that they have to be "studied" in the classroom, and in spite of all the modern "Restaurateurs," as Carlyle would have called them. Those old narratives have at least the advantage of possessing some foundation

in the actual experience of a probable man, instead of being constructed to display the mythical exploits of an impossible boy.

I do not know whether the younger generation still reads "Handy Andy" and "Rory O'More" with an added fillip of joy due to the conviction that it would be more virtuous to be reading "Ivanhoe" or "The House of the Seven Gables." Possibly the cheap historical novel and the works of one Henty are now perused in that spirit — not so profitably, it is fair to assume. One of these guilty readers, at least, has been not a little surprised on rereading these and other stories by Samuel Lover to learn how little reason there was for those youthful qualms. Not that the merry Irishman comes anywhere near Scott or Hawthorne or the other great masters of fiction, but beside the farcical activity for which the boy values, or once valued him, there is a deal of sound literary stuff in his work.

Outside of fiction, a great deal of valuable work has been done recently in the way of providing simple biography and historical narrative for boys. Ambition is a form of selfishness, no doubt,

and war is a curse, or whatever; but we like to have our sons know about Achilles and Nelson and Ethan Allen, for all that. Altogether, one may feel that the strenuous taste of boyhood is being quite as conscientiously catered to as the sentimental taste of girlhood. It is awkward to be a miss or a hobbledehoy, for all concerned, but these are experiences of the moment; a little while, and one has become more strenuous and the other more sentimental, and lo! they are man and woman, ready to accept life and art upon approximately equal terms.

III

If among books for the young some are unpalatable to grown people on account of their total lack of humor, others (and there are many of them) are too sharply humorous or too subtly sentimental to appeal to children. Their only claim to classification among children's books consists in the fact that they are about children. This, of course, does not really qualify them. There are many grown-ups who are able to heave a sigh and may be able to drop a tear over the verses of

Field and Riley. Mr. Riley may fairly be called the threnodist of departed childhood. One grows, perhaps, a little tired of this mourning for lost joys; manhood has its compensations, after all, and the state of innocence is an excellent point of departure, rather than a goal, to "such a being as man, in such a world as the present." Of course there is humor as well as sentiment in these reminiscences:

"Calf was in the back-lot;
Clover in the red;
Bluebird in the pear-tree;
Pigeons on the shed;
Tom a-chargin' twenty pins
At the barn; and Dan
Spraddled out just like 'The
Injarubber-Man!'"

Most of this verse is written in the peculiar child dialect which Mr. Riley discovered, or evolved, long ago; a speech in which "just" becomes "ist," "that" becomes "'at," "was" becomes "wuz," and so on. Experiment does not indicate that either the form or the mood of such verse appeals strongly to children. A similar exception must be taken to much of Eugene

Field's poetry about children, though in a few of his songs he does really speak directly to the young, and not merely to lovers of the young.

The classic book of English verse for children is, of course, the "Child's Garden," probably the purest and ripest expression of Stevenson's genius. No one has written so like a child, or more like a man; and consequently no book about children (except "Alice in Wonderland") is so acceptable to all ages. It is curious to see how a child feels the gentle irony of many of these verses, though he listens with a serious face; what a clear sense he has of the delicious priggishness of "The Whole Duty of Children:"

> "A child should always say what 's true,
> And speak when he is spoken to,
> And behave mannerly at table:
> At least, as far as he is able;"

or of the whimsical vagueness of the "Happy Thought:"

> "The world is so full of a number of things,
> I 'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."

There is hardly a poem in the collection which does not express some true childish mood, as the

child himself feels it, and not as it looks in retrospect.

Happily, not even the best of juvenile poetry can do for children everything which poetry can do. Several admirable collections of great verse which is intelligible to young people have been made in the past, collections like Mr. Henley's "Lyra Heroica," and the "Heart of Oak Series" edited by Professor Norton. Such books of poetry will be used gratefully by many people who have believed in reading good verse to children, but have distrusted their own judgment in selecting the right thing.

One is surprised in looking over the most popular books about children to see how few of them are really capable of being enjoyed by children. There, to be sure, was "Little Lord Fauntleroy," which was fit for the enjoyment of the sentimental and the humorless of any age; perhaps we had better speak of the best rather than the most popular books. Mrs. Ewing in "Jackanapes" and "The Story of a Short Life," and Mrs. Wiggin in "Timothy's Quest" and "The Birds' Christmas Carol," seem to have achieved the

better sort of balance. Miss Daskam has solved, or avoided, the problem of her audience by producing two kinds of story about children, a variety like "The Madness of Philip" for grown-ups, and a variety like "The Imp and the Angel" for babes.

Elsewhere the question has been decided frankly in favor of the adult reader, though there are cases in which children manage to enjoy in some manner what was meant for their elders. A boy, for instance, will devour tales like "Tom Sawyer" or "Huckleberry Finn," though he cannot understand their real merit as studies of boy-character. As narratives of delightfully meaningless depravity they have been excluded, not unreasonably, from more than one public library. The adult intelligence is necessary to understand them, far more necessary than with many books commonly read by adults which have nothing whatever to do with children. In the "Huck Finn" class one might include Mr. Kipling's "Stalky," if one were sure that the disagreeable little rascals who figure in that tale can be supposed to mean anything even to the full-grown intelligence.

There is no doubt on this score as to the value of Mr. Howells's books about boys. In his "Boy's Town" he registered, professedly for young readers, a series of minute and sharply defined after-impressions of boyhood as he had in his own person experienced it. His latest book is the story of a particular boy in the "Boy's Town." It has an admirable moral (if that were important), but I doubt if an ordinary boy would be quite sure what it is. He would enjoy the book, but the very subtlest, finest merit of it would be beyond him. The writer, in short, employs his favorite instrument of cool and dry irony to excellent effect, for grown-up readers. The style is happily colloquial, now and then slipping into boy syntax and vocabulary; and it would be hard to find elsewhere so veracious a picture of the whimsical contrarieties and unwilling compunctions of boy-nature, unless in that remarkable and, it is to be hoped, unforgotten series of boy-studies, "The Court of Boyville." The books of Mr. Kenneth Grahame, which have now been given what might well be their final form, are in a different vein. Mr. Grahame has the advantage of writing con-

fessedly for his contemporaries. His style is rather ornate than simple, and he remembers his childhood with a tenderness of personal association which he does not try to hide. His memory has more subtlety than that of Mr. Riley, and more warmth than that of Mr. Howells.

If such work as this is the writing of a man for men, so much the better for men, and, indirectly at least, for the children of men.

POETRY AND COMMONPLACE

POETRY AND COMMONPLACE

"ONLY a staff cut from Sophoclean timber will support your lonely dreamer as he makes his way over the marl," wrote an accomplished American scholar not long ago; "but the common citizen, who does most of the world's work, and who has more to do with the future of poetry than a critic will concede, finds his account in certain smooth, didactic, and mainly cheerful verses which appear in the syndicate newspapers, and will never attain a magazine or an anthology. If singing throngs keep rhythm alive, it is this sort of poets that must both make and mend the paths of genius."

The critic is not advancing a new gospel of doggerel or a defense of the slipshod. He is considering poetry as a scientific fact, as "emotional rhythmic utterance," and striving to emphasize the significance of that utterance in its ruder forms. His argument, therefore, seems to approach an apology for the commonplace. Indeed,

he is frank in accepting the word as applicable to the best poetry, if it is applicable at all. "Commonplace is a poor word," he says. "Horace gives one nothing else."

One wishes to be sure that there is reason for throwing such overwhelming stress upon the significance of the social element in poetry. When we have admitted that some sort of emotional rhythmic utterance has always been essential to the popular comfort, and when we have determined by the method which Mr. Gummere suggests that the instinct for such utterance is not likely to grow dull with time, shall we have even paved the way for proof that great poetry will continue to be produced? Or when we have gone the length of historical analysis to prove that "Lycidas, as a poem, is the outcome of emotion in long reaches of social progress," shall we have discovered some new truth about the poem or about the poetic function? Necessarily the great poet conserves and epitomizes and perfects; that is why he is great. And that, since he implies, and acts as spokesman for, a thousand smaller voices heard only by a few and for a day, is why

we still find meaning even in "those old hysteries about genius," which Mr. Gummere disdains; and why we find it unnecessary to refer every poem, great or small, to whatever mass of data in "concrete sociology."

We may turn for reassurance to certain well-remembered passages in the Oxford lectures of Mr. W. J. Courthope, a distinguished modern expositor of classical criticism. "Poetry," he says, "is the art which produces pleasure for the imagination by imitating human actions, thoughts, and passions, in metrical language." It must, however, produce pleasure not for the coterie or the class, or even the people as a whole, but "pleasure which can be felt by what is best in the people as a whole . . . pleasure such as has been produced by one generation of great poets after another whose work still moves in the reader wonder and delight." Naturally, therefore, "the sole authorities in the art of poetry are the great classical poets of the world." This view of poetry by no means ignores its fundamental relation toward society. "As the end of art is to produce pleasure, poets and all other artists must take

into account alike the constitution of the human mind and the circumstances of the society which it is their business to please." But this truth, stated without qualification, may easily mislead: "Popular taste has, no doubt, a foundation in Nature. . . . But the unrefined instinct of the multitude is, as a rule, in favor of what is obvious and superficial: impatient of reflection, it is attracted by the loud colors and the commonplace sentiment which readily strike the senses or the affections. Observe the popular songs in the Music Halls, the pictorial advertisements on the hoardings, the books on the railway stalls, the lists in the circulating libraries; from these may be divined the level to which the public taste is capable of rising by its own untrained perception. That which is natural in such taste is also vulgar; and if vulgar Nature is to be the standard of Art, nothing but a versatile mediocrity of invention is any longer possible." The classical critic, that is, would see no hope for poetry in the mere survival of a popular susceptibility for rhythm. Yet if he does not spare contempt for the commonplace and vulgar, he is at great pains to make clear the

importance of the universal element in poetry: "The real superiority of the painter or the poet, if we measure by the work of the highest excellence, lies . . . in the ability to find expression for imaginative ideas of nature floating unexpressed in the general mind." "That secret of enduring poetical life lies in individualizing the universal, not in universalizing the individual."

From this point of view, one reflects, what does Mr. Gummere's "communal song" mean? Taken to include, as seems to be expected, all current attempts at "emotional rhythmic utterance," it means very little; hardly more than the really considerable public inclination for the banjo and the coon-song would mean to the student of music. At its best, with all possible concession to its virtue of spontaneity and its suggestion of a natural prestige for poetry, it represents only the rude attempt at expressing that universal experience which the individualizing hand of genius is able to express adequately. An instinct for utterance does not in itself constitute or even imply art, though it may produce art. There have

been nations singularly prone to rhythmic utterance, yet barren of noble poetry.

Very narrow in range and monotonous in substance is the verse in which many of us common citizens find our account. It is flatly emotional and baldly respectable. It preaches, it pities, it regrets; it is full of the memories of childhood, of innocence, of the old homestead and the song that mother used to sing. At its nadir of quality and perhaps its zenith of influence, one finds it cried over at the vaudeville theatre. It is surprising how sympathetically even a "submerged" audience will listen to that babbling of green fields which it has never seen. In America this kind of verse seems to have achieved a sort of apotheosis. Not to risk the indiscretion of naming Longfellow in the connection, one may mention aloud the work of Mr. James Whitcomb Riley, a poet of real powers, who has been content to make very common people laugh and cry by quite obvious means. Doubtless it is something to be a virtuoso, even upon the harmonium, but the instrument has fatal limitations.

But such verse, as Mr. Yeats has admirably

pointed out, is not a continuance of the traditions of popular poetry in the dignified sense. It is simply middle-class poetry, while true folk-poetry is the expression of a true though unconscious art. What are we to make of such newspaper verse as this:

> "Wiser the honest words of a child
> Than the scornful scholar's fleers;
> Richer a fortnight of crudest faith
> Than a score of cynic years;"

or,

> "Let not the sham life of the tinsel city,
> Whose false gods all the blazing fires of folly fan,
> Blast the green tendrils of my human pity;
> Oh, let me still revere the sacred soul of man"?

This sort of verse is probably as palatable, and even as immediately profitable, to the common citizen as any verse could be. Nobody can possibly wish to laugh at it. Unless to the sociological student of poetry, however, it falls short of special significance; not because the feeling expressed is not sincere and sensible and of universal appeal, but because it is imperfectly individualized: loosely grasped and vaguely uttered. One perceives that this is the real status of the

trite and the commonplace, and fancies that when the champion of popular poetry chooses Horace as an eminent example of the commonplace in poetry, he is holding the weak thread to the light. For there can be nothing less commonplace than the perfect expression by individual genius of the facts of universal experience: nothing less commonplace, that is, than true poetry.

POETRY AS FINE ART

POETRY AS FINE ART

WHILE we properly choose to think of poetry as something more than a marketable commodity, and do not, under the best conditions, expect it to reach a wide circle of immediate customers, we can hardly look upon the unmarketableness of current American verse without wonder. Is the product inferior to that of other arts, or is the public taste degenerate, or what?

It is odd that people who feel virtuous in spending ten dollars for a seat at the opera, or a hundred dollars for a modern painting (let us put it mildly), do not dream of spending a dollar for the new book of verse — for any new book of verse. The point is not that such a book fails to interest them; it simply does not concern them in any way. Modern attempts at poetry do not constitute one of the worthy objects toward the encouragement of which one is expected to contribute in dollars — or cents. With the better

class of publishers it is a matter of policy to get out a new book of verse now and then. Poetry is an item which ought not to be altogether absent from the list of forthcoming books; and the publisher is willing to pay the piper rather than have it supposed that nobody is piping. Not long ago a book of verse was put forth by a well-known house, and received with unusual favor by the critics and the public. In the course of six months or so a new edition was announced with some trumpeting. One had visions of substantial returns to the lucky poet as well as the glory of a wide audience for his work, and might have been surprised to learn that the first edition consisted of seven hundred copies. That was a rare success. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that there is now an increasing tendency on the part of verse-writers of refinement to have their work privately printed. A hundred copies can be pretty cheaply produced, and readily taken care of by the old-fashioned method of subscription. That was a thrifty method: if one's bantling is to be cast into the waters, it is certainly more discreet to furnish a life-belt. But the principle is vicious, after all.

If poetry is a fine art, there is no apparent reason why the poetic product should not "exploit" itself upon even terms with any other fine-art product; and, say what we will about the independence of the artist, we cannot feel that he gains in dignity by assuming the methods of the amateur. When the poet has once fairly admitted that his product is unmerchantable, and has declined to put it to the test, he has cast suspicion upon its value. No work of art gains by fond handling; it must take its chances in the open field.

Public indifference to such attempts is, apparently, not inconsistent with a general understanding that they are pretty creditable. The technical quality of modern verse is admitted, even by modern verse-writers, to be extremely high. Certainly there is an increasing number of persons who are able to approximate good form in the employment of metre and rhyme. We study that sort of thing; we know the difference between an iambus and an anapest, and we get credit for it. Possibly we get too much credit for it. To remark that So-and-so is not much of a poet, but "writes as good verse as any in the

language," is a little like saying that a builder of manikins makes as good bodies as the Creator, though they happen not to possess the breath of life. Of course the trouble with this figure is that any one can tell a manikin from a body at a glance, and no one can tell a piece of skillful verse from a poem, at a glance. Perhaps that is why even the public that does use poetry in some form is bored with this facile and measured product of the modern verse-writer. It may very likely be poetry, but why bother with probabilities when there is so much poetry in the world of which we can be perfectly sure? Everybody knows that the generation is lucky which produces one or two notable poets: why be looking for nightingales on every bush? These are reasonable queries from persons who care only for nightingales, and are impatient of the imitators of the nightingale. Fortunately there are a good many birds which possess a delicate trill or an honest chirp of their own. One may conceivably find just as many degrees of merit in poetry as in music or painting, and take just as much satisfaction in enjoying them all.

The chances are that a great deal of this current verse must fail to be poetry in any sense, because it is the outcome of no sort of creative power. It may be merely good verse, able to satisfy the ear with metres and the taste with images. Such verse may commonly be written from some motive other than a burning desire for self-expression. People will dabble in poetry as they dabble in other arts. Or, not being quite artificial, it may more or less dimly suggest the presence of a creative power which needs to express itself through some other medium than verse. There never was such a thing as a "mute, inglorious Milton;" a great poet's power of expression in verse is a part of the man himself, perhaps the most significant part, certainly inseparable from his power of poetic conception. No such prodigy as an inarticulate genius has yet been proved to have existed; though only the highest genius, perhaps, is perfectly articulate, as only the virtuosos are really masters of technique. Except in work of the highest genius, there are all degrees of ill balance between conception and execution; but if verse is not in some sense articu-

late as well as inspired, it is not poetry, and no mere intensity of feeling, no sleight-of-hand in the employment of metre and rhyme can make it so. Not only as a means for expressing spontaneous emotion (and of course it must always be that), but as a fine art, poetry continues to appeal to a small but steadfast element in our society which the comic papers laugh at and the sober authorities condescend to.

Let me say here that I take no more interest in the pursuit of poetry for art's sake than for the sake of sociology. The ambling sentiment of the popular poet and the precious phrasing of the high-voiced literary poet are equally beside the mark. Neither sincerity nor prettiness can by themselves compass poetic beauty; the partial, the trite, the finicking, are as fatal in poetry as in sculpture or painting. One may fancy an advantage to minor work in those arts from the comparative inaccessibility of the great masterpieces. That would not hold true of music; but there, as in painting, beauty makes its appeal through one of the outer senses, while poetry, however perfect its form, bestows its full loveliness only upon the

inward ear, as sculpture communicates its full perfection only to the inward eye. The painter and the composer of no more than ordinary powers are often able by simple manipulations to impress effects confusingly suggestive of greatness, upon an audience whose mood is commonly of sensuous susceptibility rather than pure and intelligent sympathy. The luxury of this mood partly accounts for the immense and increasing encouragement given by England and America to a department of fine art in which they have actually achieved far less of moment than in poetry. English poetry as a whole is as far superior to German poetry as English music is inferior to German music.

The analogy between poetry and the sister arts must not be pushed too far. The real barrier which intervenes is suggested by the fact that we can hardly imagine the profitableness of establishing national or private schools of the poetic art. At the same time, it is a little indolent of us to lie back upon the theory that poets are born, not made. The poet must be born with the aptitude, yes; but then the aptitude must be developed.

He does not need the *viva voce* method; of necessity, the library will be his classroom and the highway his studio. Poets are not born equal, and their work, if it is to endure, must be the outcome of hard discipline and a settled philosophy of life, as well as of the mysterious glow and vigor of fancy which we call inspiration. Young persons still dream dreams of startling the world by some outburst of metrical frenzy which shall write their names upon the skies. Few persons of any age are ready to devote themselves, for better or worse, to "the homely slighted shepherd's trade." Few of us are worthy to be so slighted; we do not deserve the tribute of contempt which the vulgar world is ready to pay to those who brazenly pursue the best.

But there is little use in plaintive talk about the world, vulgar or otherwise. People who could conceivably take a live interest in poetry as a fine art must be few. But there are a good many millions of us in America; and there are, after all reservations have been made, an uncertain number of thousands who really possess and take pleasure in cultivating a sense, rudimentary at

least, for artistic value. They like, or wish to like, good paintings, good music, good sculpture and architecture; and they feel a sort of responsibility for the support of those arts. Surely it is not unreasonable to inquire if a similar sense of interest and responsibility in our immediate poetic product may not be in the future both proper and cultivable. In the meantime we shall look to our Recessionals rather than our Absent-Minded Beggars to keep the art of poetry alive. Genius will continue to work through art. It will, finally, continue to be the few supreme masters of song who can with equal success touch the stops of various quills; who are able always, in whatever mood or upon whatever plane, to conceive justly and to express rightly; to create, that is, the noble and rare flower of genius which the world will for some time continue to style Poetry.

POETRY AND THE STAGE

POETRY AND THE STAGE

Readers whose interest persists in the parlous question of the modern stage are likely to have read, not long ago, Mr. Gosse's essay in the "Atlantic Monthly" on poetic drama, and Mr. Corbin's article in "The Forum" dealing with the present dramatic situation in America. Both writers admit patiently, if not cheerfully, that most people may be expected to go to the theatre for trivial purposes, and that the stage offers little encouragement to those who wish to take the modern play seriously. "The drama," says Mr. Corbin, "is in precisely the condition in which literature would be if the reading public were limited to the ten-cent magazines." Mr. Gosse concedes that there will always be eighty per cent. of theatre-goers "who take their theatre as if it were morphia, or at least as if it were a glass of champagne. But," he proceeds, "we suggest that the residue, the twenty per

cent. are now strong enough to be catered for also." This seems a reasonable demand: not that the stage be instantly "reformed" or bodily "elevated," simply that it do the right thing by all of its patrons. What, from the point of view of that imaginable twenty per cent., the right thing would be, is a subject well worth considering.

I

By way of reply to the charge of current indifference to dramatic poetry, it is easy to allege the continued popularity of Shakespeare on the boards. Granted our fidelity to the Shakespeare tradition, it is to be doubted whether the interest of a modern audience in the Shakespeare play as now presented on the stage is often quite sincere. Moreover, even when we are not seduced into beholding the Ophelia of the lady who has just come up from vaudeville, or the Shylock of the gentleman who has just come down from melodrama, — even when we fare piously to the best attainable modern presentation of Shakespeare, — we have done nothing toward keeping English poetic drama alive. In truth, we know that as a

practical influence the Shakespeare tradition itself has dominated English dramatic poetry quite too long. Since that great day of Elizabeth, the position and the methods of the stage have inevitably changed, a new language has arisen, and a new racial temperament. Yet there are very few plays in English verse now written, upon which we may dare look without fear of being once more confronted with the pale features of the exhumed Elizabethan Muse.

Among the surprising number of recent attempts in this kind, hardly one has succeeded in putting off the trappings of Shakespearian diction. Now and then the imitation has been deliberate, or at least confessed. Such studies would seem to carry with them the discouraging implication that there is no use in trying to unite modern poetry and modern stage-craft. Of course the implication is an old one ; it was made, in a way, by all those nineteenth-century cultivators of the "closet-drama." Why, they seem to have asked, should this abrogation of the footlights and the preoccupied audience matter much ? One gets more pleasure from reading a Shakespeare play

than from seeing it performed; why should one care to have his own poetic play actually produced? It would really be unsafe to appeal to Shakespeare in this connection, for his own plays probably meant little to him except as they were worth acting before an audience whose capacity he knew; and we, at this remove, and in our chosen part as readers, cannot help sharing in that old direct contact between the poet, the players, and the pit. What a leap from this vigorous kind of play to our reluctant and sedentary drama of the closet! — a drama which substitutes declamation for rapid dialogue, and retains merely some of the outward symbols and impedimenta of action. It has its exits and its entrances, its acts and scenes upon which the curtain is never to rise or fall except in fancy. Such a play may be the product of undoubted talent, even genius, but it could not conceivably grip and hold an audience; and, of the two, it is better for a play to hail from the greenroom than from the library. Much admirable poetry may imbed itself in such a drama; but it is, at best, an interesting hybrid, rather than a pure form of lite-

rary or dramatic art. This was the fatal defect in Tennyson's dramatic essays, and, though in his case the diction was personally sincere, of Browning's.

Apart from personal sincerity of diction, however, there is a racial and temporal sincerity which in any age belongs to poetry of extensive as well as of intensive power. We shrink from connecting the notion of popularity with the idea of poetry, as it is probably right for us to shrink with regard to the higher lyrical or epical forms. But the stage is essentially a popular institution, and poetry, to achieve any vital connection with it, must in the matters of structure and diction go quite halfway to meet it. No play, therefore, which contravenes the principles of modern stagecraft, or of the simple diction which has become normal in modern poetry, can hope for anything better than a *succès d'estime;* that is, a success based upon its having done well something apart from what it primarily should have done. There have been only a few glorious instances in which the literary value of a dramatic composition has seemed to be independent of its usefulness to the contemporary stage. Most closet-dramas are seen

in perspective to have been neither here nor there; neither very good as poems, nor very good as plays. Human nature is, we are told, always the same; but each age and race has its own social nature, its own mental habit, its own emotional propriety even, — qualities which the dramatist can least afford to ignore. A living drama, in short, must not only "hold the mirror up to nature," but "show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

II

This is what, in its own way, our prose drama is doubtless attempting to do. It is natural that the modern play should have come to be, in form, pretty much everything that the Shakespeare play was not. Apart from the substitution of prose for verse, the tendency has been everywhere for simplification of substance and amplification of accessory. Our elaborate method of presentation exacts a less elaborate scheme of composition. The stage-manager, the costumer, and the scene-shifter have to be considered as ministers to the pleasure, and champions of the convenience,

of the public; the five acts dwindle to three or four, and the number of scenes is cut down by more than half. Yet writers of so-called poetic drama have ignored this change of usage till the other day, when Mr. Stephen Phillips, in his very first play, took pains to require no impossible feats of modern stage-craft. Attention to such matters is essential to a renewal of relation between poetry and the stage. If we have really no standards of poetic diction and of stage-craft which fit our time as the diction and stage-craft of Shakespeare and his contemporaries fitted the Elizabethan time, there is little hope of any such relation.

The question of theme is a pretty clear one. The poetic drama, if it continues to exist, will continue to concern itself with the ideal. We have, during the past half century, had much patter in prose, and not a little in verse, about the glorious opportunities for literature in the celebration of democracy, of commerce, of education, and what not; but nobody is really deceived by it. The enslaving of electricity, the triumphs of barter, the iron tutelage of "imperialism," have some-

how failed to expand the poet's chest or clear his voice. These things are business. The dramatic poet may therefore be expected still to treat the immemorial themes and, ordinarily, to reap advantage from a remote setting for his action.

Not infrequently of late the attempt has been made to interpret the present moment in dramatic blank verse. Every age has doubtless its noble and familiar forms of speech; each should be reserved for its proper uses. Blank verse is the poetic form least amenable to reason; it has a way of appearing, after all possible pains have been taken, to have constructed itself according to the essential genius, rather than to the talented intention, of the author. So, too often, the royal chariot turns out to be nothing but a one-horse shay. It it still to be shown that even a career so imposing and so comparatively remote as that of Napoleon can afford a theme for tragedy; it is still to be proved that American politics is capable of producing materials for anything graver than opera bouffe. A study of such experiments in poetic drama serves simply to reaffirm an ancient article of faith. No great dramatic

poetry, no great epical poetry, has ever dealt with contemporary conditions. Only the austere processes of time can precipitate the multitude of immediate facts into the priceless residuum of universal truth. The great dramatists have turned to the past for their materials, not of choice, but of necessity. Here and there in the dark backward and abysm of time, some human figure, some human episode, is seen to have weathered the years, and to have taken on certain mysterious attributes of truth; and upon this foundation the massive structure of heroic poetry is builded.

In the meantime what are we to look for as to the external character of the coming poetic drama? It is reasonable to suppose that both style and structure will be simple. To the modern theater audience, even to the imaginable twenty per cent. of it which is seeking a high and permanent satisfaction, the ideal will have to be presented in some concrete and decisive form. There will be no diffusion of interest, — we have more than enough of that in practical life, — and there will be no uncertainty of effect. The fact has been

illustrated very recently by the surprisingly enthusiastic hearing given to the revival of "Everyman." A public taste which is approachable by that simple, stern old morality need not be despaired of; it is really alive and ready to employ itself. It has been put off too long with imitations of Shakespeare, and with translations of foreign plays. Such pretty and melancholy hallucinations as "Pelleas and Mélisande," such romantic extravagances as "Cyrano de Bergerac," even such graceful parables as "The Sunken Bell," it will listen to with some forcing of the sympathy. In the end, it will demand something more easily appreciable by a solid, law-cherishing race, something simple, direct, and human.

Poetic drama is not likely soon, or ever, to recover its old supremacy on the English stage. But a beginning has now been made toward its reëstablishment in a position of influence; and it is fair to suppose that in the hands of Mr. Phillips, or of somebody else, the movement will go on. And if it does not displace prose, — which Heaven defend! — work of this sort may, with its noble simplicity of theme, its noble purity of line,

afford a priceless standard of current dramatic values, which will sensibly affect the quality of our prose drama. There are other good things in the world beside poetry, but few things which are not the better for being in the same world with it. Certainly if we could imagine a day when poetry should have been hopelessly exiled from the boards, we could imagine the drama to be doomed as a means of art, — that is, as a real influence in modern life.

LITERATURE AS A BY-PRODUCT

LITERATURE AS A BY-PRODUCT

"As a rule," says Mr. Stedman, "distrust the quality of that product which is not the result of legitimate professional labor. Art must be followed as a means of subsistence to render its creations worthy, to give them a human element." The dictum comes very gracefully from one who has never himself had to pluck the waterfowl before he apostrophized it; yet Mr. Stedman would hardly be called an amateur in letters. No doubt the literary hack gets along more expeditiously on account of the burr under his saddle. The profession of letters, like pugilism, has its corollaries; theatrical starring, for instance, or even bag-punching, — a creditable form of exercise which some people pay to see. But one does not like to feel that professionalism in literature, if it is a title to honor, should turn upon the point of support. Pretty much the same mediocrity is the rule in Grub Street as elsewhere, and a good

deal of the best work gets itself done far from that ancient *via dolorosa.* Arnold was not an amateur because he inspected schools, or Lowell because he taught, or Lamb because he clerked it. Nor has Austin Dobson's work changed in character or quality since he ceased to spend certain hours of the day in the Foreign Office.

But these men, one may say, were really literary men, whatever method of boiling the pot they may have found convenient; the genuine man of affairs, eminent in his own field, very seldom produces pure literature. Granted: but the thing does sometimes happen; and when it does, the world is not likely to wish that something else had happened instead, least of all that the man had never concerned himself with affairs. On the contrary, it recognizes that the work owes its merit to the man as he is. Some men have to be doing a great many things in order to do anything well. If their every-day brains were not busied with finance or politics or scholarship, their holiday brains would remain unnourished and sterile. They do not care for solitude or meditation. They are not interested in landscape,

natural or human. They must have a tangible end in view, whether it is the proving of a thesis or the making of a million. That end attained or in sight leaves the spirit free for fresh woods and pastures new.

Such a man was Walter Bagehot. Banker, political theorist, and economist, he was also a man of letters. Some obvious traits of the amateur he had. He was too busy either to be anxious to say things, or to be fussy about his manner of speech. His somewhat testy American editor fumes in many a footnote over the essayist's slipshod syntax and inaccuracies of quotation and allusion. Probably most of his readers feel that these details do not matter much; a worse thing would have befallen if, by taking thought of his predicates and his authorities, he had deprived us of the open, vigorous style, the hearty, talking voice, refined yet unstudied, for which we value him.

Bagehot had a good-humored contempt for the professional writer: "The reason why so few good books are written," he said, "is that so few people that can write know anything. In general, an author has always lived in a room, has read

books, has cultivated science, is acquainted with the style and sentiments of the best authors. But he is out of the way of employing his own eyes and ears. He has nothing to hear and nothing to see. His life is a vacuum." Bagehot could not foresee that in the course of a half-century the author would have deserted his comfortable quarters, and would be sleeping in byways and eating by hedges for fear some stray vagabond of copy should not be brought in to the literary feast. When this was written, the common ideal of the author's life was very different; there was the admired Southey tradition, for example. "Southey had no events, no experiences," wrote Bagehot. "His wife kept house and allowed him pocket-money, just as if he had been a German professor devoted to accents, tobacco, and the dates of Horace's amours." In truth, one hardly knows what to say for the benefits of seclusion and leisure when an active man can write like this. Bagehot's own love of action made him somewhat uncharitably impatient of anything like physical or mental sedentariness. It was a grown man's business to be doing as well as thinking, to "get

into the game," whatever it might be, and to let earned insight and unbidden zeal wield the pen, if it must be wielded. Bagehot's contribution to literature was not confined to his critical essays. He wrote on the English Constitution, on banking, on political economy, as directly, vigorously, and humorously as on Shakespeare or Gibbon. Books produced in such a vein are not "mere literature;" they are the product of study or observation and written for a practical end. They belong to the class of book which commonly makes its little contribution to contemporary knowledge or speculation, and is forgotten. The force of such work may be transmitted, and continue to exist, but such a book can live, as a book, only when it has been written by a man who is, among other things, a creator. One thinks of not a few instances in which a vigorous and polished style has resulted from the application of a cultivated mind to serious and absorbing practical themes.

Happily, the creative spirit springs forth now and then from the slough of dilettantism as well as from the paved highways of trade or the trodden paths of the quadrangle. FitzGerald on

FitzGerald is not to be taken too seriously. It was his whim to represent himself as idle and vacillating, but few men have been more consistent or more genuinely employed. Taking him, however, as the type of inaction, he would still have, in common with the other subjects of this paper, his technical amateurship in letters. He never made, or desired to make, any money by writing.

But there are still other classes of unprofessional writers to whom we are now owing the production of good literature. Toil and crime, for example, have found effective voices of their own. What the eighteenth century thought simply vulgar, and the nineteenth gathered data from, has now become literary material; even the annals of the poor are to be short and simple no longer. All scientific investigation, indeed, as the instances of Spencer and Huxley go to prove, threatens to record itself, sooner or later, in terms of some personality, and to become literature. Natural historians have not a few famous books to their credit; there seems to be some property in this gentle trade which gives especial

kindliness to the pen. The printed word of a Thoreau, a Jefferies, a John Muir, has a richness and mellowness which seem to come direct from soil and sun. Even when a naturalist's facts are discredited by later authority, his writing is likely to be cherished as literature. Gilbert White is still much more than a name to naturalists, his swallow speculations to the contrary. Nevertheless, a recent editor puts the case for him in a way which can hardly be disputed: "'T is as a literary monument, therefore, I hold, that we ought above all things to regard these rambling and amiable Letters. They enshrine for us in miniature the daily life of an amateur naturalist in the days when the positions of parson, sportsman, country gentleman, and man of science were not yet incongruous."

It is surprising how many books which the world preserves are built upon local observation and anecdote. Mr. Henry James, we recall, once said of Thoreau, "He was more than provincial; he was parochial." The remark has so much the air of finality, it is so obviously a statement of fact, that one's first instinct is to bolt it without ado. Pre-

sently, it may be, that mild inward monitor which does so much to conserve the eupeptic mind suggests that fact is not truth, and that the morsel will bear reconsideration. What is it to be provincial? and what is it supposed to do or undo for a man or his work? One has heard it said that London itself is provincial. Certainly Mr. James's cosmopolitanism has not kept him from dwelling among and upon a class of Londoners whose local preoccupation, if this were the point at issue, is quite equal to that of a New England villager. But local preoccupation is not the point; to be provincial is to be in a sense unpresentable, to hail patently, as we may fancy Mr. James saying, from an ineligible somewhere.

The cosmopolitan idea has apparently given us a new standard of eligibility. People used to take the grand tour for their souls' good; but they "dragged at each remove a lengthening chain." They traveled to become more worthy of staying at home. They did not dream that absenteeism would come to be held actually a state of grace. They would hardly have seen the point of that witty comment upon Mr. James, "To be truly

cosmopolitan a man must be at home even in his own country." It is something, after all, to be indigenous. Thoreau had his own simple philosophy as to home-staying. "There is no more tempting novelty," he writes, "than this new November. No going to Europe or to another world is to be named with it. Give me the old familiar walk, post-office and all, with this ever new self, with this infinite expectation and faith which does not know when it is beaten. We'll go nutting once more. We'll pluck the nut of the world and crack it in the winter evenings. Theatres and all other sight-seeing are puppet-shows in comparison. I will take another walk to the cliff, another row on the river, another skate on the meadow, be out in the first snow, and associate with the winter birds."

Probably no theory is more useful and comforting to critics than the theory of literature as an art. It breaks a road through much difficult country, and keeps the line open between the reconnoiterer and his base. But even in the field of pure letters one does not find that all the masterpieces have been produced by delib-

erate literary intention. The exceptions are indeed numerous enough to induce momentary doubts as to the reliability of any precise theory of composition. One sees here and there bits of pure literature which appear to have been born, not made; they are impulsive, altogether lacking in artifice — why not in art? They offer a most convenient handle to such active uncritical minds as Mr. Kipling, who is able to dispose of the whole business of art and criticism in the jaunty announcement,

> "There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
> And every single one of them is right."

Of course Mr. Kipling's famous phrase is brought to bear directly upon poetry, but it is equally true, or untrue, of a good deal of prose. Literature is really produced now and then by a kind of inadvertency; and it is easy to see why. Men who have a taste for that form of expression are likely to get a training in it which they know nothing about. We use paint or clay because we choose, and words because we must. We may, therefore, by the grace of Heaven, stumble upon forms of speech or of colloquial writing so indi-

vidual and sincere as to be better than anything we could bring forth by a more conscious impulse. A process like this cannot yield sustained flights of prose or verse, but it does yield such masterpieces of their kind as the immortal Diary of the unliterary Pepys, and the still famous letters of that author of once famous novels, Frances Burney.

INTIMATE LITERATURE

INTIMATE LITERATURE

It is a matter of common belief just now, especially among those who do not read essays, that the essay is pretty much a thing of the past. There was, of course, a day of glory for it; there was even a day when it held the top of the market, or nearly that. But this was a good vague while ago. Very few people, we are assured, try to write essays nowadays, and when they do the results are not worth much. Critical essays commonly deal with books and authors that everybody knows about, or else with books and authors that nobody wants to know about. What do we care for John Doe's opinion of Shakespeare, or Richard Roe's remarks on Lodovico Castelvetro? As for the discursive essay, it is folly, at this day of the world, to adopt such a medium for creative writing. What 's the matter with the novel? There is your true modern vehicle for eloquence, or sentiment, or philosophy; and "something doing" besides.

In a commercial sense, the essay does, just now, lie between the devil and the deep sea, the special article and the novel. Few American periodicals have room for it. In the publisher's catalogue it holds a place of comparative obscurity next door to the equally sequestered item of verse. It is not advertised in the newspapers or displayed in book-shop windows: a back-handed compliment, if one chooses, to the incorruptible quality of the audience it is destined to reach. To the quality and constancy of that audience, in fact, the essay owes its continued and healthy existence. Not yet has it been absorbed in the novel or displaced by the special article, though its quiet merits have been somewhat obscured to the casual eye by the neighborhood of more showy objects. Such books are ordained in the nature of things for a success of appreciation by comparatively few readers. The newspapers and "critical" organs will have something brief and affable to say of them; but they will not be much talked about either there or elsewhere. Nevertheless, they will make their place and hold it.

If it is true that a novelist cannot hide behind

his narrative, it is more obviously true that an essayist is at the mercy of his discourse. A dozen sentences are enough, perhaps, to lay him before us, or at least the true outline of him, and it is at our own risk that we carry on our observations. A writer of treatises may remain an unknown quantity; for his business is only to pile one stone upon another, and there is no trace of human emotion in the shaft which is finally reared. But an essay is, next to a poem, the most directly human of all literary products.

This is true, at least, of the discursive essay. We have never had a Montaigne or a Lamb in America, but cheerfully accepting as we now do for the most part the fact that our literature is a department, or, as Mr. Howells calls it, a condition of English literature, we are still at liberty to be proud of what we have done in the field of the discursive essay. For scholarship and for technical criticism there is an undoubted advantage in a logically articulate structure, and even a requirement of it. But there is a sort of creative prose which owes its charm to spontaneity, and at its best comes nearer gaining the effects of

poetry than any other prose form, — even than the carefully modulated inventions which are called rhythmic prose. In a sense, that is, the discursive essay is a purer form of literature than the logical essay. It comes more direct from the personality of the author, less compromised by mere thinking, and less hampered by set method: and this is why a considerable personality must stand behind it.

Wherever it may lie in tone and content between the extremes, say, of Thackeray's "Roundabout Papers" and Emerson's "Essays," it is a daring form, rarely found in its perfection, and then perfect because it expresses a personality of distinction. One need only think a moment of the idle triviality of Rambler, or Chatterer, or Onlooker columns in the daily press to be assured of this. In the hands of the ordinary journalist the medium becomes worthless from the literary point of view, its fine audacity becomes mere presumption, and its easy familiarity mere impertinence. What makes for an effective personality in literature? Not learning, nor logical faculty, nor cleverness of hand or fancy. These are qualities

which, joined with perseverance, can do almost anything outside of art, and nothing at all in it.

The close relation between the discursive essay and other forms of intimate literature is obvious. If the great diarists have merely written letters to themselves, so have the great essayists. Miss Burney's diary and letters hardly differ from each other, and neither form is materially distinguishable from that of the discursive essay. According to her own account, Miss Burney's conversation was not at all brilliant. She records her own trivialities and other people's clevernesses with equal candor, and was doubtless consoled by the consciousness that the colloquial flow and humor of her letters in some degree made up for the primness and parsimony of her speech. The facts are precisely reversed in Johnson's case. Even in his letters he retained for the most part that ponderous mask of style. It remained for Boswell and Miss Burney, by the record of his speech, to let us know what a good fellow the great man was. Not a few novelists have been essentially essayists; one may cull Roundabout Papers at will from "Vanity Fair," and admirable familiar

essays from "Tom Jones," *passim*. The diarist and the letter-writer are in the nature of things less subject to suspicion of "playing to the gallery" than the essayist or the novelist; but the distinction seems largely theoretical.

Whether the familiar essayist has been born to his medium or has simply seized upon it, can be determined pretty easily by appeal to his letters. Lamb and Holmes stand the test perfectly; they were not more literary, not more colloquial, in writing to a thousand persons than in writing to one. With Montaigne the case is a little less clear; we have not a great many of his letters, and it must be confessed that most of what we have are reasonably dull. He lived in a formal age, however, and was simply finding his own when, in his essays, he escaped from the trammels of polite letter-writing. The apologist for Robert Louis Stevenson cannot make out quite so good a case. His letters are not in the least like his essays, and, though both have a certain quality of intimacy, neither mode seems to express the man's personality quite satisfactorily. The Vailima letters, with all their cleverness, do not increase one's regard

for the writer. They lack the dignity and restraint which belong to all worthy forms of self-expression. One does not need to be always throwing a chest, but then, one cannot afford to doff his manners with his frock coat. Stevenson thought it rather fun to be — in point of literary taste, let us say — a little underbred with his familiars. Such was the fate of one to whom art was a heaven-blessed "stunt." What perfect literary breeding there is in all the letters of Cowper or Gray or FitzGerald; here is true intimacy without familiarity, the "ease with dignity" which is the sign of classics in this kind.

From the familiar essayist one has more to expect and less to fear than from any other worker in the field of belles-lettres. The bird's-eye viewer of book announcements may well find his vision and perhaps his patience taxed by the extent and intricacy of the prospect. Here and there, luckily, the eye finds a straight path to some green clearing or shining water which lies without shadow of doubt in the bookman's paradise. At such moments the essayist has his innings. We are feeling a little doubtful about Mr.

So-and-So's forthcoming novel, or about Miss This-or-That's new book of verse. How do we know that the divine fire may not have waned or even gone out altogether: this business of inspiration is such a tricky one. But the essayist with his lesser torch, — we shall know just where to find him, ready to lead us with even pace along the well-known waysides of his choice. We shall not make the very highest peaks of Parnassus, but the journey is sure to bring us through a pleasant and profitable country; and there will be no serious accidents by the way.

CLEVERNESS AND ORIGINALITY

CLEVERNESS AND ORIGINALITY

One can hardly give attention to the passing literary show without being struck and struck again with the cleverness of the performance. Never has an age set a higher value on skill in invention and manipulation. Never has the race more sharply enjoyed its sportsmanship. Even the stout Anglo-Saxon, though he takes satisfaction in the existence of an ethical standard, finds his recreation in spectacles of adroitness. The sleight-of-hand and aplomb of the wheat operator makes the American breathe hard; and the Briton smiles outright over a successful ruse in diplomacy. Naturally, such a public is not going to put up with any kind of dullness or clumsiness in art; naturally, also, it is ready to put up with almost any kind of cleverness. It has, to be sure, little concern with the more fastidious exercises of the pen. The issue of style, the cry of art for art's sake, has never been generally listened to in

England or America. We are too practical and straightforward for that; we have an inborn conviction that style is a verbal manifestation of personality, or, as Mr. Howells puts it, "a man's way of saying things."

We used to hear much about style as the "clothing of thought." I think it was among the cliques, the coteries, the brotherhoods, the "movements," that this notion of style as a sartorial product arose, and among them it lingers. It is not easy to imagine a Horace or a Milton solemnly assisting at the toilet of a naked and wriggling infant thought. In fact, with the great literary artist thought and language appear to be nearly inseparable; they have sprung into being together, they are one flesh. Great men work through style, not for it, and many of them have put on record their contempt for those who pursue it for its own sake. "People think I can teach them style," said Arnold. "What stuff it all is! Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style." "Can they really think," writes Newman, "that Homer, or Pindar, or Shakespeare, or Dryden, or

Walter Scott were accustomed to aim at style for its own sake, instead of being inspired with their subject, and pouring forth beautiful words because they had beautiful thoughts? This is surely too great a paradox to be borne. . . . The artist has his great or rich visions before him, and his only aim is to bring out what he thinks or what he feels in a way adequate to the thing spoken of, and appropriate to the speaker."

An affected or artificial manner of writing is, most of us feel, as unprofitable as the same manner in walking or speaking. One is left absolutely in doubt as to what sort of person the writer really is. The chances are he is not distinctly any sort of person. People who have something to say, something, that is, which must be said for their own peace of mind, and who are used to saying things, are not likely to fidget about their manner of speech. All possible care short of fidgeting they do take. Few men are conscious from the outset of a sure and distinguishable "way" of speech; and the fearsome thing is not that a man should take thought, but that he should so often mistake fastidious predilection

for creative impulse, and deliberately worry himself into an unnatural habit of utterance. In the effort to rise above commonplaceness, he sinks to imitation or contortion; and a sad hour ensues for the long-suffering boot-strap. Unfortunately this mistake, common to those who can only fidget, and important only to them, is sometimes made by their betters; as in the instance of Louis Stevenson, who as a boy began to imitate and to contort, and who never quite outgrew the notion that art is a trick. Luckily, his humor and love of life kept him at all times from the worst excesses of the stylist, and his indomitable personality insisted upon making itself felt through the many disguises with which his perverse and Pucklike ingenuity attempted to veil it.

Style may sensibly be taken to mean the verbal expression of any effective personality between the extremes of the scholar, the dreamer, the dilettante absorbed in his fancies and his periods, and the active, alert, humorous intelligence to which no human experience comes amiss, and which chooses to be downright at cost, if need be, of delicacy. The larger world prefers its

Bagehot to its Pater. It passes by with good-humored indifference such a book of essays as not long since came out of Oxford. The writer is not, perhaps, a stylist in the extreme sense. He does not look for a theme to give his cadences a chance, but words have a charm for him apart from thought. The usual result follows, that only in passages where the author loses himself does he effectually find himself — does he achieve style at all, that is. The reader is too seldom permitted to forget that the writer is a man of classical training, of æsthetic sensibility, and of certain notions as to the way in which such a man ought to write. He sculls two miles up a river, and stops at a farmhouse for luncheon, whereupon this happens: "The farm folk gave me a bowl of cream and a golden loaf with honey; then left me. Something puritanic in the place — or was it something in the air before the cockcrow of civilization? — endowed the meal with a holy sweetness as of a sacrament." Passages like this are a little irritating to the hardy intelligence; it is inclined to visualize the author at the moment of composition

not as eating the food of a hungry man in the open air, but as mincing about a library at dusk (the world well shut out), firing up now and then with a sip of tea; and as his voice melodiously rises and falls, beating time delicately with a slice of buttered toast.

That his work is a little absurd to the general does not matter if a writer is really nothing but a lover of the coddled sensation and the fetched phrase. But there are personalities which cannot be expressed in bare terms, and to which a simple style would be an affectation. When the fire of imagination fairly possesses such a writer, the elaboration of his style ceases to appear labored. But the manner which assumes force and a certain richness in moments of rhapsody is too prone, in the expression of common moods, to become ingenious and precious.

Akin to the fine work of the dilettante is that of the mystic, who obscures the obscurity of his thought by apparent simplicity of language; and that of the symbolist, whose most obvious claim upon the attention is that he may at any time be saying, if not something, something else. "No

one," says a recent critic of Mr. W. B. Yeats, "would dare to appear so meaningless unless he felt he meant a great deal." To the symbolist every art is a cult, and every artist a seer. His danger lies in following his theory of symbolism, rather than his instinct for it, so that instead of making toward a free use of symbols, he may be really constructing a code at once arbitrary and rigid. One is struck by nothing more, in following the work of this school, than by their narrow range of motive. They seem to prefer hallucination to fact, the sound of a wind blowing through a rag of tapestry to the human voice, fancies that glimmer and loom upon the dim borders of the mind to sound and fruitful imaginations. It is something, no doubt, that our Maeterlincks, our Mallarmés, our Yeatses, at their worst, should interpret for us even the naked and pathetic futilities, the pale and disembodied shadows of emotion, which haunt the background of human consciousness. But let us admit cheerfully that what our age, like other ages, has most need of, and sets most value upon, is a vigorous imaginative prose and poetry embodying human experience, not the

subtle mysteries of an art which prides itself upon suggesting præter-human emotion by code.

We Americans, while we do not demand that quite everything be written in dialect, have a liking for English which is not ashamed to own kinship with the vernacular. The cleverness of the stylist or of the coterie has little attraction and no danger for us, therefore. According to our several degrees, we nod over our Paters or wonder over our Maeterlincks, and pass on to matters which interest us.

We can, to be sure, feel no perfectly justifiable pride in our alternative choice, whether it happens to fall upon imitative cleverness or "freak" cleverness. Why should the affectations of a Hewlett be creditable simply because of their archaic flavor? And why should the hysterical confidences of a morbid precocity have, not long since, gained our serious attention simply because they were cleverly "made up"? Heaven knows, that swaggering journal was pitiful enough in itself: let us admit that those of us upon whose gaping attention the young egotist rightly reckoned became full sharers in the pitifulness of the

affair. Is this to be our conception of originality, that a man shall say things queerly, or a woman say queer things? Surely, if the choosing of bizarre phrases, or the employment of such literary motifs as the toothbrush, is to be treated as a manifestation of genius, the critic cannot do better than betake himself once more to the harmless discussion of Shakespeare and the musical glasses.

Doubtless this eager hearkening to the unusual voice is due in part to our determination to miss nothing original. With an ear to the wind we shall not be caught napping by any casual unexpected excellence. Genius is always odd: therefore (we reason) oddity has a double chance of turning out to be genius. In fact, it is one of the hardest things in the world to distinguish between inventiveness and originality; and one of the easiest things to confound them. The Jack-of-all-trades is the supreme embodiment of Yankeeism. A man who can build lighthouses, tell stories to the extent of twelve volumes, paint Venetian water-colors, and acceptably lecture to the Woman's Club, appears to us an astonish-

ing fellow; and we wish above all things to be astonished.

We have in America a special susceptibility to any unusual sort of cleverness, a fondness for surprise, based, it may be, upon a sense (which underlies our agreeable theory of his capability) of the essential commonplaceness of the average man. We like to think of Lincoln as a rail-splitter whom Fate, in a spirit of bravado, deputed to illustrate the futility of the old monarchic idea. We do not, however, hold the theory that every rail-splitter possesses the genius which clearly belonged to Lincoln; and we compromise by dwelling upon the infinite cleverness of the man, — a quality more comprehensible because capable of development by outward circumstance, but a quality quite apart from his genius. This is not good for us. We need especially to cultivate the habit of contemplating the supreme expression of personality in life and art which springs from inspiration. If that product is not to be achieved even by means of "an infinite capacity for taking pains," it is obviously unattainable by any effort of irresponsible cleverness.

If we cannot satisfy ourselves with the idea of literature at its best as a commodity produced by conscientious labor, it is possible that we ought not, either, to let ourselves look upon it as a kind of sublimated Yankee notion.

A straining away from imitativeness is unfortunately what many of our younger writers are now concerned with, as younger writers have always been. They are so much set upon producing the literature of the future that they fail to produce the literature of the present, which is, after all, what we need; and which must probably have many qualities in common with the literature of the past. Their attempts are less hopeful from the fact that these enthusiasts have a habit of getting together. A new note in art is not likely to be invented by a coterie. We have a tender memory for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but not even their achievement has changed the fact that while self-admiration has produced much of the first order in art, mutual admiration has produced nothing. What may be ordinarily expected of such a class is a more or less labored reversion. The mode of verse just now popular

in America appears to be of the rhapsodic, dithyrambic variety, not seldom degenerating into a sort of Græco-Swinburnian poetry of gesticulation. Efforts of this sort recall irresistibly the remark of old Bentley to a raw aspirant for Pindaric honors *numeris lege solutis.* "Pindar was a bold fellow," said he, "but thou art an impudent one!"

In every generation there is a class of writers which gains a hearing by the sedulous avoidance of the expected. Nothing is to be managed quite naturally or straightforwardly. Everything must be original, that is, out of the ordinary, unexpected, strained if necessary, but somehow different. Hence arises the vogue of the writer whose manner is full of petty tricks and inventions. Here is an opportunity for masters of cheap aphorism, and for cool and witty chroniclers of smart life. The popularity of such work may remind us afresh that the greater public is in matters of taste perennially an undergraduate. Even among writers of true power the tendency to cultivate catchiness at the expense of soundness is not easy to resist. Mr. Barrie's later

work has been less fundamentally shocking than "Sentimental Tommy" was, but in manner even more coquettish and inconsequent, full of cleverness, and, by the same token, a little tiresome. I do not think Mr. Barrie, except in his Jess and Margaret, has given us any distinct personalities. His studies are, in fact, in human nature rather than human character. He is a congener of Sterne, without Sterne's instinct for concrete characterization. Walter Shandy and Uncle Toby find no counterpart in reality among these amusing Tommies and pathetic Grizels.

It is a curious fact that the three modern English novelists from whom most is now looked for should be ingenious commentators rather than creators. Mr. Meredith and Mr. James, as well as Mr. Barrie, sacrifice much to their cherished function of interlocutor. As pure fiction the status of such work is dubious, but we may well afford to have it so — with the compensations. These ingenious, satirical, sympathetic, discursive essays, with illustrations, constitute an invaluable commentary upon contemporary life. Only, there is the danger, evident in each of these instances,

of too great exercise of ingenuity, of a growing appetite for subtlety and paradox, which are the wine and caviare of the literary feast, and not at all good to live on. For there follows upon the gratification of this taste a tendency to have recourse to superficial clevernesses of style which should be left to those who have nothing better to offer. Surely, without enslaving ourselves to classical or alien models, we cannot help feeling that our strife should now be, not toward an art ornate and irregular, an art overborne and even warped by cleverness, but toward an art pure and round and balanced, free from arbitrary mannerism and meretricious embellishment. By extraneous expedients, we now know, the effects of veritable genius are likely to be obscured rather than enhanced. Hardly elsewhere than in Homer do we see cleverness held firmly in its proper place as a confidential servant of Genius. Shakespeare made a boon companion of it, and Milton, not always without awkwardness, waited upon himself. Lowell was altogether too clever for that best kind of success which Hawthorne, with his utter lack of cleverness, did not fail to

attain. Byron's work now suffers from the difficulty of estimating its creative value apart from its cleverness; while the gold in the poetry of Wordsworth, who never had a clever moment, is easily freed from the dross.

THE WRITING PUBLIC

THE WRITING PUBLIC

Not long ago I took issue with the phrase "reading public," on the ground that there is little or no solidarity in the body of modern readers. In venturing to coin the phrase "writing public," I do not wish to be considered either wholly fanciful or wholly serious. It may serve to suggest the fact that the persons in America who make, or wish to make, an important affair of writing, now constitute a considerable class, at least in point of numbers. This class, like the "reading public," is easily subdivided. Writing may be, roughly, a trade, an avocation, or a profession; people as a rule write for money, for fun, or for dear life. Of course one can only suggest where the balance of motive lies. The man who most of the time writes for money, as he would make shoes or soap for money, may have his moments of disinterested desire for self-expression. The ambitious scribbler whose first object

is to see himself in print will, very likely, have a sneaking hope that what he writes may somehow turn out to be of permanent value as literature. Even the writer whose primary impulse is for self-expression by way of the printed word will be by no means slow to exact the last penny of his market value. Of course the trade of writing is a perfectly respectable one. Reporters, spacewriters, those who compile useful books for the market, all have their importance as public servants; they are not overpaid, they are not overpraised. They become contemptible only when for the pocketable consideration they profane the forms of literary art. This is an exception which perhaps demands to be excepted. I do not speak of the literary art as a pretty ideal which a right-minded person must, as he reads or writes, be always remembering to think of. It is, as far as I can see, a quite simple and intelligible matter, — nothing more or less than the best mode of expression which, outside of action, human life has hitherto found. Two things are necessary for the literary artist, — and I suppose this is true of all other artists, — that he should know life (not merely facts), and that he

should be able to express his knowledge in articulate form. First of all, he will be sincere, not only in his general desire to do his best, but in his impulse toward specific tasks. He will take advantage of the best training and opportunity that offer, but his main function is to express, not his training and opportunity, but himself. He expects a market, but he writes for an audience which may be expressed in terms of his own personality. Whenever the importance of these motives is reversed in his mind, he pretty surely ceases to be an artist and becomes a literary journeyman.

All this is a familiar enough — perhaps a too familiar — fact. The instance of a writer of the professed literary class casting his integrity and his art to the winds is as common, even, as the instance of a reporter or a hack sloughing off his colorless, impersonal habit and compassing real success in the field of letters. So the trade and the profession have always played into each other's hands. To both, money is an important object; and it seems that there are certain supersensitive minds from which not even the use of

words like "emolument" and "honorarium" can remove the sting of the fact. It is doubtless a strain upon the integrity of a worker in any art that he should depend for subsistence absolutely upon the proceeds of his labor; it is also, when the strain is successfully met, a peculiar glory.

There is, of course, another class of professional writers whose impulse is primarily moral or intellectual rather than æsthetic. With this class also sincerity is the one thing needful; but as it is a matter of mind and conscience, it can hardly be put upon a plane with that integrity of the whole personality — of intellect plus character — which is essential to the creative artist. Whether its immediate field lies in ethics, or politics, or sociology, or religion, or philosophy, such work is obviously enough distinguished from the product of "mere literature." Of didactic or scientific writers we have, at all events, nothing to say here; we have a little to say of that less commonly understood class which, by way of avocation, attempts, more or less successfully, to make headway in the literary art.

One of its most productive constituencies is of the academic way of life. A surprisingly large proportion of American writers do their work in the collegiate atmosphere. Their danger is not that of the professional author; they have little excuse for hasty or venal work. They are able to wait for inspiration. They live in a sort of busy retirement which one would think singularly likely to foster creative production. But there are the usual drawbacks. If these persons are faithful, they must fight against absorption in matters of petty routine and discipline; in any case they have to guard against a gradual narrowing of the horizon which in the end shuts them out from large work of any kind. When it comes to the practice of the literary art, there are two principal tendencies which they have to combat: the first, a tendency to a wooden and meanly academic method; the second, to over-assertiveness, not to say bumptiousness,—due, not to a consciousness of achievement which has been tested in the world of men, but to a habit of small authority over official inferiors. There is, for better or worse, a public which is willing to

adopt the classroom attitude towards anybody who protests sufficiently. Otherwise the literary amateurism of professional teachers is not unlikely to swing over into dilettantism. To be pedagogically didactic, or to be precious, these are the two horns of the dilemma. Both have been avoided in many instances; I am only suggesting that the cloistered amateur does not have everything his own way.

Nor does the successful man of affairs. The most generally known American instance, probably, is Edmund Clarence Stedman, long (though not too delicately) hailed as "the poet-banker," or "the banker-poet." He has done admirable work, but he would not seem, by his own testimony, to have labored under the happiest conditions: "As a rule," he said, some years ago, "distrust the quality of that product which is not the result of professional labor. . . . Generally, I say, distrust writers who come not in by the strait gate, but clamber over the wall of amateurship." This is a suggestive passage, worth reflecting upon for its application to American letters. It is not easily seen to apply at all, un-

less in some unflattering negative sense. One does not recall a single American writer of the first note who from first to last depended consistently upon the product of his art for subsistence. Such of them as did not find a safe harbor in the practice of one of the learned professions were fain to depend at times upon journalism, or, more comfortably, upon diplomacy. Most of them were, according to Mr. Stedman's criterion, hardly more than gifted amateurs. To me it seems fairly clear that a distinction between amateur and professional based upon the question of subsistence is not altogether adequate. That a writer should prepare himself, that he should do his best — these are the main things. It is impossible for some men to do their best under a spur of pecuniary necessity. It is impossible for others to do their best without it. Lowell was essentially an amateur, not because he made a living by teaching or in diplomacy, but because he did not feel it worth while to take the pains to be an artist. It is unnecessary to regret the fact that he was not thrown upon Grub Street; for it is hardly possible to doubt that his temperament would have led him

to seek the easy levels of journalism rather than to make a determined assault on the heights of Parnassus.

Literature is not merely a process or an ideal, it is a fact; but it is very different from the fact of journalism. The one (as we have already had occasion to note more than once) is the embodiment or interpretation of human experience, the other is a record of or commentary upon human episodes and conditions. The one is personal, the other impersonal. When the journalist produces literature, as he not uncommonly does, he becomes an artist for the nonce; and the process is quite as often reversed. There are few men of letters who do not, on occasion, make contributions to journalism. These interchanges do not affect the distinction; literature remains an art and journalism a useful employment. They do perhaps tend to increase the existing confusion in the general mind as to what constitutes literature. They do perhaps help to account for the evident and somewhat disconcerting recent growth of the most exceptionable of our writing constituencies.

This is a class which joyfully regards literature

as a trick upon which anybody may have the luck to stumble; otherwise its members have perhaps little in common. It includes earnest young persons who wish to make literature a means of escape from behind the counter, as a safer mode of gambling than playing the market with the contents of one's employer's till. They go in for all the prize short-story competitions; they write millions of bad verses which they have no possible means of knowing to be bad; above all, they write novels and romances, to the detriment of the publisher's reader more than of the public, no doubt. Another type is that of the stupid rich person who looks for fame as another world to conquer, and who does not disdain a little superlative pocket-money by the way. There are numerous other pretty clearly defined species of this dabbling genus; we need not enumerate them. They have no lack of zeal, but they have a common lack of integrity.

I suppose it is not necessary for anybody to become enraged over this situation, but I doubt if, on the other hand, persons of taste ought to be merely amused at it. Reviewers and editors too

often seem cheerfully indifferent to integrity of motive; it is enough if the given product is amusing. Fiction especially they are ready to take pretty much at its own valuation; yet there is no literary form which now offers less encouragement to the dabbling hand. What possible excuse can anybody have to-day for sitting down in cold blood to concoct a fresh novel for pay? Surely, we are well-found in that commodity. There are plenty of people writing stories because they are fitted by nature and training for just that kind of work. Yet a publisher recently announced that within a comparatively short time he had been called upon to consider something like a hundred and fifty novels before he found one fit to publish. It is not to be supposed that many of them were the outcome of a natural impulse toward fiction. The gross royalty-seeker would be largely represented in the number; the man of all-round literary facility, who has come at last to fiction because he finds little market for anything else, would be responsible for a few attempts; but the greater proportion would be laid to the account of the amateur dabbler.

One can but note with consternation how prominent this person has become of late. Collectively his name is legion and his activity incredible ; individually he has scored some extraordinary commercial successes in fiction. Several of his books have "sold" by the hundred thousand — a fact which has doubtless contributed to the increase and multiplication of his kind. He has become a phenomenon to be reckoned with. Nobody grudges him his fun or his dollars ; but it is unreasonable that he and his public should be encouraged to take themselves over-seriously. Yet there is a good deal of matter now printed for his support and edification. An odd manifestation connected with the growth of periodical literature in America during the past decade is the book-gossiping magazine which, with much flourishing of literary graces, has to do with little besides the novels and the novel-writers of the hour. A glance at any such publication is enough to show how directly it caters to the dabbling amateur. All sorts of specifics are unblushingly recommended, by the use of which any young person of intelligence and good character may attain

fame and fortune. "The Author to the Publisher," "How to Write Poetry," "The Literary Market," "A Pull with the Editor," "Current Prices for Verse," — here are a few titles of articles which have recently appeared in these publications.

Of course some part of the "reading public" may be understood to derive amusement from such printed matter. Even those who do not strictly meditate the thankless Muse may take a more or less legitimate interest in her private affairs. But it is perfectly clear that the main object of such articles is to play upon the raw susceptibilities of the person who "writes a little." This is also the object of the "personal" items, which furnish forth many columns in this type of journal. The "Littérateur," for example, devotes a column to the career of John Smith; perhaps it gives a half-tone print of himself and infants. Mr. Smith's exploits, before he produced that masterpiece of the year, "The Gates of Gaza," were, it appears, quite commonplace. So much the better. He is a little out of the ruck and we are not; never mind, he leads by only half a length: watch us on the

next lap. The advertising columns have something for us, too; here are "critical agencies," and "literary bureaus," which engagingly offer (for a nominal fee) to criticise, revise, even sell, our manuscripts for us. Why not, then, be an author?

All this is instructive as well as amusing. It helps explain the overwhelming flux of mediocre manuscripts which the day's mail brings to every editorial desk. If one could attribute all this effort to a growing seriousness toward literature on the part of cultivated persons, or even on the part of uncultivated persons! Unfortunately, it seems rather to signify the increase in America of a *cacoëthes scribendi* of a somewhat paltry sort. Too many persons among us, surely, have a notion that literary achievement is an accident which may fall to the lot of any worthy citizen. As a matter of fact, the amateur writer has his place in the economy of literature. But he ceases to dabble before he begins to succeed, if success is measured by anything less ponderable than dollars and cents. Least of all does he deserve, in the raw state, to be coddled by writers whose creative work or whose criticism is based upon sound standards of value.

REVIEWER AND CRITIC

REVIEWER AND CRITIC

"A MAXIM which it would be well for ambitious critics to chalk up on the walls of their workshops is this: Never mind whom you praise, but be very careful whom you blame." So wrote Mr. Edmund Gosse some years ago. There is no such partial legend to be seen, one may fairly guess, upon his own walls. His was an ironical caution addressed to persons who have the temerity to say what they think of new books. He had, to be sure, certain special instances in mind, for he goes on to speak of Winstanley, and Dennis, and Jeffrey, all acute and as far as they knew impartial critics, each damned to posterity by a single gross error of judgment.

No doubt the happiest field of criticism lies outside of contemporary literature. *Nisi bonum* is a rule of criticism more rigidly applied to the living than to the dead. There is nothing actionable in a sneer at Shakespeare or an assault upon

Pope; but the truth about Smith (who married one's second cousin) or Jones (who is a cult in Hoboken) is not to be uttered. Of course I mean the critic's notion of the truth, for that is the only truth he has any concern with. It is altogether probable that his conception of the truth about contemporary work will lack certain safeguards which time supplies for other judgments. The difficulties of his position are many and serious enough to have led so acute a critic as Mr. Jules Lemaître to announce that "the criticism of our contemporaries is not really criticism, but simply conversation;" a dictum so comprehensive that it seems to asperse the value of any kind of individual judgment. We cannot wait for the opinion of posterity upon the character of our next-door neighbors; nor will it necessarily be true that our expressed opinion of them is nothing more than gossip, though the chance may lie that way.

It is the business of the reviewer to express his opinion of next-door literature. His duty, like that of any other critic, is to see as clearly as he can, and to tell precisely what he sees. He

had better not be thinking much about his liability to error; it is enough to do as well as he can. Mr. Gosse's remark is interesting for its implication that reviewing *is* criticism of a sort. Rope-walking is a precarious business, but it is one way, after all, of getting across the gap. The reviewer's tumbles into the net of fancifulness or the abyss of commonplace are frequent and ludicrous enough, but it must be admitted that he accomplishes the real feat surprisingly often.

I have ventured to suggest that the only truth a critic has to do with is the truth as he sees it. I do not mean that his judgments ought to be based upon mere whim or prejudice; if they are, he is not a critic at all, in any serious sense. For criticism, as Arnold said, "is the art of seeing the object as in itself it really is;" and the critic is of value in proportion as his vision approximates perfection. The great critic is born *and* made. His naturally keen vision is refined, before it reaches its highest power, by every contact: by contact with life; with literature; finally, with the classics of criticism. At the end of all this, it

remains for him only to tell what, as the result of his being and knowing, he does actually see. The honest expression of a firm and reasonable opinion — this is the object which a critic has before him; his rank depends upon the plane of reason in which his judgments are formed. Shiftlessness of opinion and insincerity of expression are the only crimes which can be charged against a reviewer; his other errors will be due to limitations which he cannot remove.

Moreover, personality as well as intellect contributes to the effectiveness of the critic. True criticism, we have begun to see of late, is as much a means of self-expression as any of the forms which are commonly called creative. The fact has been most strikingly suggested by M. Anatole France in his definition of criticism as "the adventures of a soul among masterpieces." This suggests the chief point of disadvantage for the critic of the contemporary, or reviewer. His adventures must often be upon a lower, at least a more dubious level. His function cannot be agreeably limited to the walled gardens of literature; and he will not find masterpieces bursting from

every hedgerow. He is definitely committed to a contest of research of which the notable prizes must be few. He must travel in all places and in all companies. He cannot, as Ruskin advised, keep out of the salt swamps of literature, and live on a little rocky island; or, as Schopenhauer urged, devote his time for reading "exclusively to those great minds of all times and all countries who overtop the rest of humanity, those whom the voice of fame points to as such." He is, in fact, a drudge of fame. His reward is, now and then, to hit upon merit, to hit upon truth, to feel himself not only the drudge of fame, but the herald of excellence. At such moments he has nothing to ask of fate; the world is his, and the fullness thereof.

But why all this stress upon honesty? Is there any reason for a reviewer's being anything but honest? There are many reasons — more perhaps in America than elsewhere. England still preserves a taste for robust criticism. It rather likes the battering method; it does not grudge the "Saturday Review" its fun. One can perceive a theory behind this method, to the effect that if a

reviewer (who is free to write or not) cannot find a book good enough to write about, the next best thing is to find one bad enough. Either will give him opportunity to enunciate, or to illustrate, some critical principle. This is not the American theory. We are given to understand that a reviewer should ignore what he cannot praise. It is his duty to speak only of books about which he can find something amiable to say. He is to be a guide, but not a guardian, of the public. Unfortunately, the ordinary reviewer has obvious reasons for speaking of books in which no cultivated taste can find occasion for praise; and he is too likely to succumb to the general demand for amenity.

But let us consider the extraordinary reviewer, the writer who is free to treat only such books as commend themselves to his taste. Is he altogether absolved from the duty of warning his audience against meretricious work upon which the perfunctory reviewer is pronouncing silly encomiums? It is quite true that the best service of criticism is affirmative. We are in no danger of underrating the value of Professor Dowden's assertion that

"The most valuable critic is the critic who communicates sympathy by an exquisite record of his own delights." The purest pleasure, the highest profit, lies in constructive work; nobody covets the office of literary headsman. Yet it is a necessary office, and there is no reason why the reviewer should feel himself culpable in occasionally undertaking it. He is not so fatuous as to imagine that his comment upon a book will have a mysterious power of adding to or subtracting from its value. We do not fancy that the merit of a sunset is determined by the approbation of a tourist, or the no merit of a thunderstorm by the whimpering of an old lady under a bed. The immediate circulation of a book may conceivably be affected by somebody's opinion of it; its quality, and consequently its permanent standing, can be in no way affected. Works of merit do not always speak for themselves at once; works of no merit very commonly speak beyond themselves. It is for the reviewer to offer some intelligible surmise as to the value of one as well as of the other.

The especial temptation of the American reviewer is to concern himself more with persons

and with volumes of printed matter than with qualities and principles. He thinks of the author, he thinks of the publisher, he thinks of the public — they all like to hear pleasant things said. He says them.

One is reminded of Borrow's experience of the trade as reported in "Lavengro:" "If I am asked how I comported myself, under all circumstances, as a reviewer, I answer, — I did not forget that I was connected with a review established on Oxford principles, the editor of which had translated Quintilian. All the publications which fell under my notice I treated with a gentlemanly and Oxford-like manner, no personalities, — no vituperation, — no shabby insinuations; decorum, decorum was the order of the day. Occasionally a word of admonition, but gently expressed, as an Oxford undergraduate might have expressed it, or master of arts." This is obviously not a method of criticism; not a respectful method of approaching an author or his work. An ingenious argument is sometimes advanced in favor of it, based upon the theory that the duty of a reviewer is not only to judge literature, but

to encourage writers. We must have no more instances like that of poor young Keats. This theory of the reviewer's function seems to me utterly false. It is his business to express his opinion of the distinct value of a book as literature; it is the publisher's business to express his opinion of its concrete value as a commodity. If it falls to anybody to encourage, to depreeate, to distinguish between promise and achievement, it is the editor. Every good editor brings out much new material by this kind of semi-official manipulation. But the critic is under obligation only to the truth as he sees it. The moment he begins to falter, to qualify, to mitigate the substance of his criticism, he makes it worthless. To its form he may well give the greatest possible amenity.

These principles cannot be too strictly kept in mind by the reviewer whose critical integrity finds itself wavering under, it may be, the fourfold pressure of author, editor, publisher, and public. He is a judge, or he is a mere fabricator of book notices. It is not his business to help the sale of books, or to coddle sensitive writers,

or to make everybody feel comfortable about everything; discrimination is always offensive in one quarter or another; and the reviewer, like other critics, discriminates, or is lost.

The Riverside Press
Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.

JRN CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT

202 Main Library 642-3403

N PERIOD 1 **IOME USE**	2	3
	5	6

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405

nth loans may be recharged by bringing books to Circulation Desk

enewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

B 1 7 1977 # 7

N NO. DD 6, 40m, 6'76

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720