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FRIDAY NIGHTS

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FRIDAY NIGHTS

LITERARY CRITICISMS AND APPRECIATIONS

by

EDWARD GARNETT



FIRST SERIES

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NOTE

My thanks are due to Messrs. Duckworth for permission to reprint the Introductions, respectively, to Mr. C. M. Doughty's 'Wanderings in Arabia'; Richard Jefferies' 'Amaryllis at the Fair'; Ostrovsky's 'The Storm'; also to Messrs. Chatto & Windus and the Macmillan Co. for permission to reprint 'A Note on Tchekhov's Art'; also to the editor and the publisher of 'The Atlantic Monthly' for permission to reprint the essays Robert Frost's 'North of Boston,' 'Some Remarks on English and American Fiction,' 'A Gossip on Criticism,' 'Critical Notes on American Poets,' and finally to the proprietor of 'The Dial' for permission to reprint 'Mr. D. H. Lawrence and the Moralists,' and some passages from W. H. Hudson's 'Nature Books,' which originally appeared in 'The Humane Review' in 1903.

E. G.

CONTENTS

I	NIETZSCHE	Page 15
2	W. H. HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'	23
3	TCHEHOV AND HIS ART:	
	(a) A Note on Tchehov's Art	41
	(b) Tchehov's Traditions	45
	(c) Tchehov's 'Modernity'	50
4	IBSEN AND THE ENGLISH	63
5	MR. JOSEPH CONRAD:	
	(a) An Appreciation in 1898	73
	(b) Mr. Conrad's Art	78
	(c) Mr. Conrad's Basis	84
6	MR. C. M. DOUGHTY:	
	(a) 'Arabia Deserta'	89
	(b) 'Arabia Deserta' Rediviva	94
	(c) Mr. Doughty's Poems	98
7	OSTROVSKY'S 'THE STORM'	111
8	MR. D. H. LAWRENCE AND THE MORALISTS	117
9	RICHARD JEFFERIES' 'AMARYLLIS AT THE FAIR'	129
10	HENRY LAWSON AND THE DEMOCRACY	139
11	SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S TALES	147
12	STEPHEN CRANE AND HIS WORK	155
13	ROBERT FROST'S 'NORTH OF BOSTON'	169
14	SOME REMARKS ON AMERICAN AND ENGLISH FICTION IN 1914	189
15	AMERICAN CRITICISM AND FICTION	211
16	CRITICAL NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS	237
17	TWO AMERICAN NOVELISTS	255
18	THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC	265

P R E F A C E

THE work of a publisher's reader cultivates his sense of irony. He sees so many writers start, so many men of promise never arrive, perhaps for lack of encouragement. He witnesses the daily triumphs of the mediocrities, hailed everywhere by the mediocre, the success of the adroit shallow talents quickly staled by the years. He watches the literary cliques at work, each loyally championing its members. He notes with a smile the pressmen rushing to acclaim the work of a writer suddenly grown popular, whose finest effort, ten years back, was greeted with chilling or patronizing nods. He sees also the force or fire of the finest craftsmen finally prevail, and the day of other fine talents dawning. The publisher's reader knows what literary success signifies: he has no need to cultivate his sense of irony.

But what have these reflections to do with 'Friday Nights'? the reader may ask. This: the following papers and essays were written mainly in years gone by on favourite authors whose sails were either flapping in the uncertain breezes of public esteem, or had borne their craft on far reaches athwart the popular tide. The writer had a habit of saying to himself on Friday nights, after he had returned to his cottage from town, 'Let me write something on this or that author, from this aspect or from that angle.' And lying in his porch, he would reach for paper and ink and jot down on the fly-leaf of a book some notes of 'appreciations.' But the next morning the tide of life immersed and the open air or friends beckoned him. He rarely completed the 'appreciations' over which he had fallen asleep on Friday nights. However, some he finished and printed, and

P R E F A C E

looking through these criticisms and eulogies to-day, he finds that his opinions, a little blunted by time, are much as they were then. He has added a few later contributions, and sends forth 'Friday Nights' to join the great majority.

EDWARD GARNETT

August, 1921

FRIDAY NIGHTS

NIETZSCHE



THE roads of progress twist every way to-day before an 'enlightened' Populace rushing on to 'find itself' – where? With Science pressed in to aid man, indicating that the routes are endless, with modern environments staring a little stonily at the breeding democracies, will not the European crowd necessarily evolve upwards? But what of the seas of cheaper, shallower breeds of civilized man evolved? What if the democracies, using Science for the intensification of material problems, specialize on utilitarian lines, with a machine-made dead-level life *en masse* ahead? Progress lies every way—but where? Thus Nietzsche asks.

Nietzsche's appearance in European thought marks a strong, savage reaction against the waves of democratic beliefs and valuations now submerging the old aristocratic standards, more or less throughout Europe. Other philosophers, such as Herbert Spencer, have made their protest against modern tendencies; other thinkers, as Ibsen, have put some of Nietzsche's questions in a tentative spirit; but Nietzsche is the first man to fall foul of democratic values altogether, and try to formulate his aristocratic standards of life into a definite creed – Master-Morality versus Slave-Morality.

There lies Nietzsche's value. It is because Nietzsche challenged Modernity, because he stood and faced the modern democratic rush which is backed by rank on rank of busy specialists to-day, because he opposes a creative aristocratic ideal to negate the popular will, instincts, and

FRIDAY NIGHTS

practice, that he is of such special significance. He showed the way the crowd is not going. Than this, nothing is more valuable in an age where the will of the majority is apt to become an imitation of its chance environment, a will to copy the majority; when the 'standard of values' is chiefly given by the mass of minds that are anxious to think and do what they are told the majority is thinking and doing. And Nietzsche's antipathy to the crowd largely springs from his conviction that to give the reins of power over to the popular mind is to put a premium on the 'wholesale,' the 'average,' and 'machine-made' ideal, for that suits it, that pleases it, that it is its instinct to follow.

Accordingly Nietzsche's ideal of a stern, hard, noble nature, with an instinct for beauty, for fineness of life, is evolved from his innate hostility to all the cheapness, compromise, and cowardliness of average human nature that is conquered by life, moulded by despicable circumstances, stunted and warped, crushed even beneath itself, through its lack of power. 'Power! that is the test: will-to-power, that is the secret of life,' ran Nietzsche's thought, and looking back to the fine ideals of pagan societies and trying to account for our smug human growths fostered by Christianity, he hit on his chief thesis — that there are two moralities in society: the morality of the conquerors, the aristocrats, that which is a free, joyous, ascending triumph in life, and the morality of the slaves, that which is a sick, ascetic, resigned, religious distrust of life, and a reliance on a life-to-come. And as Christianity is, or was, the gospel of the lowly and suffering, evolved for 'the mass,' Nietzsche sees it not merely as a solace to the weariness of life, and an

N I E T Z S C H E

instrument of 'deteriorating values,' but as the underminer of the free, joyous, powerful, aristocratic ideal, and the chief instrument of the poor, weak, and cowardly in their accession to power.

In the development of this thesis Nietzsche deals with the provinces of the specialists, the historians, critics, scientists, theologians, much as the Roman road-makers dealt with the jungle. He goes right through the conceptions of the theologians, metaphysicians, and historians, using their forest of contentions and brush-wood of intricacies as piles on which to build his stern and narrow road. That is why he is so immensely stimulating and invigorating. The road of his 'valuation of life' lands you right outside the old-fashioned provinces. Truly it takes you far! farther than you are ready to be taken, a road of assumptions on which science cannot advance, but the air is invigorating, it takes you out of the mists of every way to a goal of its own.

To find this goal Nietzsche passed through many contradictory phases. He begins as an enthusiast, the ardent and generous champion of other men's goals, the follower of Wagner and Schopenhauer – he enters into the blankly materialistic stage of Bazarovism, or negation – he emerges again with the positive creative values of his creed of life as the will-to-power. He is going to conquer life, he is going to wage war against all weariness of life, all the easy goodness of safe, comfortable petty folk; he is going to preach the necessity of evil in man; of that strife by which man becomes hardier, bolder, more daring, more dangerous and heroic; he is going to root out pity from the heart, so that

FRIDAY NIGHTS

malformed, unhappy souls may cease to poison the gay, free, joyous love of life by their aspersing of Nature's ethics with pious lies about 'Beyond Worlds,' and with the phantasmagoria of priestly concoctions. He is going to see Democracy, modern Science, and Christianity adjudged and condemned because they assist into life, and keep in life, and help to propagate all the sick, miserable, deteriorating types that the joyous, powerful, healthy society of paganism helped out of life by crushing without mercy. To wage war on Sentimentalism, Pity, Christianity, Decadence in all forms, and Feminism, that is the road by which Nietzsche sought to get free of modern tendencies, and set up a new standard of values for the race.' And his doctrine, arbitrary, excessive, anti-scientific, self-annihilating, is nevertheless like an electric current traversing the current generalizations, acceptances, prejudices, superstitions of modern life; it is a mischievous, ironical, shifting searchlight flashing keenly amid the thick and stupefying mists that always hang around orthodox opinion and popular conformity in every age. Poet, philosopher, classicist, scientific critic all in one, Nietzsche undoubtedly was the deepest, though most biased, psychologist of human institutions that the twentieth century has seen. His analysis of the Christian and ascetic ideal in life, though extremely one-sided, is, on its special lines, the most telling and brilliant psychological analysis yet made. His special instinct for tearing off the idealistic veils which hide the religious nature in its use of human suffering as a means of attaining worldly power, makes Nietzsche the great specialist on the arts of priestcraft. And as Voltaire lives as the

N I E T Z S C H E

most brilliant adversary in literature of the Christian faith, so Nietzsche lives in literature as the most powerful antagonist of the Christian soul.

That Nietzsche's audacious and narrow road ends abruptly in the mystical doctrines of 'Beyond Man,' that 'The Eternal Recurrence' ended in the madness of colossal egoism, is but proof too painful of the severity, honesty, and intensity of his intellectual life. Little men who talk of their own sanity and of the sanity of others are but knocking complacently at the lath-and-plaster walls of their meagre consciousness. The development of Nietzsche's genius, and the germ of madness lying in his doctrine of Life as the will-to-power, form one of the most interesting documents to the pathologist and the critic.

Nietzsche's special inspiration, the key that unlocked his most secret depths, was pain. Pain, cruel and prolonged, pursued, chased, and captured him, deepened the world for him, and forced into the light all the tendencies of his nature. It was pain attacking his aristocratic soul that brought out all his endurance, power of scorning, force of resistance, pain that emphasized so violently the will-to-power. For what is this philosophy, in his case, but the definition of the spirit in which he faced an unsparing reality, with which he dared it, and scorned to bend. And this power to face suffering, the lack of which casts the weak, delicate, or ordinary mind outside itself, into the arms of 'reliance on a God,' exhibited in a satiric light to Nietzsche the sufferings of inferior natures, and made vulgar all sentimentalism, expression of suffering, the daily illusions of mankind, and the panaceas of the priests. And

FRIDAY NIGHTS

suffering also threw into Nietzsche's mind the deep light of understanding as to how life fabricates in man his petty concepts of what is good and what is evil, what he wishes to avoid and escape—*i.e.*, what he is afraid of. Thus pain brought to Nietzsche the necessity for hardness, courage, sternness, even cruelty, if mankind is to be shaped on fine, strong, and heroic lines. Pain also it was that gave him his aspiration towards joy, gaiety, and the mocking spirit, because these are the antithesis to the weak despairing soul. But to give in to suffering! to give in to life! that is the part of the vulgar soul; to face reality, to triumph over it, was the fundamental instinct of Nietzsche's indomitable spirit. Pain therefore it was that made Nietzsche inhuman, intensified his caste bias, and transformed his natural distaste for the cheap idealism and shallow optimism of the mass of men (who cannot either suffer life nobly or enjoy nobly) into a virulent hatred of Modernity, that Modernity which advertises all its benefits aloud! and is afraid to even recognize its weaknesses. Suffering it was that made Nietzsche isolate himself from the outer world, and concentrate himself on the immensely richer world of passions, tastes, hatred and distastes within him. Pain forces him to revise all his acquired opinions, to cast away his enthusiasms, his first idealistic interpretations of life, and it forces himself also into keen self-analysis, into a passion for analysing all 'goodness' and discovering its motive.

Pain forces him into cavernous depths to face hidden truths that undermine belief, that destroy the appearances, the beauty, the spontaneity of life; till at last, in the smouldering heat of his destructiveness, the flash of a colossal

NIETZSCHE

egoism shows that his brain has reached the danger-point where he can bear no more.' How, if at the point where wickedness dances its old dance of exultation, where Evil openly shows itself the eternal companion and necessary habitant of the world, how if the world itself, with its old superstitious belief in good and evil, has grown shadowy! How if the ego is only conscious of its drama, necessity?

He can bear no more! But his creed is to endure, to conquer, and he goes farther still, along his lonely road, goes so far that to continue he must cast all humanity from himself; and now he becomes like a surgeon cutting his own flesh and casting out all but purpose. It is strange, that 'love' which he has cast out as weakness rushes back on him as love for 'Higher Man.' But finding a way is still his goal. Courageous spirit! evading desperation by facing self, by exploring the loneliest and bleakest lands of his tortured self, he must go on, for how can he shirk knowing what is worse, what is to come? Strange irony, that to endure he had to cast his nobility from him and praise himself! 'Zarathustra' is all self-praise, the praise of the will which will not be beaten, even if driven to the insanity of egoism, with the rich world become poor, with the rich world blotted out. Is not the will-to-power logically a creed of self-annihilation? Nietzsche matched himself against life, therefore he loved Necessity his fate. 'When drinkest thou this strange soul, oh sky Eternity?' 'Do I seek for my happiness? I seek for my work.' Life beat him, as it beats us all, whether we oppose it or lie down before it. Does it matter that the end came with crashing violence,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

that he dared too much, while others dare too little? That for his defeat he paid, while others pay for their safety? What each struggles after is perhaps always commensurate with the price.

1899

W. H. HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

I

ONE of the commonplace phrases in everybody's mouth, the meaning of which is of necessity grasped in the feeblest and most fragmentary manner, is 'the fecundity of nature, that same illimitable force of hers that perpetually brings myriads of forms of sentient life out of every rood of earth's surface, that protean force that creates the endless resurgence of new waves of life in the eternal ocean of the Universe flowing round us. Man, in fact, can never adequately stretch and sharpen his faculties so as to become purely absorbed, as a spectator, in the vast drama of nature's myriad activities, and enjoy it as the one entrancing supreme spectacle, inasmuch as nature has cunningly given to man's vision the illusive perspective of self, and his outlook must always be blurred by this partial lens with its finitely human focus. If we can momentarily conceive a man gifted with the fabulous Merlin's power of entering by turn into, and feeling with, all the myriad forms of sentient life, and on changing back again to human flesh remembering the sensations of each of his transformations, we should be stricken no less by an appalling sense of our human limitations than of our human powers terrible in comparison with the animals'. Such a man's soul would be filled with the mysterious pantheism which breathes in the Lay of Amergin:

'I am the wind which breathes upon the sea,
I am the wave of the ocean,
I am the murmur of the billows,
I am the ox of the seven combats.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

I am the vulture upon the rocks,
I am a beam of the sun,
I am the fairest of plants,
I am a wild boar in valour,
I am a salmon in the water,
I am a lake in the plain,
I am a word of science,
I am the point of the lance of battle,
I am the God who creates in the head of man
the fire of thought,'

and we should realize as never before that man's mind, though the most marvellously complex instrument of all, is still, as it were, but a human eyelet-hole, through which the Universe can only be refracted back to us in certain aspects of its incalculable whole. Even were man's intimate penetration into nature's secrets to be increased a thousand-fold, we must still look on man's consciousness as an instrument capable only of the adjustments peculiar to his nature. But this being so, all the more do we prize those original minds among us whose talents are, as it were, new variations of our ordinary mental vision, talents which carry us some little way beyond the overworked channels of our busy human interests, and make us penetrate into that vast archipelago of nature's life where man's being and doing appear as merely one sort of phenomena, as the human speck in the universal ocean of life. W. H. Hudson has one of these creative minds, and he is the chief writer on nature's life, to-day, whose spiritual vision is inspired by some elusive strain of Merlin's fabled power.

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

At first sight all the great secrets of the future would seem to belong to the scientific students, to the calm, 'passionless' observers equipped with the ever-increasing marvellous instruments that Science places daily in their hands, but at first sight only. Admitting that the discoveries of the great captains of Science, and the observations of the vast band of humble workers, have immeasurably increased our knowledge of nature's laws, and indeed revolutionized our conceptions of the formation and evolution of the material universe, it is obvious that the scientists themselves cannot escape the great law of the specialization of functions, and that their angle of vision, no matter how adjusted or to what ends directed, can never serve them as a magical glass harmonizing and uniting all the manifold human visions in general. The scientific view has in fact its strictly defined sphere of applications, and has little power to enter into, for example, the fields of vision of seers, such as the poets, the musicians, the painters, the philosophers, or the great religious teachers. Indeed, in recognizing the triumph of Science in explaining the working of vast ranges of nature's laws, we cannot help seeing that our whole human understanding of life has not come to us through any 'scientific method' of observation, and that the 'scientific method' can only be used as the auxiliary tool of our instinctive perceptions. For example, the great scientist when he wishes to comprehend his wife's feelings about him does not employ a scientific method to determine them! So we are justified in turning round on the scientific men, and saying to them: 'What you tell us is of extraordinary light-giving value, but you will be the first

FRIDAY NIGHTS

to admit that your demonstrations of fact can never synthesize the most important fact of all? You tell us countless facts about the laws of life, but the actual spirit of life, its living feeling, which is the essential volatile principle of life, can never be fully assessed by you.' 'Quite so,' the scientific men will rejoin; 'we don't pretend to be able to analyse feeling, except in some of its physiological causes and psychological effects, and therefore our descriptive studies nearly always leave it on one side as an indeterminate force.'

Now the surprising characteristic of Mr. Hudson's writings is that this mysterious force of feeling, ever present in nature's life, which modern scientific writers agree to leave out, Mr. Hudson puts in. 'Ah! but he puts his own human feelings into his descriptions, and that is unscientific,' the reader may exclaim. Wait a little. Himself a scientific student, he has an instinctively poetic and artistic method of his own in examining living nature, a method which interprets for us 'the facts' of the trained observers, and synthesizes for us the living creature's *spirit* – a method which is indispensable to any spiritual comprehension of nature. Our knowledge of the workings of the human mind and of human life that the great creative artists, from Homer to Shakespeare, have brought to us may be 'unscientific' in this sense, that it is not demonstrable of proof, but it is none the less knowledge. The key that has unlocked the gates of the vast regions of spiritual life is our mysterious instinctive *feeling* about life. A page from Mr. Hudson's last book, 'Hampshire Days,' will best illustrate the degree to which his subtle artistic method of

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

interpreting 'scientific facts' throws open new avenues in approaching nature's life:

'The end of the little history – the fate of the ejected nestling and the attitude of the parent robins – remains to be told. When the young cuckoo throws out the nestlings from nests in trees, hedges, bushes, and reeds, the victims, as a rule, fall some distance to the ground, or in the water, and are no more seen by the old birds. Here the young robin, when ejected, fell a distance of but five or six inches, and rested on a broad, bright green leaf, where it was an exceedingly conspicuous object; and when the mother robin was on the nest – and at this stage she was on it a greater part of the time – warming that black-skinned toad-like, spurious babe of hers, her bright, intelligent eyes were looking full at the other one, just beneath her, which she had grown in her body, and had hatched with her warmth, and was her very own. I watched her for hours; watched her when warming the cuckoo, when she left the nest, and when she returned with food, and warmed it again, and never once did she pay the least attention to the outcast lying so close to her. There, on its green leaf, it remained, growing colder by degrees, hour by hour, motionless, except when it lifted its head as if to receive food, then dropped it again, and when, at intervals, it twitched its body, as if trying to move. During the evening even these slight motions ceased, though that feeblest flame of life was not yet extinguished; but in the morning it was dead and cold and stiff; and just above it, her bright eyes on it, the mother robin sat on the nest as before, warming her cuckoo.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

'How amazing and almost incredible it seems that a being such as a robin, intelligent above most birds, as we are apt to think, should prove in this instance to be a mere automaton! The case would, I think, have been different if the ejected one had made a sound, since there is nothing which more excites the parent bird, or which is more instantly responded to than the cry of hunger or distress of the young. But at this early stage the nestling is voiceless – another point in favour of the parasite. The sight of its young, we see, slowly and dumbly dying, touches no chord in the parent; there is, in fact, no recognition; once out of the nest it is no more than a coloured leaf, or bird-shaped pebble, or fragment of clay.

'It happened that my young fellow-watchers, seeing that the ejected robin if left there would inevitably perish, proposed to take it in to feed and rear it – to *save* it, as they said; but I advised them not to attempt such a thing, but rather to *spare* the bird. To spare it the misery they would inflict on it by attempting to fill its parents' place. . . . It would perhaps have a wholesome effect on their young minds and save them from grieving overmuch at the death of a newly hatched robin, if they would consider this fact of the pain that is and must be. . . . When summer came round again they would find no more birds than they had now. And so it would be in all places; all that incalculable increase would have perished. Many millions would be devoured by rapacious birds and beasts; millions more would perish of hunger and cold; millions of migrants would fall by the way, some in the sea, and some on the land; those that returned from distant regions would be a

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

remnant. It is not only that this inconceivable amount of bird-life must be destroyed each year, but we cannot suppose that death is not a painful process. In a vast majority of cases, whether the bird slowly perishes of hunger and weakness, or is pursued and captured by birds and beasts of prey, or is driven by cold adverse winds and storms into the waves, the pain, the agony, must be great. The least painful death is undoubtedly that of the bird, that, weakened by want of sustenance, dies by night of cold in severe weather. It is indeed most like the death of the nestling, but a few hours out of the shell, which has been thrown out of the nest, and which soon grows cold and dozes its feeble, unconscious life away. . . .

'I am not sure that I said all this, or marshalled fact and argument in the precise order in which they are here set down. I fancy not, as it seems more than could well have been spoken, while we, standing there in the late evening sunlight by that primrose bank, looking down on the little flesh-coloured mite in its scant clothing of black down, fading out of life on its cold green leaf. But what was said did not fail of its effect, so that my young tender-hearted hearers, who had begun to listen with moist eyes, secretly accusing me, perhaps, of want of feeling, were content in the end to let it be – to go away and leave it to its fate in that mysterious green world we, too, live in and do not understand, in which life and death, and pleasure and pain, are interwoven light and shade.'

This descriptive analysis of bird-life is saturated with human feeling. But do we lose or gain knowledge thereby?

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Does it not carry us from low to higher ranges of comprehension? Let us suppose that it were paraphrased in 'impassive,' scientific language, and its artistic and poetic shades of feeling were expunged. In that case the bald facts recounted would remain as a groundwork, but the very spirit of life in the thing seen would be altered, our insight and comprehension would be infinitely lessened. So the 'impassive' scientists themselves are in a dilemma. We cannot actually comprehend nature's life without being emotionally affected by it, *i.e.*, our comprehension *is* largely the emotion it excites in us. So face to face with nature's wild life 'scientific observation' must be supplemented and inspired by artistic and poetic methods of divination. To comprehend sentient life we must employ all the old emotional tools of the human mind, all those shades of æsthetic sensibility and of human imagination by which the great artists and poets seize and apprehend the *character* of life. The scientists are in their element in investigating the working of physical laws, in determining the properties or the functions of living organisms, but a knowledge of these laws no more qualifies them to apprehend the character, nature, or spirit of the life of nature's wild creatures under the open sky than a perfect knowledge of anatomy can make a man a Praxiteles.

And wild nature's life being a natural drama of instinct, an unceasing play of hunger, love, battle, courtship, fear, parental emotion, vanity, and most of all, perhaps, pure enjoyment of physical powers, it is obvious that every man who is irresponsive in his feelings, or possessed of a dull artistic imagination, or weak æsthetic sensibilities,

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

must remain practically aloof from wild nature, and its infinite feast of characteristic displays. He will not see or feel what is going on in forest and meadow, and so, remaining blind to the whole force and spirit of nature, he will not be able to pronounce on its *life*.

II

It is indeed by his rare and rich endowment of many complex shades of feeling, by the finest and most delicate variability of mood, running up the whole emotional gamut, that we explain Mr. Hudson's genius for entering into, and interpreting back to us, wild nature's life. 'What if Truth be a woman,' said Neitzsche, in one of his brilliant flashes, 'and what if the solemn old philosophers have gone just the wrong way to work to get her to reveal herself?' or words to that effect. And in face of nature's infinite beauty, deceptiveness, complexity of motives, and capriciousness, in face of the complex ruses by which she accomplishes her ends, of the feminine care with which she arranges appearances, and fulfils her purposes under the seductive cover of sensuous delights, the man who would penetrate into her life must treat her much as a man turns to the woman who allures and fascinates him, for whose bewitching presence his spirit hungers. He may indeed be incredulous, cool, and doubting, knowing that she constantly plays with him, and cheats him, and that if he grasps one of her meanings her whole subtlety is infinitely beyond him; but if he is not sympathetic in her presence, if he does not feel that her beauty is beyond all beauty, she will deceive him far more! And if he does not

FRIDAY NIGHTS

please her by his attentions she will treat him as Truth has treated the ugly old philosophers, and he will never really possess her or be one with her. Now Mr. Hudson's method face to face with nature, this curious mingling of scientific curiosity to know all about her, with artistic susceptibility to her charms, derives its inner inspiration from what is essentially a poet's spiritual passion to lose himself in contemplation of her infinitely marvellous universe. Though it is indeed largely by the gleams and flashes of light arising from the poets' communion with nature that man's spiritual sense of the great Universe flowing around him has best found its expression, the poets in general (some of the great poets excepted) have only tentatively explored the vast archipelago of nature's life that exists for itself outside man's world of thought, though it exists indeed in invisible relations with it. It is Mr. Hudson's distinction, however, to have sought and followed these mysterious realms of nature's life, not as a scientific specialist, as a botanist, or zoologist, studying natural laws of structure, habit, or environment, but in the same spirit of creative enjoyment with which the great poets examine and search human life, *i.e.*, with a sense not only of what this life's *character* is as life, but of what all this absorbing drama of nature's eternal fecundity signifies spiritually to man. Any adequate treatment of Mr. Hudson's writings would therefore have to analyse the extreme originality with which he enlarges both the poets' and the scientists' horizons, at one and the same time, by showing the poets new worlds to conquer, and by showing the scientists that their methods, though indispensable, do not carry us far enough. We cannot

pursue this analysis in detail here beyond saying that Mr. Hudson's work as an ornithologist has been to cut away, as it were, whole sections of dead and petrified lore from our shelves, and replace them by a series of the most delicate living studies of the character, habits, and genius of bird-life.¹ Nor have we space to dwell here on what we chose to call, a little arbitrarily, his artistic feats of delineation, by which he has drawn away with a magician's hand the heavy veils of misunderstanding with which our dull ordinary brains, scientific or otherwise, cloak the actual life led, with the rich zest of instinct, by the great non-human populations of squirrels, jays, weasels, hornets, moths, spiders, adders, stag-beetles, shrew-mice, crickets, dragon-flies, moles, snails, and the thousands of other little creatures to whom nature has given the earth no less than to us. The two books, 'Hampshire Days' and 'Nature in Downland,' contain, as it were, *la vie intime* of all these independent tribes of creatures, and chronicle their wars, their loves, their hates, their prejudices, and the countless agitations of their days, with all the insight, grace, whimsical humour, and delicious freshness that the true artists employ in fashioning our human chronicles. We pass over these feats of artistic penetration for the pleasure of quoting a very simple unobtrusive passage in 'Birds in a Village,' a passage by studying which attentively the reader will be able to forecast the critical road he is here asked to travel:

'Meanwhile the girl talked eagerly to the little ones,

¹ *Birds in a Village*. (Chapman and Hall, 1893.)

Birds in London. (Longmans, Green and Co., 1893.)

Birds and Man. (Longmans, Green and Co., 1901.)

FRIDAY NIGHTS

calling their attention to the different birds. Drawing near, I also became an interested listener; and then in answer to my questions she began telling me what all these strange fowls were. "This," she said, glad to give information, "is the Canadian goose, and there is the Egyptian goose, and here is the king duck coming towards us; and do you see that large beautiful bird standing by itself, that will not come to be fed? That is the golden duck. But that is not its real name; I don't know them all; so I name them for myself. I call that one the golden duck because in the sun its feathers sometimes shine like gold." It was a rare pleasure to listen to her, and seeing what sort of a girl she was, and how much in love with her subject, I, in my turn, told her a good deal about the birds before us, also of other birds she had never seen, nor heard of, and after she had listened eagerly for some minutes, and had then been silent a little while, she all at once pressed her two hands together, and exclaimed rapturously, "Oh, I do so love the birds." I replied that that was not strange, since it is impossible for us not to love whatever is lovely, and of all living things birds were made most beautiful.

"Then I walked away, but could not forget the words she had exclaimed, her whole appearance, the face flushed with colour, the eloquent brown eyes sparkling, the pressed palms, the sudden spontaneous passion of delight and desire in her tone. The picture was in my mind all that day, and lived through the next, and so wrought on me that I could not longer keep away from the birds, which I, too, loved; for now all at once it seemed that life was not life without them; that I was grown sick and all my senses dim; that

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

only by drenching it in their wild melody could my tired brain recover its lost vigour.' – (*Birds in a Village*, p. 6.)

III

There is a pregnant passage in 'Resurrection' in which Tolstoy says:

'Without these conditions, the terrible acts I witnessed to-day would be impossible in our times. It all lies in the fact that men think there are circumstances when one may deal with human beings without love; and there are no such circumstances. One may deal with things without love; one may cut down trees, make bricks, hammer iron, without love; but you cannot deal with men without it, just as one cannot deal with bees without being careful. If you deal carelessly with bees you will injure them, and will yourself be injured. And so with men.'

Does the reader see the relation between this passage from Tolstoy's 'Resurrection' and the passage we have quoted above from 'Birds in a Village'? The secret fascination of Mr. Hudson's outlook, the real force of his spiritual vision arises from his *refusal to divide man's life off from nature's life*. Civilized man as he exists to-day, in his present stage of mental development, may be defined as nature's unruly independent child, who, having thrown off the instinctive stage of babyhood, thinks, because he has learnt to stand alone, and feed himself, that his reason is greater than his mother's wisdom. All nature's realm is now for *his* interests, all her creatures are to serve *his* purposes, for use and food, all exist for him to spoil, slay, maim,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

extirpate – just as he pleases. This brutal callousness to the value and beauty of life other than his own (and he does not scruple to hunt out of existence the inferior races of man) is in fact an inherited instinct of those days – not long back, and indeed hardly past yet – of stern necessity, when every hour was a struggle for bare existence. Nature herself has implanted in man, as in all her creatures, this imperious instinct for conquest, nature herself who in all ranks of creation is full of intestine wars, with her great law of the strong species preying on the weak. But man having gained the mastery over all other of earth's creatures, man having gained the supreme dictatorship by the superior force and subtlety of his mind, will never be able to supplant nature's laws, and put himself to reign in his mother's stead. On the contrary, as the struggle for bare subsistence becomes less and less intense, he rises higher and higher, by understanding her laws, by studying and admiring her miracles. And as his mind develops, Earth's teeming fecundity of living things, each gloriously fashioned and framed, becomes less and less a mere arena with man entering as their bodily conqueror, to spoil and slay. The great law of conquest is applied more and more to mental spheres, where man, by his creative intelligence, can contemplate nature's life as the supreme, inexhaustible spectacle; and in losing himself in contemplation of the eternal ocean of the Universe flowing round him, man enters into nature, and becomes one with her more absolutely than in his earlier stage of preying on and slaughtering all other of her creatures.

Now the force and fascination of Mr. Hudson's vision of

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

Life, as we have said, is that he reveals to us more than any modern writer man's true spiritual relation to the vast world of created sentient things in earth and sky, that free life of wild nature whose beauty cannot yet content our souls, but we must harass, mutilate, and exterminate them, or scientifically catalogue and 'collect.' Everybody must have felt at some time or other in his heart stir a vague faint feeling of love or struggling pity for some poor 'brute beast,' or captive bird fluttering at its cage's bars. And it is by the force of this mysterious love, by the intensity of the feeling with which he enters spiritually into communion with wild nature's life, that in Mr. Hudson's wrathful pleading against man's short-sighted brutality we hear the voices of hundreds of thousands of people scattered throughout the earth who, like him, also love and rejoice in the wild creatures' life. He is their spokesman. And so it is that it is not surprising that Mr. Hudson, who, flinging off the soiled dust of our human thoroughfares, and going into nature's wilderness to escape the sight of the 'pale civilized faces,' with the mean round of petty human interests of their 'artificial indoor lives,' it is not surprising that Mr. Hudson, who has written the finest invective ever penned against the yearly carnival of bird-slaughter, is the same man who has given us one of the tenderest and deepest and saddest stories of human life¹ that our readers can name. It is not surprising either that in his nature books, taken together, there are hundreds of passages in which man's life is presented to us as a beautiful thing when seen *as a part of nature*, with all its strong ties, visible and invisible,

¹ *El Ombu.*

FRIDAY NIGHTS

to the earth that sustains and nurtures him, and to the firmament in which he draws his breath. Even as Mr. Hudson refuses to believe that the birds of the air can be in truth 'scientifically' studied by shutting them up in boxes, or by dissecting them in class-rooms, or by stuffing their dead bodies, and arranging them on museum shelves, and holds that if you wish to comprehend what the lark's life *is* you must go into the fields and hear his ecstatic song of the sun, the driving winds, and the rustling grass; so does he take no pleasure in seeing man in that predominant aspect which the modern world conspires to place him in – the aspect of a stuffy town animal, leading an unnaturally artificial gaslight existence. Man of course can be examined truthfully from a thousand angles of vision. You can, for example, study the labourer simply as he appears in the tap-room, and you can study him at his work in the fields. The finer, however, is the writer's field of vision the more does his picture of life suggest not merely the visible limitations of its immediate phase, but its permanent relations with the great background of human life, into which it is continually being dissolved, and out of which it is continually emerging reshaped. It has been reserved for 'modern thought,' temporarily intoxicated by its hasty draught of 'scientific discoveries,' to fail (where no age has ever failed before) to lay stress on man's spiritual dependence on the world of nature round him. The great minds, the great poets, philosophers, and religious teachers of all ages, from Homer to Virgil, from Shakespeare to Turgenev, from the Hebrew prophets to Buddha, have never shared in this materialistic trick of human vision, of seeing man out of

HUDSON'S 'NATURE BOOKS'

perspective. Now, owing to Science's materialistic discoveries obscuring our field of spiritual vision, nearly every writer to-day is, as it were, trying to see nature's life, *without* the medium of human emotion, and *in vacuo*, as it were. It is Mr. Hudson's distinction to have shown by his superior penetration into wild nature's life that though the material gain to Physical Science of studying nature *in vacuo* may be great, the supreme inexhaustible field that lies before man lies outside the narrow province of pure reason, lies outside his utilitarian interests, lies in his own spiritual absorption in the vast drama of nature's myriad activities. Man, in short, Mr. Hudson shows us, can only enter into the vast world of her myriad sentient life by employing all the old emotional tools – his sense of mystery, love of beauty, poetic imagination, and human love – to supplement and vivify the 'impassive' truths of Science. So shall he develop his innate Merlin power of sympathetic *feeling*, and comprehend better and better that mysterious essence or spirit of life which is itself inseparable from feeling. Thus man may slowly become one in thought with nature, and more and more shall he comprehend the beauty of the eternal ocean of life flowing around him.

1903

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART



(A) A NOTE ON TCHEHOV'S ART ¹

TCHEHOV's range of subject, scene and situation is so varied that it will be convenient here to classify his Tales as follows:

- (a) The short humorous sketches, of which the author wrote many hundreds, chiefly in early life.
- (b) Stories of the life of the town – 'Intelligentsia'; family and domestic pieces, of which 'The Duel' and 'Three Years' – a study of Moscow atmosphere and environment – are the longest.
- (c) Stories of provincial life, in which a great variety of types – landowners, officials, doctors, clergy, school-teachers, merchants, innkeepers, etc. – appear.
- (d) Stories of peasant life – settled types.
- (e) Stories of unconventional and lawless types – roving characters.
- (f) Psychological studies, such as 'The Black Monk,' 'Ward No. 6.'

One must recall here, also, Tchehov's plays, his short farces, and his descriptive account of Saghalien life.

By his supremacy as a writer of short stories, Tchehov has been termed the Russian Maupassant, and there are, indeed, several vital resemblances between the outlook of

¹ Introduction to *The Tales of Tchehov*. Translated by Constance Garnett. Vol. I. (Chatto and Windus, 1915.)

FRIDAY NIGHTS

the French and the Russian master. The art of both these unflinching realists, in its exploration of human motives, is imbued with a searching passion for truths and a poet's sensitiveness to beauty. But whereas Maupassant's mental atmosphere is clear, keen, and strong, with a touch of a hard, cold mind, Tchehov's is born of a softer, warmer, kindlier earth. Had Maupassant written 'The Darling,' he would have been less patient with Olenka's lack of brains, more cynical over her forgetfulness of her first and second husbands. And a French Olenka would, in fact, have been less naïve than the Russian woman, and in that respect more open to criticism.

The temperamental difference between the Norman and the Russian, in fact, reflects the differences between their traditions and the spiritual valuations of their national cultures. As an illustration we may cite Tchehov's handling of those odious women, Ariadne and the rapacious wife in 'The Helpmate.' It is characteristic that Tchehov shows them to us through the eyes of a kindly, good-natured type of man whose judgment, however exasperated, does not crystallize into hardness or bitterness. Tchehov, though often melancholy, is rarely cynical; he looks at human nature with the charitable eye of the wise doctor who has learnt from experience that people cannot be other than what they are. It is his profundity of acceptance that blends with quiet humour and tenderness to make his mental atmosphere one of subtle emotional receptivity. In his art there is always this tinge of cool, scientific passivity blending with the sensitiveness of a sweet, responsive nature. Remark that Tchehov, unlike Dostoevsky, rarely

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

identifies himself with his sinners and sufferers, but he stands close to all his characters, watching them quietly and registering their circumstances and feelings with such finality that to pass judgment on them appears supererogatory. Thus, in 'The Two Volodyas,' when the neurotic Sofya Lvovna abandons herself to the dissipated Vladimir Mihailitch we realize that she is preparing for herself fresh wretchedness, and whatever she may do, she is bound to go on paying the price for her folly in marrying Colonel Jagitch, the elderly handsome lady-killer. It is equally useless to pass judgment on the two Volodyas, who, between them, having helped to ruin Sofya Lvovna's life, will go on shrugging their shoulders at her, and following their life of bored, worldly pleasure. This is life, and it is the woman who pays.

Readers have complained of Tchehov's 'greyiness,' but such a story as 'The Two Volodyas' cannot with justice be styled grey any more than can an etching by a master, whose range of the subtlest gradations of tone, in the chiaroscuro, stands in place of a fine colour scheme. Just as the colour of a flower is not a solid pigment, but is the result of the play of light on the broken surface of its innumerable cells, so Tchehov's art, however tragic or melancholy may be the life of his characters, produces the effect of living colour by the shifting play of human feelings. Note, for example, how the 'depressing,' squalid atmosphere of 'Anyuta' is broken up by the artist's rapid inflexions of feeling. Again, 'A Trousseau' and 'Talent' offer us fine examples of Tchehov's skill in conveying the essence of a situation, and of people's outlooks, by striking

FRIDAY NIGHTS

a few notes in the scale of their varying moods. Further, remark how from the disharmony between people's moods and circumstances springs the peculiar, subtle sense Tchehov conveys of life's ironic pattern of time and chance playing cat and mouse with people's happiness. Compare the opening pages, in 'Three Years,' of Laptev's passion for Yulia with the closing scene where she is waiting to tell him how dear he is to her, while he himself finds no response in his heart, and 'cautiously removes her hand from his neck.' But Tchehov is too subtle, too delicate an artist to emphasize this note in his impressionistic picture of life's teeming freshness and fullness; so he touches in life's elusiveness and promise in the description of how 'Yartsev kept smiling at Yulia and her beautiful neck with a sort of joyous shyness.' Here is love's new birth indicated with exquisite delicacy. And here, as in the little scene preceding, where Laptev stands in the moonlit yard, a mysterious sense of the intricacy of the mesh of our lives steals over us. It is the poet's special sense for conveying an atmosphere, the same that we find in his plays, such as 'The Cherry Orchard' – a delicate responsiveness to the spectacle of life's ceaseless intricacy. We get this in the account of the dying woman Nina Fyodorovna's relations with her husband, the incorrigible Panaurov, and in Polina Nikolevna's inscrutable changes of feeling towards Laptev. With what beautifully, slight, firm strokes these last two characters are touched in. If we stress here this side of Tchehov's talent – how a feeling of the inevitableness of things seems to float in the atmosphere of his finest sketches and stories – it is to point out how his flexible and transparent method

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

reproduces the pulse and beat of life, its pressure, its fluidity, its momentum, its rhythm and change, with astonishing sureness and ease. But any appreciation of T'chehov's talent is inevitably partial, since its leading characteristic is its surpassing variety. This, the first volume of a new translation of his Tales, presents a few aspects of T'chehov's incomparable gift. All who want to know modern Russia, especially the life of the educated class, must read T'chehov.

1915

(B) TCHEHOV'S TRADITIONS

Of English appreciations of T'chehov Mr. Middleton Murry's is alike the most serious and the most illuminating. His eloquent pages in 'Aspects of Literature'¹ testify that he among the younger school of critics has understood best the quality of T'chehov's genius and the beauty of his character. Moreover, he it is who directed attention to the modernity of T'chehov's attitude, rightly declaring that he is 'a good many phases in advance of all that is habitually described as modern in literature.' It is therefore in no sense of fault-finding if I try here to enlarge our vistas of the subject and supplement some of Mr. Murry's critical remarks by other comments. Mr. Murry in his articles has discussed (a) T'chehov's life and (b) T'chehov's art. Let me quote some of his remarks on T'chehov the man:

'He had been saturated in all the disillusiones which we regard as particularly our own, and every quality which is

¹ *Aspects of Literature*. By J. Middleton Murry. (Collins Sons and Co., 1920.)

FRIDAY NIGHTS

distinctive of the epoch of consciousness in which we are living now is reflected in him – and yet, miracle of miracles, he was a great artist. He did not rub his cheeks to produce a spurious colour of health; he did not profess beliefs he could not maintain; he did not seek a reputation for universal wisdom, or indulge himself in self-gratifying dreams of a millennium which he alone had the ability to control. He was and wanted to be nothing in particular, and yet, as we read these letters of his, we feel gradually form within ourselves the conviction that he was a hero – more than that, the hero of our time. . . .

‘In every conjecture of his life that we can trace in his letters he behaved squarely by himself, and since he is our great exemplar, by us. He refused to march under any political banner – a thing let it be remembered of almost inconceivable courage in his country; he submitted to savagely hostile attacks for his political indifference; yet he spent more of his life and energy in doing active good to his neighbours than all the high-souled professors of liberalism and social reform. He undertook an almost superhuman journey to Saghalin in 1890 to investigate the conditions of the prisoners there, in 1892 he spent the best part of a year as a doctor devising preventive measures against the cholera in the country district where he lived, and, although he had no time for the writing on which his living depended, he refused the government pay in order to preserve his own independence of action; in another year he was the leading spirit in organizing measures of famine relief about Nizhni-Novgorod. From his childhood to his death, moreover, he was the sole support of his family. Measured by the stan-

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

dards of Christian morality, Tchegov was wholly a saint. His self-devotion was boundless. . . .

'It seems a simple discipline, this moral and intellectual honesty of Tchegov's, yet in these days of conceit and coterie his letters strike us as more than strange. One predominant impression remains; it is that of Tchegov's candour of soul. Somehow he has achieved with open eyes the mystery of pureness of heart; and in that, though we dare not analyse it further, lies the secret of his greatness as a writer and of his present importance to ourselves.'

This is an admirable tribute to Tchegov, for which all his admirers must be grateful, but it presents Tchegov too much as a phenomenon. Tchegov must be seen in relation to Russian culture, if his English readers are not to see him out of focus. Candour of soul is common in Russian literature. It was the spiritual tradition of Tchegov's great predecessors no less than intellectual sincerity. Of course in Russia, as elsewhere, vanity and stupidity, conceit and pretentiousness are qualities ever springing up like tares in the corn; but for the two generations before Tchegov, Russian genius had evolved and responded to the twin ideals of remorseless sincerity and large warm-hearted humanity. From Pushkin (1799-1837) to Tchegov (1860-1904) we find these twin ideals animating Gogol, Byelinsky, Aksakov, Grigorevitch, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Shtchedrin, Ertel, Korolenko, Garschin and Gorky. These ideals are to be found underlying the conversations and analyses of character in the works of the leading writers. In Turgenev's novels especially we find 'candour of soul'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

and 'pureness of heart' in constant evidence, no less than were respect for human personality, 'dread of lying and of vanity,' 'development of æsthetic feeling,' 'the ennoblement of the sexual instinct,' insisted upon as the chief constituents of the 'true culture' which Tchehov emphasizes in his letter to his brother Nikolay. And 'the new humanity' which Mr. Murry says Tchehov 'set himself to achieve' was nothing new to Russian contemporary thought, though Mr. Murry is perfectly right in stressing the 'modernity' of his attitude. In restating and emphasizing this creed of humanism Tchehov proved himself a true spiritual descendant of his great literary forerunners, and their representative successor in the nineties.

Secondly, Mr. Murry has not perhaps quite grasped that among the salt of Tchehov's own generation there were thousands of workers in science, art and the liberal professions—school-teachers, professors, doctors, students, and landowners – who also had 'been saturated in all the disillusion,' who, like him, 'did not march under any political banner' but did their work with 'pureness of heart,' with complete 'moral and intellectual honesty.' It was to them that Tchehov appealed, it was they that Tchehov represented both in their aspirations and their disillusionment with politics. The eighties and early nineties which left their imprint on Tchehov's youth and early manhood were a time of discouragement and general disbelief in revolutionary activity. The Nihilist movement of the previous decade had collapsed; political reaction was in full swing.¹

¹ See Tolstoy's *Letter to the Liberals*.

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

Kropotkin indeed¹ singles out Tchegov as pre-eminently the painter of 'the disillusioned intellectuals' of the eighties and early nineties and of the 'breakdown of the Intelligentsia.' 'In the fifties,' he says, 'the intellectuals had at least full hope in their forces – now they had lost even these hopes.' Kropotkin, a revolutionary propagandist himself, criticizes Tchegov in a partisan spirit, but it is true that in Tchegov's four plays, 'Ivanov,' 'Uncle Vanya,' 'The Three Sisters,' 'The Cherry Orchard,' the moral collapse of the Intelligentsia is threatening, and that this was one of the portents heralding the crash of the régime a generation later. It is true also, as Mr. Murry states, that 'Tchegov submitted to savagely hostile attacks for his political indifference,' but it is an exaggeration to style his action 'an act of almost inconceivable courage' in the Russia of the nineties, where the periodical press had long been saturated with polemical attacks on this writer and that for his 'reactionary' or 'revolutionary' or 'indifferent' attitude. Tchegov's contemporaries, Ertel and Garschin, were equally indifferent to politics. Turgenev himself, for the last twenty years of his life, had lived in a storm of such attacks. Yet, as Mr. Murry says, Tchegov was a 'saint' and a 'hero' and an example to his contemporaries, though this does not make him a phenomenon in Russian eyes. His unselfishness and purity of spirit, his radiant character, and devotion to his work, his struggle against human stupidity and contemporary lies, unite with his genius and his modesty to make him the most delightful figure of his 'disillusioned' generation.

¹ *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, pp. 313-14.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

(C) TCHEHOV'S 'MODERNITY'

'Anton Tchehov, born in 1860 at Taganrog, was the son of an emancipated serf. His father was a very talented man, active in all the affairs of the town, devoted to church singing and violin playing. His mother was the daughter of a cloth merchant of fairly good education, a highly spiritual woman, who instilled into her children a hatred of brutality, and a feeling of regard for all who were in an inferior position, and for birds and animals. As a boy Anton "was always writing stories." By the age of twenty he had seen a variety of life, earning his living from the age of sixteen, at Taganrog, and paying for his education at the high school, practising music, fond of the theatre, flirting with the high-school girls, making country excursions and learning to ride and shoot. In 1879 he joined his family at Moscow. "It was the absolute necessity of earning money to pay for his fees at the University and to help support the household that forced Anton to write," says his biographer. At Voskresensk, where his brother was master of the parish school, Tchehov gained an insight into the life of teachers, landowners, peasants and military society. A little later, having trained for a medical career, he took a job as a doctor's assistant, at Zvenigorod, where he was introduced to the society of literary and artistic people.'¹

Thus at the age of twenty-five Tchehov had intersected Russian provincial life at many angles, had made

¹ See the 'Biographical Sketch' in *Letters of Tchehov*. Translated by Constance Garnett. (Chatto and Windus, 1920).

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

many friends by the charm of his lively and sweet nature, and could have had, in fact, no better preparation for his delineation of the life of contemporary Russia. His art, naturally, did not reach perfection all at once. Many of his early humorous sketches are superficial and crude, and when his Tales were collected those excluded would fill four volumes. Again, he did not learn at once to suppress didactic touches, and blend his comments artistically with his characters'. Always modest, he did not take his sketches seriously till Grigorevitch urged him to do so. But by temperament, training, experience and outlook Tchehov became the literary incarnation of the rich emotional consciousness of the Russian nature, of its fluid responsiveness of feeling. And not only so, but Tchehov is the 'last word' in the modern criticism of life. As Mr. Murry has well put it, 'To-day we begin to perceive how intimately Tchehov belongs to us; to-morrow we may feel how infinitely he is in advance of us.'¹ Wherein is he so 'modern'? It was the conjunction of his peculiarly independent flexibility of mind with his keen scientific outlook² that equipped him for seizing and judging modern life from fresh angles. While representative of the changing horizons and complexity of the social organism of the now Russia (1885-1904), Tchehov's vision fused the detached impartial attitude of the modern scientist with the deep

¹ *Aspects of Literature*, p. 84.

² 'Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night at the other's. It is rather disorderly, but not so dull, and besides *neither of them loses anything from my infidelity*.'—*Letters of Tchehov*, p. 99.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

humanism, the psychological insight, the caressing tenderness and the gay humour of his sensitive temperament. It would be wrong to exaggerate this 'scientific' strain in Tchehov's art, but it is sublimated in the soft, rich depths of his æsthetic consciousness, and is constantly inspiring or reinforcing his critical attitude. For example, 'The Duel' turns on the antipathy felt by Van Koren the zoologist, a man of unbending character, whose life runs on the straight track of scientific ideas, for Laevsky the neurasthenic young official, preoccupied with his dissolute amours. The antagonism between the two men ends in a stupid duel. But Van Koren, whose clear, cold reasoning about the moral law, sexual morals and the extinction of the weak is theoretically sound, is as much blinded by his over-logical convictions as Laevsky is obsessed by his dissolute instincts. The complexity of life is shown by the sequel, when Van Koren's failure to kill Laevsky is the instrument of the latter's regeneration. 'If one is not mistaken in the main one is mistaken in details,' is Tchehov's moral, 'nobody knows the real truth.' And this sceptical, scientific conscience speaks in 'The Duel' to reinforce Tchehov's characteristically Russian insistence on human charity. Tchehov indeed is in advance of us by the way in which his scientific knowledge corrects or sharpens ordinary insight and his humanity corrects scientific narrowness.¹

¹ 'I have no doubt that the study of medicine has had an important influence on my literary work; it has considerably enlarged the sphere of my observation, has enriched me with knowledge the true value of which for me as a writer can only be understood by one who is himself a doctor. It has also had a guiding influence; and it is

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

In England, America and Europe generally scientific men are apt to be cribbed, cabined and confined by their work of specializing. Their scientific horizon stops short of the humanities. But with Tchegov science broadens the humanities, and both reconcile themselves with art. Speaking of a French story, Tchegov says significantly: 'I thought at the time that an artist's instinct may sometimes be worth the brains of a scientist, that both have the same purpose, the same nature, and that perhaps in time as their methods become perfect they are destined to become one vast prodigious force, which now is difficult to imagine.' ¹ Another good example of this fusion of artistic and scientific insight is to be found in that brilliant and fascinating social picture 'The Party,' a story which for atmospheric truth and subtle inflexions of tone leaves most of contemporary art in the shade.

'The Party' is a study of the agonizing strain felt by a smiling hostess, seven months gone with child, during the festivities at a country-house party to celebrate her husband's name-day. The well-bred Olga Mihailovna would give anything to be able to sit down and dream happily about her coming child, but she is forced by her code of perfect manners to study each one of her guests' wants, to probably due to my close association with medicine that I have succeeded in avoiding many mistakes.

'Familiarity with the natural sciences and with scientific method has always kept me on my guard, and I have always tried where it was possible to be consistent with the facts of science; where it was impossible I have preferred not to write at all.'—*Letters of Tchegov*, p. 369.

¹ *Letters of Tchegov*, p. 76.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

make conversation, to invent new amusements, to give fresh orders, to welcome late arrivals; and the agonizing gulf between her outer, smiling attentive self and her inner misery is at last declared at the end of the day, in an emotional storm with her husband and a tragic miscarriage. Tchekhov's own comment on the tale was 'It really isn't bad to be a doctor and to understand what one is writing about. The ladies say the description of the confinement is true.' Tchekhov's attitude to women would need a study to itself, but one may note that while no one has yet equalled his unsparing dissection of the modern parasitic woman, his power is sharpened by his physiological insight. Yet another good example of Tchekhov's 'modernity' is seen in 'The Grasshopper,' 'A Misfortune,' 'Ionitch,' etc. 'The Doctor's Visit,' an exposition of the modern social muddle, as exemplified by the monotonous, brutal life led by the factory workers and the stuffy, bored life led by the factory owner's family, rich bourgeois whose wealth is an impediment to their happiness. While the doctor thinks the whole factory system a kind of social disease, humanly irrational, he is very guarded in his diagnosis.¹ The same subject is handled in richer, livelier, freer aspects, in that incomparable story, 'A Woman's Kingdom', which in its large, easy, human contacts gives us foreigners the key to the charm of Russian intercourse. Here the 'modernity' is implicit in the complex web of the involved relations of

¹ 'As a doctor accustomed to judging correctly of chronic complaints, the radical cause of which was incomprehensible and incurable, he looked upon factories as something baffling, the cause of which was obscure and not removable.'—*The Doctor's Visit*.

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

Capital and Labour, with the large-natured heroine, Anna Akimovna, a girl of the people, paralysed by her false position, between her grand gentlemen friends who sponge on her, and the exploited work-people who strive to cheat her. It is human nature, but rebellious human nature caught in the wheels of our relentless social machine. But Tchegov draws his picture with such delicacy of touch and subtlety of insight, with such gay warmth of feeling as to make us sympathize equally with the large-hearted Anna who 'would give half her life and all her fortune only to know there was a man upstairs who was closer to her than anyone in the world, that he loved her warmly and was missing her,' and with the frivolous, elderly dilettante Lysevitch who assures her 'It's essential for you; it's your duty to be frivolous and depraved. Ponder that, my dear, ponder it.' Here is the artist, triumphant, the pure artist who answered his friend Savorin: 'You abuse me for objectivity, calling it indifference to good and evil, lack of ideas and ideals, and so on. You would have me when I describe horse-stealers,¹ say: Stealing horses is an evil. But that has been known for ages, without my saying so . . . it's my job simply to show what sort of people they are . . . I must all the time speak and think in their tone and feel in their spirit.' '*It's my job simply to show what sort of people they are*'; this is the artist's aim which carries him unerringly into the reckless soul of Sasha Uskov,² the dissipated young man who has forged a promissory note, and the three scandalized uncles who sit in judgment on him; and into the

¹ See *The Horse-Stealers*.

² See *A Problem*.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

soul of the young girl Anna,¹ who, disgusted with her fat, elderly, sycophantic husband, plunges into a noisy, brilliant, laughing life, with its music, dancers and train of adorers,' from his Excellency downwards. The artist's sympathy with all those characters, moral or immoral, is equally keen, but he is specially 'modern' when his experience and observation enable him to strike down to the roots of 'modern disillusionment.' It is the remorseless Russian sincerity here, that in such stories as 'Neighbours' enables Tchehov's heroes and heroines to realize what is the flaw in themselves, and why life mocks their efforts at happiness. In general it is the combination of poor weak human nature with the misfits in environment and human relationships that thwarts our happiness. But life's processes in Tchehov are very intricate, very elusive in pattern, and in 'My Life' we have a wonderfully rich arrangement of the human muddle with all its cares, sorrows, brutalities and cheats intertwined with its compensating hopes, gratifications and fleeting gains. We must note here that one of the most vital features of Tchehov's art, as in the case of his great Russian predecessors, is that the background of his pictures nearly always breathes of the vast ocean of humanity, the peasant masses, and that this vision of secret depths lifts the picture out of the petty, restricted class plane of fiction in Western Europe. It is so in 'My Life,' which is non-European in its social atmosphere. It is so in 'The Coach-house,' 'The Schoolmistress,' 'Misery,' 'Sorrow,' 'The Cattle-Dealers,' 'On Official Duty,' to take only one volume of Tchehov's tales.² It is this background of the vast, haunt-

¹ See *Anna on the Neck*.

² Volume IX. (Chatto and Windus).

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

ing sea of human life, appealing and tragic, from which is born the Russian breadth of vision, and the Russian scale of emotional apprehensions, of moral valuations so distinct from our own. But Tchegov is undoubtedly nearer to and more intimate with the peasant masses than were Turgenev and Tolstoy, who came of the race of 'seigneurs.' Compare, for instance, 'The Peasants' with Tolstoy's 'Polikushka,' a marvellously close study of peasant types, but done with the subtle intellectual inflexions of an upper-class mind. It is Tchegov's peasant ancestry crossed by the familiar experiences of a hard-worked country doctor that in that wonderful creation 'Peasants' reveals his complete intimacy with the harsh realities, the virtues and the vices of peasant existence.¹ Tchegov's attitude to peasant life and Russian provincial life is generally that of the observer and the commentator in 'My Life,' 'The New Villa,' 'In the Ravine.' To combat ignorance, inertia, apathy, savagery, as also the disease, drunkenness and vice of provincial Russia, 'we must study and study and study, and we must wait a bit with our deep social movements; we are not mature enough for them yet, and to tell the truth we don't know anything about them . . . genuine social movements arise when there is knowledge; and the happiness of mankind in the future lies only in knowledge.' 'There is the same savagery, the same uniform boorishness, the same

¹ 'I have peasant blood in my veins, and you won't astonish me with peasant virtues. From my childhood I have believed in progress and I could not help believing in it since the difference between the time when I used to be thrashed and when they gave up thrashing me was tremendous.'—*Letters of Tchegov*, p. 324.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

triviality as five hundred years ago in the people of the towns.' 'We talked of the fanaticism, the coarseness of feeling, the insignificance of those respectable families. . . . What good had they gained from all that had been said and written hitherto, if they were still possessed by the same spiritual darkness and hatred of liberty, as they were a hundred and three hundred years ago?'¹

People in the mass, everywhere, are the same in all grades; at root there is the same stupidity, cruelty and dishonesty at work in the press and the politicians as in the peasants; and the evils of human life can only be opposed by 'love and work, study and will.' The one thing essential is that we should understand, and *it is the artist's job to show people what they are*. Sympathy and knowledge, insight and charity, these are the corner-stones of Tchehov's morality and also of his art. 'I thought people already knew that horse-stealing was wrong; but what's essential is to show the motives, the nature, the how and why of people's actions' is Tchehov's attitude. So in 'In the Ravine,' the cruel triumph of the hard, sly, unscrupulous Aksinya over her mild, sweet sister-in-law, Lipa, is recorded remorselessly. Aksinya gets all the family power and property into her own hands, and even turns her old father-in-law out of doors. Hers is the success of the harsh, strong, callous world. But what is there left to offset this unceasing triumph of human greed and human stupidity? Only, in Tchehov's view, beauty and truth. 'And however great was wickedness still the night was calm and beautiful, and everything on earth is only waiting to be

¹ *My Life*, p. 96, p. 157.

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

made one with truth and justice, even as the moonlight is blended with the night.' It is this element, the element of tenderness and sweetness of understanding, that forms the spiritual background of so many of Tchehov's Tales, and dominates invisibly the coarse web of the human struggle and the petty network of human egoism. It is seen to perfection in that golden tale, steeped in hues of dying sunset, of the death of 'The Bishop.' But, like the colour in the evening sky, soon the good old man's virtues fade out of people's minds, in the stir of the appointment of the new suffragan bishop, 'and no one thought any more of Bishop Pyotr, and afterwards he was completely forgotten.' It is so in the exquisite 'Easter Eve,' with its magical, wistful softness of atmosphere, where the gentle lay brother Jeronim grieves for his dead friend and brother priest Nikolay, who wrote the most beautiful canticles, which nobody in the monastery appreciated. This floating atmosphere of charity, of tender humour, and so of compassion for ordinary human nature, which cannot be other than what it is, envelops 'A Nightmare,' a pathetic sketch of a parish priest's miserable poverty, a sketch far superior both in its pity and its sense of human equality to anything western literature can show. We meet it again in 'Dreams,' the story of a guilty little convict's childish dreams of future happiness in Siberia, before he is crushed by the stern, bitter facts, a story where Tchehov's tender humour blends with irony in the strain peculiar to himself. And again in 'The Letter,' that exquisite piece of humour, with its caressing allowances made for both the saints and the sinners. All these tales show Tchehov's rich, æsthetic sensibility weav-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

ing the subtle spell of poetical harmonies; as also in 'The Kiss,' where the tedious round of regimental duties and boring details of the life of Ryaboitch, the shy and insignificant little officer, are steeped for a few days in his dreamy haze of love for the unknown lady who has kissed him in the dark, in mistake for her lover. Again, in 'The Exile' with its immense horizon of suffering and sorrow and frustrated hopes, Tchekhov evokes in the soul of a sick desolate Tartar these wistful, mournful harmonies. It is not merely the individual life, however, with its broken, shifting tangle of yearnings and regrets that calls forth Tchekhov's wistful compassionateness, but his recognition disentangles the irony in the very texture of life. Time's revenges or the irony of satisfied desires are treated in 'Ionitch,' 'A Teacher of Literature' and 'The Lady with the Dog.' Yet one cannot say that Tchekhov himself is 'disillusioned.' His sense of spiritual beauty is too strong, and his depth of acceptance of life's patterns forms, as it were, an aura enveloping his subject. This spiritual aura hovers about it and enwraps the gloomiest, greyest, most sardonic facts of life: death itself cannot diminish it. Examine 'Gusev,' a sketch of the death of two worn-out soldiers on board a steamer, when returning from the East, a sketch that is so 'modern' in its all-embracing outlook and bold acceptations as to shame nearly all the writers of to-day. It is so humanly broad, so tender, so infallibly true in its spiritual lightings, and it conveys the mystery of nature and all her transitory processes with sharp precision. In 'Gusev' there is a sharper consciousness of life's pulsating forces, of its inescapable laws, and evasive rhythms than in

TCHEHOV AND HIS ART

any other 'modern.' Compare it with Tolstoy's wonderful 'Three Deaths' and note how the tinge of 'science' that faintly colours 'Gusev' marks the advance of a new generation. The fluid, emotional receptivity of the Russian nature, which we have noted above, is seen here, like a wave, to gather force in its onward sweep. 'The Cattle-Dealers' is another fine example of Tchegov's sensitive response to every shade of movement and feeling in a scene before his eyes. His sensitive, indulgent observation of the play of human nature exhibits the drovers, the railway men and even the unhappy cattle penned in their trucks, in a soft, zestful atmosphere. It is a slice of common life delightful in its spontaneous force, while other men pass by unseeing the charm of the human by-play, here revealed to the master's eye.

Tchegov's æsthetic charm culminates in 'The Steppe,' a tale where his tender, fluid consciousness, infinitely delicate, mirrors in its pellucid depths the whole mirage of nature, variegated, wild and stern, elusive in its changing breadth, in the vast bosom of the steppes. This consummate piece of art is not 'modern,' save in a few recurring notes. It is a record, seen through the magic glass of boyish memories, of the passing life of travelling merchants and wayfarers, journeying in old-world conditions; Tchegov is here looking backward, away from the new currents and atmospheres that his vision caught and reflected from the great ocean of contemporary life within Russia's boundaries. But when he looked forward he caught and reflected with equal subtlety, with equal precision, the new vistas of our modern emotions and apprehensions; the new 'values,'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

moral and intellectual, of our modern vision. He has recorded his faith in our progress in his letter to Dagilev.¹ 'Modern culture is only the first beginning of work for a great future, work which will perhaps go on for thousands of years in order that man may, if only in the remote future, come to know the truth of the real God – that is not, I conjecture, by seeking it in Dostoevsky, but by clear knowledge, as one knows two and two are four.'

By 'clear knowledge,' that was Tchehov's hope for men, a hope which, in this era of Europe's violence and lying, shines afar off like a star.

1921

¹ *Letters of Tchehov*, p. 404.

IBSEN AND THE ENGLISH



THERE are many interesting things in Brandes' criticisms on Ibsen:¹ an illuminating analysis of 'The Master Builder,' little pictures of Norwegian society, letters from Ibsen on European politics, and, perhaps the most instructive of all, a few pages on the suffocating Philistine atmosphere which lay like a fog over the Scandinavia of the seventies and eighties. Such pages as these, though fragmentary, help the English reader to understand the environment of frigid respectabilities and humdrum orthodoxy which Ibsen defied, and later, turned to our profit in his dramas that criticize middle-class ethics.

'What is really wanted is a revolution of the spirit of man,' wrote Ibsen to Brandes in 1870, and this saying actually reveals the source of Ibsen's power over us better than any lengthy criticism could do. It is because Ibsen is so dissatisfied with average human nature, because he pierces through its self-regarding egoism and realizes its shallow pretentiousness, that he has had the power to treat public opinion in ordinary as the Voice of mediocrity, without himself being either a superior person, or pessimist, or idealistic preacher. As a poet of insight Ibsen sympathizes with humanity, as a moralist he sets his face against the average man's pettiness and self-complacency; it is this two-sidedness that makes him formidable to our middle-class communities, so naïvely in love with their own special limitations, so bold in developing their life on material

¹ Henrick Ibsen; Bjornstjerne Björnson. *Critical Studies*, by George Brandes. London, 1899.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

lines, so fearful of applying to themselves unwelcome truths.

Has English society the ability to understand him? This is the question which really concerns English people, and one which they are incapable of asking themselves, though Brandes' suggestive pages lie before them. And at this question English Philistinism opens unastonished eyes and winks blandly at the reception of Ibsen as a celebrity, and at the growing convention that, after all, we English can look with modest satisfaction at the success of this great European writer. Birthday honours! opponents hushed! respectful reviews! let us shake hands! While, as a matter of fact, Ibsen's influence over here – owing to the English people's dislike of all critical truths – has been almost null.

That is what Brandes understands, no doubt, despite the propaganda of the loyal Ibsenites – 'thousands of copies sold: success most marked.' Ibsen's influence has been practically nil, save on a small socialistic-ethical circle. Ibsen's plays have been acted to nobody. His spirit has modified our complacent acceptation of the popular English burlesque-of-life drama not at all. No school of young writers has been stimulated by his work to try to create love for an intellectual drama. If we cannot clear our minds of cant in the matter, at least let us have less of superior cant involved in a theoretical acceptation and a practical denial. But let us admit that Ibsen's influence – on his commentators has been most marked!

And yet how many reasons combine to make Ibsen appear in part acceptable to the English spirit! First and foremost is the fact that Ibsen is, among other things, a

IBSEN AND THE ENGLISH

great Moralist, that he attacks life with seriousness, that he is not a pure artist steeping himself in the beauty, the cruelty and the strangeness of life; but a semi-earnest, semi-ironical poet occupied with the problems of conduct, an ethical teacher at root, speaking, it is true, in ironical tones, but always seeking the way. Secondly, the Scandinavian people to whom Ibsen presents us come surprisingly near us in their thoughts and feelings. Less stiff, a little naïve and introspectively morbid, they depart from us in externals and reveal their near relationship to us in their idealistic hedging over life and conduct. Their northern blood runs also in our veins; and we must accept them with all their queerness and strangeness, for the great family of the North unites them to us: a group are we standing together against the great Southern family of peoples whose tastes and standards we Northerners have scant sympathy with, or feel ourselves opposed to. Thirdly, Ibsen, as presented to us in Mr. Archer's translations, is remarkably easy to follow; his language is clear, terse and simple, though often it unfolds his meaning by the delicate veils of symbolistic poetry. Fourthly, the man himself is generally accepted! seriously discussed, as we know, by solid-brained, by influential people! How near that touches the English soul, and in itself calls forth Britannic public approval! And it is just there that the joint in Philistia's armour-plating gapes a little and shows us the discrepancy: Ibsen, on the one hand, a great European celebrity, whom we are ashamed not to know, 'sold in thousands,' and, on the other hand, Ibsen's dramas left in the hands of a small coterie of enthusiasts, abandoned to the devotion of a

FRIDAY NIGHTS

handful of amateurs. Ibsen's dramas are not acted, cannot be acted, because the English cultured Philistinism is not ready for them; is, indeed, innately hostile to them. All this is very obvious. Let us get to a little analysis.

'Brand' is undoubtedly of Ibsen's works the one most congenial to the English taste. It is the most moral. Brand is a serious person, a clergyman full of zeal. Religious enthusiasm we can understand. We give our men of zeal in England rope enough for them to commit themselves, on the plea of the public weal. After all, it *may* be that the Brands will save us from the burning. To look down on such men (as we must) from the superior standpoint of moral worldliness, and yet not to abandon the Old Testament spirit entirely, this is a daily lesson in finesse for the English conscience. But, on the whole, 'Brand' we approve of. Does it not make for morality? Are there not three or four translations of this work in the market to one of 'Peer Gynt'?

In 'Peer Gynt' have we not an uneasy suspicion that Ibsen is satirizing *us*? Given an English background and atmosphere, 'Peer Gynt' might read as a fantastic analysis of many an English soul, self-analytic for once in its desire to get wholly clean. A true Northern nature has Peer Gynt, and semi-English in his compromising, greedy, problem-making, enterprising, mystical conscience, with idealistic aspirations shot with the grossest materialism: a psychological document for all peoples of Teutonic stock; but a nature without the grand English recipe for self-satisfaction. For the English mind hates above all things to search into itself. Too well it knows that beneath its skin

IBSEN AND THE ENGLISH

of satisfied conventionalism stretch the queerest depths of human nature; that is why we all live on the comfortable surface of things, *healthily*. At all costs we must preserve our spirituality, for if we have *that* to fall back on, we feel safe in acting in comfortable worldly fashion. From these two reservoirs in our nature gushes forth unconsciously English cant, *i.e.*, virtuous interpretations of our very mixed motives. We turn on the spiritual tap, so to speak, when we explain to the other nations our disinterestedness, but the worldly tap, still running, we ignore. All our motives mixed virtuously are very like Peer Gynt's, but Ibsen's poem is far too frank ever to be liked by us.

As for 'Ghosts,' we take back the cataract of abusive epithets that hailed the drama, 'putrid carrion,' 'filthy,' 'prurient garbage,' etc., etc.; we abandon that frantic dance where Mrs. Grundy's outraged feelings led out Public Morality to a solemn *pas de deux*. It was an impressive, if funny, spectacle to see the two old things rejuvenescing at the fountain of a virtuous mistake! Ibsen – we bow our heads – is now a moral celebrity. Let bygones be bygones, so long as nobody insists on acting this most unpleasant play. And Ibsen? Is he not conscious of having gone a little far in 'Ghosts'? Genius, of course, has its privileges, its distressing insight into social ulcers; but why brandish –. However, let us forget it all. We have our Censor of Plays.

In 'The Doll's House' Ibsen was really not so very, very far from popularity. Nora's strange conduct was debated, it excited society's virtuous bosoms. Ought she to leave her home? asked the English man and woman, and an exceedingly popular English man of letters wrote a sequel to show

FRIDAY NIGHTS

what happens when the husband and the servants are left in charge! In Sir Walter Besant's sequel the husband abandoned took to drink, and the children fell ill, whereat a vicious neighbour over the way was scandalized, and returned to the seemingly courses of a respectable family man. And do not let us dismiss this 'Sandford and Merton' solution of Ibsen's ethical problem as too naïve, too incredibly simple. Incredibly simple it may be; but how practical, how English in re-affirming the narrow, insular attitude to art – *i.e.*, what the English mind wants is that good, strong, healthy optimism, that healthy tone in literature which it believes is conducive to morality, and then again to more morality, and still once more to morality. What the English nature loves is a positive solution of every problem. What it asks from art is – *make me more English*. An Englishman, to do him justice, is conscientiously ready to go along with the artist into any examination of life, if he can arrive thereby at some standard in practical ethics which he may apply to conduct, if he can rise up from art feeling his attitude to himself and his 'mission,' and his financial investments are thereby strengthened. But art's primary purpose is *to reveal*, and by reflecting back the stream of life, by creating new valuations, strange new effects, and by showing all forces at work equally, art unsettles by its revelations; and once launched into this mirage of the ocean of life the English mind loses its bearings. Confronted by art with life as a spectacle, the English nature can only use its special weapons – character and conduct. It can only ask in utilitarian fashion: What is the solution? Where is the moral? What ought to be done? But Ibsen

IBSEN AND THE ENGLISH

though deeply concerned with conduct, is artist enough to bring forward situations *without* special solutions, and show us the individual hampered by circumstances succumbing to Fate. Once bereft of its great weapon – character – the English mind asks powerlessly, ‘Why plunge me into all this? Why harrow me and bother me with the bewildering spectacle of life triumphing over me, and things going wrong?’

Now in Ibsen’s plays, things commonly do go wrong more or less, *e.g.*, ‘Hedda Gabler,’ ‘Rosmersholm,’ ‘Little Eyolf,’ ‘The Master Builder’; it is life, and Ibsen is the old *artist moralist*, exhibiting to us the wrongness of life. But this the English mind hates – hates because its mental stock is invested in going concerns, earthly or heavenly; concerns that make for more duty, for more health, for more energy. The modern Englishman has almost come to be a well-paid shareholder in family life, political life, and remunerative opinion. He does not want to be unsettled, to be made uneasy in his convictions about life, he wants to be optimistic, to make things go better, to be made more *certain*. And so strong is this English instinct that the larger vision of *life as a spectacle* has been crowded and shoved in the English consciousness into a place subordinate to the Englishman’s special programme! He wants art to fit human life carefully into a special narrow ideal of how life *ought* to go, *à l’anglaise*. That art should represent life as accommodating itself gratefully to our ideals – excellent but utilitarian! Every nation, of course, holds aloof from the art that is too foreign to its own life; but has not the English mind, by adding utilitarianism to its old ethical

FRIDAY NIGHTS

spirit, got to a point where it rules out freedom of art? It does not want art now to *recognize* the way life is going, and if art cannot use life for special (English) purposes, the English mind prefers not to know the life, not to admit the art. 'Ibsen is against health! He deals with our motives,' so runs the average English objection. Healthiness for the individual at the cost of stupidity? Perhaps. Healthiness for society, for the artist to butter up its ways and its blindness, its little recipes for its virtuous existence. Its virtuous existence! but what *an art*!

We touch here another reason why the English nature is hostile to Ibsen. Ibsen's genius is largely concerned with showing society its unflattering portrait. Collective opinion, how blundering, forgetful, flabby and cowardly it often is! *e.g.*, 'An Enemy of the People.' But an Englishman balances his own intense individualism by a curious, and, it is said, an admirable, solidarity. In this strong sense of solidarity lies much of the Englishman's over-respect for society's verdicts, much of his slavish deference to 'good form.' But Ibsen's tendency is to show the advanced individual so much in the right, and society so conclusively in the wrong, that the English nature feels its sense of solidarity is endangered. The Philistine nature, all the world over, knows too well that to have the solid things on one's side means that healthy duty and energy in society are thereby being capitalized by the lucky individual, and public security and confidence are returning cent per cent; but the English mind, leaning for support on its sense of duty, utility, and solidarity, perhaps goes farthest in its inability to see that the great artist's appeal is to *life* from

IBSEN AND THE ENGLISH

the verdict of special communities, ruling majorities and changing civilizations. And thus our original question – has English society the ability to understand Ibsen? – may be re-stated by our saying that the current of the national life sets too strongly in certain directions for Ibsen to be accorded genuinely more than a general lip-valuation. Brandes' Essay will receive most marked, most respectful attention – everywhere. And Ibsen will remain unacted – in England, where as in France (for different reasons) the community has special cause *not* to understand him, and so cannot admire

1899

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD



(A) AN APPRECIATION IN 1898

THE sun rises and sets through all the wonderful ages on a prosaic and commonplace spectacle: the everyday world. To men busied in their little crowd's concerns, struggling to best others, the daily life is seen in the morning light, here in their work in the fields, there in the city, as a succession of hard facts to be squared, suffered, or ameliorated, a life of well-known surfaces and confused depths, with odd varieties of sensation stringing it, and the necessity for action always hurrying the individual past self-realization and deep perception. And in the midst of this light-of-day, solid world of matter-of-fact appearances and startling confusions occasionally comes a glimpse of a mysterious world behind the apparent, a shattering of the human surfaces that death or love perchance brings us; but the revelation passes, and the tide of events, people, circumstances, rolls on again mechanically, and as shockingly natural as faces crowd upon us in the streets of our inevitable and ridiculous civilization.

And so with life everywhere. A generation passes away, to the last man; and to the immense new concourse of people that throngs the old street, the old fields, the daily trivial round appears to have always been cast for them, to be always going to be theirs. But each generation, because it lives on surfaces and is so dull in its imagination, so harassed by work, so desperate or so contented in its environment, has always a baffled feeling that if it could but get a connected view of itself life would be illuminated.

FRIDAY NIGHTS.

And always the generation looks round for the men who are articulate, and pausing at the orators, priests and statesmen recognizes that in so far as the past generations are illumined for us it is through the work of the artists.

Whenever the artists are absent – in enormous tracts of life, that is – human nature appears to the imagination absolutely uncanny and ghost-like. But wherever the artist has been, *there* the life of man appears suddenly natural and comprehensible. When we think of the cities of Romanized Britain our imagination becomes as a blank wall with a few historical facts staring at us from it. But in Rome under the Caesars human life is almost as fresh and actual to us as in London to-day; we see and hear the people going down the street, the world of Horace, Juvenal, Catullus. The appearance of the artist makes an astonishing difference. Was it not yesterday that one of them appeared, and Anglo-Indian life started up coherent out of the huge mass of historical facts, statistics, and home letters that had stood for India in the British imagination? Individual life in general is an ego asserting itself in a chaos of experiences, and the man of the world who (touching spectacle!) failed to grasp the nature of his wife and misunderstood his own children, was seen holding fast by his Thackeray and his Dickens, creators who resolved his world and made it less uncanny to him. To mention these two names is forthwith to see two lamps shining in the strange darkness of the unexplored oceans of humanity. The darkness of human nature is really everywhere, the commonplace darkness, and the lights are very few;

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

and so even the unintelligent cluster round the artists' lamps.

In the unilluminated tracts of swarming life the artist suddenly appears, unexpected, and never to be foreseen. They come, the artists, and they are always welcome (the impostors are always welcomed by humanity, but they can never stay); they come to us, and each brings along with him new worlds, spiritual, powerful, complex, brutal or subtle, the worlds that have come to them through contact with the old prosaic spectacle of the everyday world. They come, and at the first word from them we know that that strange world lives and dies with that individual artist. And always we realize how unilluminated that particular tract of life, stretching before us, was before we heard coming from it the artist's voice.

So with the work of all true artists, and so with the work of Joseph Conrad. The unexpected has happened, and the artist has appeared where he was least looked for. From the far-away, material, jumbled world of seamen, from the strange places of the earth where the emphatic, hard-fisted, cautious men of action 'civilize' and subjugate alien races, from the forecastle and the Eastern ports and the high seas, suddenly springs this artist's living world of men and shadows, of passions, shapes, and colours, swiftly arranging itself in meaning outline. The artist has spoken: a new world finds a voice; and we understand. The blank solid wall of the familiar, the strange world of new and old that fronts the puzzled sensations of those people far off, has melted away before this artist, and he has seen in everything the significant fact, he has seen and shown us the way

FRIDAY NIGHTS

that that man spoke or this wave curled before breaking. It is always what the artist sees that defines his quality; and whether he can connect this tangible world with that vast unseen ocean of life around him, that determines whether he is a poet.

What is the quality of his art? The quality of Mr. Conrad's art is seen in his faculty of making us perceive men's lives in their natural relation to the seen universe around them; his men are a part of the great world of nature, and the sea, land and sky around them are not drawn as a mere background, or as something inferior and secondary to the human will, as we have in most artists' work. This faculty of seeing man's life in relation to the seen and unseen forces of nature it is that gives Mr. Conrad's art its extreme delicacy and its great breadth of vision. It is pre-eminently the poet's gift, and is very rarely conjoined with insight into human nature and power of conceiving character. When the two gifts come together we have the poetic realism of Turgenev's novels. Mr. Conrad's art is realism of that order. 'The Nigger of the Narcissus' is masterly not merely because the whole illusion of the sailor's life is reproduced before our eyes, with the crew's individual and collective attitude towards one another and their officers, with the daily round of hardship, peril, and love for their ship; but because the ship is seen as a separate thing of life, with a past and a destiny, floating in the midst of the immense, mysterious universe around it; and the whole shifting atmosphere of the sea, the horizon, the heavens, is felt by the senses as mysteriously near us, yet mysteriously aloof from the human life battling against it. To reproduce life

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

naturally, in its close fidelity to breathing nature, yet to interpret its significance, and to make us see the great universe around — art cannot go beyond this, except to introduce the illusion of inevitability.

We find life's daily necessity in Mr. Conrad's art; we find actuality, charm, magic; and to demand inevitability from it is perhaps like asking for inevitability from Chopin's music. For Mr. Conrad's art, in its essence, reminds us much of his compatriot's — it is a delicate, and occasionally a powerful instrument. There is a story, 'The Lagoon,' in the *Tales of Unrest*, which flows out of itself in subtle cadence, in rise and flow and fall of emotion, just as you may hear Ernst's delicate music rise and sweep and flow from the violin. For occasionally the author's intense fidelity to the life he has observed seems to melt and fade away in a lyrical impulse, the hard things of actual life die and are lost in a song of beauty, just as the night comes to overwhelm the hard edges of the day.

They are incorrigible, these artists; they juggle with reality till they make life yield up all its beauty to them; they are impostors, humanity angrily feels, for why should they have deep in them these organic worlds of beauty while the daily life stares stonily, prosaically, at you and me? Yes, they are impostors, these artists, even as old Nature, the only thing they love in their hearts, is the greatest artist and impostor of them all. For she, as they, deals in perpetual illusions, perpetual appearances, dreams and shifting fantasies, the hope and vision of beauty; she, as they, creates dissolving worlds, fading mirages out of

FRIDAY NIGHTS

the stuff men call reality, out of the earth which mothers everything – the good and the bad.

1898

(B) MR. CONRAD'S ART

In 'Nostromo,' a tale of the seaboard of Central America, Mr. Conrad has achieved something which it is not in the power of any English contemporary novelist to touch. His genius, that rose to the consummate art of 'The Heart of Darkness' and the beauty of 'Youth,' has in 'Nostromo' descended a step or two to a lower plane to weave the more orthodox, structured novel, with a plot and *dénouement*. For we cannot disguise that the weak point of the ordinary novel is the conventionalized plan of its structure. Happily, however, Mr. Conrad's gifts have triumphed over the regular form prescribed for the public's consumption: 'Nostromo' is not particularly orthodox in its structure, and the larger canvas Mr. Conrad has chosen on this occasion gives him more elbow-room to show the working unity and harmonious balance of his gifts.

We draw attention to the harmonious balance of the author's vision in 'Nostromo,' for to speak frankly we did not expect that the creator of 'Lord Jim' would have threaded the mazes of the situation exposed in 'Nostromo' with such unerring steps, or would have so clearly shaped the minor clues that lead us to the main issue. If we put aside the somewhat lengthy handling of the early history of the San Tomé silver mine and the abrupt and hurried final chapters that describe Nostromo's death, which are

artistically too violent, there is scarcely a line in the book that is not essential to the development of this dramatic pageant of life in a South American State. For the book's theme is not, indeed, the life and death of the hero Nostromo, El Capitan de Cargadores, as Mr. Conrad no doubt originally conceived it, neither is it the story of the vicissitudes of the great San Tomé silver mine and of the Europeans who develop it in Sulaco, as in Part I, it threatens to become. Mr. Conrad's artistic instinct has perhaps unconsciously led him to clear the reefs of these subsidiary issues, and has brought him and his readers safe into the open sea, whence they can look back at the sharp outline of the Costaguanan coast, the placid waters of the Golfo Placido, and realize that his subject is the great mirage he has conjured up of the life and nature of the Costaguanan territory lying under the shadow of the mighty Corderillas. The foreground of 'Nostromo' is, indeed, the dramatic narrative of the political and revolutionary vicissitudes of the town of Sulaco. Shut off by the Corderillas from the other portions of the Republic of Costaguana, Sulaco (though dominated politically by the intrigues of native military dictators and parliamentarians, whose successive factions rise to power by hatching periodic revolutions) is in part controlled by the interests of the European and American capitalists, who have developed the silver mines, introduced the service of the O. S. N. Shipping Co., and projected the National Central Railway. Thus, the Europeans, who direct the Indian mining population and the imported Italian workmen and dock labourers of the shipping and railway companies, can hold, more or less, in

FRIDAY NIGHTS

check the native South American populace of Sulaco. At the period when the tale opens the rival Monterist faction, however, is just gaining the upper hand, and is thirsting to cut the throat of every prominent Moderate or Ribierist in Costaguana. The story of the street-fighting and the suppression of Gamacho and his Nationals by the mixed group of Europeans and Ribierists with Nostromo, the magnificent Capitan, who leads his body of Cargadozes against the town rabble and then hastily takes out to sea a lighter with its cargo of silver ingots, just in time to escape the raid of Colonel Sotillo and the revolted garrison of Esmeralda, while Pedro Montero and his cut-throats sweep into the town from the mountains – all this is told us through the medium of various characters, as Captain Mitchell, the pompous old resident officer of the O. S. N. Co., Nostromo himself, Martin Decoud, Spanish creole, Parisian boulevardier and Ribierist journalist, Doctor Monygham, a broken and gloomy army doctor, who has seen too much of Costaguana and its revolutions to have any illusions left; and indirectly through the medium of Mrs. Gould, the wife of the mineowner, Giorgio Viola, an old Garibaldian soldier, and Colonel Sotillo, military bravo, and torturer of the miserable Hirsch, the German Jew. Mr. Conrad has never before attempted to group together such a variety of characters, to exhibit so many conflicting issues, and to make pass before us such a dramatic pageant as in this wonderful mirage of South American life. How has he been able to do it, and what is the nature of the artistic method by which scene after scene flows clearly, freely, in natural and convincing sequence,

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

leaving the impression on the reader of having seen and assisted at a national drama?

The critic, pressed for an explanation of Mr. Conrad's special power by which he accomplishes particular feats beyond his rivals', may boldly declare that he has a special poetic sense for *the psychology of scene*, by which the human drama before us is seen in its just relation to the whole enveloping drama of Nature around, forming both the immediate environment and the distant background. In Mr. Conrad's vision we may imagine Nature as a ceaselessly flowing river of life, out of which the tiny atom of each man's individual life emerges into sight, stands out in the surrounding atmosphere, and is lost again in the infinite succession of the fresh waves of life into which it dissolves. The author's pre-eminence does not lie specifically in his psychological analysis of character, but in the delicate relation of his characters to the whole environment – to the whole mirage of life in which their figures are seen to move. Thus, the character drawings *per se* of Mrs. Gould and Dr. Monygham, Captain Mitchell and old Viola, though admirable studies, cannot be called deeply original creations; but their human significance is great if we consider them as figures which serve as arresting points by which we can focus the character of the national drama around them and so penetrate to the larger drama of Nature. Thus, while the psychology of certain characters, as Charles Gould, Decoud, and Nostromo himself, is indeed not always clear and convincing, when we take the figure of Mrs. Gould and analyse the effect made on us by the vision of her exquisite and gracious nature,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

moving 'with her candid eyes very wide open, her lips composed into a smile,' amid the electric and sullen atmosphere of this South American town, weighed down by the ever-hanging menace of her husband's danger, ministering to all the world in turn seeking her ear, while conscious in secret that her husband, in his fanatical devotion to the interests of the San Tomé mine, has surrendered, merged, and lost sight of his love for her – if we consider the spirit of this woman we shall recognize how exquisitely just is the author's sense of perspective which has led him to place her so that, like a figure in a landscape, she serves as the gleam of light against the sombre and threatening horizon. And so against the devotion to duty of Giorgio Viola, the old Garibaldian hero, the Spanish-American revolutionary rabble of Sulaco shows up 'sullen, thievish, vindictive and bloodthirsty.' And thus against the wooden-headed unimaginativeness of the Britisher, Captain Mitchell, the hard-headed idealism of Charles Gould, and the gloomy disillusionment of Dr. Monygham, the whole racial genius of this captivating and gracious South American land, semi-barbarous, with its old-world, Spanish traditions and its 'note of passion and sorrow,' stands forth triumphantly; and its atmosphere, which is, indeed, an artistic quintessence of both Central American and South American States, penetrates home to our European consciousness. And if this is so – and if in Mr. Conrad's art the whole mirage of Nature be everything, with its series of flowing scenes in which are reflected the subtly shifting tides of human emotion and human passion – we shall see why it is that the artistic imperfections of some of his figures

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

seem of curiously little importance. It is because with most writers the whole illusion of the scene is centred in their characters, but with Mr. Conrad the central illusion is the whole mirage of Nature, in which the figures are, strictly speaking, the human accessories. Thus in 'The Heart of Darkness,' that sinister presentment of the imbecility, the cruelty, and the rapacity of the white man in the Dark Continent, the effect is got by the tropical atmosphere of a savage environment dominating the white man's morale, and sapping him, body, mind, and soul. Thus in 'Lord Jim,' Jim's actions and words and thoughts are not nearly so convincing in themselves as the poetic conception of his figure placed by fate, and by the force of his momentary break-down, in the environment of the wanderer of the Eastern seas. It is not, indeed, essential to the author's spell over us that they should be. This great gift of Mr. Conrad's, his special sense of *the psychology of scene*, that he shares with certain of the great poets and the great artists who have developed it each on his own chosen lines, it is that marks him out for pre-eminence among the novelists. His method of poetic realism is, indeed, intimately akin to that of the great Russian novelists, but Mr. Conrad, often inferior in the psychology of character, has outstripped them in his magical power of creating the whole mirage of Nature. It is for this reason that we regret that the last two chapters describing Nostromo's death are included in the novel. Their touch of melodrama does violence to the evening stillness of the close. The narrative should have ended with the monologue of Captain Mitchell and the ironic commentary of Dr.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Monygham on the fresh disillusionment in store for the régime of 'Civilization' planted by European hands on the blood-stained soil of the Republic of Costaguana.

1904

(C) MR. CONRAD'S BASIS

The dominant impression left by 'Notes on Life and Letters' ¹ is the creative veracity of Mr. Conrad's mind. When moved by sympathy of understanding his critical appreciations are lucid, penetrating, and comprehensive, as his luminous pages on Daudet, Maupassant, Anatole France, and Turgenev, and his seamen's tributes to Marryat and Fenimore Cooper attest, but his temperament does not readily imbue itself with the atmosphere or follow the curves of other men's works, as the born critic's must do. In two cases Mr. Conrad does so; in that of Maupassant and that of Anatole France he bows his head in sympathy and in homage, and enters entirely within these masters' thresholds. His tribute to Turgenev is also a beautiful thing in the spirit of its emotion, but the paper on Maupassant has the finality of perfect justice; nothing truer on him has been written. But when an author's platform or æsthetic basis does not please Mr. Conrad's temperament, as in the case of Mr. George Bourne's 'The Ascending Effort,' he obliterates it with his own *dicta*. Naturally, creative minds have their own prepossessions, and subjects are apt to be soils in which they propagate their own cuttings and grow their own exquisite flowers. We recognize this even in the sensitive paper on Henry

¹ *Notes on Life and Letters*, by Joseph Conrad, London, 1921.

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

James, which, while defining him as 'the historian of fine consciences,' yields only the most ghostly impression of that master's literary kingdom and individual temperament. This is not because Mr. Conrad does not bring to Henry James' work profound and discerning insight, but because his temperament bids him create something positively his own, something imbued with his own magic, his own artistic chiaroscuro. The born artist must be true to his own vision; the born critic to those of other men.

Mr. Conrad tells us in his preface that he is constitutionally unable to appear *en pantoufles*, and this may lead one to the secret of his temperament. His artistic sensibilities always lead him back to fundamentals, and the latter always reinforce his sensibilities. His hatred for lofty generalities and idealistic assumptions is because they violate the basis of artistic veracity; they do not spring from the feeling born of knowledge, from direct contact with life, but are like hot air, dissipated by the first keen wind of reality. And it is reality with which Mr. Conrad is concerned, the reality not only of the visible world without us, but of the obscure thoughts of our hearts. As an example of the searching penetration of his vision take his paper on 'Autocracy and War,' dated 1905, wherein he predicted the fall of the Russian autocracy; the Bolshevik revolution, 'a rising of slaves'; the era of capitalistic State Wars, 'the idea of ceasing to grow in territory, in strength, in wealth, in influence – in anything but wisdom and self-knowledge – is odious to them as the omen of the end'; and finally the warning, 'Russia weakened down to the second place or Russia eclipsed altogether during the throes

FRIDAY NIGHTS

of her regeneration will answer equally well the plans of German policy – “Le Prussianisme – violà L’ennemi!” The handwriting was on the wall, it may be said. Yes, but there were many inscriptions on many walls, fragmentary and contradictory, and Mr. Conrad by his grasp of fundamentals, by the force of his ruthless sincerity and fine scepticism, by the depths of his conviction and of his prejudices if you like, pieced that script together and read it correctly.

Artistic veracity – *i.e.*, veracity to the forces of life within and without us – is Mr. Conrad’s basis. And, never leaving go of the fundamentals, he brings into play, with grace and ease, all the qualities of his temperament. For a brilliant piece of swordplay, uncanny in its bravura, note how in ‘The Censor of Plays’ he advances on that unhappy functionary and cuts off his head. The feat is accomplished in an address of ironical raillery that leaves ‘the grotesque thing nodding its mandarin head’ helpless at our feet. And it is only that this ‘obscure, hollow, Chinese monstrosity ornamented with Mr. Stiggins’s plug hat and cotton umbrella by its anxious grandmother the State’ is, as Mr. Conrad asserts, ‘an utterly unconscious being’ that the Censorship still survives! This brilliant concentration on the bases of things is accompanied by a concentration of feeling from which is born – style. It is not for nothing that Mr. Conrad cannot appear *en pantoufles*. If he risked himself outside the territories and marked boundaries of his art he would be false to his creative veracity. His feeling born of knowledge and intimate perception *is* his manner. And it would be to break Prospero’s wand, for

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

him to write uninspired by the force of his sincerity, from which his vision proceeds. No, Mr. Conrad cannot appear *en pantoufles*. It is against his nature. It is not to our interest.

1921



(A) DOUGHTY'S 'ARABIA DESERTA'

This paper, which in its original form appeared in *The Academy*, 1902, was adapted in 1908 to form the introduction to the abridged edition, 'Wanderings in Arabia.'

LEST I be suspected by men who do not know 'Arabia Deserta' of too great a partiality for it, let me here quote the critical estimate of Mr. D. G. Hogarth, whose knowledge of the literature of the subject is probably unrivalled among modern Englishmen. In his work 'The Penetration of Arabia' (London, 1904) Mr. Hogarth says:

'No one has looked so narrowly at the land and the life of Arabia as Doughty, and no one has painted them in literature with a touch so sensitive, so sincere and so sure. And not only Bedawin life, of whose hardships he suffered the last, wandering as one poorer than the poorest, but also the life of the oasis towns of Nejd.

Right Elizabethan or not, no word of Doughty's best description of the desert and the desert folk can be spared. Each falls inevitably and indispensably to its place, as in all great style; and each strikes full and true on every reader who has seen, be it ever so little, the dusty steppe and the black booths of hair. One can do Doughty's pregnant pages no justice by quotation; but, for an example, lest I seem to praise him overmuch without book, let me offer this to any one who has had experience of the camel.'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

After citing a passage Mr. Hogarth continues:

‘Yet this no better picture than a hundred others you may find in that Georgic of the desert. Therein one sees not so much particular scenes as types; even as, on reading Doughty’s personal adventures, one feels him to be less an individual than a type of all his kind undergoing a certain trial of spirit. His book belongs to that rare and supreme class in which the author speaks not for himself, but for all who might find themselves in like case.’

No critical estimate could sum up better than the above the characteristics of ‘Arabia Deserta.’

And it is ‘for the sake of the appeal that this great book should make to a wider audience than the few who feel enthusiasm for Arab things’ that I have sought and obtained the author’s sanction to make the abridgment of his narrative here presented.¹ It is, indeed, in the conviction that the book has only to become known to the English public to be hailed by all for what it is – a masterpiece second to none in our literature of travel – that I have attempted the task of abridgment. And here the writer must confess that he knows no other book of travel which makes him so proud that the author is an Englishman. Gentleness, courage, humanity, endurance, and the insight of genius, these were the qualities that carried Doughty safely through his strange achievement of adventuring alone, a professed Christian, amid the fanatical Arabians. That he proclaimed his race and faith wherever he went is a supreme testimony to the firmness of his spirit and to the

¹ *Wanderings in Arabia*. Duckworth and Co., 1908.

magnetism of a frank and mild nature that evoked so often in response the humanity underlying the Arabs' fanaticism. His narrative, indeed, testifies how much milk of human kindness the solitary stranger could count upon finding in the breast of all but the most fanatical Mohammedans. But it is surely less the author's valuable discoveries than the intense human interest of his book that will bring him enduring fame? What an unforgettable picture it is, that of this Englishman of an old-fashioned stamp adventuring alone for many long months in the deserts of Arabia, going each day not very sure of his life, yet obstinately proclaiming to all men, to sheykhs and shepherds, to fanatical tribesmen in every encampment, that he is a Nasrâny, a Christian! With a pistol hidden in his bosom, and a few gold pieces in his purse, with a sack of clothes and books and drugs thrown on the hired camel of his rafîks, or wandering guides, he goes onward, a quiet man of peace, a scholar of scholars, applying his stores of learning to interpret all the signs and tokens of the Bedouins' life, gaining thereby a draught of camel's milk in the sickness of exhaustion, and now drawing on himself an Emir's irony by his rough bluntness of speech. He goes, this good man, this Englishman, alone into the heart of hostile Arabia, insularly self-conscious yet lost in the sensation of his adventurings, keenly alive to every sight and sound, very shrewd in his calculations, often outwitted and sometimes spitefully treated, a great reader of men's characters, always trusting in God, yet keeping a keen watch on the Arabians' moods; and as he journeys on, this scholar, geologist, archæologist, philologist, and anti-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Mohammedan, we see Arabia as only a genius can reveal it to us; we see, hear, and touch its people as our most intimate friends. And all these Arabs' characters, daily cares, occupations, pleasures, worries, their inner and outer selves, are closer to us than are the English villagers living at our own doors. It is a great human picture Doughty has drawn for us in 'Arabia Deserta,' and not the least testimony to the great art of the writer is that we see him in the Arabians' minds. But wherever the wandering Englishman goes he cannot stay long. He must move on. From town to village, from village out into the wilderness, from Nomad's tent to Nomad's tent he is carried, fetched, dropped, left by the wayside by his uneasy rafîks. The fingers of the most fanatical itch to cut the Nasrânî's throat, but with the chief sheykhs and the rich elders of the towns it is an instinct of living graciousness and humanity to shelter him, show him true hospitality, and drive away the mob of base-born fellows clamouring at the stranger's heels. So Doughty makes strong friends wherever he journeys, finds kindly shelter with liberal-hearted hosts who love to sit and question him about the wonders of the Western world, and hear him speak his learned mind on Eastern ways; until at last, a little tired of the Nasrânî's power of sitting still, tired of the constant clamour of the town, and of their own growing unpopularity because they shelter him, they open suddenly some postern gate, pack the Nasrânî and his saddle-bags upon some worthless beast, and send him forth into the desert with some brutish serving-man to act as faithless guide. So Doughty goes, protected by the stars, by his own shrewd weakness, by chance and

by his sturdy obstinacy; he goes quite safe, yet ever in jeopardy, trusting in Arab human nature, and in his own command of Arab lore, yet humanly alarmed and ready to cry out when his fanatical companions eye his bulging saddle-bags and feel the edges of their knives.

The style in which Doughty brings before us a mirage of the strange wilderness of the upland stony deserts of Arabia, a land of rocky lava drifts girt in by savage crater pits and interspersed here and there with green valley oases, where villages and walled towns have been built because there, only there is water, — the style by which Doughty communicates to us the strange feeling of his traveller's days and nights, his hourly speculations and agitations, his inner strength, his muttered doubts, his own craft and purpose, is the style of a consummate master of English. Many are the travellers and few are the styles. Palgrave's style is flat and colourless and tame beside Doughty's; Burton's style is ordinary, vigorous, commonplace. Doughty has surely succeeded better than any other English traveller in fashioning a style and forging and tempering it so as to bring the reader into intimate contact with the character of the land he describes, while contrasting with it artistically the traveller's racial spirit. Doughty forges and smelts words as only a learned man can; he goes back to the Old Testament for a plain, smiting simplicity of speech; he lifts straight from the Arabic the names of the creatures, the plants that Arabia has fashioned in her womb, the names for the weapons, the daily objects, the slang and the oaths that are in the mouth of the Arab. And into this rich medley of idioms he mixes the old

FRIDAY NIGHTS

English words, the Norse words he loves as only a cunning craftsman in language can. He is an artist therein, for the main vision his book leaves on the mind is that of a stubborn latter-day Norseman (mixed with the blood of an Old English cleric) adventuring forth amid the quick-witted, fierce, fanatical, kindly and fickle Arabians. Doughty's style is that of a man with a great instinct for the shades of language; his vocabulary is very rich and racy. If there be a spice or more of affectation in his speech, we welcome it as a characteristic ingredient in the idiomatic character of the whole.

1902-1908

(B) 'ARABIA DESERTA' REDIVIVA¹

The wheel has come full circle by the republication in its entirety of this great travel book, the greatest surely in the English language. Two editions of a great classic have been called for in thirty-three years!

It is a strange history, this neglect of 'Arabia Deserta,' and one that for book lovers is shadowed with a curious irony. The original edition, published in 1888 by the Cambridge Press, though known to all Arabic scholars, lay long on the shelves of the warehouse, unregarded. The grudging review that appeared in the 'Athenæum' was a masterpiece of the reviewer's art of suppression. My curiosity was aroused one day by hearing from Mr. Sidney Cockerell that William Morris kept the book by his bed-

¹ *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. By Charles M. Doughty. Introduction by T. E. Lawrence. Two vols. Medici Society and Jonathan Cape. Nine guineas.

side, so that he might dip into it at night, and refresh himself from its well of noble, archaistic style. I procured a copy and lost myself for many days and nights, as every reader must, wandering with Doughty on his lonely and perilous adventuring among the desert tribes.

'Arabia Deserta' is not a book: it is a continent. I wrote a eulogy on the book, in the 'Academy,' nearly twenty years ago, a eulogy which no man regarded. Years passed, and one day Mr. Doughty, with my article and his great epic 'The Dawn in Britain' in his hand, appeared in the publishers' office in which I was then working. And so it was that the abridged edition, 'Wanderings in Arabia,' appeared, and the English world at last paid a long-delayed meed of tribute to our greatest traveller. But still no publisher was wise or bold enough to reissue that king book in its entirety, which just before 1907 had exhausted the first small edition. Nay, 'Arabia Deserta' would still be unprocureable but for the Great War.

The book, Colonel Lawrence, second only to Doughty in his achievements in Arabia, tells us:

'Arabia Deserta,' which had been a great joy to read, as a great record of adventure and travel (perhaps the greatest in the language), and the great picture-book of nomad life, became a military text book, and helped to guide us to military victory in the East.'

It is said that the War Office was on the point of reprinting the book as indispensable to officers shortly before the unexpected victory in 1919 crowned our arms. In one aspect this is touching, and no tribute could well be

FRIDAY NIGHTS

more grateful to Doughty, the most patriotic of Englishmen; but in another aspect, that of our interest in humanity, white, black, or brown, and of our natural pride in the great Englishman's achievements, how significant it is that it needs a war, and all the benefits of Imperial loot, to spur our countrymen to passing knowledge of a masterpiece of literature. For if Colonel – I mean Mr. – Lawrence had not bestirred himself in earnest, one may doubt if 'Arabia Deserta' would have been republished in this generation.

And the irony cuts deeper. While the road to Persia is littered with derelict British barracks and canteens and swimming-baths – the abandoned glories of Lord Curzon's policy – while the British name is blackened throughout Mesopotamia by our perfidy and cruelty to the natives, to whom we pledged our faith, Colonel Lawrence tells us:

'Doughty was the first Englishman they (the Arabs) had met. He predisposed them to give a chance to other men of his race because they found him honourable and good. So he broke a road for his religion. He was followed by Mr. Wilfrid Blunt and Miss Gertrude Bell, other strong personalities. They confirmed the desert in its view of Englishmen, and gave us a privileged position which is a grave responsibility upon all who follow them. Thanks to them an Englishman finds a welcome in Arabia, and can travel, not indeed comfortably, for it is a terrible land, but safely over the tracks which Doughty opened with such pains. No country has been more fortunate in its ambassadors. We are accepted as worthy persons unless we prove ourselves the contrary by our own misdoings. This

is no light monument to the memory of a man who stamped so clear an impression of his virtue on a nomad people in the casual journeyings of two years.' – P. xxvii.

'They gave us a privileged position which is a grave responsibility upon all who follow them'! Fortunately for the Arabians no oil has been located hitherto in their deserts! And if it ever be, the 'mandates' will go swiftly forth among the Christian Powers, and the chiefs of the desert tribes will be hanged high at the gates of their towns, as our Indian Army satraps have hanged the Mesopotamian tribesmen.

Colonel Lawrence's introduction is worthy of this king book among travels. He testifies: 'The more you learn of Arabia, the more you find in "Arabia Deserta." The more you travel there the greater your respect for the insight, judgment, and artistry of the author. . . . It is the first and indispensable work upon the Arabs of the desert. . . .

'The book has no date and can never grow old. Every student of Arabia wants a copy. . . . Doughty's completeness is devastating. There is nothing we could take away, little we could add. He took all Arabia for his province, and has left to his successors only the poor part of specialists. . . . The realism of the book is complete. . . . It is a book which begins powerfully, written in a style which has apparently neither father nor son, so closely wrought, so tense, so just in its words and phrases, that it demands a hard reader.'

And this king book lay upon the shelves of the Cam-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

bridge Press in practical oblivion for sixteen years! The price for possessing it has trebled since 1888. You must pay for it now the price of a woman's fashionable French hat or a suit of West End clothes, or of fifteen bottles of watered whisky. One wonders how many rich, patriotic Englishmen will find the book 'beyond their means.' After all, it is only a book! Only a book by a great Englishman, though it holds within it, as Colonel Lawrence says: 'All the desert, its hills and plains, the lava fields, the villages, the tents, the men and animals . . . the true Arabia, the land with its smells and dirt, as well as its nobility and freedom.' Still, for your rich profiteering, patriotic Englishman, it is only a book.

1921

(C) MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS ¹

A curious study might be made of the early efforts of men of genius whose inborn forces have long struggled with an environment of æsthetic fashions and traditions to which they are hostile. Luckily, genius is like a winged seed which floats, on favouring airs, past many obstacles till it finds a congenial soil to nurture it, and Mr. Doughty's was determined by his early wanderings in Arabia, and by his ambition, conceived in youth, to create for his own

¹ *The Dawn in Britain*. By Charles M. Doughty. Vols. I-VI. London: Duckworth and Co., 1906.

Adam Cast Forth. A sacred Drama. By Charles M. Doughty. London: Duckworth and Co., 1908.

The Cliffs. By Charles M. Doughty. London: Duckworth and Co., 1909.

MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS

country a national epic, which, in style and texture of language, should derive from the ancient roots and stem of the English tongue, and not from those latter-day grafts which, to the critical taste of some, bear doubtful fruit. Of the language of 'Travels in Arabia Deserta' a critic, Mr. Hogarth, has said, 'It has the precision and inevitableness of great style . . . it must be allowed that archaistic effort, sustained by Doughty's genius through more than a thousand pages of his "Arabia Deserta," is curiously in keeping . . . with the primeval society he set himself to describe.'

The implication here that our modern literary language cannot boast of a style of austere force is just. Modern English, which has long shed hundreds of simple idioms and a great part of the racy vocabulary that was in familiar use from Chaucer's to Shakespeare's time, exhales the uncertain atmosphere of a complicated civilization. It is, therefore, folly in the critic to complain that the linguistic horizon of Mr. Doughty's epic is not bounded by the practice of our poets of to-day or of yesterday. The subject itself precludes it. The extraordinary feat of conjuring up before our eyes the struggle of the Celtic and Teutonic aristocracies of barbaric Europe against the Roman arms (B.C. 450—A.D. 50) is one that only a great genius, confident in its resources, could have planned and achieved. But it could not have been accomplished before our period. Though many generations of scholars and students have cultivated with assiduity the fields of archæology, philology, and folklore, the right of the latter to rank as exact sciences is but recent. Mr. Doughty has surveyed this

FRIDAY NIGHTS

enormous field of research, and the fabric of his epic is built upon the knowledge of the life of our barbaric forbears, unearthed by the labours of a great band of scholars. As for the language in which the vision of 'The Dawn in Britain' is embodied, it is obvious that there is no instrument in the whole armoury of our English poets, ancient or modern, that could fittingly have moulded it. A new weapon had to be forged, and Mr. Doughty's blank verse, concentrated and weighty, great in its sweep and range, rich in internal rhythms, if sometimes labouring, and sometimes broken, is the product of his theme, a theme of heroic strife, vast and rugged as a mountain range, titanic in breadth and in savage depth of passion. As a critic, Mr. Edward Thomas says, 'The test of a style is its expressiveness and its whole effect,' and one might as well criticize what Mr. Doughty's style expresses as the style itself, *e.g.*, the face of the primeval landscape with its dense forests and boggy valleys, marshlands and fens, the tribal settlements in stockaded villages, raths and dunes, and rude walled towns, or the battles, sieges, tumults, famines, the shock of racial invasions, the dynastic customs and religious rites, the poetic myths and legends, the marriage feasts, and funeral ceremonies of this barbaric civilization in all its uncouth wildness and rude dignity. The heroic grandeur and strange wild beauty of this great pageant of life, resolving swiftly into new changing forms, are conveyed to us in a style that makes no concessions to the indolent reader.

One of his critics, Mr. R. C. Lehmann, has asked, 'What reason was there, either in the nature of things, or in the purpose of the book, which could compel Mr.

MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS

Doughty to this violent excess of archaism, to this spasmodic arrangement of truncated phrases with all their baldness of expression and strenuous inversion of order?' The answer to this is, simply, that you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs, and that if the style can bring before us by direct poetic images the mysterious forces of elemental nature, the clash of nations in conflict, the physical character and spiritual breath of a thousand varied scenes, that style, with its 'obscurities,' 'inversions,' 'baldness,' 'mannerisms,' 'truncated phrases' and what not, is a style of epic greatness. So unerring is the force of the author's imagination, so mysterious his creative insight, that in the whole twenty-four books of his epic there is not a single event narrated that we do not accept and believe in as implicitly as though it had passed before our eyes. All has the inevitableness and actuality of nature. And we dare not question the artistic method, even in the broken waters of truncated phrases and obscurities, or in the prosaic stretches of the narrative, any more than we can hope to smooth away the lines from a man's face and yet retain its character.

Mr. Doughty's verse raises questions of vital interest to-day when so many modern poets by their predilection for the rarefied moods of cloistered emotions, by their retreat into æsthetic sanctuaries and inner shrines, shut out the common air and life, and abandon character and gesture in order to create cunningly carven images. Poetry, always a matter of high artifice, grows pale and languid as a plant which is sheltered indoors from the forces of wind and weather. Without the constant revolt of the great, free

FRIDAY NIGHTS

spirits who are the innovating forces in art, against the petrifying tendency of tradition, we know that the fairway of the main channel would gradually be silted up by time. Mediæval Irish poetry, for example, after its fresh and forceful youth, stagnated for centuries, sinking to the level of a mere game of skill in metrical technique. Mr. Doughty's verse shows life, movement and interplay of character and spontaneous force, in a measure that transcends the example of all but the great immortals. Its rugged, strange, uncouth beauty, repellent at first sight, bears with it an air of actuality that soon weakens a reader's taste for the smoother, more graceful styles of verse. The strangeness of the achievement is that the author has preserved the flow and stress of real life on the scale of epic grandeur. Even Cæsar Claudius, the unready epicurean, trembling at the din of battle, shows that mysterious vitality which the great artists always stamp upon their portraits. It is the spirit of a man, the genius of the people or place, the essence and atmosphere of things visible and invisible that Mr. Doughty paints with intensity and force, and with such breadth and freedom of handling as to impair, by comparison, creations of admirable artifice but of less character. Examine, for example, this speech of Cæsar Claudius at the banquet of Asiaticus, his host, and note how the genius of Roman civilization, its imperial outlook and the flavour of patrician luxury are all here together in twenty lines:

'Good is this loaf, of sheaf reaped by our soldiers!
We also some will fraught in ship, to Rome.

MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS

Which grind shall Briton captives, and thereof
Be loaves set, on all tables, in Rome's streets;
What day to Rome's citizens, we shall make,
(As erewhile *divus* Julius), triumph-feast.
Thy maidens, Friend, be like to marble nymphs,
Praxiteles, fecht to Rome, those which
Stand in *impluvium* of our golden house:
Swift Cynthia's train, with silver bows; that seem,
And rattling quivers, on their budded breasts,
Leaping their high round flanks, on crystal feet,
Follow, with loud holloa! the chase in heaven.
This, which beside me, my Valerius, hath
So bright long hair-locks like ringed wiry gold,
And gracious breast, whereon sit wooing doves,
Meseems that famous Cnidian Aphrodite,
Great goddess mother of our Julian house;
Whereby now Thermæ Agrippæ are adorned.

What damsel! mix me cup of Lesbian wine;
And give, with kiss of Venus' lips, of love.
Ha, these, that skill not of our Latin tongue,
Hold scorn of Cæsar, Asiaticus!

And, again, in the following passage, note how the wind of shameful adversity that Caratacus knew when led through the streets of Rome at Claudius' triumph, blows in our face so that we behold him with our eyes of the Roman populace, and feel with the sad and scornful hearts of the captive Britons:

'Loud trumpets sound! Much insolent concourse is
Descended, in Rome's way of mingled speech;

FRIDAY NIGHTS

(For flow the world's offscourings now by Rome,
Wherein are infinite slaves of many wars.)
Stand on all foot-ways, Rome's proud citizens,
Ranged; 'bove when framed be scaffolds, in long rows;
Where sit patricians, and Rome's senators;
And ambassades, with purpled magistrates;
Women look proudly on from every porch,
Stairs, pillared temples. Other throng house-tops;
Where great Britannic King, Caractacus,
Their Sacred Way along, towards his death,
Shall pass. He cometh, lo, chained, like savage beast!
Afoot. With him fares Embla; and twixt them both,
Their little daughter traces, Maid-of-Kent.
His brethren peers, come after, in Rome-street.
As on Jugurtha bound, all Romans gaze
On thee; (with ribald jests they mock thy looks,)
Sword-of-the-gods, divine Caractacus!
Great King Cunobelin's scythe-cart then is seen;
Wherein war-kings of Britain wont to ride.
It draw forth, teamed, six tall young noble Britons,
War-captives! and winged dragon seemed the beam;
With vermeil shining scales. The bilge is full
Of dints; yet seen distained with battle-blood!
The wheels seem running eagle's claws, of bronze.
And men those barbare brazen hooks behold,
Whereon were wont be hanged, in every field
The off-hewed polls, of chief slain ones of Romans!
Was taken that royal cart at Camulodunum;
Wherein is reared now of Cunobelin,
Broad sun-bright targe, and hauberk of Manannan,

MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS

The shrieking Briton axe-tree, of hard bronze
Rumbles, not washt, with scab of battle-dust,
And rotten gore, on, dread, through mighty Rome;
And thereon gazing, shrink the hearts of Romans;
That fear again the antique Gauls of Brennus!
Thereafter, four-wheel Briton chariots drawn
Are. March tall young men captives of the Isle,
Beside; upholding barbare glittering ensigns.
Those wains pass forth, behanged with painted shields,
Of island peoples vanquished in the wars.
Gleam war-horns, in the first, and long iron glaives:
Bound, in the next, lo, thraves of bronze head spears.
Passeth forth god-like, pale, Caractacus,
(Whose only arm a nation's shelter was!)
Betrayed, not taken, in wars; midst dog-faced press.
The Briton King, erect, magnanimous,
Vouchsafes not them behold. The strings have pierced,
Of ire, his noble breast; proud sorrow slays.
On Embla's looks, long-time, all Romans gaze
Though she, from prison-pit, came lean and wan;
So fair a woman's face is none in Rome.
Her tresst locks part are wounden, like to crown,
Upon her noble front; part, backlong hang,
Like veil of gold. She, sad-faced Britain's queen,
Hath a royal majesty, in her countenance!
Like snowdrop pale, (the innocent oppressed!)
Their maiden child, she leads on by the hand.'

The noble simplicity of the style here bears with it the atmosphere of inevitability, of things seen, suffered and

FRIDAY NIGHTS

lived through. We must repeat, however, that the appeal of the style lies in the cumulative effect of the whole image; and what wealth there is in the strange spiritual depths of this human ocean! To take one Book only out of the twenty-four: Book XX unfolds the shipwreck of Britain's fortunes, the agony of Caractacus, his night frenzy in the grave-fields, his capture by the plotted treachery and subtle spells of Cartismandua, the harlot queen, the madness and punishment of her paramour, Prince Velloclatus, the transportation of Caractacus and his queen overseas, and their incarceration in the prison-pit of Servius Tullius. Another perhaps more amazing feat of the poet's imagination is the wild passage in which Belisama, the British goddess, incites the warrior Camulus to save Caractacus. We know nothing in literature like this, in its astounding insight into the conceptions of a primitive society.

It is not by subject, not by his form merely, that we must rank a poet, but by the original creative force and beauty of his whole vision. In 'The Cliffs,' a modern drama of the invasion of England by a fleet of Dreadnoughts, and aerial ships of a hostile European Power, Mr Doughty shows as great imaginative insight in his treatment of an old shepherd, a Crimean veteran walking the shore by night, and of the strife of factitious politicians in Parliament, as in his picture of Caractacus in Rome. The sharp, homely pathos of the veteran's memories of the trenches, the biting satiric invective and fantastic mercilessness of the picture of the politicians, the aerial delicacy and poetic humour of the elves' marriage, all this is great poetry, poetry that seizes on the spiritual essences of human

MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS

life and feeling and weaves them into an original tissue of rich imagery. We do not claim that 'The Cliffs' is an achievement comparable with 'The Dawn in Britain.' 'The Cliffs' is a poem written with a patriotic purpose, and wherever the purpose becomes obtrusive, as in certain speeches of the invading foreigners on the Anglian cliff, and in the last sixty pages of the poem describing how news is brought of the repulse and retreat of the invading foe, winding up with the patriotic 'Te Deum' of 'Sancta Britannia' which is sung by the English villagers, the vicar and all good Englishmen, we drop abruptly from poetry to prose, and the effect is the more marked, since it is not the details that are unfit for poetic treatment, but the vision that has grown ordinary in spirit and imagery through over-accentuation of the national, patriotic purpose. Extraordinary in its marred, imperfect achievement as is 'The Cliffs,' one has only to place it beside 'Adam Cast Forth' to see that the latter in imaginative intensity and creative loftiness is the crown of the poet's creations. In sublimity, in native austerity, in the qualities of elemental awe and pity, the sacred drama of the earthly fate of Adam and Eve, after they have been cast forth from Eden, vies with the Miltonic drama. The Judæo-Arabian legend on which 'Adam Cast Forth' is founded is, no doubt, a product of the same deserts from which the awful Monotheism of the Bible sprang. After the whirling fiery blast of Sarsar, the rushing tempest of God's wrath has reft Adam and Adama [Eve] apart, Adam is hurled over sharp rocks, and buffeted through thickets of thorns to desolate Harisuth, the sweltering land of fiery dust and burning stones, a sun-beat

FRIDAY NIGHTS

wilderness; where he lies, blackened and sightless, fed by ravens for a hundred years, bowed to the scorching earth, in agony of bruised flesh, piteous and groaning. The drama opens with the appearance of Ezriel, the Angel of the Lord's Face, who tells of the Lord's mercy. Now to the blinded man comes Adama, whom he recognizes by her voice, and entreats that she will bind their bodies together so that he may not lose her again. The originality and exquisite quality of the poem lie in the contrast between the naked sublimity of the awful landscape, this waterless, sun-blackened, high, waste wilderness over which broods the Wrath of God of the Hebraic conception, and the pitiable defencelessness of the 'naked and simple fleshling Adam.' We have said that 'Adam Cast Forth' vies in sublimity with Milton's epic, and certainly not only is the picture of primeval Arabian landscape wrought with an austere force that no poet could command who had not himself known the horrors of its savage desolation, but the figure of Adam in elemental simplicity and force of outline, 'mixt of the baser ferment of beasts' flesh,' and 'the breath of the Highest,' is both a grander and more humanly credible 'world father' than the scholastic creation of Milton. In its dramatic development 'Adam Cast Forth' shows the inevitability of great art. A Voice proclaims that the years of Adam's punishment are ended, and Adama guides her helpmate to a palm-grove, where, bathing in a spring, he recovers sight and strength. To prove their hearts, 'Whether, indeed, ye will obey His Voice,' Adam and Adama are bidden to leave the valley of the Lord's Rest and journey perilously through Harisuth, the Land

MR. DOUGHTY'S POEMS

of the Lord's Curse. The narrative of their tormenting march and augmented sufferings among the glowing crags of this vast waste of desolation is inspired by a deep tenderness and pity for human sorrow, born of an extreme sensitiveness united to a natural austerity of vision. What is to be remarked in the character of all our author's works is this dualism of mind which penetrates into the spirit of all harsh and terrible forces in nature, and on the other hand sheds mild, beneficent and healing rays of loving kindness.

But we cannot hope here to indicate more than hastily the essential characteristics of Mr. Doughty's genius. And it is vexatious for our immediate purpose that in his poems every part is so subordinate to the effect of the whole that to separate a passage from the context is as though we were to break away a portion of a limb from a statue. The attentive reader may, however, judge, from the few lines subjoined, the archaic grandeur of 'Adam Cast Forth,' a poem that in simplicity and force stands beside the great poems of the antique world:

AUTUMN.

'Earth's fruit hangs ruddy on the weary bough.
In all the fallow field, the bearded herb,
Stands sere and ripened seed: fall russet leaves,
Cumbering clear brooks, which bitter flow thereof

STRIFE.

(Adam speaks his vision.)

'Ah, ah, Lord,
I see, in bands, Lord God! men with men, strive:

FRIDAY NIGHTS

As yester we the murmuring honey-flies
Have seen 'mongst the wild cliffs, for their sweet nests.
And full of teen were their vext little breasts.
Ah, and beat those down each other, to the ground!
And blood is on their staves, ah and sharp flint stones!
But Lord! when shall these things be?

1908

OSTROVSKY'S 'THE STORM'



UP to the years of the Crimean War Russia was always a strange, uncouth riddle to the European consciousness. It would be an interesting study to trace back through the last three centuries the evidence of the historical documents that our forefathers have left us when they were brought face to face, through missions, and commerce, with the fantastic life, as it seemed to them, led by the Muscovite. But in any chance record we may pick up, from the reports of a seventeenth-century embassy down to the narrative of an early nineteenth-century traveller, the note always insisted on is that of all the outlandish civilizations, queer manners and customs of Europeans, the Russians' were the queerest and those which stood farthest removed from the other nations'. And this sentiment has prevailed to-day, side by side with the better understanding we have gained of Russia. Nor can this conception, generally held among us, which is a half-truth, be removed by personal contact or mere objective study; for example, of the innumerable memoirs published on the Crimean War, it is rare to find one that gives us any real insight into the nature of the Russian. And the conception itself can only be amended and enlarged by the study of the Russian mind as it expresses itself in its own literature. The mind of the great artist, of whatever race he springs, cannot lie. From the works of Thackeray and George Eliot in England and Turgenev and Tolstoy in Russia, a critic penetrates into the secret places of the national life, where all the clever objective pictures of foreign critics must lead him astray.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Ostrovsky's drama, 'The Storm,' here translated for the English reader,¹ is a good instance of this truth. It is a revelation of the old-fashioned Muscovite life *from the inside*, and Ostrovsky thereby brings us in closer relation to that primitive life than was in the power of Tolstoy or Goncharov, or even Gogol, to bring us. These great writers have given us admirable pictures of the people's life as it appeared to them at the angle of the educated Westernized Russian mind; but here in 'The Storm' is the atmosphere of the little Russian town, with its primitive inhabitants, merchants, and workpeople, an atmosphere untouched, unadulterated by the *ideas* of any exterior European influence. It is the Russia of Peter the Great and Catherine's time, the Russian patriarchal family life that has existed for hundreds of years through all the towns and villages of Great Russia, that lingers indeed to-day in out-of-the-way corners of the Empire, though now invaded and much broken up by modern influences. It is, in fact, the very Muscovite life that so puzzled our forefathers, and that no doubt will seem strange to many English readers. But the special triumph of 'The Storm' is that although it is a realistic picture of old-fashioned Russian patriarchal life, it is one of the deepest and simplest psychological analyses of the Russian soul ever made. It is a very deep though a very narrow analysis. Katerina, the heroine, to the English will seem weak, and crushed through her weakness; but to a Russian she typifies revolt, freedom, a refusal to be bound by the cruelty of life. And her attitude,

¹ *The Storm*, by Ostrovsky. Translated by Constance Garnett. London, 1899.

OSTROVSKY'S 'THE STORM'

despairing though it seems to us, is indeed the revolt of the spirit in a land where Tolstoy's doctrine of non-resistance is the logical outcome of centuries of serfdom in a people's history. The merchant Dikoy, the bully, the soft characterless lover Boris, the idealistic religious Katerina, Kuligin the artisan, and Madame Kabanova, the tyrannical mother, all these are true national types, true Russians of the changing ages, and the counterparts of these people may be met to-day, if the reader takes up Tchekhov's tales. English people no doubt will find it difficult to believe that Madame Kabanova could so have crushed Katerina's life, as Ostrovsky depicts. Nothing, indeed, is so antagonistic to English individualism and independence as is the passivity of some of the characters in 'The Storm.' But the English reader's very difficulty in this respect should give him a clue to much that has puzzled Europeans, should help him to penetrate into the strangeness of Russian political life, the strangeness of her love of despotism. Only in the country that produces such types of weakness and tyranny is possible the fettering of freedom of thought and act that we have in Russia to-day. Ostrovsky's striking analysis of this fatalism in the Russian soul will help the reader to understand the unending struggle in Russia between the enlightened Europeanized intelligence of the few and the apathy of the vast majority of Russians who are disinclined to rebel against the crystallized conditions of their lives. Whatever may be strange and puzzling in 'The Storm' to the English mind, there is no doubt that the Russians hail the picture as essentially true. The violence of such characters as Madame Kabanova and Dikoy may be weakened

FRIDAY NIGHTS

to-day everywhere by the gradual undermining of the patriarchal family system now in progress throughout Russia, but the picture is in essentials a criticism of the national life. On this point the Russian critic Dobroliubov, criticizing 'The Storm,' says: 'The need for justice, for respect for personal rights, this is the cry . . . that rises up to the ear of every attentive reader. Well, can we deny the wide application of this need in Russia? Can we fail to recognize that such a dramatic background corresponds with the true condition of Russian society? Take history, think of our life, look about you, everywhere you will find justification of our words. This is not the place to launch out into historical investigation; it is enough to point out that our history up to the most recent times has not fostered among us the development of a respect for equity, has not created any solid guarantees for personal rights and has left a wide field to arbitrary tyranny and caprice.'

This criticism of Dobroliubov's was written in 1860, the date of the play; but we have only to look back at the internal history of Russia for the last thirty years to see that it too 'has not created any solid guarantees for personal rights, and has left a wide field to arbitrary tyranny and caprice.' And here is Ostrovsky's peculiar merit, that he has in his various dramas penetrated deeper than any other of the great Russian authors into one of the most fundamental qualities of the Russian nature – its innate fondness for arbitrary power, oppression, despotism. Nobody has drawn so powerfully, so truly, so incisively as he, the type of the 'samodour' or 'bully,' a type that plays a leading part in every stratum of Russian life. From Turgenev we

OSTROVSKY'S 'THE STORM'

learn more of the reverse side of the Russian character, its lack of will, tendency to weakness, dreaminess and passivity; and it is this aspect that the English find so hard to understand, when they compare the characters in the great Russian novels with their own idea of Russia's formidable power. The people and the nation do not seem to correspond. But the riddle may be read in the co-existence of Russia's internal weakness and misery along with her huge force, and the immense rôle she fills as a civilizing power. In 'The Storm' we have all the contradictory elements: a life strongly organized, yet weak within; strength and passivity, despotism and fatalism side by side.

The author of 'The Storm,' Alexander Ostrovsky (born in Moscow 1823, died 1886), is acknowledged to be the greatest of the Russian dramatists. He has been called 'a specialist in the natural history of the Russian merchant,' and his birth, upbringing, family connections and vocations gave him exceptional facilities for penetrating into the life of that class which he was the first to put into Russian literature. His best period was from 1850 to 1860, but all his work received prompt and universal recognition from his countrymen. In 1859 Dobroliubov's famous article, 'The Realm of Darkness,' appeared, analysing the contents of all Ostrovsky's dramas, and on the publication of 'The Storm' in 1860, it was followed by another article from the same critic, 'A Ray of Light in the Realm of Darkness.' These articles were practically a brief for the case of the Liberals, or party of Progress, against the official and Slavophil party. Ostrovsky's dramas in general are marked by intense sombreness, biting humour and merci-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

less realism. 'The Storm' is the most poetical of his works, but all his leading plays still hold the stage.

'The Storm' will repay a minute examination by all who recognize that in England to-day we have a stage without art, truth to life, or national significance. There is not a single superfluous line in the play: all is drama, natural, simple, deep. There is no *falsity*, no forced situations, no sensational effects, none of the shallow or flashy caricatures of daily life that our heterogeneous public demands. All the reproach that lives for us in the word *theatrical* is worlds removed from 'The Storm.' The people who like 'farcical comedy' and social melodrama, and 'musical sketches' will find 'The Storm' deep, forbidding and gloomy. The critic will find it an abiding analysis of a people's temperament. The reader will find it literature.

1899

MR. D. H. LAWRENCE AND
THE MORALISTS



THE instinct of men to moralize their actions, and of society to confine in a theoretical network of ethical concepts the whole heaving mass of human activities, is fundamental. The suspicion with which ethics views art – exemplified by Plato's casting of the poets out of the Republic – indicates men's unwillingness to let this framework of moral rules and social conventions (which bulges obligingly this way and that according to particular requirements) be challenged by æsthetic representations which may invalidate it. Both the Governments and the 'average citizen' are never quite easy about the activities of the artists and poets who are likely to be innovating forces. Thus a Byron or a Shelley may suddenly scatter far and wide, in their poems, the seeds of the French Revolution; or an Ibsen may appear whose 'Doll's House' may undermine the *bourgeois* conception of marriage; or a Tolstoy may arise, whose interpretation of Christian ethics may threaten the structure of the State. The efforts of the State or Society to stamp as 'immoral' powerful representations of life often as not recoil on the authorities' heads – as in the case of Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary.' Since the suppression of Mr. D. H. Lawrence's novel, 'The Rainbow,' last year in unusual circumstances, called forth a weighty testimonial to its merits from Mr. Arnold Bennett, I shall not here comment on the case. Certain

FRIDAY NIGHTS

books excite the ordinary mind unduly, and it was the unseemly scandal made over 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' and 'Jude the Obscure' that brought Thomas Hardy to lay down his magic wand of fiction. In glancing at Mr. Lawrence's two volumes of poems, I should like to indicate why his talent is one of the most interesting and uncompromising literary forces of the recent years.

Briefly, he is the poet-psychologist of instincts, emotions, and moods that it is needless to try and moralize. Society's network of ethical concepts is constantly challenged by the spectacle of our passionate human impulses. Take the spectacle of two armies of men struggling to destroy one another. Society moralizes their actions by the single word 'patriotism,' and glorifies slaughter by emphasizing their 'heroic' virtues. But other artists, such as Tolstoy and Garschin, arise whose pictures of war show us its crimes against Humanity.

But the more nakedly and vividly does the pure artist of Mr. Lawrence's type depict the slipping of the leash which holds in the animal impulses, and the more he catches the terror of scenes of carnage, the more does the ordinary man look askance at him. Why? Because the artist has torn aside the 'idealistic' veils which conceal the depths of the world of seething passions. But should the artist stamp with a terrible beauty the upheaval of these elemental emotions, what then? The moralists will be very wroth with him. It is difficult to moralize the beauty of passion and the leaping fire of the senses. Accordingly, the moralists try and turn the flank of such an artist by asserting

either that his work is without 'high ideals,' or that the æsthetic representation of such sensations is not art of 'high rank,' or that it has deleterious effects on the reader. But has it deleterious effects on our human consciousness? I believe that the true answer to such objectors – who are, to-day, legion – is that they do both literature and morals a grave disservice by striving to confine æsthetic representations within too narrow a circle, and that by seeking to fetter and restrain the artist's activities they cripple art's function of deepening our consciousness and widening our recognitions. If the Rev. S. P. Rowe has his place, so also has Boccaccio. We must not forget that the moralists have always special ends in view, and very little would be left us if they had had their will in every age and could to-day truncate and lop and maim literary and æsthetic classics at their pleasure. Euripides and Aristophanes, Rabelais, Molière, Voltaire, Marlowe, and Shakespeare, Fielding, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Sterne, Flaubert, Maupassant, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Whitman, T'chehov, Tolstoy himself – all have been condemned and charged with 'immoral' tendencies by the moralists, who may be answered shortly, 'Your conception of "the good" is too narrow. In your hands æsthetic delineations of the passions would become tame as domestic fowls.' Thus Art would thereby lend itself to the propagation of flat untruth. This, indeed, is what frequently happens in literature. Representations of life are over-idealized or over-moralized, as the 'heroic' aspects of War by the lyrical poets; and another class of artists, the realists, have to be called in to redress the balance and paint the terrible, bestial,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

heartrending side, which the European nations are experiencing to-day. And as with War, so with Love. Mr. Lawrence, by his psychological penetration into love's self-regarding impulses and passionate moods, supplements our 'idealistic' valuations of its activities and corrects their exaggeration by conventionalized sentiment. The 'idealistic' valuations of Love have their high abiding-place in literature, unassailable as in life; but, under cover of their virtual monopoly of our Anglo-Saxon attention, we see the literary field, to-day, covered with brooding swarms of sugary, sentimental erotics, artificial in feeling, futile and feeble and false as art. I am not concerned here to stigmatize these cheap sentimental sweets that cloy and vitiate the public palate, but to point out that their universal propagation coincides with a veiled hostility to the Beautiful, and the consequent impoverishment of our spiritual life. The harmful effects of the over-development of material progress with its code of utilitarian standards is shown by the artificial and parasitic position in which poetry and art are thrust in the modern community. Our poets and artists are kept, so to say, as a sect of *dilettanti*, apart, ministering to scholarly æstheticism or drawing-room culture, and are disregarded in the central stir and heat of worldly activities. And our spiritual life, bound up and entangled in the wheels and mechanism of our worldly interests, is conscious of being stunted, of being cheated of its rightful æsthetic enrichment. And the general abasement of Art in public eyes, its parasitic and artificial status run parallel with that vulgar aspersion cast on 'the life of the senses,' that is, of our sensuous perceptions, with the

implication that the latter are somehow or other divisible from our 'spiritual' life.¹ Which is absurd.

Mr. Lawrence in his two volumes, 'Love Poems, and Others' and 'Amores,' comes to-day to redress the balance. As a poet he rehabilitates and sets before us, as a burning lamp, passion – a word which, in the sense of ardent and tumultuous desire, has almost shed to the vulgar mind its original, enrooted implication of *suffering*. His love poems celebrate the cry of spirit to flesh and flesh to spirit, the hunger and thrill and tumult of love's desires in the whole whirling circle of its impetus from flame to ashes, its swift reaching out to the anguished infinity of warring nature, – his love poems, I say, restore to passion the creative rapture that glows in the verse of Keats. And his spiritual synthesis of passion's leaping egoism, its revolt against finite ties and limitations, its shuddering sense of inner disharmonies and external revulsions, its winged delight in its own motion, declare its superior intensity of vital energy to the poetry of most of his English contemporaries. I do not wish to exaggerate the qualities of Mr. Lawrence's verse. His range of mood is very limited, his technique is hasty, his vision turns inward, self-centred; but in concentration of feeling, in keenness, one might almost say in fierceness of sensation, he seems to issue from those tides of emotional energy which surge in the swaying ocean of

¹ In *A History of American Literature since 1870*, Prof. F. L. Pattee writes: 'Beauty to Keats is only that which brings delight to the senses . . . he turned in disgust from the England about him . . . to the world of sensuous delight where *selfishly* he might swoon away in a dream of beauty.' – !

FRIDAY NIGHTS

life. Shall we say that the source of his power is this quivering fire of intensity, which like a leaping flame at night in a garden throws back the darkness in a chiaroscuro of shapes and colours and movements, from the rustling earth to the starlit sky? So the poet's imagery is steeped in primary emotional hues, — moods of pity or cruelty, passionate yearning, sorrow, fear, tenderness, aching desire, remorse, anguish. This imagery springs direct from his sensations and is born of his momentary emotional vision, not of his cultivated, imaginative reflections, unlike that of the majority of our talented *dilettanti* poets. It carries with it to a remarkable degree the feeling, the atmospheric impression of nature in the passing moment. But we must quote an example:

A BABY ASLEEP AFTER PAIN.

‘As a drenched, drowned bee
Hangs numb and heavy from a bending flower,
So clings to me
My baby, her brown hair brushed with wet tears
And laid against her cheek;
Her soft white legs hanging heavily over my arm,
Swinging heavily to my movement as I walk.
My sleeping baby hangs upon my life,
Like a burden she hangs on me.
She has always seemed so light,
But now she is wet with tears and numb with pain
Even her floating hair sinks heavily,
Reaching downwards;

MR. D. H. LAWRENCE

As the wings of a drowned, drowned bee
Are a heaviness, and a weariness.'

This, so simple, so spontaneous, and apparently effortless, holds all the felicity of the moment in the emotional mood. And while psychologically true, the poet's rendering of a sensuous impression is most spiritual in its appeal. But here I must pause, and turn to some consideration of Mr. Lawrence's work in creative fiction.

II

It was evident to a critical eye that with 'The White Peacock' (1911) a new artistic force was stirring in fiction. Curiously, those qualities of 'realism' and 'naturalism' both, that had been solemnly exorcised with book, candle, and bell in many professorial admonitions, reappeared here in company with intense poetic susceptibility and with an evident delight in the exuberance of nature. There was nothing here of M. Zola's 'false naturalism' or of his 'scientific reporting'; on the contrary, the artist's fault lay in the unchastened vivacity of his thronging impressions and rioting emotions. The story, one of country life, traces at length the subtle degeneration of the young farmer, George, who, slow and inexperienced in woman's ways, takes the wrong girl to wife. The book, in its frank and unabashed imaginative fecundity and luxuriant colouring, is a baffling one: an extraordinary intimacy with the feminine love instincts is blended with untrammelled psychological interest in the gamut of the passions. But a certain over-bold, lush immaturity, a certain sprawling

FRIDAY NIGHTS

laxity of taste, confused the outlines. The youthful artist evidently did not know where to be silent, or how to select and concentrate his scenes. These faults were less in evidence in 'The Trespasser' (1912), the tale of a sensitive, frail, and ardent man's fleeting amour with a girl, superficial and cold in nature, who is dallying with passion. The same intense susceptibility to physical impressions, the same vibrating joy in sensuous feelings were repeated here in a solo on erotic strings. The atmosphere is heavy with the odour of meadow-sweet, which is suddenly dissipated by the shock of tragedy. Sigismund's suicide, and the settling down again of his forgetful suburban family into the tame stream of its *bourgeois* commonplaceness, are painted with inflexible sincerity and great psychological acumen. An occasional commonness both of language and tone is, however, at variance with the artist's intensity of perception. But Mr. Lawrence silenced his critics by his third novel, 'Sons and Lovers,' an epic of family life in a colliery district, a piece of social history on a large canvas, painted with a patient thoroughness and bold veracity which both Balzac and Flaubert might have envied. The central theme, an unhappy working-class marriage, a woman's struggle to rear her children while sustained by her strong puritanical spirit, develops later into a study of her maternal aversion to surrendering her son to another woman's arms. The theme is dissected in its innermost spiritual fibres with an unflinching and loving exactitude, while the family drama is seen against an impressive background of the harsh, driving realities of life in a colliery district. This novel is really the only one of any breadth

of vision in contemporary English fiction that lifts working-class life out of middle-class hands, and restores it to its native atmosphere of hard veracity. The mining people, their mental outlook, ways of life, and habits, and the woof of their domestic joys and cares, are contrasted with some country farming types in a neighbouring village, where the smoky horizon of industrialism merges, to the passionate eyes of a girl and boy in love, in the magic of quiet woods and pastures. The whole treatment is unerringly true and spiritually profound, marred a little by a feeling of photographic accuracy in the narrative and by a lack of restraint in some of the later love scenes. The main theme, a life-conflict between husband and wife, is handled again in a tragedy, 'The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd' (1914), a drama finely human in its passionate veracity. This is a study, intimately observed, of powerful primitive types, first shown with the hot breath of anger in the nostrils, and then with the starkness, pallor, and rigidity of death. Contrasted with the puerile frivolity and catchy sensationalism of the London stage, this drama stands like one of Meunier's impressive figures of Labour amid the marble inanities of a music-hall *foyer*. In his volume of short stories, 'The Prussian Officer' (1914), the intensity of the poet-psychologist's imagination triumphs over the most refractory material. Again it is the triumph of passion thrilling both flesh and spirit, making the material of life subservient to itself, forcing its way from smoky darkness to light through the eager cells of nature. Whether it be the sustained lust of cruelty in the rigid Prussian officer, or the flame of sick misery leaping to revenge in the heart of

FRIDAY NIGHTS

the young Bavarian orderly; or the cruel suspense and agony of pain in the mutual confession of love of the young miner and the vicar's daughter; or the bitterness of ironic regret of the lovers who have fallen asunder in 'The Shades of Spring'; or hate and suffering in a wife's reckless confession of her past in 'Shadow in the Rose Garden'; in each of the dozen tales it is the same poetic realization of passion's smouldering force, of its fusion of aching pleasure and pain in the roots of sexual life, and the same twinness of senses and soul in the gathering and the breaking waves of surging emotion.

And here is the secret of the individual quality and the definite limitations of Mr. Lawrence's vision. Like a tree on a hot summer noon, his art casts a sharp, foreshortened shadow. His characters do not pass far outside that enchanted circle of passion in and round which they move. That this circle is narrow compared with the literary field, say, of a Maupassant, is I think due to Mr. Lawrence's poetical intensity restricting his psychological insight. And his emotional intensity, again, is indissolubly one with his sensuous impressionability. And here we may pick up again the dropped thread of our opening remarks about the suspicion with which the moralists always view art. The attack on the literature of passions (and indirectly on sensuous beauty itself which feeds the passions) is generally conducted on the line of argument that such literature is in opposition to the 'higher and more spiritual' instincts of mankind. The answer is that each specimen of such literature can only be judged according to the relation and the equilibrium, established by the artist, between the

morality of nature and the morality of man. In the love life the struggle is endless between the fundamental instinct of sexual attraction and the narrowing instincts of worldly prudence and of family and social duty. In seeking to cripple or suppress the literature of the passions, the moralists are tipping up the 'idealistic' scale unduly to the detriment of the fundamental human instincts; and this reacts injuriously, just as does the ascetic vilification of the 'body,' on the spiritual life. The greater the triumph of materialism and industrial squalor in our commercialized society, the more contempt is poured on the 'world of sensuous delight' and the less regard paid to Art, Poetry, and æsthetic Beauty. So Keats is indicted, as we have seen, of 'selfishly swooning away in a dream of beauty!' And whom would the moralists who cut off the truthful delineation of the passions on the ground that such leads to sensuous indulgence – whom would the moralists put in Keats's place? This is what we ask also in the case of Mr. Lawrence's work, which, as I have said, restores to 'passion' shades of its original meaning of *suffering*. His lovers are not those bright young people of the popular novel whose idea of love seems to be inseparably connected with success and worldly prosperity and having a nice house and being envied by their neighbours. His lovers are shaken, they suffer; to them is revealed the significance of things: they have to pass through much and endure much in attaining or missing their passionate desire. Theirs are spiritual experiences, not merely 'sensuous gratification,' as the moralists so glibly phrase it. And therefore Mr. Lawrence's representation of the sensuous and animal strands

FRIDAY NIGHTS

and instincts in our nature needs, I say, no moralization. These elements exist, — they are, in a sense, the foundation on which our moral being has been slowly reared; and the artist who can draw (and few there are who can) a truthful representation of our passionate impulses, kept under or leaping into action, takes an indispensable place in literature. In the literature that explores, the relations between the morality of nature, as expressed in the activity of sexual feeling, and worldly conduct, Mr. Lawrence's fiction takes a high place. His story, 'Daughters of the Vicar,' is an admirable analysis of the frequent clash between the two; and the sketches called 'Second Best' and 'Shadow in the Rose Garden' re-establish the necessary equilibrium so flagrantly disturbed by the moralists in their exaltation of the 'idealistic' scale. Such studies, to which one may add 'The Christening' and 'The White Stocking,' at best made an appeal to our fundamental consciousness that 'the good' as conceived by the moralists confines to too narrow a circle our tides of emotional energies; and this vindication of 'passion' in these stories appears to take its rise in the instinct for racial health. But I have said enough on this head, and will only add that those critics who challenge the right to existence of such works of art might penetrate to a more vulnerable side if they left the road of 'morals' and took the path of 'taste.'

1916

RICHARD JEFFERIES' 'AMARYLLIS AT THE FAIR'¹



'THE book is not a novel' is a phrase often in the mouth of critics, who on second thoughts might, perhaps, add with less emphasis, 'it does not conform to the common type of novel.' Fortified, however, with that sense of rectitude that dictates conformity to our neighbours and a safe acquiescence in the mysterious movements of public taste, Victorian critics have exclaimed with touching unanimity – 'What a pity Jefferies tried to write novels! Why didn't he stick to essays in natural history!'

What a pity Jefferies should have given us 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' and 'After London'! This opinion has been propagated with such fervency that it seems almost a pity to disturb it by inquiring into the nature of these his achievements. Certainly the critics and their critical echoes are united. 'He wrote some later novels of indifferent merit,' says a gentleman in 'Chambers' Encyclopædia.' 'Has anyone ever been able to write with free and genuine appreciation of even the later novels?' echoes the voice of a lady, Miss Grace T'oplis, writing on Jefferies. 'In brief, he was an essayist and not a novelist at all,' says Mr. Henry Salt. 'It is therefore certain that his importance for posterity will dwindle, if it has not already dwindled, to that given by a bundle of descriptive selections. But these will occupy a foremost place on their particular shelf, the shelf at the head of which stands Gilbert, White and Gray,' says Mr.

¹ *Amaryllis at the Fair*, by Richard Jefferies. Introduction by Edward Garnett. New Edition, London, 1904.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

George Saintsbury. 'He was a reporter of genius, and he never got beyond reporting. Mr. Besant has the vitalizing imagination which Jefferies lacked,' says Mr. Henley in his review of Walter Besant's 'Eulogy of Richard Jefferies'; and again, 'They are not novels as he (Walter Besant) admits, they are a series of pictures. . . . That is the way he takes Jefferies at Jefferies' worst.' Yes, it is very touching, this unanimity, and it is therefore a pleasure for this critic to say that in his judgment 'Amaryllis at the Fair' is one of the very few later-day novels of English country life that are worth putting on one's shelf, and that to make room for it he would turn out certain highly-praised novels by Hardy which do not ring quite true, novels which the critics and the public, again with touching unanimity, have voted to be of high rank. But what is a novel? the reader may ask. A novel, says the learned Professor Annandale, is 'a fictitious prose narrative, involving some plot of greater or less intricacy, and professing to give a picture of real life, generally exhibiting the passions and sentiments, in a state of great activity, and especially the passion of love.' Well, 'Amaryllis at the Fair' is a fictitious prose narrative professing to give a picture of real life, and involving a plot of little intricacy. Certainly it exhibits the passions and sentiments in a state of great activity. But Mr. Henry Salt, whose little book on Jefferies is the best yet published, further remarks: 'Jefferies was quite unable to give any vivid dramatic life to his stories . . . his instinct was that of the naturalist who observes and moralizes rather than that of the novelist who penetrates and interprets; and consequently his rustic

RICHARD JEFFERIES

characters, though strongly and clearly drawn, do not live, as, for example, those of Thomas Hardy live. . . . Men and animals are alike mere figures in his landscapes.'

So far the critics. Jefferies being justly held to be 'no ordinary novelist,' it is inferred by most that something is wrong with 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' and the book is passed over in silence. But we do not judge every novel by the same test. We do not judge 'Tristram Shandy,' for example, by its intricate plot, or by its 'vivid drama,' we judge it simply as an artistic revelation of human life and by its humorous insight into human character. And judged by the same simple test, 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' we contend, is a living picture of life, a creative work of imagination of a high order. Iden, the unsuccessful farmer who 'built for all time, and not for the circumstances of the hour,' is a masterly piece of character drawing. But Iden is a personal portrait, the reader may object. Well, what about Uncle Toby? From what void did he spring? Iden, to our mind, is almost as masterly a conception, as broadly human a figure as Uncle Toby. And Mrs. Iden, where will you find this type of nervous, irritable wife, full of spiteful disillusioned love for her dilatory husband, better painted than by Jefferies? But Mrs. Iden is a type, not an individual, the reader may say. Excellent reader! and what about the Widow Wadman? She is no less and no more of an individual than is Mrs. Iden. It was a great feat of Sterne to create so cunningly the atmosphere of the Shandy household, but Jefferies has accomplished an artistic feat also in drawing the relations of the Idens, father, mother, and daughter. How true, how

FRIDAY NIGHTS

unerringly true to human nature is this picture of the Iden household; how delicately felt and rendered to a hair is his picture of the father's sluggish, masculine will, pricked ineffectually by the waspish tongue of feminine criticism. Further, we not only have the family's idiosyncrasies, their habits, mental atmosphere, and domestic story brought before us in a hundred pages, easily and instinctively by the hand of the artist, but we have the whole book steeped in the breath of English spring, the restless ache of spring that thrills through the nerves, and stirs the sluggish winter blood; we have the spring feeling breaking from the heavens, and the March earth in copse, meadow, ploughland as it has scarcely been rendered before by an English novelist. The description of Amaryllis running out into the March wind to call her father from his plot planting to see the daffodil; the picture of Iden pretending to sleep in his chair that he may watch the mice; the description of the girl Amaryllis watching the crowd of ugly men of the countryside flocking along the road to the fair; the description of Amadis the invalid, in the old kitchen among the stalwart country folk – all these pictures and a dozen others in the book are painted with a masterly hand. Pictures! the critical reader may complain. Yes, pictures of living men and women. What does it matter whether a revelation of human life is conveyed to us by pictures or by action so long as it is conveyed? Mr. Saintsbury classes Jefferies with Gray, presumably because both writers have written of the English landscape. With Gray! Jefferies in his work as a naturalist and observer of wild life may be classed merely for convenience with

RICHARD JEFFERIES

Gilbert White. But this classification only applies to one half of Jefferies' books. By his 'Wild Life in a Southern County' he stands beside Gilbert White; by his 'Story of My Heart' he stands by himself, a little apart from the poets; and by 'Amaryllis at the Fair' he stands among the half-dozen country writers of the century whose work is racy of the English soil and of rural English human nature. I will name three of these writers, Barnes, Cobbett, Waugh, and my attentive readers can name the other three.

To come back to 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' why is it so masterly, or, further, wherein is it so masterly? the curious reader may inquire. 'Is it not full of digressions? Granted that the first half of the "novel" is beautiful in style, does not Jefferies suddenly break his method, introduce his own personality, intersperse abrupt disquisitions on food, illness, and Fleet Street? Is not that description of Iden's dinner a little – well, a little unusual? In short, is not the book a disquisition on life from the standpoint of Jefferies' personal experiences? And if this is so, how can the book be so fine an achievement?' Oh, candid reader, with the voice of authority sounding in your ears (and have we not Messrs. Henley, Saintsbury and Toplis bound in critical amity against us?), a book may break the formal rules, and yet it may yield to us just that salt of life which we may seek for vainly in the works of more faultless writers. The strength of 'Amaryllis at the Fair' is that its beauty springs naturally from the prosaic earthly facts of life it narrates, and that, in the natural atmosphere breathed by its people, the prose and the poetry of their life are one. In the respect of the artistic naturalness of its homely picture, the book is

FRIDAY NIGHTS

very superior to, say, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge,' where we are conscious that the author has been at work arranging and re-arranging his charming studies and impressions of the old-world people of Casterbridge into the pattern of an exciting plot. Now it is precisely in the artifice of the dramatic story of 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' – and we cite this novel as characteristic both in its strength and weakness of its distinguished author – that we are brought to feel that we have not been shown the characters of Casterbridge going their way in life naturally, but that they have been moved about, kaleidoscopically, to suit the exigencies of the plot, and that the more this is done the less significance for us have their thoughts and actions. Watching the quick whirling changes of Farfrae and Lucetta, Henchard, and Newson in the matrimonial mazes of the story, we perceive indeed whence comes that atmosphere of stage crisis and stage effect which suddenly introduces a disillusioning sense of unreality, and mars the artistic unity of this charming picture, so truthful in other respects to Wessex rural life. Plot is Mr. Hardy's weakness, and perfect indeed and convincing would have been his pictures if he could have thrown his plots to the four winds. May we not be thankful, therefore, that Jefferies was no hand at elaborating a plot, and that in 'Amaryllis at the Fair,' the scenes, the descriptions, the conversations are spontaneous as life, and Jefferies' commentary on them is like Fielding's commentary, a medium by which he lives with his characters. The author's imagination, memory, and instinctive perception are all working together. And thus his picture of country life in 'Amaryllis' brings with it

RICHARD JEFFERIES

as convincing and as fresh a breath of life as we find in Cobbett's, Waugh's and Barnes' country writings. When a writer arrives at being perfectly natural in his atmosphere, his style and his subject seem to become one. He moves easily and surely. Out of the splintered mass of ideas and emotions, out of the sensations, the observations and revelations of his youth, and the atmosphere familiar to him through long feeling, he builds up a subtle and cunning picture for us, a complete illusion of life more true than the reality. For what prosaic people call the reality is merely the co-ordination in their own minds of perhaps a hundredth part of the aspects of life around them; and only this hundredth part they have noticed. But the creative mind builds up a living picture out of the hundreds of aspects most of us are congenitally blind to. This is what Jefferies has done in 'Amaryllis at the Fair.' The book is rich in the contradictory forces of life, in its quick twists and turns: we feel in it there is nature working alike in the leaves of grass outside the Idens' house, in the blustering winds round the walls, and in the minds of the characters indoors; and the style is as fresh as the April wind. Everything is growing, changing, breathing in the book. But the accomplished critics do not notice these trivial strengths! It is enough for them that Jefferies was not a novelist! Indeed, Mr. Saintsbury apparently thinks that Jefferies made a mistake in drawing his philosophy from an open-air study of nature, for he writes: 'Unfortunately for Jefferies his philosophic background was not like Wordsworth's clear and cheerful, but wholly vague and partly gloomy.' It was neither vague nor gloomy, we may

FRIDAY NIGHTS

remark, parenthetically, but we may admit that Jefferies saw too directly Nature's life to interpret all Nature's doings, *à la* Wordsworth, and lend them a philosophic, solemn significance.

The one charge that may with truth be brought against 'Amaryllis at the Fair' is that its digressions damage the artistic illusion of the whole. The book shows the carelessness, the haste, the roughness of a sketch, a sketch, moreover, which Jefferies was not destined to carry to the end he had planned; but we repeat, let us be thankful that its artistic weaknesses are those of a sketch direct from nature, rather than those of an ambitious studio picture. But these digressions are an integral part of the book's character, just as the face of a man has its own blemishes: they are one with the spirit of the whole, and so, if they break somewhat the illusion of the scenes, they do not damage its spiritual unity. It is this spiritual unity on which we must insist, because 'Amaryllis' is indeed Jefferies' last and complete testament on human life. He wrote it, or rather dictated it to his wife, as he lay in pain, slowly dying, and he has put into it the frankness of a dying man. How real, how solid, how deliciously sweet seemed those simple earthly joys, those human appetites of healthy, vigorous men to him! How intense is his passion and spiritual hunger for the beauty of earth! Like a flame shooting up from the log it is consuming, so this passion for the green earth, for the earth in wind and rain and sunshine, consumes the wasted, consumptive body of the dying man. The reality, the solidity of the homely farmhouse life he describes spring from the intensity with

RICHARD JEFFERIES

which he clings to all he loves, to the cold March wind buffeting the face, the mating cries of the birds in the hot sunshine. Life is so terribly strong, so deliciously real, so full of man's unsatisfied hungry ache for happiness; and sweet is the craving, bitter the knowledge of the unfulfilment. So, inspiring and vivifying the whole, in every line of 'Amaryllis' is Jefferies' philosophy of life. Jefferies 'did not understand human nature,' say the learned, the erudite critics. Did he not? 'Amaryllis at the Fair' is one of the truest criticisms of human life, oh reader, you are likely to meet with. The mixedness of things, the old, old human muddle, the meanness and stupidity and short-sightedness of humanity, the good salty taste of life in the healthy mouth, the spirituality of love, the strong earthy roots of appetite, man's lust of life, with circumstances awry, and the sharp wind blowing alike on the just and the unjust – all is there on the printed page of 'Amaryllis at the Fair.' The song of the wind and the roar of London unite and mingle therein for those who do not bring the exacting eye of superiority to this most human book.

1904

HENRY LAWSON AND THE DEMOCRACY¹



WHAT Henry Lawson's talent is it would be impossible to discover from his poetry. His verse, to put it bluntly, is the verse of a thousand-and-one vigorous versifiers of to-day, writing humorously or picturesquely it may be, but producing work thereby which shows the stamp of the literary artisan rather than that of the artist. To consider Lawson's verse is, however, interesting, because through its medium his characteristic humour, sentiment and outlook on life struggle vainly to express anything that others have not put as well. Lawson's verse is that of a third-rate writer; his prose is that of a writer who represents a continent. Like a voice speaking to you through a bad telephone, the poems convey the speaker's meaning, but all the shades of original tone are muffled, lost or hidden. There is plenty of evidence of rattling humour and sentimentalism in the poems, and these indeed show the skeleton of his talent, but all its delicate nerves and tissues and the ligaments that make the writer truly original, one must look for in his prose.

I have said that Henry Lawson's sketches bring before us the life of a continent, and if my readers like to qualify this high praise by putting it thus: 'In the absence of great writers he is the writer who best represents the Australia of to-day,' I shall not object. No writer, of course, stands for the whole of his nation, but only for a part; and if Australia had now a flowering time of national genius,

¹ *While the Billy Boils*. By Henry Lawson. Sydney, 1896.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

with a representative group of creative talents appearing, Lawson, undeniably, might find his place marked *proxime accessit*. A writer's place in the national life cannot, however, be assessed by any official handicap, or by including him in an Olympian contest of merit between the modern writers of all nations. Lawson's special value to us is that he stands as the representative writer of a definite environment, as the portrayer of life on the Australian soil, and that he brings before our eyes more fully and vividly than any other man the way the Australian settlers' life has been going, its characteristic spirit, code and outlook, the living thought and sensation of these tens and hundreds and thousands and millions of people who make up the Australian democracy. And here, to place Lawson rightly, I must make a distinction between 'representative' writers. Thousands of modern writers are typical of their surroundings, and are, indeed, products of the environments they envisage for us. There are, perhaps, over a hundred clever French writers to-day who consciously and acutely analyse the spirit of their generation; but a writer must not only reflect life, he must *focus* and typify, and the more he can focus of life the more significant he becomes. Thus, there are many clever novelists, but only one Anatole France. Lawson, as an artist, is often crude and disappointing, often sketchy and rough, but many of his slightest sketches show he has the faculty of bringing life to a focus, of making it typical. Further, the point is, What is the artist's commentary on the life he represents worth? What depth of human nature does his insight touch? To answer these elementary questions is to explain why we place two

HENRY LAWSON

such representative writers as Balzac and Eugene Sue, the one fairly high in the scale, the other decidedly low, and why we place Fielding higher than Smollett. And to answer it is also to explain why Australia can really show us a national writer in Henry Lawson, while Canada is sending us an ingenious, theatrical story-teller in Mr. Gilbert Parker. Lawson's journalistic sketches establish fresh creative values of life, but the merely ingenious story-tellers only re-affirm stale valuations. It is in the sense, then, of being a national writer that Henry Lawson's work deserves careful attention from the English people. We hear a great deal to-day of 'The Empire,' and of 'Hands Across the Sea,' but in truth English people seem to care much more about expressing fraternal emotions than in ascertaining what is in their kinsmen's heads.

To turn to Lawson's art. If we are to measure his tales chiefly by their sketchiness, by their inequalities, by their casual air of being an ingenious reporting of entertaining incidents, if we are to lay stress on the caricaturist and the sentimental writer in him, we must in that case join hands with the academic critics who may affirm that Lawson's work really falls within the province of those ephemeral story-tellers who serve only to amuse their generation. The answering argument is that Lawson through these journalistic tales *interprets* the life of the Australian people, typifies the average life for us, and takes us beneath the surface. His tales are not merely all foreground. His pictures of life convey to us a great sense of the background of the whole people's life; their struggles and cares, their humour and outlook, live in his pages. Nothing is more

FRIDAY NIGHTS

difficult to find in this generation than an English writer who identifies himself successfully with the life of the working democracy, a writer who does not stand aloof from and patronize the bulk of the people who labour with their hands. This, no doubt, is because nearly all our writers have a middle-class bias and training, and so either write down to or write up to their subject when it leads them outside their own class, and accordingly their valuations thereof are in general falsified. Mrs. Humphrey Ward describes her own class admirably, for example, but her working people are ludicrous. Gissing's lower-middle-class people are generally good, but his working men are feebly drawn. Even Hardy's West-country rustics are idealized at times to suit the middle-class taste. We have no English writer so true as Miss Wilkins is to the life of 'the people,' and she does not profess to write as one of them. Lawson, however, has the great strength of the writer writing simply as one of the democracy, and of the man who does not have to climb down from a class fence in order to understand the human nature of the majority of his fellow-men. I have never read anything in modern English literature that is so absolutely democratic in tone, so much the real thing, as 'Joe Wilson's Courtship.' And so with all Lawson's tales and sketches. Not even Maupassant himself has taken us so absolutely inside people's lives as do the tales 'Joe Wilson's Courtship' and 'A Double Buggy at Lahey's Creek.' And it is this rare, convincing tone of this Australian writer that gives him a great value now, when forty-nine out of fifty Anglo-Saxon writers are insisting on *not* describing the class they were born in, but

straining their necks and their outlooks in order to describe the life of the class which God has placed beyond them. Hence the comparative decay and neglect of true realism, the realism of 'Tom Jones,' and of 'Emma,' of 'Barchester Towers,' and of 'Middlemarch.' Our commercialized public, intent on 'rising,' instinctively prefers to nourish itself on Mr. Anthony Hope rather than on Mrs. Mary E. Mann. It is therefore an immense relief to the unsophisticated critic, after looking East and West and North and South for writers untainted by the ambition to be mentally genteel, to come across the small group of able democratic writers on the 'Sydney Bulletin,' of whom Mr. Lawson is the chief. In 'The Country I Come From,' in 'While the Billy Boils,' in 'Joe Wilson and His Mates,' in 'On the Track,' and 'Over the Slip Rails,' we have the real Australia, the real bushman, 'selector,' 'squatter,' 'roustabout,' 'shearer,' drover, shepherd, 'spieler,' shanty-keeper and publican, the real Australian woman, mother, wife and girl, the real 'larrykin,' the real boy, the real 'Boss,' and the real 'mate.' Read 'The Union Buries its Dead,' in 'The Country I Come From,' if you care to see how the most casual, 'newspapery' and apparently artless art of this Australian writer carries with it a truer, finer, more delicate commentary on life than do the idealistic works in any of our genteel school of writers. It isn't great art, but it is near to great art; and, moreover, great art is not to be found every 'publishing season.' Read 'An Oversight of Steelman's' if you want humour, the real thing, and read 'No Place for a Woman' if you want pathos, also the real thing. If you want a working philosophy of life, read 'How Steel-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

man told his Story,' and if you want to see how admirably a man can sum up his own country in ten careless pages, read 'His Country After All,' and 'The Little World Left Behind.' There is a little sketch in 'While the Billy Boils' called 'A Drover's Wife,' a sketch of a woman in the bush, left for months alone with her four children while her husband is up-country droving. If this artless sketch be taken as the summary of a woman's life, giving its significance in ten short pages, even Tolstoy has never done better. Lawson has re-treated this subject at length in the more detailed picture in 'Water them Geraniums'; I leave it to mothers of all ranks and stations in life to say how it affects them, and whether it has not universal application to the life of working women wherever the sun goes down. Art stands for much, but sincerity also stands for much in art, and the sincerity of Lawson's tales nearly always drives them home. There is another little sketch called 'They Wait on the Wharf in Black,' which artists may call sentimental. Well, it is sentimental; it is on a sentimental subject, and I have never found anywhere a tale that so well describes the meeting of a father with his children: it is all there in the last two pages, the family meeting, and the family feeling, and I invite the sceptical reader to turn to it. I leave it to more competent critics to say how far mere sketches of human nature, such as 'The Shanty-Keeper's Wife,' can vie with the art of literary pictures carefully arranged in studio lights, with real models posed 'from the life,' *à la* Mr. Marion Crawford. I have not laid much stress on Mr. Lawson's humour, as the public is likely to lay such stress on it as to fail to see that his

HENRY LAWSON

vision of life cannot be summed up by the term 'humorist'. But, undoubtedly, Mr. Lawson is pre-eminent among modern humorists. Humorists, so luckily common in life, are uncommonly scarce in literature – the reason being that the intonation and the gesture of the living man can only be reproduced by writers who have a racy language of their own. Lawson has this racy language and an extremely delicate observation of those tiny details which reveal situation and character. His minute appreciation of individual peculiarities is as well shown in the sketch 'Mr. Smellingscheck' as is his power of idiomatic language in the 'Stiffner' stories. His weakness as an artist lies chiefly in his temptation to introduce sentimental touches that mar his realism – see, for example, in his admirable 'Two Larrykins' and the last page of 'Telling Mrs. Baker.' To come back to my main point – that Lawson is a national writer, of whom the Australians may be proud – I should be inclined to pair him with Miss Wilkins, who is also a national writer, if I did not find that his canvas, his range, his experience of life, are richer and wider than the American authoress's. The difference between the two writers is largely the difference of masculine and feminine. Miss Wilkins – none better – can describe the indoor life of women, and Lawson – none better – the democratic life of the road, the bush, the track, the shearer, the 'selector,' the 'pub,' the wharf, the river, and the street.

If Lawson's tales fail to live in another fifty years – and where will be much of Kipling's, Stevenson's, Hardy's, and Henry James's fiction then? – it will be because they have too little beauty of form, and there is too much crudity

FRIDAY NIGHTS

and roughness in their literary substance. Henry Lawson's matter is more interesting than his form, and matter in general only survives through its form. This admitted, it may be claimed for Lawson that he of the Australian writers best pictures for us and interprets democratic Australia to-day, and that he is one of the very few genuinely democratic writers that the literature of 'Greater Britain' can show.

1902

SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S TALES



IT is ten years since a London publisher presented an admirable selection of Miss Sarah Orne Jewett's stories to that great public of ours which is, and may well be, richer in its opportunities than in its discernment. 'Tales of New England' the neat, smooth, green volume was entitled, but though its little band of enthusiastic readers could be mustered from scattered English homes, many of the copies must have lain retired from the world, for no second edition of the Tales was issued. Some of its readers had hailed old friends among the stories, reprinted from the magazine that stood for the best traditions in American literature — 'The Atlantic Monthly,' and some there were who recognized that in Miss Jewett's exquisite talent America had gained a writer who can be ranked second only to Hawthorne in her interpretation of the spirit of New England soil. Since that quiet uneventful appearance of 'New England Tales' among us, Miss Jewett's works have made a few discreet attempts to enlarge their modest circle of English readers. 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' 'A Tory Lover,' 'The Queen's Twin,' 'The Life of Nancy,' these books, and perhaps others, have been imported from time to time by English publishers who have placed their respective imprints on the Riverside editions. It is on the occasion of a fresh announcement by a London publisher of an English edition of 'The King of Folly Island' that I venture to offer here a slight analysis of a talent that has had in England far too scanty and transitory attention paid it. The fault has been on the English critics' side. Miss

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Jewett's talent at its best is so quietly delicate, its spiritual aroma so subtle, that to come to it is like coming to one of the quiet sea beaches or woody hill-sides of Maine she so tenderly describes for us. 'What is there to stay our attention?' the readers hardened by all the insistent effectiveness and unmitigated emphasis of most modern novelists may ask as they scan her unassuming pages. And in truth in some of Miss Jewett's early writings, as 'Old Friends and New,' 'A Country Doctor,' 'A Marsh Island,' we feel that a certain faint charm is struggling unavailingly with an artistic method too monotonous; and in some of her later stories she has also her uninspired hours, where her subjects of common daily life have their uninteresting reaches and stretches which defy the delicacy of her touch. Moreover, in her historical novel, 'A Tory Lover,' she has clearly stepped outside her own art, and her art has refused definitely to accompany her on this hasty excursion. It is therefore the less surprising that the English public should have failed to discover and acclaim the exquisite portion of her work – let me sum it up here as thirty little masterpieces in the short story, and one book, 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' – by which I believe her position is permanently assured in American literature.

By what special excellence, the curious reader will ask, is the province of Miss Jewett's art marked out as a country set apart from its neighbours? By a peculiar spirituality which her work exhales, a spirituality which is inseparable from her unerring perception of her country-people's native outlook and instinctive attitude to life. It

is by this exquisite spiritual gravity interpenetrating with the finest sense of humour, intensely, even maliciously discriminating, that Miss Jewett seems to speak for the feminine soul of the New England race. Her shade of humour cannot be described: it must be tasted in such delicious examples as 'The Only Rose' or 'The Guests of Mrs. Timms,' but should my readers ask me to name a story that is an epitome of Miss Jewett's talent I will name 'Miss Tempy's Watchers' as an example showing the finest shades of her quality. The story describes how two women, Mrs. Crowe and Sister Binson, are sitting up as watchers in the house of the dead woman, Miss Tempy, the night before the funeral. The slightly eerie relation of the living to the dead, the manner in which the two women are constrained to draw close together in outspoken confidences, and the way the character of the dead woman creates the powerful invisible atmosphere around them are most finely brought out. The sketch is tender, grave, wholly spiritual in its essence; but subtly strong is the feeling of our human frailty, lurking in these good women's private chat. It is the taint of human life's appetites and human life's necessities that is so finely indicated by contrast with the impassive silence of the dead. Here it is the fine flower of the Puritan nature that speaks in Miss Jewett's art,¹ though the delight she takes in human nature argues perhaps that she has inherited some artistic strain foreign to the Puritan. A clearness of phrase almost French

¹ In a charming letter received by the writer in response to this criticism, Miss Jewett declared that she was descended from English cavalier, not from Puritan stock.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

is allied indeed to her innate precision of language. Her gift for characterization is exceedingly subtle, but neither rich nor profound. Her people are sketched rather in their essential outlines than in their exact lineaments. It is puzzling to say by what hidden artistic spell she manages so craftily to indicate human character — as in the characters of William and Mrs. Hight in the story, 'A Dunnet Shepherdess,' but after a few subtle hints are dropped here and there, her people are felt to be living an intensely individual life, one all their own, beyond their creator's control or volition. This gift of indicating character by a few short simple strokes is the gift of the masters. Perhaps we shall touch near to the secret of Miss Jewett's power and the secret of her limitations if we say that her art is exceedingly feminine in the sense that she has that characteristically feminine patience with human nature which is intimately enrooted in a mother's feeling. Just as a woman's criticism of the people near and dear to her is modified by her instinctive understanding (shared by man in a far fainter degree) that nothing will ever change them radically, so Miss Jewett's artistic attitude shows a completely sympathetic patience with the human nature she has watched and carefully scrutinized. Her gift is therefore the gift of drawing direct from nature, with an exquisite fidelity to what appeals to her feminine imagination — such as the infinite variety of women's perceptions in their personal relations; but the feminine insight only moves along the plane of her sympathetic appreciation, and she can invent nothing outside it, neither has she a depth of creative feeling apart from her actual observation of human

life. She is receptive but not constructive in her talent. It is for this reason that her historical novel, 'A Tory Lover,' is almost a complete failure. All the men in the book are masculine ciphers, and its real hero, Paul Jones, never begins to live. On the other hand, when she is content to interpret for us the characteristic attitude to life of grimly hard-working New England spinsters, such as Miss Peck, in 'Miss Peck's Promotion,' or broad matronly natures such as the village wife, the herb-gatherer, in 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' we get a delicious revelation of how men by nature play the second fiddle in women's eyes. Man as a boy, a lover, a husband, brother, father or friend, with his somewhat obtrusive personality as an honest, well-meaning, forceful creature, is shown us as filling up woman's mental background in Miss Jewett's stories; but woman herself it is that decides, arranges and criticizes her own life, and the life of her friends, enemies and relations, and of the whole parish – and the reader has a sense in her pages that should the curtain be dropped on the feminine understanding, the most interesting side of life would become a mere darkened chaos to the isolated, masculine understanding.

I have spoken of Miss Jewett's art as coming second only to Hawthorne's in its spiritual interpretation of the New England character. In originality of vision, and in intense and passionate creative force, she is, of course, not to be compared with him. The range of her insight is undeniably restricted. Nevertheless, it makes the cosmopolitan appeal that all art of high quality makes, and her work at its best, no less than Hawthorne's, conveys to

FRIDAY NIGHTS

us a mysterious sense of her country people's mental and moral life, seen as a whole in relation to their environment and to their past, and reveals it as the natural growth of the very definite history of the many Puritan generations that have gone before them. In stories such as 'Decoration Day,' 'The Hiltons' Holiday,' 'A Dunnet Shepherdess,' and in scenes in 'The Country of the Pointed Firs,' such as 'The Bowden Reunion,' and 'Shellheap Island,' her art attains to that highest perfection of literature when the fleeting passage of life presented is felt in its invisible relations to immense reaches of life around it, in which, as in an ocean, it blends, merges, and is lost. 'The Hiltons' Holiday,' a sketch, describing how a countryman drives his two little girls on a summer's day to the neighbouring town of Topham Corners, is an amazing instance of how broad a homely record of family life in the true artist's hands can suggest the great horizons of the human life it typifies. There is 'nothing' in the tale and yet there is everything – fatherhood, motherhood, the spirit of childhood – it is an extraordinary fine performance, an epitome of universal family life.

Now this rare poetic breath that emanates from Miss Jewett's homely realism is her artistic reward for caring above all things for the essential spiritual reality of her scenes, and for departing not a hair's-breadth from its prosaic actualities. A word wrong, a note untrue, the slightest straining after effect, and the natural atmosphere of scene and place would be destroyed, and the whole illusion of the life presented would be shattered. Often, of course, this rare poetic breath is not found enveloping Miss

Jewett's stories: sometimes her keen sense of humour, as it were, keeps it at a natural distance, as in 'The Passing of Sister Barsett,' a delicious little comedy of the feminine soul; and occasionally, as in 'The King of Folly Island,' we feel that though it be floating around the unobtrusive spiritual drama of the misanthropic George Quint, and his poor daughter Phebe, self-exiled on their barren island, yet it fades away a little soon, since the author, shown by some hesitation in her technique, has not quite arrived at the point of absolute unity with her subject. It is indeed by the extreme rarity of artists showing this complete spiritual possession of their subjects that we must explain the fact that out of the thousands of imaginative writers each generation produces, not a dozen achieve any subtle perfection in the quality of their work. To discover intimately the subtle laws by which individual character works, to catch the shifting shades of tone by which a man reveals to the onlooker how life is affecting him, is not a common gift; but to reproduce by written words a perfect illusion, a perfect mirage of life, with each character seen in its proper perspective in a just relation to the exterior world around it, with everybody breathing his natural atmosphere and a general sense of life's inevitable flux and flow diffused through the whole — this is such an artistic feat that we need not wonder that Miss Jewett has succeeded only when she is writing as a close and humble student of nature. Almost anybody can produce an arbitrary, concocted picture of life in which every line is a little false, and every tone is exaggerated. Such pictures of life are often as plausibly interesting as the scenes of a spirited panorama.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

They serve their purpose. But in relation to the rare art which synthesizes for us the living delicacy of nature they are what most modern popular fiction is to the poetic realism of 'The Country of the Pointed Firs.' So delicate is the artistic lesson of this little masterpiece that it will probably be left for generations of readers less hurried than ours to assimilate.

1903

STEPHEN CRANE AND HIS WORK

I

A SHORT time ago I picked up on a London bookstall the first edition of 'The Red Badge of Courage.' Its price was sixpence. Obviously the bookseller laid no store by it, for the book had been thrown on the top of a parcel of paper-covered novels among the waifs and strays of literature. Chancing to meet a young American poet, I asked him, curiously, how his countrymen esteemed to-day that intensely original genius, Crane, the creator of 'The Open Boat,' 'George's Mother,' 'Maggie,' 'The Black Riders.' He answered, 'One rarely hears Crane's name mentioned in America. His work is almost forgotten, but I believe it has a small, select circle of admirers.' I confess I was amused, especially when a little later a first edition of 'Almayer's Folly,' the first Conrad, was sold at auction for five hundred times the amount of the early Crane. And Conrad was also amused when I told him, and we suggested a title for an allegorical picture yet to be painted – the Apotheosis of an Author crowned by Fashion, Merit and Midas. For we both had in mind the years when the critics hailed 'The Nigger of the Narcissus' as a worthy pendant to the battle-pictures presented in 'The Red Badge of Courage,' and when Sir, then Mr., Arthur Quiller-Couch spoke of 'The Nigger' as 'having something of Crane's insistence.'

We talked together over Crane and his work and cast our memories back over twenty years when we were both in touch with 'poor Steve,' he more than I. And we agreed that within its peculiar limited compass Crane's genius was

FRIDAY NIGHTS

unique. Crane, when living at Oxted, was a neighbour of mine, and one day, on my happening to describe to him an ancient Sussex house, noble and grey with the passage of five hundred years, nothing would satisfy him but that he must become the tenant of Brede Place. It was the lure of romance that always thrilled Crane's blood, and Brede Place had had, indeed, an unlucky, chequered history. I saw Crane last, when he lay dying there, the day before his wife was transporting him, on a stretcher bed, to a health resort in the Black Forest, in a vain effort to arrest the fatal disease, and I see again his bloodless face and the burning intensity of his eyes. He had lived at too high pressure and his consumptive physique was ravaged by the exhausting strain of his passionate life, and sapped by the hardships of the Cuban campaign, which he suffered as a war-correspondent. Crane's strange eyes, with their intensely concentrated gaze, were those of a genius, and I recall how on his first visit to our house I was so struck by the exquisite symmetry of his brow and temples, that I failed to note, what a lady pointed out when he had left, the looseness of his mouth. Yes, the intensity of genius burned in his eyes, and his weak lips betrayed his unrestrained temperament. Crane's genius, his feeling for style, were wholly intuitive and no study had fostered them. On first reading 'The Red Badge of Courage,' I concluded he had been influenced by the Russian masters, but I learned when I met him, that he had never read a line of them. Would that he had! For Crane, as Conrad reminded me, never knew how good his best work was. He simply never knew. He never recognized that in the volume 'The

STEPHEN CRANE

Open Boat' he had achieved the perfection of his method. If he had comprehended that in 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky' and in 'Death and the Child' he had attained then his high-water mark, he might perhaps have worked forward along the lines of patient, ascending effort; but after 'The Open Boat,' 1898, his work dropped to lower levels. He wrote too much, he wrote against time, and he wrote while dunned for money. At first sight it appears astonishing that the creator of such a miracle of style as 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky' should publish in the same year so mediocre a novel as 'On Active Service.' But Crane ought never to have essayed the form of the novel. He had not handled it satisfactorily in 'The Third Violet,' 1897, a love story charming in its impressionistic lightness of touch, but lacking in force, in concentration, in characterization. My view of Crane as a born impressionist and master of the short story, I emphasized in an Appreciation in 1898, and since it is germane to my purpose here, I reprint the criticism:

MR. STEPHEN CRANE

AN APPRECIATION

'What Mr. Crane has got to do is very simple: he must not mix reporting with his writing. To other artists the word must often be passed: rest, work at your art, live more; but Mr. Crane has no need of cultivating his technique, no need of resting, no need of searching wide for experiences. In his art he is unique. Its certainty, its justness, its peculiar perfection of power arrived at its birth, or at least at that precise moment in its life when other artists

FRIDAY NIGHTS

— and great artists too — were preparing themselves for the long and difficult conquest of their art. I cannot remember a parallel case in the literary history of fiction. Maupassant, Meredith, Mr. James, Mr. Howells, Tolstoy, all were learning their expression at the age where Mr. Crane had achieved his, achieved it triumphantly. Mr. Crane has no need to learn anything. His technique is absolutely his own, and by its innate laws of being has arrived at a perfect fullness of power. What he has not got he has no power of acquiring. He has no need to acquire it. To say to Mr. Crane, “You are too much anything, or too little anything; you need concentration, or depth, subtlety, or restraint,” would be absurd; his art is just in itself, rhythmical, self-poising as is the art of a perfect dancer. There are no false steps, no excesses. And, of course, his art is strictly limited. We would define him by saying he is the perfect artist and interpreter of the surfaces of life. And that explains why he so swiftly attained his peculiar power, and what is the realm his art commands, and his limitations.

“Take “George’s Mother,” for example — a tale which I believe he wrote at the ridiculous age of twenty-one. In *method* it is a masterpiece. It is a story dealing simply with the relations between an old woman and her son, who live together in a New York tenement block. An ordinary artist would seek to dive into the mind of the old woman, to follow its workings hidden under the deceitful appearances of things, under the pressure of her surroundings. A great artist would so recreate her life that its griefs and joys became significant of the griefs and joys of all motherhood on earth. But Mr. Crane does neither. He simply repro-

STEPHEN CRANE

duces the surfaces of the individual life in so marvellous a way that the manner in which the old woman washes up the crockery, for example, gives us the essentials. To dive into the hidden life is, of course, for the artist a great temptation and a great danger – the values of the picture speedily get wrong, and the artist, seeking to interpret life, departs from the truth of nature. The rare thing about Mr. Crane's art is that he keeps closer to the surface than any living writer, and, like the great portrait-painters, to a great extent makes the surface betray the depths. But, of course, the written word in the hands of the greatest artist often deals directly with the depths, plunges us into the rich depths of consciousness that cannot be more than hinted at by the surface; and it is precisely here that Mr. Crane's natural limitation must come in. At the supreme height of art the great masters so plough up the depths of life that the astonished spectator loses sight of the individual life altogether, and has the entrancing sense that all life is really one and the same thing, and is there manifesting itself before him. He feels that, for example, when he watches Duse at her best, or when he stands before Leonardo da Vinci's "La Joconda" in the Louvre and is absorbed by it. I do not think that Mr. Crane is ever great in the sense of so fusing all the riches of the consciousness into a whole, that the reader is struck dumb as by an inevitable revelation; but he is undoubtedly such an interpreter of the significant surface of things that in a few strokes he gives us an amazing insight into what the individual life is. And he does it all straight from the surface; a few oaths, a genius for slang, an exquisite and unique

FRIDAY NIGHTS

faculty of exposing an individual scene by an odd simile, a power of interpreting a face or an action, a keen realizing of the primitive emotions – that is Mr. Crane's talent. In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," for example, the art is simply immense. There is a page and a half of conversation at the end of this short story of seventeen pages which, as a dialogue revealing the whole inside of the situation, is a lesson to any artist living. And the last line of this story, by the gift peculiar to the author of using some odd simile which cunningly condenses the feeling of the situation, defies analysis altogether. Foolish people may call Mr. Crane a reporter of genius; but nothing could be more untrue. He is thrown away as a picturesque reporter: a secondary style of art, of which, let us say, Mr. G. W. Stevens is, perhaps, the ablest exponent of to-day, and which is the heavy clay of Mr. Kipling's talent. Mr. Crane's technique is far superior to Mr. Kipling's, but he does not experiment ambitiously in various styles and develop in new directions as Mr. Kipling has done. I do not think that Mr. Crane will or can develop further. Again, I do not think he has the building faculty, or that he will ever do better in constructing a perfect whole out of many parts than he has arrived at in "The Red Badge of Courage." That book was a series of episodic scenes, all melting naturally into one another and forming a just whole; but it was not constructed, in any sense of the word. And further, Mr. Crane does not show any faculty of taking his characters and revealing in them deep mysterious worlds of human nature, of developing fresh riches in them, acting under the pressure of circumstance. His

STEPHEN CRANE

imaginative analysis of his own nature on a battlefield is, of course, the one exception. And similarly the great artist's arrangement of complex effects, striking contrasts, exquisite grouping of devices, is lacking in him. His art does not include the necessity for complex arrangements; his sure instinct tells him never to quit the passing moment of life, to hold fast by simple situations, to reproduce the episodic, fragmentary nature of life in such artistic sequence that it stands in place of the architectural masses and co-ordinated structures of the great artists. He is the chief impressionist of our day as Sterne was the great impressionist, in a different manner, of his day. If he fails in anything he undertakes, it will be through abandoning the style he has invented. He may, perhaps, fail by and by, through using up the picturesque phases of the environment that nurtured him, as Swinburne came to a stop directly he had rung the changes a certain number of times on the fresh rhythms and phrases he had created. But that time is not yet, and every artist of a special unique faculty has that prospect before him. Mr. Crane's talent is unique; nobody can question that. America may well be proud of him, for he has just that perfect mastery of form which artists of the Latin races often produce, but the Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon races very rarely. And undoubtedly of the young school of American artists Mr. Crane is the genius — the others have their talents.'

On the above criticism Conrad wrote me at the time, 'The Crane thing is just — precisely just a ray of light flashed in and showing all there is.'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

II

But when I wrote that criticism, that journalistic novel 'On Active Service' was yet to be published, and I did not fully comprehend Crane's training and his circumstances. I sounded a warning note against 'reporting,' but though he had emerged from journalism, he was still haunted by journalism and was encircled by a — well! by a crew of journalists. I remarked, 'I do not think Mr. Crane can or will develop further,' but pressing him were duns and debts and beckoning him was the glamour of the war-correspondent's life, and before him were editors ready for ephemeral stuff, while they shook their heads sadly over such perfect gems as 'The Pace of Youth.' Crane had seen much for a man of his years, but he was still thirsting for adventure and the life of action, and he had no time to digest his experiences, to reflect, to incubate and fashion his work at leisure. In the two or three hurried years that remained to him after the publication of 'The Open Boat,' he created some notable things, but the dice of fate were loaded by all his circumstances against his development as craftsman.

We must therefore be thankful that his instinct for style emerged when his psychological genius broke out and so often possessed him in the teeth of the great stucco gods and the chinking of brass in the market-place. He had written his best things without advice or encouragement, urged by the demon within him, and his genius burned clear, with its passionate individuality, defying all the inhibitions and conventions of New England. Was that genius

ever appreciated by America? I doubt it, though Americans were forced to accept him, first because of the fame which 'The Red Badge of Courage' brought Crane in England, and secondly because his subject was the American Civil War, a subject that could not be disregarded. On re-reading 'The Red Badge of Courage' I am more than ever struck by the genius with which Crane, in imagination, pierced to the essentials of War. Without any experience of war at the time, Crane was essentially true to the psychological core of war – if not to actualities. He naturally underestimated the checks placed by physical strain and fatigue on the faculties, as well as war's malignant, cold ironies, its prosaic dreadfulness, its dreary, deadening tedium. But as Goethe has pointed out, the artist has a licence to ignore actualities, if he is obeying inner, æsthetic laws. And Crane's subject was the passions, the passions of destruction, fear, pride, rage, shame and exaltation in the heat of action. The deep artistic unity of 'The Red Badge of Courage' is fused in its flaming, spiritual intensity, in the fiery ardour with which the shock of the Federal and Confederate armies is imaged. The torrential force and impetus, the check, sullen recoil and reforming of shattered regiments, and the renewed onslaught and obstinate resistance of brigades and divisions are visualized with extraordinary force and colour. If the sordid grimness of carnage is partially screened, the feeling of War's cumulative rapacity, of its breaking pressure and fluctuating tension, is caught with wonderful fervour and freshness of style. It is, of course, the work of ardent youth, but when Crane returned from the Græco-Turkish

FRIDAY NIGHTS

War he said to Conrad, 'My picture of war was all right! I have found it as I imagined it.' And his imaginative picture he supplements, four years later, in that penetrating, sombre, realistic piece 'Memories of War' in 'Wounds in the Rain,' his reminiscences of the Cuban campaign that in fact had set death's secret mark already on him. I may note, too, how Crane, sitting in our garden, described that on questioning Veterans of the Civil War about their feelings when fighting, he could get nothing out of them but one thing, viz., 'We just went there and did so and so.'

III

And here I must enlarge and amend my criticism of 1898 by saying that two qualities in especial combined to form Crane's unique quality, viz., his wonderful insight into and mastery of the primary passions, and his irony deriding the swelling emotions of the self. It is his irony that checks the emotional intensity of his delineation, and suddenly reveals passion at high tension in the clutch of the implacable tides of life. It is the perfect fusion of these two forces of passion and irony that creates Crane's spiritual background, and raises his work, at its finest, into the higher zone of man's tragic conflict with the universe. His irony is seen in its purest form in 'Black Riders,' 1896, a tiny collection of *vers libres*, as sharp in their naked questioning as sword-blades. These verses pierce with dreadful simplicity certain illusions of unregarding sages, whose earnest commentaries pour, and will continue to pour, from the groaning press. In 'Maggie,' 1896, that little masterpiece which drew the highest tribute from the

veteran, W. D. Howells, again it is the irony that keeps in right perspective Crane's remorseless study of New York slum and Bowery morals. The code of herd law by which the inexperienced girl, Maggie, is pressed to death by her family, her lover and the neighbours, is seen working with strange finality. The Bowery inhabitants, as we, can be nothing other than what they are; their human nature responds inexorably to their brutal environment; the curious habits and code of the most primitive savage tribes could not be presented with a more impartial exactness, or with more sympathetic understanding.

'Maggie' is not a story *about* people; it is primitive human nature itself set down with perfect spontaneity and grace of handling. For pure æsthetic beauty and truth no Russian, not Tchekhov himself, could have bettered this study, which, as Howells remarks, has the quality of Greek tragedy. The perfection of Crane's style, his unique quality, can, however, be studied best in 'The Open Boat,' 1898. Here he is again the pure artist, brilliant, remorselessly keen, delighting in life's passions and ironies, amusing, tragic or grimacing. Consider the nervous audacity, in phrasing, of the piece 'An Experiment in Misery,' which reveals the quality of chiaroscuro of a master's etching. No wonder the New York editors looked askance at such a break with tradition. How would they welcome the mocking verve and sinister undertone of such pieces as 'A Man and Some Others,' or the airy freshness and flying spontaneity of 'The Pace of Youth'? In the volume 'The Open Boat' Crane's style has a brilliancy of tone, a charming *timbre* peculiar to itself. As with Whistler, his per-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

sonal note eschews everything obvious, everything inessential, as witness 'Death and the Child,' that haunting masterpiece where a child is playing with pebbles and sticks on the great mountain-side, while the smoke and din of the battlefield, in the plain below, hide the rival armies of pigmy men busy reaping with death. It is in the calm detachment of the little child playing by which the artist secures his poetic background; man, pigmy man, watched impassively by the vast horizons of life, is the plaything of the Fates. The irony of life is here implicit. Perfect also is that marvel of felicitous observation 'An Ominous Babe,' where each touch is exquisitely final; a sketch in which the instincts of the babes betray the roots of all wars, past and to come. This gem ought to be in every anthology of American prose.

The descent of Crane in 'On Active Service,' 1898, to a clever, journalistic level was strange. It was a lapse into superficiality; much stronger artistically was 'The Monster,' 1901, a book of stories of high psychological interest, which might indeed have made another man's reputation, but a book which is ordinary in atmosphere. The story 'The Blue Hotel' is, indeed, a brilliant exploration of fear and its reactions, and 'His New Mittens' is a delightful graphic study of boy morals, but we note that when Crane breathes an everyday, common atmosphere his æsthetic power always weakens. One would give the whole contents of 'Whilomville Stories,' 1902, for the five pages of 'An Ominous Baby'; and the heterogeneous contents of 'Last Words,' 1902, a volume of sweepings from Crane's desk, kick the balance when weighed against the sketch 'A

STEPHEN CRANE

'Tale of Mere Chance,' the babblings of a madman, which Dostoevsky might be proud to claim. The companion sketch 'Manacled' (in 'The Monster') bears also the authentic stamp of Crane's rare vision.

To conclude, if America has forgotten or neglects Crane's achievements, above all in 'Maggie' and 'The Open Boat,' she does not yet deserve to produce artists of rank. Crane holds a peculiar niche in American literature. Where it is weak, viz., in the æsthetic and psychologically truthful delineation of passion, Stephen Crane is a master. And masters are rare; yes, how rare are masters, let the men of Crane's generation, looking back on the twenty years since his death, decide.

1921

ROBERT FROST'S 'NORTH OF BOSTON'¹



A SHORT time ago I found on a London bookstall an odd number of 'The Poetry Review,' with examples of and comments on 'Modern American Poets' – examples which whetted my curiosity. But the few quotations given appeared to me literary bric-à-brac, the fruit of light *liaisons* between American dilettantism and European models. Such poetry, æsthetic or sentimental, – reflections of vagrant influences, lyrical embroideries in the latest designs, with little imaginative insight into life or nature, – abounds in every generation. If sufficiently bizarre, its pretensions are cried up in small Bohemian coteries; if sufficiently orthodox in tone and form, it may impress itself on that public which reads poetry as it looks idly at pictures, with sentimental appetite or from a vague respect for culture. Next I turned to some American magazines at hand, and was brought to a pause by discovering some interesting verse by modern American poets, especially by women whose sincerity in the expression of the inner life of love compared well with the ambitious flights of some of their rivals. I learned indeed from a magazine article that the 'New Poetry' was in process of being hatched out by the younger school; and, no doubt, further researches would have yielded a harvest, had not a literary friend chanced to place in my hands a slim green volume, 'North of Boston,' by Robert Frost. I read it, and re-read it. It

¹ This essay appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, under the title of 'A New American Poet.'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

seemed to me that this poet was destined to take a permanent place in American literature. I asked myself why this book was issued by an English and not by an American publisher. And to this question I have found no answer.¹ I may add here, in parenthesis, that I know nothing of Mr. Robert Frost save the three or four particulars I gleaned from the English friend who sent me 'North of Boston.'

In an illuminating paper on recent American fiction, Mr. W. D. Howells remarks, 'By test of the native touch we should not find genuine some of the American writers whom Mr. Garnett accounts so.' No doubt Mr. Howells's stricture is just, and certain American novelists – whom he does not, however, particularize – have been too affected in spirit by European models. Indeed, Frank Norris's early work, 'Vandover and the Brute,' is quite continental in tone; and it is arguable that Norris's study of the French Naturalists may have shown beneficial results later in the breadth of scheme and clarity of 'The Pit.'

This point of 'the native touch' raises difficult questions, for the ferment of foreign influence has often marked the point of departure and rise of powerful native writers, such as Pushkin in Russia and Fenimore Cooper in America. Again, if we consider the fiction of Poe and Herman Melville, would it not be difficult to assess their genuineness by any standard or measure of 'native touch'? But I take it

¹ An American edition, published by Henry Holt and Co., followed the English edition.

ROBERT FROST

that Mr. Howells would ban as 'not genuine' only those writers whose originality in vision, tone, and style has been patently marred or nullified by their surrender to exotic influences.

So complex may be the interlacing strains that blend in a writer's literary ancestry and determine his style, that the question first to ask seems to me whether a given author is a fresh creative force, an original voice in literature. Such an authentic original force to me speaks from 'North of Boston.' Surely a genuine New England voice, whatever be its literary debt to old-world English ancestry. Originality, the point is there, — for we may note that originality of tone and vision is always the stumbling-block to the common taste when the latter is invited to readjust its accepted standards.

On opening 'North of Boston' we see the first lines to be stamped with the magic of *style*, of a style that obeys its own laws of grace and beauty and inner harmony.

'Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
'That sends the frozen ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun:
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast,
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. . . .'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Note the clarity of the images, the firm outline. How delicately the unobtrusive opening suggests the countryman's contemplative pleasure in his fields and woods. It seems so very quiet, the modern reader may complain, forgetting Wordsworth; and, indeed, had Wordsworth written these lines, I think they must have stood in every English anthology. And when we turn the page, the second poem, 'The Death of the Hired Man,' proves that this American poet has arrived, not indeed to challenge the English poet's possession of his territory, but to show how untrodden, how limitless are the stretching, adjacent lands. 'The Death of the Hired Man' is a dramatic dialogue between husband and wife, a dialogue characterized by an exquisite precision of psychological insight. I note that two college professors have lately been taking Mr. Ruckstuhl to task for a new definition of poetry. Let us fly all such debates, following Goethe, who, condemning the 'æsthete who labours to express the nature of poetry and of poets,' exclaimed, 'What do we want with so much definition? A lively feeling of situations and an aptitude to describe them makes the poet.' This definition, though it does not cover the whole ground, is apropos to our purpose.

Mr. Frost possesses a keen feeling for situation. And his fine, sure touch in clarifying our obscure instincts and clashing impulses, and in crystallizing them in sharp, precise images, — for that we cannot be too grateful. Observe the tense, simple dramatic action, foreshadowing conflict, in the opening lines of 'The Death of the Hired Man':

ROBERT FROST

'Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."
She pushed him outward with her through the door
And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.'

'It's we who must be good to him now,' she urges. I wish I had space to quote the debates so simple in its homely force, so comprehending in its spiritual veracity; but I must restrict myself to these arresting lines and to the hushed, tragic close:

'Part of a moon was falling down the west
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard the tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night.
"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."
"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?

It all depends on what you mean by home.
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

FRIDAY NIGHTS

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in."

"I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

"You'll be surprised at him – how much he's broken.
His working days are done; I'm sure of it."

"I'd not be in a hurry to say that."

"I haven't been. Go, look, see for yourself.

But, Warren, please remember how it is:

He's come to help you ditch the meadow.

He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.

He may not speak of it, and then he may.

I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud

Will hit or miss the moon."

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there making a dim row,

The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.

Warren returned – too soon, it seemed to her,

Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

"Warren," she questioned.

"Dead," was all he answered.'

Yes, this is poetry, but of what order? the people may question, to whom for some reason poetry connotes the fervour of lyrical passion, the glow of romantic colour, or the play of picturesque fancy. But it is precisely its quiet passion and spiritual tenderness that betray this to be poetry of a rare order, 'the poetry of a true real natural vision of

life,' which, as Goethe declared, 'demands descriptive power of the highest degree, rendering a poet's pictures so life-like that they become actualities to every reader.' One may indeed anticipate that the 'honourable minority' will appraise highly the spiritual beauty of the lines above quoted.

But what of his unconventional *genre* pictures, such as 'A Hundred Collars'? Is it necessary to carry the war against the enemy's cardboard fortresses of convention by using Goethe's further declaration:

'At bottom no subject is unpoetical, if only the poet knows how to treat it aright.' The dictum is explicit: 'A true, real, natural vision of life . . . high descriptive power . . . pictures of life-like actuality . . . a lively feeling of situation' – if a poet possess these qualifications he may treat any theme or situation he pleases. Indeed, the more prosaic appears the vesture of everyday life, the greater is the poet's triumph in seizing and representing the enduring human interest of its familiar features. In the characteristic fact, form, or feature the poet no less than the artist will discover essential lines and aspects of beauty. Nothing is barred to him, if he only have *vision*. Even the most eccentric divagations in human conduct can be exhibited in their true spiritual perspective by the psychologist of insight, as Browning repeatedly demonstrates. One sees no reason why Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi' with all its roughcast, philosophic speculation should be 'poetry' and Mr. Frost's 'A Hundred Collars' should not; and indeed the purist must keep the gate closed on both or on neither. If I desired indeed to know whether a reader could really

FRIDAY NIGHTS

detect the genuine poet, when he appears amid the crowd of *dilettanti*, I should ask his judgment on a typical uncompromising passage in 'A Hundred Collars,' such as the following:

"No room," the night clerk said, "Unless—"
Woodville's a place of shrieks and wandering lamps
And cars that shook and rattle—and *one* hotel.

"You say 'unless.' "

"Unless you wouldn't mind
Sharing a room with someone else."

"Who is it?"

"A man."

"So I should hope. What kind of man?"

"I know him: he's all right. A man's a man.
Separate beds of course you understand."
The night clerk blinked his eyes and dared him on.

"Who's that man sleeping in the office chair?
Has he had the refusal of my chance?"

"He was afraid of being robbed or murdered.
What do you say?"

"I'll have to have a bed."

The night clerk led him up three flights of stairs
And down a narrow passage full of doors,
At the last one of which he knocked and entered.
"Lafe, here's a fellow wants to share your room."

ROBERT FROST

"Show him this way. I'm not afraid of him.
I'm not so drunk I can't take care of myself."

The night clerk clapped a bedstead on the foot.
"This will be yours. Good night," he said, and went.
The doctor looked at Lafe and looked away.
A man? A brute. Naked above the waist,
He sat there creased and shining in the light,
Fumbling the buttons in a well-starched shirt.
"I'm moving into a size-larger shirt.
I've felt mean lately; mean's no name for it.
I've found just what the matter was to-night:
I've been a-choking like a nursery tree
When it outgrows the wire band of its name-tag.
I blamed it on the hot spell we've been having.
'Twas nothing but my foolish hanging back,
Not liking to own up I'd grown a size.
Number eighteen this is. What size do you wear?"

The Doctor caught his throat convulsively.
"Oh - ah - fourteen - fourteen."

The whole colloquy between this tipsy provincial reporter, Lafayette, and the scared doctor will, at the first blush, seem to be out of court to the ordinary citizen trained from childhood to recognize as 'poetical,' say, Bryant's 'Thanatopsis.' The latter is a good example of 'the noble manner,' but the reader who enjoys it does not therefore turn away with a puzzled frown from Holmes's 'The Wonderful One-hoss Shay.'

But is Mr. Frost then a humorist? the reader may

FRIDAY NIGHTS

inquire, seeing a gleam of light. Humour has its place in his work; that is to say, our author's moods take their rise from his contemplative scrutiny of *character* in men and nature, and he responds equally to a tragic episode or a humorous situation. But, like creators greater in achievement, his humorous perception is interwoven with many other strands of apprehension, and in his *genre* pictures, sympathy blends with ironical appreciation of grave issues, to endow them with unique temperamental flavour. If one styled 'Mending Wall' and 'A Hundred Collars' idylls of New England life, the reader might remark sarcastically that they do not seem very idyllic; but idylls they are none the less, not in the corrupted sense of pseudo-Arcadian pastorals, but in the original meaning of 'little pictures.' One may contend that 'The Housekeeper' is cast in much the same gossiping style as Theocritus's idyll, 'The Ladies of Syracuse,' with its prattle of provincial ladies over their household affairs and the crush in the Alexandrian streets at the Festival of Adonis. And one may wager that this famous poem shocked the academic taste of the day by its unconventionality, and would not, indeed, please modern professors, were it not the work of a Greek poet who lived three hundred years before Christ.

It is not indeed a bad precept for readers who wish to savour the distinctive quality of new original talents to judge them first by the *human interest* of what they present. Were this simple plan followed, a Browning or a Whitman would not be kept waiting so long in the chilling shadow of contemporary disapproval. Regard simply the people in Mr. Frost's dramatic dialogues, their motives and feel-

ROBERT FROST

ings, their intercourse and the clash of their outlooks, and note how these little canvases, painted with quiet, deep understanding of life's incongruous everyday web, begin to glow with subtle colour. Observe how the author in 'A Servant to Servants,' picturing the native or local surroundings, makes the *essentials* live and speak in a woman's homely confession of her fear of madness.

But it is best to give an example of Mr. Frost's emotional force, and in quoting a passage from 'Home Burial,' I say unhesitatingly that for tragic poignancy this piece stands by itself in American poetry. How dramatic is the action, in this moment of revelation of the tragic rift sundering man and wife!

'He saw her from the bottom of the stairs
Before she saw him. She was starting down,
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.
She took a doubtful step and then undid it
To raise herself and look again. He spoke,
Advancing toward her: 'What is it you see
From up there always – for I want to know?'
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,
And her face changed from terrified to dull.
He said to gain time: "What is it you see?"
Mounting until she cowered under him.
"I will find out now – you must tell me, dear."
She, in her place, refused him any help
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Blind creature; and a while he didn't see.
But at last he murmured, "Oh," and again, "Oh."

"What is it – what?" she said.

"Just that I see."

"You don't," she challenged. "Tell me what it is."

"The wonder is I didn't see at once.
I never noticed it from here before.
I must be wonted to it – that's the reason.
The little graveyard where my people are!
So small the window frames the whole of it.
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight,
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those*.
But I understand: it is not the stones,
But the child's mound –"

"Don't, don't, don't, don't," she cried.'

He entreats his wife to let him into her grief, and not to carry it, this time, to someone else. He entreats her to tell him why the loss of her first child has bred in her such rankling bitterness toward him, and why every word of his about the dead child gives her such offence.

– "And it comes to this,
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead."

ROBERT FROST

"You can't because you don't know how.
If you had any feelings, you that dug
With your own hand – how could you? – his little grave;
I saw you from that very window there,
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
Leap up like that, like that, and land so lightly
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.
I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice
Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,
But I went near to see with my own eyes.
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes
Of the fresh earth from your baby's grave
And talk about your everyday concerns.
You had stood the spade up against the wall
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it."

"I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.
I'm cursed, God, if I don't believe I'm cursed."

"I can repeat the very words you were saying.
'Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.'

Think of it, talk like that at such a time!
What had how long it takes a birch to rot
To do with what was in the darkened parlour!
You *couldn't* care! The nearest friends can go
With any one to death, comes so far short

FRIDAY NIGHTS

They might as well not try to go at all.
No, from the time when one is sick to death,
One is alone, and he dies more alone.
Friends make pretence of following to the grave,
But before one is in it, their minds are turned
And making the best of their way back to life
And living people, and things they understand.
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't.' '

Here is vision, bearing the flame of piercing feeling in the living word. How exquisitely the strain of the mother's anguish is felt in that naked image,

'Making the gravel leap and leap in the air,
Leap up like that, like that, and land so lightly.'

Perhaps some readers, deceived by the supreme simplicity of this passage, may not see what art has inspired its perfect naturalness. It is indeed the perfection of poetic realism, both in observation and in deep insight into the heart. How well most of us know, after we have followed some funeral and stood by the grave-side of some man near to us, that baffled, uneasy self-questioning, 'Why do I feel so little? Is it possible I have no more sorrow or regret to feel at his death?' But what other poet has said this with such moving felicity?

I have quoted 'Home Burial' partly from the belief that its dramatic intensity will best level any popular barrier to the recognition of its author's creative originality. But one does not expect that even a sensitive taste will respond so

ROBERT FROST

readily to the rare flavour of 'The Mountain' as did the American people to Whittier's 'Snowbound,' fifty years back. The imagery of the Quaker poet's idyll, perfectly suited to its purpose of mirroring with faithful sincerity the wintry landscape and the pursuits and character of a New England farmer's family, is marked by no peculiar delicacy or originality of style. Mr. Frost, on the other hand, may disappoint readers who prefer grandeur and breadth of outline or magical depth of colouring to delicate atmospheric imagery.

But the attentive reader will soon discover that Mr. Frost's cunning impressionism produces a subtle cumulative effect, and that by his use of pauses, digressions, and the crafty envisagement of his subject at fresh angles, he secures a pervading feeling of the mass and movement and elusive force of nature. He is a master of his exacting medium blank verse – a new master. The reader must pause and pause again before he can judge him, so unobtrusive and quiet are these 'effects,' so subtle the appeal of the whole. One can, indeed, return to his poems again and again without exhausting their quiet imaginative spell. For instance, the reader will note how the feeling of the mountain's mighty bulk and hanging mass, its vast elbowing flanks, its watching domination of the near fields and scattered farmsteads, begins to grow upon him, till he too is possessed by the idea of exploring its high ravines, its fountain springs and granite terraces. One of the surest tests of fine art is whether our imagination harks back to it, fascinated in after contemplation, or whether our interest is suddenly exhausted both in it and the subject. And

FRIDAY NIGHTS

'The Mountain' shows that the poet has known how to seize and present the mysterious force and essence of living nature.

In nearly all Mr. Frost's quiet dramatic dialogues, his record of the present passing scene suggests how much has gone before, how much these people have lived through, what a lengthy chain of feelings and motives and circumstances has shaped their actions and mental attitudes. Thus in 'The Housekeeper,' his picture of the stout old woman sitting there in her chair, talking over Estelle, her grown-up daughter, who, weary of her anomalous position in the household, has left John and gone off and married another man, carries with it a rich sensation of the women's sharp criticism of a procrastinating obstinate man. John is too dense in his masculine way to know how much he owes to them. This psychological sketch in its sharp actuality is worthy of Sarah Orne Jewett.

But why put it in poetry and not in prose? the reader may hazard. Well, it comes with greater intensity in rhythm and is more heightened and concentrated in effect thereby. If the reader will examine 'A Servant to Servants,' he will recognize that this narrative of a woman's haunting fear that she has inherited the streak of madness in her family would lose in distinction and clarity were it told in prose. Yet so extraordinarily close to normal everyday speech is it that I anticipate some academic person may test its metre with a metronome, and declare that the verse is often awkward in its scansion. No doubt. But so, also, is the blank verse of many a master hard to scan,

ROBERT FROST

if the academic foot-rule be not applied with a nice comprehension of where to give and when to take. In 'A Servant to Servants' the tragic effect of this over-driven woman's unburdening herself of her load of painful memories and gloomy forebodings is to my mind a rare artistic achievement, — one that graves itself on the memory.

And now that we have praised 'North of Boston' so freely, shall we not make certain stiff critical reservations? Doubtless one would do so were one not conscious that Mr. Frost's fellow poets, his deserving rivals, will relieve one of the task. May I say to them here that because I believe Mr. Frost in 'North of Boston' has found a way for himself, so I believe their road lies also open before them. The roads are infinite, and will surely yield, now or tomorrow, vital discoveries. A slight defect of Mr. Frost's subtle realistic method, and one does not wish to slur it over, is that it is sometimes difficult to grasp all the implications and bearings of his situations. His language in 'The Self-seeker' is highly figurative, too figurative perhaps for poetry. Again in 'The Generations of Man,' as in some of this extract we have given, his method as art seems to be a little long-winded. In many of his poems, his fineness of psychological truth is perhaps in excess of his poetic beauty, — an inevitable defect of his cool, fearless realism. And the critical corollary no doubt will be made, that from the intensity with which he makes us realize things we should gain a little more pleasure. But here one may add that there is pleasure and pleasure, and that it seems remarkable that this New England poet, so absorbed by the

FRIDAY NIGHTS

psychological drama of people's temperaments and conduct, should preserve such pure outlines and clear objectivity of style.

Is his talent a pure product of New England soil? I take it that just as Hawthorne owed a debt to English influence, so Mr. Frost owes one also. But his 'native touch' is declared by the subtle blend of outspokenness and reticence, of brooding conscience and grave humour. Speaking under correction, it appears to me that his creative vision, springing from New England soil, and calmly handing on the best and oldest American tradition, may be a little at variance with the cosmopolitan clamour of New York. It would be quaint indeed if Americans, who, according to their magazines, are opening their hospitable bosoms to Mr. Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual poems and dramas of Bengal life, should rest oblivious of their own countryman. To certain citizens Mr. Frost's poems of the life of inconspicuous, humble New England folk may seem unattractively homely in comparison with the Eastern poet's lofty, mystical dramas; but by American critics this view will doubtless be characterized as a manifestation of American provincialism. The critics know that a poet who has no 'message' to deliver to the world, whose work is not only bare of prettiness and sentimentality but is isolated and unaffected by this or that 'movement,' is easily set aside. Nothing is easier, since his appeal is neither to the interests nor caprices of the market. Ours indeed is peculiarly the day when everything pure, shy, and independent in art seems at the mercy of those who beat the big drum and shout their wares through the megaphone.

ROBERT FROST

And knowing this, the critic of conscience will take for his watchword *quality*.

‘Mr. Frost is a true poet, but not a *poetical* poet,’ remarked a listener to whom I read ‘A Servant to Servants,’ leaving me wondering whether his verdict inclined the scales definitely to praise or blame. Of poetical poets we have so many! of literary poets so many! of drawing-room poets so many! – of academic and dilettanti poets so many! of imitative poets so many! but of original poets how few!

SOME REMARKS ON AMERICAN AND ENGLISH FICTION IN 1914

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I

THE Editor of 'The Atlantic Monthly' having invited me to speak with candour on the practice and prospects of English and American fiction, I feel that it is best to direct my remarks to a few aspects which may possibly lead to some discussion among American novelists themselves.

I speak here as an English reviewer who has been interested for many years in the American attempt to evolve, in imaginative literature, a standard of fine quality, one which in Mr. W. D. Howells's phrase 'should be neither shamed nor vaunting.' And first it may be of profit to inquire whether the artistic quality of English and American fiction is higher than was the case fifteen or twenty years ago. I believe that though the ordinary English novel is a mediocre affair, truly representative of our middle-class limitations, our dull but honest domesticity, our lack of wit and insensitiveness to form, our dislike of bitter truths, our preference for mild idealism and sentimental solutions, still the typical English novel to-day is less vulgar, less false, less melodramatic in its appeal than it was a generation ago.

Can the same be said of the American novel? My opinion is here set down in the hope of eliciting the views of other critics. But it appears to me that, of late, a certain intensification of the commercial ideal in America, with the increasing 'hunt of the dollar,' is more and more

FRIDAY NIGHTS

restricting the field of exercise of the finer and quieter talents in fiction, and that the rivalry of American publishers in flooding the country with inferior brands of novels must be tending to depress the public standard of taste. It must be, indeed, that there are fine and delicate talents emerging amid the raging spate of 'best sellers'; but it is harder to distinguish their gleam amid the subfusc, swollen cataract of stories made to order.

In England, of course, as in America, there are bottomless depths in the insatiable appetite of the public for an art of sensational shocks and sentimental twaddle,¹ but the point is whether the market for the fine, conscientious piece of literary craftsmanship is a rising or a falling one? Various straws of tendency in the United States point in a depressing direction. Twenty years ago did not Mr. W. D. Howells's splendid example in literature carry more weight with the intelligent public than to-day? It will be rejoined, perhaps, that there is no living novelist of the younger American school who can paint with such subtle flexibility of insight and such breadth of vision the portrait of his

¹ To balance the disconcerting fact that Mrs. Florence Barclay's twaddling novels hail from an English vicarage, we quote an American publisher's advertisement: "'The Book of Thrills," *Darkness and Dawn*. By George Allan England'; and so forth.

'Also you have a wonderful wooing under perfectly unheard-of conditions; an ideal love, pure, tender, unselfish. . . . Beatrice's abduction, Allan's fight with a giant gorilla, the air-ship wreck, the thrilling defence against a horde of half-animal savages, and the building up of a new world and a *beautiful idealistic civilization* on the ruins of a blasted planet - these but suggest the *entertainment* possibilities of this big romance,' and so on.

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

generation as did the author of 'Silas Lapham.' If so, the sign is not auspicious.

The fact that the influence wielded by two of your ablest novelists, Edith Wharton and Anne Douglas Sedgwick, is so restricted in scope in proportion to their gift suggests that the American mind is hostile to the artist in literature, whereas our English audience, at worst, is apathetic or indifferent. With us, though the fight against commercial Philistinism is perennial, the writers of rare imaginative gift do not seem to me so isolated, so hemmed in, and cut off from assistance of cultivated minds as in America.

II

Let us look back along the line some twenty years. From an undated cutting from the London *Speaker*, which must belong to 1894, or 1895 at latest, I find that I singled out Mr. Hamlin Garland, Miss Murfree, Miss Grace King, Mr. F. Hopkinson Smith, Miss Mary Wilkins, and Miss Katharine Smith as the most gifted literary artists in the younger, rising school, Messrs. W. D. Howells's, Henry James's, and George W. Cable's reputations having been of course long solidly established.

By some accident I did not come across Miss Sarah Orne Jewett's incomparable short stories till several years later, when I recommended an English publisher to import an edition of 'The Country of the Pointed Firs.' But the failure of American criticism to recognize that, by virtue of thirty little masterpieces in the short story, Miss Jewett ranks with the leading European masters, and its grudging,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

inadequate recognition of the most original genius it has produced in story-telling, Mr. Stephen Crane, showed me that it had not realized that real talent, æsthetic or literary, is individual in its structure, experience, outlook, and growth, and that it makes its appeal and survives to posterity by reason of its peculiar originality of tone and vision, expressed in beauty and force of form, of atmosphere, and of style.

Every fresh native talent emerges by virtue of its revelation of fresh aspects and original points of view, which create fresh valuations in our comprehension of life and human nature. Now this very simple test, which is indeed self-evident, is the touchstone by which we separate the genuine metal of imaginative art from the sham or common alloy of the popular fabricated article. If we apply it in the cases of Frank R. Stockton and Joel Chandler Harris, we perceive that the originality of those delightful humorists entitles them to seats not far removed from that of Mark Twain. Again, when Mr. Frank Norris appeared, his 'McTeague' was no literary echo, or iteration or affirmation of current social ideas or ideals, whatever may have been the precise measure of literary talent. The same may be said of Mr. Harold Frederick's powerful novel 'Illumination.' Later, when Mr. Dreiser came in sight with his 'Sister Carrie,' the present writer had the honour of recommending it for English publication, while that admirable piece of realism was being cold-shouldered and boycotted for years by the body of American publishers.

I do not know whether the late O. Henry's marvellous powers of language, gaiety, creative fecundity, and imagin-

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

ative power in handling a situation have yet received their due in America, but the point I wish to make clear is that between the writers above enumerated, namely, between Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, Miss Murfree, Miss Mary Wilkins, Miss Grace King, Mrs. Wharton, Miss Anne Douglas Sedgwick, Mr. Frank R. Stockton, Mr. J. C. Harris, Mr. Hamlin Garland, Mr. F. Hopkinson Smith, Mr. Stephen Crane, Mr. Frank Norris, O. Henry, and such clever popular favourites as Mr. Winston Churchill, Miss Mary Johnston, Mr. Robert W. Chambers, Mr. Richard Harding Davis, Mr. John Fox, Jr., Mr. Owen Johnson, it would be waste of time to institute comparisons in respect of artistic gifts and originality of temperament. The work of the first class of writers, unequal as are their achievements in point of individual genius, is of a grade artistically far beyond the reach of the second class enumerated.

In saying that the work of the latter – represented by the six authors I have cited – is obviously deficient in ‘temperamental value,’ I do not mean that these authors are indistinguishable one from another, but that in tone, in insight, in style, each is little more than a popular sounding-board for the reverberation of current tones and moods of the mass of minds. Take Mr. R. H. Davis’s story ‘The Man who could not Lose,’ Mr. R. W. Chambers’s ‘The Business of Life,’ Mr. Owen Johnson’s ‘The Salamander,’ and ask what measure of creative originality informs them. None. None at all, or next to none. These stories no doubt may amuse or interest or instruct their audience, but the first is worthless, the second mediocre, the third mere-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

tricious as an artistic achievement. They are destined for the rubbish heap, if indeed they have not been deposited there already. And the works, all told, of Mr. Winston Churchill, Miss Mary Johnston, and Mr. John Fox, Jr., despite the amazing energy and industry of their authors, kick the beam when weighed against a single little masterpiece by Miss Sarah Orne Jewett or Stephen Crane. This, of course, is an obvious truth to any critical intelligence, but I do not know how far it is now accepted in America.

III

At this point of the inquiry my reader may ask, Do not you possess in England this same class of popular favourites whose novels and tales are also destitute of real creative originality, æsthetic interest, and individual insight? We do. But the work of industrious talents such as Sir Gilbert Parker, Mr. A. E. W. Mason, Mr. W. J. Locke, Mr. H. A. Vachell, 'Richard Dehan,' Miss E. T. Fowler, and others, is not ranked by any critic worth his salt with that of writers of creative originality, as Messrs. Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, Thomas Hardy, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett.

I must admit that the vast majority of our English audience is uncritical in its taste, and that many of our 'best sellers' are also the most poverty-stricken and mediocre in point of vision, form, atmosphere, and style. But the chief advantage we possess which leads to the fostering of literary talent, giving it liberty to grow and a certain, if small, measure of favouring recognition, springs, I believe, from the fact that the Englishman is so individual in his

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

instincts that the unorthodox novelist of real talent will always find some backer to publish and support him, and reviewers to criticize him with insight and fairness, *without deferring to the opinion of the majority*. However dull or mediocre an ordinary English novelist may be, I do not think that he deliberately echoes the orthodox shibboleths, moral or social, of the public at large, or that he makes a fetish of 'recognized opinion.' I cannot help connecting the strange timidity (I had almost written cowardice) of the American publishers in backing work of original individuality with the great superstition of the good American in his present stage of culture, namely, that he ought to be thinking and feeling and reiterating what he imagines everybody round him is thinking and feeling and reiterating. Everybody is busy copying everybody else! — an absurd state of things which is not only destructive of true individuality, but directly inimical to the creation of fine art.

The dogma persistently put forward in America under innumerable guises, that the thinker and the literary artist must cater for the tastes, ideas, and sentiments, moral and emotional, of the great majority under pain of being ignored¹ or ostracized, was noted by De Tocqueville three generations ago; but this dogma bred in the American bone seems to have been reinforced by the latter-day tyranny of the commercial ideal. The commercial man

¹ 'One is told, for example, of the fate of the late Frank Norris's rejected posthumous novel. *Vandover* was not in accord with the spirit of the day in literature, and in the time of rapid production it was easy to ignore its claim.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

who says, 'Read this book because it is the best seller,' is seeking to hypnotize the individual's judgment and taste. If there be a noticeable dearth of originality of feeling and outlook in latter-day American fiction, it must be because the individual is subjected from the start to the insistent pressure of social ideals of conformity which paralyse or crush out the finer, rarer, more sensitive individual talents. I do not say that English writers are not vexed in a minor degree by Mrs. Grundy's attempts to boycott or crush novels that offend the taste of 'the villa public,' but I believe that our social atmosphere favours the writer of true individuality; and in proof of this statement I set down here a list of over sixty novelists of genuine original talent, many of whom are literary craftsmen of high artistic quality; and these are in addition to the six I have already named:

George Moore, Hilaire Belloc, Cunninghame Graham, W. H. Hudson, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Foster, William De Morgan, Leonard Merrick, Maurice Hewlett, John Masefield, Sir A. Quiller-Couch, Robert Hichens, Stephen Reynolds, A. F. Wedgwood, David W. Bone, Barry Pain, C. E. Montague, Oliver Onions, J. C. Snaith, James Stephens, Frank Harris, Neil Lyons, Perceval Gibbon, Walter De La Mare, Charles Marriott, Ford Hueffer, H. De Vere Stacpoole, Neil Munro, Morley Roberts, Vincent O'Sullivan, Marmaduke Pickthall, Compton Mackenzie, J. D. Beresford, E. V. Lucas, Frank Swinnerton, W. L. George, Edwin Pugh, Gilbert Cannan, Archibald Marshall, Grant Richards, Algernon Blackwood, Gerald O'Donovan, Shan Bullock, Eden Phillpotts, George Bir-

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

mingham, Richard Pryce, Sir Conan Doyle, James Prior, Mrs. Mary E. Mann, Miss May Sinclair, Miss Ethel Sidgwick, Mrs. Steel, Mrs. Dudeney, Mrs. Gertrude Bone, Miss Macnaughtan, Miss Violet Hunt, Mrs. Ada Leverson, Mrs. C. Dawson Scott, Miss Amber Reeves, Miss Silberrad, and Mrs. Margaret Woods.

It would be interesting to know how far the above list – which could be extended – can be paralleled by a similar list of living American novelists of artistic rank. I have counted up to twenty myself, in addition to those already cited; but I cannot claim to have explored or examined thoroughly the field of American fiction for several years past, and I must remind my readers that in touching on certain aspects in the outlook for fiction I am hoping to elicit information and discussion.

Now it may perhaps help the inquiry if I quote some passages from a criticism of Mr. Jack London's 'Burning Daylight,' a criticism styled 'Made in America,' which I contributed to a London newspaper three years back:

'Why is it that the work of so many highly intelligent American novelists is so deficient in *artistic quality* when we come to compare it with European fiction and the same intellectual level? Writers of genius America can of course show us . . . but I am speaking with reference to scores of the clever popular novelists whose artistic instincts seem to be affected, indeed largely stultified, by an insidious force, omnipresent in the American social atmosphere, which dictates such absurd observances as "the happy ending." While nearly every society wishes its governing ideas to be paramount, and is distrustful of the artist who sub-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

jects them to an unfaltering analysis, it is only in America that the commercial instinct seems to have succeeded in erecting the mediocrity of the ordinary man, in matters artistic, into an imperative standard of tastelessness. . . .

'Now, in modern art what matters perhaps most is the temperament of the artist, that individual essence which creates a new spiritual quality and atmosphere out of the life and forms and patterns of society. . . . An essential in creative art is the artist's temperamental absorption in his own work. Art in that respect is essentially aristocratic, however democratic its appeal may be. That is what Meredith meant when he said, "Do not democratize literature." Beer or blankets or biscuits or braces may be manufactured to please the taste of the average man, but art cannot be so dealt with under penalty of losing its quality as art. The business people do not, of course, understand this. They cry aloud for novels that sell in hundreds of thousands, — those novels which are "graded," cleverly or not, to a standard of mediocre taste. And temperamental quality, being unadaptable and self-regarding, is apt to be a stumbling-block in the way of those popular achievements. Americans, however charming and intelligent they may be, always seem nervously anxious to appear orthodox in their artistic tastes and appreciations. And this of course means keeping to the high road of mediocrity, for genuine taste implies again the expression of an individual temperament. . . .

'Mr. Jack London's "Burning Daylight" has more individuality than most American novels — as a work of picturesque information on Yukon pioneering, and as a

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

smashing criticism of American business ideals, it is indeed quite valuable. The story is a "live" book, as his countrymen say, broad in outlook, manly in its standpoint, and one written with literary skill and conviction. Yet this same curious absence of temperament is to be remarked, and the novel has something of the effect of a composite photograph. Mr. Jack London does not echo other writers, or conform to the opinion of the majority, so his case is worth investigating. The hero, Harnish, is an American superman. His physical feats are almost superhuman. He out-runs, out-walks, out-distances, out-drinks, out-gambles, out-fights, and so forth, every other man in the Yukon territory, including the Indian Karna, "the pick of his barbaric race."

'And the consequence is that one does not believe in Harnish as one believes, say, in the existence of the heroes of the Icelandic Sagas. He is a monster, not a man. The American tendency to exaggeration has in fact annihilated all the finer lines and traits of human personality. And, after all, art is a matter of precise shades and particular lines. So with Dede Mason, the heroine of the tale, Harnish's "ninety-dollar-a-month stenographer," who refuses to marry him when he is a millionaire because she dislikes the fevered life he is leading. Dede Mason is generalized, not individualized. She talks not like any girl in particular, but like a syndicate of American women as reported by a news agency. Harnish's courtship and Dede's replies give one the sensation of love-making by human machinery, very smooth-running and effective in working, but without individual power or charm or flavour. . . . May we not

FRIDAY NIGHTS

draw the conclusion that it is the pressure of "standardized" ideas in the mental interchange of American society that is so destructive of the finer shades of "temperamental" valuation?"

I quote the above criticism the more readily since it lays stress on the two characteristics of popular latter-day American fiction which are destructive of its appeal to rank as fine art: that is, (*a*) exaggeration, (*b*) the presentation and glorification of 'standardized' morals, manners, emotions, and stereotyped social ambitions and ethical valuations.

Let us take Mr. Owen Johnson's 'The Salamander' for an illustration of charge (*a*). Mr. Johnson has chosen a promising subject, for the 'salamander' girl, Doré, is a significant product of her feverish and artificial New York environment. But the author exhausts us with a surfeit of flimsy and violent sensationalism, he plays with the loud pedal down, and is continually throwing in all kinds of flashy effects. He commences with exaggerated emphasis, and after the first seventy pages he can only offer us a repetition of the old shocks. The men characters – Massingale, Lindaberry, Sassoon, and Harrigan Blood – are merely coarsely modelled types, not individual men in any sense of the word. The girl characters are little better. We soon sicken of the erotic sentimentalities that Massingale and Doré exchange, and all the latter scenes between them are vamped up shockingly and surcharged with false rhetoric and theatrical over-emphasis.

The above criticism of 'The Salamander' may seem a little harsh, but I make it deliberately, on the ground that

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

it would be absurd to style the novel 'a work of art.' If we compare it, say, with Mr. W. D. Howells's recent novel, 'New Leaf Mills,' with its classic balance, exquisite restraint, and gracious clarity of vision, we shall refuse to dignify 'The Salamander' with the name of 'literature.' The fact that it sells one hundred thousand copies or a quarter of a million copies, or a million copies, is no mitigation of the fact that 'The Salamander' violates almost every canon of good art. It may be added that a vital reason for the discouragement of crude, violent, and noisy art is that an audience which is habituated to being 'thrilled' will require coarser and coarser stimulants to excite its jaded mental palate. Sensational art is art in which everybody seems to be talking at the top of his voice to attract attention, till at last the hubbub becomes so deafening that the people still resolved on being heard begin to howl and scream. So it is with 'best sellers' that are 'all outside and no inside,' and with 'the New Fiction that People are Reading'; the publishers and the authors seem to be conspiring to force the note of exaggeration till the typical 'best seller' works with automatic precision in producing scenes of sweet sentimentalism or shock after shock of melodramatic incident. If I am in error in thinking that twenty years ago the American novel of sensation was a far soberer and more human affair than it is to-day, I should welcome evidence on the point.

IV

As regards my second criticism, (*b*), that the modern American novelist seems to delight in the presentation of

FRIDAY NIGHTS

'standardized' morals, manners, and emotions, and a glorification of stereotyped aspirations and ethical valuations, I may illustrate it by saying that his unconscious habit seems to be to swim with the current, to swim not across the stream, but down it. He would appear to be carried along by the force of the social stream at such a pace that his swimming, that is, his work, does not show any appreciable resistance to the way that the tide of popular ideas and ideals happens to be setting. I except of course the work of a score or more of novelists, such as Booth Tarkington, Robert Herrick, Owen Wister, Miss Dewing, and Neith Boyce, whose criticism of character is accompanied by a criticism of society; but the weakness of the ordinary well-written American novel lies, if I may say so, in its sentimental and ethical conventionality. Even the novelists who set out to create 'fresh valuations' in social propaganda seem to me to deal in 'stock' sizes of manly emotions. Let me illustrate my meaning by a quotation from a criticism, written a few years ago, of Mr. Winston Churchill's 'Mr. Crewe's Career':

IS

"The naïveté of the author's artistic method is shown in the idyllic contrast that he draws between the two ^{men} ~~are~~ who control the fortunes of the North-Eastern Railway — Mr. Flint, the President, and his legal adviser, the Hon. Hilary Vane, and their pure and upright children, Victoria Flint and Austen Vane, who, of course, fall in love and run counter to their parents' crooked policy.

'We do not believe in the candid innocence of the fascinating Victoria. She is a stock tradition of the Anglo-Saxon theatre, this pure and trusting heroine who, lapped

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

in luxury, never dreams of questioning her hard father's methods and business code of ethics, till the moment comes when, enlightened by her lover, she is "satisfied with nothing less than the truth," and her "life-long faith" in him is broken thereby. We fear that in real life Victoria would have been quite prepared to speculate for the fall in North-Eastern securities.

Nor can we accept the high-souled Austen Vane as a figure representative in any sense. He has the moral tone of an Emerson, the brains of a Lincoln, and the purity of Sir Galahad. He is obviously constructed to flatter the idealism always strong in the great community of hard-headed business citizens of the United States. His career is improbable: after a wild youth, he has gone West and shot his man, and then returned to the home of his father, where by turns he patronizes, and is filled with a dumb sorrow and compassion for the erring ways of the Hon. Hilary. He takes up and wins a suit for a suffering farmer against the tyrannical North-Eastern Railroad, but he is too magnanimous in his filial affection to accept a nomination for the governorship of the state, when all the honest citizens come thronging round, entreating him to be the "people's man."

'It is a very touching conception, but we may say candidly that we distrust the *bona fides* of these idealized figures. There is an unpleasant flavour of moral bunkum, moreover, in some of the situations, as in the scene where the Hon. Hilary, bowed and broken by his uneasy sense of a life misspent, defies his old friend the President of the North-Eastern Railroad, and says, "I'm glad to have

FRIDAY NIGHTS

found out what my life has been worth before I die." The radiant and unselfish Victoria, who, by the by, is wearing "a simple but exquisite gown, the creation of which aroused the artist in a celebrated Parisian dressmaker," with an "illuminating smile" pierces "the hard layers of the Hon Hilary's outer shell, and hears the imprisoned spirit crying with a small, persistent voice – a spirit stifled for many years and starved." Then the Hon. Hilary has a stroke. It is a little simple, this "triumph of the right," as is also the ethical flavouring of the love-making between the spotless Austen and his bride, who has a "fierce faith that it was his destiny to make the world better and hers to help him." When, however, we leave the sentimental trimmings on one side, and get to the real "business politics," we may congratulate Mr. Winston Churchill on having got his knife well into the corporations.'

Even in novels of a superior order, which may be marked by some psychological insight, atmospheric truth, and a highly conscientious exposition of character and motive, we find that the didactic touch often robs the story of the qualities of flexible grace and naturalness which are essential to fine craftsmanship. A former criticism of Mr. James Lane Allen's 'The Bride of the Mistletoe' may serve as an illustration:

'Conscientious is the term that best describes the spirit and the workmanship of "The Bride of the Mistletoe," as of so much of the work of the best American novelists. Perhaps one of the drawbacks of addressing a democracy is that the conscientious writer is led to take his responsibilities over-seriously, and is careful to enunciate nothing that

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

is not sanctioned by severe ethical standards or upheld by common sense. This underlying correctness of mental and moral tone is apt to be destructive of artistic grace, spontaneity, and intensity; and even in the most unstudied moments of Mr. Allen's story he never lets the significant detail speak for itself, but swathes it with commentary, didactic or sentimental. When Maupassant advises the young writer not to reason overmuch, he implies that the force of the thing in itself and of its atmosphere, which art conveys, is impaired by any obtrusive desire of a writer to play Providence to his readers. Mr. James Lane Allen is too accomplished a writer to err by gross didactic underlining, but a multitude of subtle touches betray that he, like his hero, is conscious of a "task," of a "message" which may "kindle in American homes some new light of truth, with the eyes of mothers and fathers fixed upon it, and innumerable children of the future the better for its shining. . . ."

'We could enlarge on the striking absence of economy of line in Mr. Allen's method, on its deliberate impressiveness, to which are sacrificed grace, ease and the flash of the unforeseen. But, passing much artificiality in the literary style, as in the description of a brook which is likened to "a band of jewelled samite," or as in the phrase "grey-eyed querist of actuality," when the husband addresses his wife, we may point out that the story loses all illusion of actuality in passages of conversation such as the following:

" "Frederick," she said, "for many years we have been happy together, so happy! Every tragedy of nature has stood at a distance from us, except the loss of our children.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

We have lived on a sunny pinnacle of our years, lifted above life's storms. But, of course, I have realized that, sooner or later, our lot must become the common one: if we did not go down to sorrow, sorrow would climb to us; and I knew that on the heights it dwells best. That is why I wish to say to you to-night what I shall: I think fate's hour has struck for me; I am ready to bear it. Its sorrow has already left the bow and is on its way; I open my heart to receive it. This is as I had always wished. I have said that if life had any greatest tragedy for me, I hoped it would come when I was happiest; thus I should not know it all. I have never drunk half of my cup of happiness, as you know, and let the other half waste; I must go equally to the depth of any suffering. Worse than the suffering, I think, would be the feeling that I had shirked some of it, had stepped aside or shut my eyes, or in any manner shown myself a cowardly soul," – and so on.

'It does not need much insight to perceive that every sentence here of Josephine's speech is false to nature, and quite impossible for a woman in her situation. The imagery and the carefully balanced periods smell of the lamp, of the highly literary endeavour of the conscientious writer, whose strength lies in meditation and not in catching or conveying to us the movement and interchange of living things.'

V

It seems as if even a slight dose of 'ethical intention' may be as fatal to the creation of a perfect illusion or mirage of life in an artist's picture as is the bias of diffused

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

sentimentalism. American novelists in general might ponder the acute saying of Joubert: 'In painting the moral side of Nature, what the artist has most to beware of is exaggeration; while in painting its physical side what he has to fear most is weakness.' Latter-day American storytellers, most of them, seem to be in a conspiracy to 'make the world better,' to 'touch the heart,' to 'make you forget all your troubles,' to 'exalt life and love,' to be 'a sunshine-maker.' These intentions are so unfaltering, and the stress laid on 'clean living' is so insistent, that one is forced to ask one's self whether the practice and theory of living in America are not antagonistic? whether the exaggerated sentimental appeal may not denote a thinness of real emotion, and the persistent absorption with the moral issue an uneasy self-distrust? It would be as ridiculous to charge the great American people with being less honest with themselves than are those of other nations, as it would be to doubt that in the 'land of freedom,' there is less inner freedom than elsewhere. But the latter-day American novel often leaves one with an uneasy idea that the weight and momentum of American civilization are rolling out the paste of human nature very flat, and are stamping it with machine-made patterns of too common an order.

Another simile that obtrudes itself in reading many American novels is that of a visit from kindly folk who have come to a gathering in Sunday clothes and with Sunday manners. The people's week-day spontaneity is replaced by a cautious preoccupation with their deportment, as to how they are expected to behave, and everything that they say is a little forced. Even in the admirable

FRIDAY NIGHTS

novels of Mrs. Wharton and Anne Douglas Sedgwick the conflict so often depicted between the idealism of the characters and their ordinary earthly motives gives one an odd feeling that both their morals and their manners are like tightly cut clothes in which people cannot be quite at ease. What seems odd is that this persistently active 'conscience' apparently forces the American novelist to dodge and evade any real examination of the cleavage between his so-called 'higher nature' and the claims of the senses. The blinking of facts concerning the appetite of love was marvellous indeed in the Victorian novel; but the effect of the conspiracy of silence in the American novel concerning the sexual passion is seen in the alarming featurelessness of its portraits of women. But this aspect of the subject requires an essay to itself.

To bring my remarks to a head I will conclude by saying that, whereas the limited horizon of modern English fiction, its lack of national breadth, its tameness and lack of sympathy with the democracy, are due to its restricted middle-class outlook, the American novel fails by virtue of its idealistic bias and psychological timidity. The novelist should put human nature under the lens and scrutinize its motives and conduct with the most searching and exacting interest. His æsthetic pleasure in the rich spectacle of life should be backed by a remorseless instinct for telling the truth. But it is impossible to combine these qualities with the commercial, ethical, and sentimental ideals that seem to make up American 'optimism.' 'America is strong in the uplift,' said a publisher of 'Sunshine-Makers' and 'Best Sellers' to the present writer, who, rejoicing at these

SOME REMARKS ON FICTION

synonymous terms, wandered back to the shelf of his prized American classics, Walt Whitman and Poe, Mr. W. D. Howells, Thoreau, Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, O. Henry, and Stephen Crane.

1914



I

ONE morning, when I was reading Mr. Owen Wister's pungent paper on 'Quack Novels and Democracy,' my maid entered the room and said that she had been told that 'an English transport had gone down.' I gazed at her, but her words did not pierce the quick till she added that 'the dead bodies of men in uniform had been seen floating on the water.' The man who penned that little phrase achieved his aim, which was to bring the scene before one's eyes. A touch too much or too little and the scene would not be visualized so clearly or directly. Why do 'official reports' commonly convey so little to one's mind? Because they are dryly and inartistically written, as in this specimen from Petrograd:

'Thanks to the efforts of our valiant regiments of the Caucasus and Turkestan, the resistance of the enemy was shattered. His rear-guards which were covering his retreat were annihilated,' and so forth.

How flat and misty is the generalized outline here. We do not see the scene, because there is no sharp image of life in the phrase, 'the resistance of the enemy was shattered.' Nor do we need to hear that the regiments were 'valiant' or that rear-guards cover a retreat.

But though this dispatch, being inartistic, will not live, as a piece of favourable news it pleased the Russian public more, no doubt, than did the grim little *chose vue* by a

¹ This essay appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, under the title of 'A Gossip on Criticism.'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

war correspondent who wrote that he saw the Turkish prisoners fighting like wild beasts for scraps of food in the cattle-trucks, and that he had noticed one prisoner hold a wounded comrade down on his hands and knees, and then mount astride his back to eat the crust he had torn from him! The vivid vignette of the horrors of war, truly artistic in its pregnant force, is of the order that our English editors strike out of their columns. Why? Because the public is afraid of knowing things as they are. The artists strive to make men understand what forces move in human life and character, but the heedless public averts its eyes from the great poets and artists of our time, such as Tolstoy and Whitman, and feeds on the vulgar sensationalism of the newspapers, and the fiction of Mr. Harold Bell Wright. This is not merely because the average citizen is both uncritical and superficial in his insight and taste, but because the particular self-interest of each generation conspires to obscure the beauty in truth.

What have these discursive remarks to do with criticism? my readers may inquire. Well, they introduce my little thesis: that the recurring failure, the ancient failure of American criticism, is its inability to recognize and appraise what the artistic force in literature achieves, and that while this remains so, its standard of critical values rests upon sand. It is not that I wish to exalt English standards. I make the admission frankly that our criticism suffers, though in less degree, from the same evil. But the traditional interest of the English leisured class in literary classics, and some measure of travel and liberal education, have combined to keep oases of taste above the muddy

CRITICISM AND FICTION

floods of mediocrity. The Englishman is practical-minded to a fault, and his excessive respect for social prosperity, worldly power, and strong character, have kept him vaguely intolerant of the life of ideas, and prone to rate too low the disinterested appeal of art, science, and letters. Being a bad psychologist, he responds very slowly to those profound, witty, or subtle analyses of life and conduct which distinguish the masterpieces of literature. But being independent in his instincts and judgments he resists the contagion of shibboleths and spiritual shams which, as Mr. Wister and others tell us, afflict American culture and life. Our social atmosphere of a mild good-tempered Philistinism therefore leaves the writer and artist in England free to go his way, and assert himself as he wishes, and his pursuits and work are recognized and ministered to by some score 'critics' in our press.

It is really on the catholicity of taste and mental responsiveness of these latter that the public reception of works of cultivated talent depends. They form an indispensable bridge between the talent and the public at large, and on their measure of insight and sincerity it rests whether a man of original genius can fight his way through to favouring recognition.

But passing directly to our inquiry into the state of American criticism, one notes the divergent views of Mr. W. D. Howells, and Mr. Owen Wister. Can they be reconciled? Mr. Howells, after wittily remarking that 'the production of bad fiction' became 'a germ disease which began to be epidemic shortly after the Spanish War and raged with an ever-increasing virulence,' declares that

FRIDAY NIGHTS

American criticism is not to blame, 'having shown a very notable fidelity to its duty.' Mr. Wister, on his part, asserts that as regards literary criticism, America is still in the provincial stage. He states pointedly, 'Until the genteel critic gathers heart not only to brand the bad but to celebrate the good, I doubt if there will exist any word too contemptuous for American criticism.'

A casual observer may adduce his impression that the staunch fortresses in America, where critics take their stand in defence of good literature, have the air of being beleaguered by the inhabitants and shut in by immense wastes of wild, uncultivated territory. One notes admirable criticism appearing here and there in the columns of weekly and monthly organs, but these voices seem confused and drowned in the thundering roar of the great flood tide of mediocrity sweeping past. And the attitude of the rank and file of reviewers in the daily press (with honourable exceptions) reminds one of the triumphant Ephraimites at the passages of Jordan. If an unorthodox artist or poet or novelist who would pass over with his work does not frame the four great shibboleths aright, he and his book are banned and cast in derision on the rocks. These four shibboleths, tests for literary righteousness, which, taken together appear to exercise the tyranny of a great superstition over the modern American imagination, might perhaps be classified as (*a*) the commercial-success shibboleth; (*b*) the moral shibboleth; (*c*) the idealistic or sentimental shibboleth; (*d*) the optimistic shibboleth. I shall not touch on them separately but conjointly, while discussing the seeming incapacity of the American mind to

CRITICISM AND FICTION

recognize what the artistic force in literature *is*, and what it does achieve.

To glance for an instant, however, at the all-pervasive influence of (a) the commercial or market-place test,¹ one may suggest that it is time for American satirists to undermine its triumph by humour and ridicule. The spectacle of a great nation justly proud of its lavish resources of material refinement and secretly uneasy as to its spiritual taste and culture, might to-morrow inspire a great national humorist. And the critics who scan the horizon for the arrival of another Mark Twain may be reminded that he would probably have humble beginnings and hail from some obscure provincial district. Let me say here, before going further, that I believe firmly that American literature will count many great, original achievements within a couple of generations. All the pith and sap of a great literature are there, now inchoate in the social body, a ferment of spiritual force which sooner or later must burst into flower. The blend of buoyancy and gravity in the American temperament, of rare audacity and questioning conscientiousness, enriched by the foreign ingredients lavishly cast for generations into the national melting-pot, will find expression by and by in multiple free-running springs of original genius, in works of conquering vigour

¹ 'Our civilization is still predominatingly commercial. We all dress, we all live, in competition with the well-to-do. . . . The American has no social tradition to sustain him. The social tradition is all the other way: he must be a commercial success, or he is a recognized failure. . . . It is a disgrace not to make one's works justify one's self by providing a living as good as one's neighbours.' - 'Current Comment,' *The Century Magazine*, June, 1915.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

and triumphant energy. But American critics, in their aim of hailing and supporting a native American literature, must make a continuous and sustained effort to penetrate the blank, rolling mist of conventional valuations, which ever threatens to veil and smother the works of original power and beauty.

Why is it that the American mind as represented by its literature is so prone to accept conventional, stereotyped valuations in place of first-hand, fearless analyses? The peculiar vice of commercialized civilization, and especially American civilization, lies in the association of what is useful and profitable materially with what is mean and ugly spiritually and æsthetically. The sin of ugliness is predominant in the cities. It is reflected in the mental atmosphere of the newspapers, with their unending stream of drab or sensationally coloured reports of life's multitudinous happenings. The ordinary man who eagerly accepts his newspaper's superficial commentaries and its jumbled scrawls and transcripts of news, served up at lightning pressure by the pressmen on the trail, does not ask that these reports shall be palpably idealized, or moralized, or grossly conventionalized. But when the poet — Whitman yesterday, or Mr. Robert Frost to-day — shows us the essential beauty or force of life, working in the familiar scene, in the characteristic human impulse, the American reviewer applies instinctively his shibboleths: Is this piece of literature commercially profitable? Is it morally useful? Is it idealistically water-tight? Is it happy in its ending?

This is the attitude of mind of people who will not face

CRITICISM AND FICTION

truth; and the artist in literature, it must be repeated, is known by the peculiar truthfulness of his insight, as well as by the original manner, style and atmosphere in which the forces of life and nature, men's passions and appetites, their characters and ideas, their impulses, motives, and actions are reflected back to us by the mirage of his art. Let us take, for simple demonstration, the direct description we first quoted, — 'The dead bodies of men in uniform were seen floating in the water,' — and reflect, how any lurid, sensational, sentimental, or rhetorical account, contributed by a vulgar mind, would cheapen the human appeal of the same, the appeal to our taste and feeling. But reflect further with what infinite variations artistic creative genius would stamp, in permanent lines and hues, the essential force and features of the tragedy in the minds of those relatives who waited and watched for the bringing to land of the bodies of those drowned men. The critic does not ask that the artist shall conceal anything significantly human in the scene. The latter selects, and emphasizes as he selects it, the characteristic and vital. That is what we mean when we speak of the peculiar truthfulness of the artist's insight: he illumines, he shows us the essential qualities of things, the character of life in meaning perspective.

We all know what a reporter would make of the situation described in Crane's 'The Open Boat,' which is a masterpiece from the lightning-like vividness with which Crane flashes before us the tranquil indifference of nature to the struggles of four men ship-wrecked on the coast of Florida. The American reader can enjoy this little classic

FRIDAY NIGHTS

because its tragic irony is shot through and through with a humorous zest. He is not enthusiastic over it, however, because the story is disconcerting to his pathetic belief that things must come right in the end. But let us suppose that a commonplace writer were to compose (*a*) a pathetic story of the oiler's death, or (*b*) a sensational description of the landing of the bodies of the Lusitania victims. Let us suppose, also, (*c*) that a creative artist of the rank of Crane or Maupassant, handling the latter theme, were to put the narrative in the mouth of a callous reporter, who, greedy after 'copy,' was inquisitively probing into a mother's anguish. An uncritical audience would be highly affected by tales (*a*) and (*b*), but the majority of reviewers would greet the tale (*c*) with a chorus of condemnation of the 'sordidness' or 'brutality' of its realism not perceiving that its remorseless exposure of heartlessness would be a far more powerful appeal to an understanding of good and evil, and so to our sense of the beautiful, than would the rather sugary pathos of tales (*a*) and (*b*). The commonplace mind, disliking to face the truth, would style tale (*c*) 'repellent,' forgetting the Biblical tale of King David's evil dealings with Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel, 41). And had Maupassant given us a variant in his best manner, of the story of Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar, and of his murder by his brother Absalom (II Samuel, 13), the American press and public would indignantly protest that the subject was 'indecent' and was indeed altogether outside the pale of art! But nothing is outside the pale of art. And all such critics would be in the wrong did they fail to recognize that the remorseless tale of Amnon is great by

CRITICISM AND FICTION

its stern outlines, by the stern truthfulness with which it mirrors the destructive passions of the deceitful heart of man.

Observe that the common failure of the ordinary man to recognize great art when he sees it arises at root from his own weakness. When he sees a base act in life, the normal man reacts against it, and knows very well where to place evil in the scale of his human judgments. Nay! he even becomes a good artist himself when he has known a terrible or brutal experience, and when he recounts to others a narrative such as tale (*b*). But the very same man who, reacting thus against the cruelty of living fact, would indignantly burst through the network of conventional shibboleths, did the critics try to close his mouth, will employ these shibboleths himself to close Maupassant's mouth! Why? It is owing to his own mental simplicity that the ordinary reader grows confused and unhappy when Tolstoy or Maupassant bids him watch in the mirror of art the nature of evil or the strands of cruelty in life. He is then made to realize acutely that cruelty and baseness are not merely incarnated *there* in the enemy's figure before him but they are forces *here*, latent in his own heart and interwoven in the whole scheme of nature; and being now, not active in doing, but passive in receiving, he feels his faith disturbed and grows distressed. It is the artist's cunning force, the intensity of the Biblical artist's or of Tolstoy's unsparing analyses of the devious springs of men's impulses and actions, that attacks the reader's naïve wish to see merely the 'presentable' surface, the idealized exterior of life.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

And, correspondingly, the parrot cry for conventional values that to-day dominates the popular mind in America is largely the fear of commercialized society lest it should be told unpleasant truths about itself; lest the unpleasant gulf between its daily practice and its 'ideal' should be sounded by the artist. Similarly the puritan's confused fear of sensuous beauty, and his desperate shutting of the eyes to the interdependence of body and soul, of flesh and spirit, is a sign of his own weakness, of his lack of truthfulness. In such an atmosphere of make-believe, there is and can be neither real art nor real beauty, dominated as it is by considerations of utility and material profit and 'ideals,' and divorced as it is from mental sincerity and the beauty of truth. The only art that is possible is the art of the parlour, with its polite appearances and polite conversations; and indeed the art of a typical 'best seller' is one that goes with the best parlour, with its neat carpet and gilt-framed pictures and easy chairs and airless atmosphere. The people who thrive there have no conception of what art is, for they imagine art should sustain them in their narrow ideas of 'good,' and their sugary sentimentalism and their restless gospel of 'getting on.'

This would not be worth emphasizing if for three generations the great majority of American critics had not sheltered themselves behind the fence of mild academicism and conventional verdicts. They have never associated art with the simple enjoyment of life as a spectacle, never hailed with understanding such pure pieces of art as Crane's 'An Experiment in Misery,' where his description of a vagrant's misery in a grimy lodging-house infects one with

CRITICISM AND FICTION

all the æsthetic joyousness that is traditionally associated with Botticelli's Spring.

But it is unnecessary to adduce instances to drive home our contention, that if the artistic force in literature be that force which reproduces and transmits to us the artist's temperamental sensations of life or nature, any *parti pris* in the shape of conventional valuations, or of prejudices, social and moral, is, *ipso facto*, fatal to good criticism. All *a priori* valuations must be directly in conflict with critical catholicity of taste and a disinterested, intuitive response to the *original manner, quality, and atmosphere of the author's method*. The critic's duty is, first, to lend an attentive ear to what the new artist is telling us, and how he is telling it, and then to determine his rank according to the original force and beauty of his achievement. That is all, but the critic knows well that it is precisely because the new creative vision, be it Poe's or Whitman's or Crane's, is so original, that it affects the contemporary mind as something strange and disturbing and excites the hostility of the commonplace person.

II

The commonplace person! — the secret is out. The failure of modern criticism generally and of American criticism in particular, is that it instinctively defers to and exalts the commonplace view. It has a taste for mediocrity. I take up a novel by Mr. W. D. Howells, and I see that the quality of his literary work is peculiar to himself and is unmistakable. No one ever wrote precisely like this, and no one ever will again. And so with the stories of, say,

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Crane and Frank Norris and O. Henry, or the works of Grace King and Robert Frost, 'The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard' and 'North of Boston'; they have added by their quality of vision to the stock of artistic riches; they are sharply unique, with a particular subtlety of their own. But when I take up, say, 'The Harbour' by Mr. Poole, 'The Titan' by Mr. Dreiser, or 'The Far Country' by Mr. Winston Churchill, if I perceive that their experience and sensations of life do not add this fresh beauty in quality of vision or style, I know where to place *them*. Where? In a different, a lower category. They deserve an honourable place. They are to be welcomed and prized, but – and this distinction is vital – their creative imagination only multiplies patterns of insight and feeling of masses or groups of cultivated minds round us. The works – showing indeed talented observation and insight – of this latter class of writers, however much they diverge as individuals in experience and outlook, are not sufficiently rich in creative originality, and so they belong to the cultivated mass. That is their value and their limitation.

'But wait a little,' the kind reader may exclaim, – 'now you contradict yourself. You first asserted that the sentence "The dead bodies of men in uniform were seen floating on the water" was intuitively artistic. Well, is there anything "sharply unique" in the quality of that description? And does not "The Harbour" offer us many admirable descriptions on this broad level of "artistic" excellence?' To this the answer is that genuine artistic force is certainly in evidence in the planning and execution of 'The Harbour,' and this has enabled Mr. Poole to give

CRITICISM AND FICTION

pleasure and instruction to scores of thousands of American readers, and to Mr. Howells himself; but that the artistic force diffused throughout the book nowhere bursts into the fire of genius. His art acts as a good steady illuminant of his theme, and is turned on like gas in a chandelier, nicely regulated by his skilful care and judgment; but his art is never fused by exquisite touches into the flame of inspiration. As art it is on the highest level of mediocrity. Observe we say the highest level; for could Mr. Poole take one step upwards, only one step, he would attain the rank which is denied to thousands of highly talented men.

And – to repeat a criticism that we have offered elsewhere – first let us consider his strength and weakness. A novel that is planned on symmetrical, powerful lines, that aims at picturing in just perspective the struggle between the shipping companies and the captains of industry, with Wall Street behind them, and the exploited mass of dockers, stokers, labourers, – a novel that has breadth of vision and atmospheric actuality, – for this one ought indeed to be grateful. It may be owned frankly that the novel of large social vision, in which the life of modern types is shown as conditioned by mass movements and the pressure of economic forces, is rarely offered us. The Anglo-Saxon novelist, unlike the Latin, has little aptitude for generalization, is weak in the architectural sense, and derives from the individual, particular unit, achieving national significance or epical breadth by accident, as it were, as in ‘Tom Jones’ and ‘Vanity Fair.’ Indeed, in most of the exceptions to this rule, as Frank Norris’s ‘The

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Pit' and Mr. Galsworthy's 'The Man of Property,' one detects very quickly the influence of the French naturalists. No doubt Mr. Poole not only has a natural gift for viewing society in the large, but his philosophic sense has been stimulated and trained by the study of good models. His canvas, ambitious in size, is not grandiose; his central purpose, the delineation of the great Harbour as a tidal way of human energies, changing with the generations, focusing and radiating, receiving and giving forth new forces and forms of the nation's development, does not dwarf his characters. In fact, so far as charity of design, structural skill, descriptive talent, and faithful observation can prevail, 'The Harbour' is conscientious and spirited. It is a novel that holds one's attention by the interest and variety of its scenes, one that is instructive, one that rarely falls in execution beneath a certain level standard of excellence. What more do you want, then? the American critics may ask. It seems ungrateful to reply that 'The Harbour' is lacking both in imaginative intensity and in artistic originality.

Mr. Poole's audience is not indeed affronted by a strange vision, by a style peculiar in quality, by characters, spiritual atmosphere or æsthetic force intense and self-centred. Any intelligent person can understand and appreciate 'The Harbour,' which is, indeed, primarily a work of sound intelligence, and not one of artistic inspiration. The wiry, quick-witted young hero, Billy, who 'makes good' at college, and later as a magazine writer wins success, and marries a sweet and capable girl, Eleanore, has no individuality; neither has Eleanore, who is an amalgam

CRITICISM AND FICTION

of feminine virtues. His father, who typifies the out-of-date American ship-owner, with his belief in a big mercantile marine; and her father, Dillon, the masterful engineer, who concentrates on the economic problem of organizing the port and the traffic of the railways and the shipping lines on a scientific basis, are no doubt representative, but are almost devoid of personal features. Even Joe Kramer, the fiery Socialist, whose life-work it is to champion the sweated worker against the forces of capitalism and commercialism, is at best a silhouette, living in his energetic gestures and fighting power, but never intimately portrayed in his idiosyncrasies. Joe's revolutionary activities in Russia and on European battlefields are as obviously imaginary as Billy's view of Paris is 'made in America.' The people are not distinguished one from another by those subtle inflexions of manner and feeling by which character declares itself. So with their personal relations — they are not generalized, not particularized. Thus, one knows nothing more of Billy's and Eleanore's married life than they are affectionate with one another, that she is any good wife, and that he is any hard-working husband. Better, in its suggestive touch of surprise, is the sketch of the relations of Marsh, the strike-leader, with the disillusioned, bitter Mrs. Marsh. This shows more artistic cunning, precisely because it discloses the fresh gesture of a snapshot from life. If we are not much interested by the fugitive episode of Joe Kramer's and Sue's love-affair, it is not because it is unconvincing, but because the author has not shown us in intimate detail how this man and woman affected one another. The general lines of their

FRIDAY NIGHTS

actions and behaviour are there, but not the revealing minutiae.

Mr. Howells suggests that an analogy may be drawn between Mr. Poole's epical aim and that of his predecessor, Frank Norris. Between their aims, certainly. But turn to the first chapter of 'The Octopus' and note the nervous, resourceful, and sure handling of the characters of Presley, Harlan, Annixter, and Varamée. What suppleness, dexterity, and intimacy of touch! You know the men through and through – their shaping circumstances, and the laws of their being. You feel the impelling force of their temperaments in their gestures and voices, as they halt or go forward, constrained by their aims, and by the winds of their destiny. But there is nothing of this psychological force and nervous creative intensity in Mr. Poole's characterization. His people are impelled and controlled, so to say, each by a separate automatic switch, visible in the author's grip, which imparts to them each one set of motives, one manner of feeling, and one way of affecting the spectator. The photographer has posed them in one special attitude, and bade them look straight in front, while he takes the likeness. They do not change and fluctuate, and ripen before our eyes, like Norris's people. Again, note in 'The Octopus' how the sense of personal contacts, of the shock and hurry of incident, of daily accident, of the coming and going and pressure and surge of life, all blend into the epic force of the drama, which moves in actual heat and energy before the spectators' gaze, there in the teeming Californian arena. But Mr. Poole's drama, again, is largely static. The confusion and

CRITICISM AND FICTION

surprise of life are not conveyed in his studied, cinematographic arrangements, which carry on his story, indeed, and us with it, from point to point. Only in his strike scenes do we gain an actual sense of movement, collision, interfusion, and intricacy.

But how ungrateful to draw this invidious comparison between 'The Octopus' and 'The Harbour'! Mr. Poole has never claimed that his work ranks with Norris's, and he would be the first to admit that in subtlety of touch, as well as in its richness of artistic illusion, it is inferior to that youthful master's. We should owe him an apology for, Procrustes-like, stretching his valuable, carefully wrought novel on the bed of a genius, did not the critics so constantly fail to draw the line between the novel of skilful talent and the novel of creative genius. It is with fiction as with that large majority of modern works of art in our galleries, works which, however excellent in design and technical skill, are deficient in temperamental originality. Talented as they are, they are, in fact, 'brain-spun.'

III

When the critic turns to 'The Titan,' he is faced with the old dilemma. Ought he to insist on the particular significance for society which a novel may possess as a document of life? Or ought he rather to lay stress on its æsthetic shortcomings? This critic has observed elsewhere: 'To subject a piece of contemporary literature to high æsthetic literary standards is often simply to suppress its significance. As the majority of new words are but the

FRIDAY NIGHTS

age's ephemeral children, they can only make an appeal to their parent age; the critic's duty is therefore to fix, in the significant documents of the life of his time, the *character* of his age; and to the majority of literary works he will do justice by treating them as revelations of the contemporary mind, knowing that though the inner individual spirit of these documents may be of little significance, its testimony to the overlordship of the age may be of very much.' And Mr. Dreiser is very significant! Very unrepresentative he is in his honest, set determination to tell his countrymen all those sinister, ugly truths concerning the national life, with which their newspapers teem, but for mirroring which in fiction the novelist is boycotted.

And yet how representative is Mr. Dreiser in his disregard for beauty, for beauty in form, for the fine shades of living subtlety! How is one to account for this curious contradiction in the author's attitude? One hazards the suggestion that Mr. Dreiser has been seduced by Balzac's example – Balzac who was defined as being 'a sociologist rather than a novelist.' If only our author had studied Horace instead! It is not a question of 'realism,' for Horace's descriptions of the daily life of the Roman citizen are quite as intimately 'realistic' as are Mr. Dreiser's descriptions of the life of his Chicago financiers. But while Horace selects the essential detail and rejects everything superfluous, Mr. Dreiser rejects nothing! Everything goes into his pot! ;

To quote here a former criticism, 'We see a bold American hand in the encomium blazoned on the book's

CRITICISM AND FICTION

wrapper – “The size of this man, Cowperwood, genius of finance, protagonist of great business combines, art patron, light o’ love, and the scope of Mr. Dreiser’s ability are united in this new book, totally unlike fiction as we have come to know it – a book big in matter and a long book too,” and so forth. There you have it! the national conviction that size counts for more than quality, that a big book or a big business must necessarily dwarf the appeal of books or businesses of lesser scope or compass. . . . We cannot concede the claim that the multiplicity of the titanic Mr. Cowperwood’s love-affairs invests them with more interest than does the solitary infidelity of the little grocer in the back street round the corner. On the contrary, the grocer’s conjugal lapse is likely to mean more to him and his family. All Mr. Cowperwood’s *amours* run much the same course, and as soon as we have grasped this we become comparatively uninterested in the identity of the next candidate for his affections or in the fate that awaits her. Indeed, these ladies, Aileen, Rita, Stephanie, Claudia, et cetera, till we reach the last of the cluster, Berenice, are not much more interesting than are a set of chairs in a “parlour suite.”

“So with the millionaire’s lavish dealings as an “art patron.” We are told that “in London he bought a portrait by Raeburn; in Paris a ploughing scene by Millet, a small Jan Steen, a battlepiece by Meissonier, and a romantic courtyard scene by Isabey”; and later on, that the fascinating American girl, Berenice, when she saw the Greek frieze in his splendid New York mansion, “knew that he and she had one God in common – Art; and that his mind was fixed on things beautiful as on a shrine”

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Gammon! The Titan's knowledge of art only reflected what his dealer and his cheque-book told him, and he would have purchased with lavish enthusiasm that vulgar series of Fragonards that have recently passed and repassed, at fabulous prices, into the possession of his fellow American millionaires. The real shrine at which Berenice and her magnate worship is the shrine of money-power, and that is why Mr. Dreiser's detailed exposition of his Chicago boss's career has national significance, although its value as art is intrinsically small.

'No, Mr. Dreiser's eulogistic wrapper hits the wrong nail on the head when it claims that "the book is totally unlike fiction as we have come to know it." On the contrary, its merit is that in its heavy, lumbering conscientious way, "The Titan" presents, *à la* Balzac, a detailed picture of Mammon-worship in the States a generation back: a picture of the swamp of public corruption, of "graft" and "boodle" and private greed, in which the jungle of "financial interests" is enrooted. Frank Cowperwood, the financier, just released from a Philadelphia prison, makes a fresh start in the rising city, Chicago; and Mr. Dreiser traces with unrelenting, praiseworthy frankness the sordid maze of intrigue, bribery, and corruption which the Titan threads to gain his throne of money-power. It is the story of a human jungle and of financial beasts of prey stalking and striking down "a democracy grovelling and wallowing, slowly, blindly trying to stagger to its feet." The author is to be congratulated on his exposure, not only of the intricate web of intrigue, financial and political, which the "masterful" Cowperwood spins in order to secure his

CRITICISM AND FICTION

"controlling interests" in the gas companies and street railways of Chicago, but of the atmosphere of hypocrisy which the wealthy citizens, the bank presidents, and directors of trusts and combines generate for their own purposes.

'Of course, there is nothing particularly new in the picture, but Mr. Dreiser is one of the very few American novelists who have dared to dispense with the idealistic veils under which, in fiction, the unpleasant truth gracefully hides its features. The pity is that, obsessed by the idea of bigness, the author insists, so to say, on dragging us up to every floor of his giant hotel, and making us peep into all the offices and suites of apartments.

'Now this method is a clumsy one in art and defeats its purpose. Mr. Dreiser rarely introduces a character without giving a comprehensive sketch of his past and his social position, and we soon grow bored by the multiplicity of explanations and conversations, all of equal significance. There is no play of light and shade in the novel, but everything is exhibited in the hard, level glare, so to speak, of an enormous chamber lit from the ceiling. Crowds of people come and go, and one remembers little more of them than of a file of faces passing in an interminable procession. The artist, above all things, needs so to select and concentrate his details that his figures contrast, and his scenes interest by dramatic surprise. But there is no surprise and no relief in Mr. Dreiser's human drama: everything sweeps past our eyes at the same level pace, as on a train journey. It is a pity, for at times one suspects that the scenes closely crowded together are like pictures in exhibitions, which kill one another by numbers and by

FRIDAY NIGHTS

mere proximity. But this is the logical effect of the worship of Bigness, whether in art or commerce or civilization; the charm of individuality is crushed down till it is lost in a mass of ponderous uniformity. The colossal ends in the insignificant.'

Whereas Mr. Poole's failure lay in lack of intensity of creative imagination, Mr. Dreiser fails in his ability to show human drama in its true spiritual perspective, and to stamp it in permanent lines and hues of beauty. In both cases the rich stuff of the teeming national life is before us, in both cases the treatment is ambitious and highly conscientious, but in neither case is there born anything unique in quality of vision or style. We may therefore repeat that the creative imagination of each of our two authors only multiplies general patterns of insight and feeling of masses or groups of cultivated minds. And the critic, passing on, will search all the more eagerly for authors who, whether representative or not, stand out more clearly in vision and insight from the mass of cultivated minds. Such an author, it seems to me, is Miss Cather, whose delightful picture of the life of a family of Swedish immigrants in a Nebraskan homestead is no doubt known to the reader of 'The Atlantic Monthly.' I shall not, therefore, offer here any appreciation of the freshness of its individual charm, or of the calm strength of her portraiture of the Bergsons, of Alexandra, the large-hearted heroine, of Frank and Marie Shabata, of Emil, Ivar, and Amédee. This work, 'O Pioneers,' with its record, so typical, of a network of immigrant roots which are thrusting deep into American soil, and fructifying

CRITICISM AND FICTION

the national life with its ramifying human energies, belongs to a precious, if small, class of American novels which it is difficult to praise too highly.

Even higher, in its literary art, must we rank Grace King's 'The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard,' a story rare in its historical significance. This poignant lament for the South, at the close of the Civil War, rehearses a woman's lingering memories of the charm and grace of the New Orleans atmosphere, and of the humiliation suffered by a ruined family. Will not its exquisite shades of feeling, delicate in vibrating sadness, give this novel a permanent place as an American literary classic?

IV

To recapitulate: as regards fiction and poetry no subject or theme is outside the pale of art. The literary artist is known by the spirit of his treatment; and fresh beauties, fresh forces, are generated in a greater or lesser degree by the work of creative spirits.

It is by this unique temperamental quality, something peculiar to himself as expressed in the fresh intensity, power, or charm of his imagination and insight, that we assess the rank of a literary artist.

It is from the perception of the significant relations of the living parts to the general scheme of nature and life that new pieces of art are continually being born.

Any conventional valuations, social or moral, as to what is 'good,' 'beautiful,' or 'useful,' or any stereotyped academic or æsthetic formulas are necessarily inimical to the powers of art.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

In mediocre art the public sees its own face as in a glass, and loves to see mirrored back to it its own familiar features.

The critic may aim at showing what significant light a piece of indifferent or bad art may cast on the life of society, but his main object is, first to lend an attentive ear to what a literary artist is telling us, and then to make clear anything false, commonplace, or weak in his outlook or treatment, and to hail any elements of original power or beauty.

It is time to bring to a close this gossip on criticism, but before doing so the writer would like to direct his readers' attention to the work of a novelist of rank, Mr. Vincent O'Sullivan — work which, we fancy, has curiously almost escaped the attention of the Americans. This is probably due in great part to the fact that Mr. O'Sullivan has spent many years abroad. His last novel, 'The Good Girl,' the story of the victimization of the American hero, Vendred, by an English family, the Dovers, who sponge and prey upon him, finding their weapon in his infatuation for the beautiful Mrs. Dover, is one of accomplished psychological skill. The portraiture of Mrs. Dover, a self-indulgent and sensuous nature, is a triumph of artistic veracity, and the relations of both husband and wife to their victim, relations which are veiled by a mask of sinister shadowiness, are painted with true subtlety. One could wish that the author had replaced some of the discursive episodes of his detailed narrative by a bolder and intenser dramatic handling of his main situation. One may add also that the analysis of the character of the weak

CRITICISM AND FICTION

hero, Vendred, is wanting in sharp precision. But whatever be its artistic flaws, 'The Good Girl' is one of the most accomplished novels of its year, one that entitles its author to a place among the first twenty modern American novelists.

1915

CRITICAL NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS



ON opening a little volume 'Poems and Lyrics,' by George Reston Malloch, one recognizes that our young English poets inherit advantages denied their American brothers. The English literary soil has been fructified by the germs of poetic associations since the days of Chaucer. Indeed, not only were the Elizabethans inspired by the riches of the mediæval world and the Renaissance, but elements of the rich compost of the buried civilizations first carried into Britain by the invading Celts, Romans, and Teutonic tribes reappear in the literary magic of the Shakespearian drama. 'Macbeth' and 'King Lear' are the poetic fruits of cycles of legends. And to read our contemporary poets, Hardy, Doughty, Bridges, Yeats, Davies, Flecker, de la Mare, Hodgson, Sturge Moore, Lawrence, etc., is to recognize that in their literary blood courses sap from these ancient English roots ramifying in our literary soil. Mr. Malloch's verses are no better, line for line, than most of the poems in 'The Little Book of Modern (American) Verse,'¹ edited by Miss Rittenhouse, but one feels that many of the latter suffer from a thinness of literary *humus*. The effect of the majority of these American poets of a decade ago, as also that of the Transition poets of the 'sixties,' Stedman, Aldrich, etc., and of their successors, Gilder, Cawein, etc., refined, sensitive and conscientious as is their work, is too much that of a literary dessert, and too little that of the meat or the wine, the labour or the

¹ Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1913.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

joy of life. Such work is an ornamentation, like the cut flowers on the table. One feels that Miss Rittenhouse's seventy poets have not so much created their own styles as that they have selected them from imported English stock, and that when they mix in their native images the effect is incongruous, as in the poem 'Lincoln' by Edwin Markham, where the moral grandiloquence flowers in rhetoric:

'Sprung from the West,
The strength of virgin forests braced his mind,
The hush of spacious prairies stilled his soul.
Up from log cabin to the Capitol,
One fire was on his spirit, one resolve –
To send the keen axe to the root of wrong,
Clearing a free way for the feet of God.
And evermore he burned to do his deed
With the fine stroke and gesture of a king;
He built the rail-pile as he built the State,' etc.

It is surely the borrowed or adulterated literary styles of the vast majority of American poets, contemporary with Whitman, that have proved fatal to their claims in the eyes of this generation? It is therefore with curiosity we turn to the New Poetry, to the renaissance of poetry in America of which Mr. W. S. Braithwaite is a learned sponsor. His Index of Poets, of Magazine Poems and of Volumes of Poetry, published in America in 1916, is so imposing as to abash a foreign critic, who feels that in offering here a few remarks he necessarily remains in ignorance of verse of rarer quality than he has been privi-

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

leged to examine. But the main conclusion he draws from Mr. Braithwaite's 'Annual' is that American poetry is in a vigorous state. Not only is the growth of the vine luxuriant, but there is plenty of body in the new, fermenting wine, though of fine bouquet, of high distinction of style, there is, as yet, not much evidence. One must not ask too much at once. The main thing is that the poets should be fortified by public interest in the movement and that the standard of critical taste should be raised. From a few magazine articles here and there one gathers that the reviewers are a little too busy confounding the geese with the swans, and the coteries too intent on crowning their own friends with laurels. With the spirit and aims of the innovators in *vers libre* one must declare oneself in sympathy. The old metrical forms cannot suffice the new impulses, and there must be continuous experiment, if a disastrous crystallization of form is not to fetter the poets, as the bardic poets of Ireland were fettered by their elaborate school craft for many centuries. But doubtful taste is sure to parade in its pretentious *papier-mâché* mask. Mr. Ezra Pound's 'Personæ,'¹ for instance, is a specimen of false poetic mosaic, pseudo mediæval *tesserae* set in sticky modern cement that can never harden. Such stand condemned as style by their adulterate jargon. Some reviewers have commended Mr. Pound's 'freshness of inspiration,' his 'immense vitality and passion,' but these are precisely the qualities nature has denied him. His 'Canzoni'² may offer us technical feats, but are they not

¹ Elkin Matthews. London, 1909.

² *Ibid.*, London, 1911.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

bankrupt in feeling? Everything in Mr. Pound's verse appears to be derived, or imitated or cut out of old patterns. One is told, however, that he is at his best in translations from the Chinese.

Mr. Untermeyer, on the other hand, is rich in feeling but poor in artistry. Many of his pieces in 'These Times,'¹ as 'The Swimmers,' 'On the Palisade,' 'A Side Street,' one reads with sympathy, applauding the truth and unconventional vigour of his sensations and impressions; but even when most successful he needs to concentrate and purify his verse and eliminate the dross from his metal. In 'Thirteen Portraits' by his force of feeling he gets home on his human target with a satiric sabre edge, and in 'Lovers' he has retold the old story of Love's satiety in a manner all his own. His ideas are bold, but he is too apt to philosophize and divagate, and mar his pictures with hasty, random strokes and coarse metaphors, as in his poem 'To a Weeping Willow,' where he speaks thus of the storm wind:

'You laughed a welcome to that savage lout,
I heard the thunder of his heavy boots.'

Mr. Untermeyer shouts over-loudly of his unconquerable optimism, of his unquenchable faith in life. Is this a genuine temperamental trait? or is it that he needs must echo the popular American creed, and its 'red-blood' gospel? Walt Whitman shouted too, but his giant lungs could carry over prairie and savannah to far continents. But is not Mr. Untermeyer shouting at the crowd

¹ Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1917.

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

from his literary window? In 'The Poet' he describes aptly enough the qualifications of the true poet, concluding:

'His soul is but a fragile glass
Revealing what his age has been,
But it shall live, though all else pass,
For all of Time is seen therein.'

A fine illustration of the truth of the above stanza is offered us in a little booklet, 'Chinese Poems' (Privately Printed, London, 1916); and from a score of exquisite little cameos I select one by a poet of the Pre T'ang period, to compare with Mr. Untermeyer's method:

A PRE T'ANG POET

'Yellow dusk; messenger fails to appear,
Restraining anger, heart sick and sad.
Turn candle towards bed-foot;
Averting face – sob in darkness.'

From Mr. Untermeyer's 'Truce' a description, in seventy lines, of two lovers, clinging together in the dusk of a winter's evening while watching from a city window the falling snow, we take the following lines:

'And as she smiled and snuggled closer there
The dusk crept up and flowed into the room.
Softly, with *reverent hand*, it touched her hair
That like a soft brown flower seemed to bloom
In the deep-lilac gloom.
Kindly it came

FRIDAY NIGHTS

And laid its blurring fingers on the sharp edges of things,
On books and chairs and figured coverings,
And all at once delicately wrought.
Then almost hastily
As though with *a last merciful thought*
It covered with its hand the sharp, white square
That stood out in the corner where
The evening paper had been flung.' – etc.

Note how the cheap, sentimental images we have italicized clash and jar. Whereas the Pre T'ang poet's picture by its simple veracity of feeling will endure to the end, Mr. Untermeyer by smothering the essentials and emphasizing what is superfluous has so weighed down his craft with heavy stocks and stones that it has already sunk to the bottom of 'Time's Stream.' Thus the 'New Poetry,' however 'progressive' its practitioner may claim to be, is not necessarily in advance of the art of sixty generations back!

The test for American poetry, to-day, is, of course, simply the old two-fold test – how does your vision enrich our consciousness of man's life and nature's life? and what original effects of force and beauty in language does it communicate? When one turns to Mr. Edward Lee Masters' 'The Great Valley'¹ one asks oneself – does one read it solely for the psychological interest of its human drama? Not entirely. For his poems, 'Gobineau to Tree,' 'Autochton,' 'Hanging the Picture,' 'Lincoln and Douglas Debates,' highly original in their psychological insight, are more native, more individual in style than Mr.

¹ Werner Laurie, 1917.

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

Markham's 'Lincoln,' quoted above. But still is not Mr. Masters growing in danger of becoming a little too fluent, too careless? In 'Spoon River Anthology' he struck out a form of psychological epitaph which, in grim terseness and pregnant irony of phrasing, rises superior to much bald, atmospheric ugliness. What did his vision accomplish for us? His acute insight cut through the dead flesh of sham morality and conventional ideals, probing the living impulses and hidden passions of a typical community of citizens. He pierced the joints of the armoured mail of Pharisaism with its encrusted materialism, greed, self-complacency; and he cast the tragi-comedy of the life-stories of hundreds of men and women in the bronze of his psychological epitaphs. This was a great achievement, and his exposure of the ironical shams of life, flaunting in the headlines and glozed by the tombstones, will live in 'Spoon River Anthology,' not only by his faith in truth and all that is humanly fine, but by the force of his caustic, naked phraseology. The same insight and the same generous humanity inspire 'The Deep Valley' indeed in widening circles of vision, but the *form*, more prolix in narrative and reflection, has not the same finality. 'The passion and colour and grave music' which Mr. W. M. Reedy finds in it, do they find worthy form? Read 'Cato Barden,' an admirable sketch of a life's failure, and count how many of the lines are tedious, unnecessary. For example:

'He had in short a nature fit to work
With great capacity; had he combined

FRIDAY NIGHTS

An intellect but half his nature's worth
He might have won the race. But many thought
He promised much, his father most of all
Because he had these virtues, and in truth
Before his leaves unfolded with the spring
His mind seemed apt, perhaps seemed measured full
Of quality, the prizes he had won
At Valparaiso pointed to the fruit
He would produce at last.'

Not a line of these eleven is worth preserving. Read the hundred lines of 'Steam Shovel Art,' a *conte* to please any lawyer, or the hundred and thirty lines of 'New Year's Day,' and consider whether these narratives would not be far more effective in prose. The psychological analysis in 'The Typical American' is as piercing as ever, but the art is too didactic, the metaphors too unchastened, for the piece to rank as fine poetry. And 'The Last Confession,' 'Marsyas,' 'The Desplains Forest,' 'Apollo at Pheraea,' 'The Apology of Demetrius,' 'The Radical's Message,' and various other pieces fall to a place that lies between poetry and prose. Most grateful as one is for 'The Great Valley,' for the wit and truth of its varied human drama, one feels that the form, generally, is scarcely worthy of the author's penetrating spiritual vision.

Has not the delicate voice of Mr. Frost's muse lost something of its timbre in 'Mountain Interval'? Every one knows that in a stretch of country there are certain fields, woods, meadows, which subtly allure one to return again and again to them in preference to others. The

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

contours of the ground, the way trees break the skyline, the shape of a field, the curve of a road or a lane are elating or comforting, whereas neighbouring fields and copses seem uninspiring in comparison. Well, 'Mountain Interval,' this stretch of new country, leaves me comparatively unresponsive. Is there not some flatness in the cadence of the rhythms, in the character of the verse; and less of, well, one must use the old word, beauty, in spirit or in mood? It occurs to one that possibly Mr. Frost has evolved a new theory of verse, or, perhaps, that he has wed his old practice to some new method. Does he hold that one subject is as desirable, one word as beautiful as another? But 'Mountain Interval' shows that they are not. Though there are interesting poems in the book, as 'Snow,' 'Hyla Brook,' 'The Line Gang,' this admirer of 'North of Boston' feels as though a hard grey sky had succeeded the soft light and rolling clouds of a South-West wind. But nothing is so inconstant as weather: it breaks, and sun, wind and sky will restore speedily the charm of Mr. Frost's landscape.

In 'Men, Women and Ghosts,'¹ Amy Lowell supplies those very factors of fresh, sensuous imagery and emotional zest of which we note the comparative absence in American poetry of the previous decade. Miss Lowell has undoubtedly reinforced her agile æsthetic instinct by a craftsman's care. Her choice of subjects and her way of approach show a culture truly cosmopolitan. There is little she cannot do in the *genres* she has chosen, when she puts her mind to it. Has she not drawn admirable inspira-

¹ The Macmillan Co., 1916.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

tion from Keats in 'Pickthorn Manor,' and from Byron in 'The Cremona Violin'? Note how near, both in spirit and method, is the clever 'The Hammers' to 'The Ingoldsby Legends.' In psychological sureness in 'The Overgrown Pasture' as in 'Figures in old Saxe' Miss Lowell's insight is not to be criticized. She has the light touch, is shrewd and amusing in observation, and is fertile in inventiveness. Brilliant is the term for 'Men, Women and Ghosts,' praise which holds good when the book is put to the test of a second reading. Her curious attempts to render the rhythms of music, as Scriabin's, in verse are indeed no novelty. It has been done long ago, perhaps more successfully, by Spanish poets not of high stature. Where are we to place Miss Amy Lowell? What gives one pause is her very versatility. She recalls a virtuoso whose renderings of Chopin or Scarlatti are equally accomplished. Has she a spiritual atmosphere and temperamental colours of her own? Perhaps we taste her individual quality best in 'The Dinner Party' and 'The Aquarium,' which open new vistas in the New Poetry, of finer import than does her prose poem 'Malmaison' or her *vers libre* 'The Trumpet-Vine Arbour' and 'The City of Falling Leaves.' Miss Lowell is too clever not to have observed that with each re-reading of the three last-mentioned pieces the picture seems to dull, to grow rigid and stereotyped. This must give her pause. For the highest aim of poetry is to indicate the flux, the growth, the mystery of nature by the art of the concrete image. The greater a piece of literary art the more inexhaustible is it in suggesting the springs and forces of life. The

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

sharp limitation of 'Decorative' poetry, and of such experiments in 'polyphonic prose' as 'Red Slippers,' 'Thompson's Lunch Room,' 'An Opera House,' etc., is that the poet in striving to convey to us the cunning appearance of things secures surface at the expense of depth – and the result is æsthetic superficiality. For this reason the psychological pieces 'The Cremona Violin,' 'The Overgrown Pasture,' 'The Dinner Party,' etc., can be read and re-read with pleasure when 'Malmaison,' 'Red Slippers,' etc., simply tire us by their almost mechanical rigidity and spiritual poverty. And there is something wrong with an artistic method, surely, that leaves nothing to the imagination? The Chinese masters did not fall into this trap of mere cleverness. Miss Lowell in her amusing, light, bright 'A Roxbury Garden' takes 370 short lines in her effort to give 'the circular movement of a hoop bowling along the ground, and the up and down elliptical curve of a flying shuttlecock.' Whereas a Chinese poet, of the Pre T'ang epoch, concentrates for us a marital drama, communicating both the essence and whole movement of a situation in seven lines:

THE EJECTED WIFE

'Entering the Hall, she meets the new wife.
Leaving the gate she runs into former husband.
Words stick; she does not manage to say anything;
Presses hands together; stands hesitating,
Agitates moon-like fan, sheds pearl-like tears,
Realizes she loves him as much as ever –
Present pain never comes to an end.'

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Now here is a model which our Imagists would do well to study. It follows the laws laid down in 'Some Imagist Poets. An Anthology,'¹ with one important exception, viz.: 'Law 5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.' 'The Ejected Wife' is not *hard*, but soft! soft as growing nature, as the emotion of love. Luckily neither Mr. Aldington, Mr. Flint, Mr. D. H. Lawrence nor Miss Amy Lowell herself lives up to this theory of poetry hard and clear. How can they? They would forswear the genius of this English language if they did, and indeed are not the Imagists apt to go too far in that direction?

Within the limits of his soundings of neurotic impulses and morbid moods, Mr. Conrad Aiken would seem to have succeeded admirably in his aim of weaving strange dream moods and emotional obsessions into rhythmical patterns of ebb and flow and recurring flux. Psychologically 'The Jig of Forslin'¹ is highly interesting. It re-reproduces with equal dexterity and sincerity, in rich variation, the amoral impulses and desires of adolescence when fevered emotion and thought leap up divorced from moral 'controls.' By steeping Forslin's dream moods and imaginary actions in the atmosphere of the operatic and music-hall footlights and passing abruptly from this artificial stimulation of the passions into the hard lights and sinister shadows of night streets and pavements, the author escapes the dicta of the moral censors which have no jurisdiction in the plane of music, enervating, luring, thrilling, discordant. The verse is subtly rich in tone effects and in

¹ Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, 1915.

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

inner rhythms, and Mr. Aiken, accomplished in his artistry, by his sharp critical sense preserves his equilibrium, and does not allow the riot of neurotic impulses to damage his perspective. 'The Jig of Forslin' is indeed an original achievement, one valuable by its creator's sincerity, though it is impossible to say how much it may appeal to civilizations less artificial than that which has generated it.

No less interesting, indeed more remarkable by its curious experiments in a new technique, is 'Goblins and Pagodas.'¹ Mr. J. G. Fletcher's practice raises all the most perplexing questions together! Does he attain his ends in his 'symphonies' by the 'spirals' and subtle musical curves of his *vers libre*? His is the *allusive* method, and often one loses the trail and becomes irritated by his vague, windy transitions, by the clouds of coloured verbal reflections that he flings lavishly on the page to convey his vibrating sensations and to create his atmosphere. If we wait patiently and watch these verbal rockets soaring and their trailing down, something beautiful will emerge. As an example, note how his 'Golden Sympathy' hovers and flickers for the first seventy lines, like a lantern slide that cannot be got fairly on the screen, and lo! a fine, intensely imaginative effect breaks upon us with the line,

'The Village drowns in the darkness.'

Again note in 'The Red Symphony' how his realistic images of a ship battering her way to port through an

¹ Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, 1916.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

icy gale are reinforced and transcended by his recurring sensations of a city, seen on the skyline, through the stormy sunset, given to the flames. In 'Poppies of the Red Year' Mr. Fletcher's imagination shows rare creative intensity, in the vision of the European towns and fields, delivered over to devastation and death and War's anarchy. One must salute such achievements. The criticism, however, of the method, generally, is that it is prodigal of eccentricities and too impaired by affectations. Will a future generation style his method self-destructive through lack of concentration, grace and directness of appeal? It certainly exacts much patient attention from the reader, and here again the best Chinese example is worthy of Mr. Fletcher's study. His recondite exposition in his Preface, of his technical procedure, which he identifies on Professor Fenollosa's authority with the practice of the poets of the Sung dynasty, need not be taken too seriously.

The charge of adulterated imagery can certainly not be brought against Mr. Edwin Arlington Robinson's 'The Man Against the Sky.'¹ Here we meet a technique accomplished in its ease and certainty, indubitable psychological insight, a sequence of ideas and images that flow with the smoothness of a brimming river – and yet, withal, an effect is produced of a narrative whose implications cannot be grasped in their entirety. Was there not less of mechanism and more of artistic chiselling in Mr. Robinson's earlier manner? for example in the poems 'Lincoln,' 'Calverly's,' 'Miniver Cheevy' given by Miss

¹ Macmillan Co., New York, 1916.

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

Rippenhouse? Though we follow easily enough poems such as 'Eros Turannos,' 'The Unforgiven,' 'Bewick Finger,' we confess we are puzzled by the intellectualized imagery of 'The Man Against the Sky.' We find no centre in the composition. The fault may lie in our lack of sympathy with the highly intellectual appeal of Mr. Robinson's poetry, but our criticism, put shortly, is that his thought and imagery fall into over-symmetrical patterns, and that the attention is fatigued thereby, almost as though, indeed, one had been gazing through a kaleidoscope. Has not Mr. Robinson's polished manner stiffened, unconsciously, into a mannerism that binds too inflexibly his emotion and thought?

The genuineness of Sara Teasdale's simple lyrics is proved by the fact that we become infected by and share the emotions she communicates in 'Rivers of the Sea.'¹ Her form seems to be born of her feeling. Her phrasing, though marked by no particular individuality, is happily adequate to reflect the light that flushes a woman's vision of the world, when she gains and loses love. By the spontaneity of Miss Teasdale's poetic achievement we may measure the more ambitious appeal of Mr. Neihardt's 'The Quest,' where both imagery and language are in a sense too 'literary' to create a fresh poetic atmosphere. This we think is true even of Mr. Neihardt's best poems, such as the vigorous 'Nuptial Song.' And if we are a little churlish to 'The Quest,' shall we not show ourselves also irresponsive to the indubitable claims of Josephine Preston Peabody's 'Harvest Moon'? The title poem in-

¹ Macmillan Co., New York, 1916.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

deed moves us by its sincerity, and in it and in some others, as 'The Neighbours,' the authoress tempers her high aspirations for the 'Life that Might be' with a true version of the lacerating irony innate in War's brutal fact. Perhaps the authoress's song soars a little too high into the poetic ether, in days when the women of fifteen embattled nations have abetted whatever their men-children have done, the slaying and the slain. Even in 'The Poems of Alan Seegar,' it is perhaps less the noble exaltation of such pieces¹ as 'The Aisne' and 'Champagne 1914-1916' that will give the dead poet his place in American Anthologies than the fact that they combined the spirit of one who for faith and honour's sake endured two years of self-imposed hardship and danger on the Battlefields of France - 1914-1916. Lack of space forbids the discussion here of the significant spectacle of many hundreds of new poets first finding voice in the actual shock of war. The American reader who desires to follow the contemporary movement in British poetry should procure 'An Annual of New Poetry.'² Perhaps the most interesting contributions to this volume are those by Edward Eastaway (Edward Thomas), whose poetic impulse was stimulated by the example of Robert Frost. Alas! Edward Thomas, whose sensitive Celtic vision is an abiding example of the riches of our poets' inheritance, now lies dead on a French battle-field. As a specimen of Thomas's intense communion with nature let us quote this exquisite little lyric - for the consideration of American poets:

¹ Constable, London, 1917.

² Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1916.

NOTES ON AMERICAN POETS

All day the air triumphs with its two voices ~~of~~ wind
and rain:

As loud as if in anger it rejoices,
Drowning the sound of earth
That gulps and gulps in choked endeavour vain
To swallow the rain.

Half the night too, only the wild air speaks
With wind and rain
Till forth the dumb source of the river breaks
And drowns the rain and wind,
Bellows like a giant bathing in mighty mirth
The triumph of earth.'

1917

A NOTE ON TWO AMERICAN NOVELISTS

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER AND
SHERWOOD ANDERSON



I

WHAT a relief to find oneself swimming again in deep water, borne buoyantly along by the full running tide of 'The Three Black Pennys.' Here were those æsthetic qualities flooding-in that American fiction is always nervously exorcizing, the qualities ostracized for at least a generation. What a surprise to find again an American novelist who in feeling, atmosphere, artistry, was abreast of the great European tradition. For since the death of Stephen Crane the American practice in fiction had appeared to be 'standardizing' itself, to be reaching out to the machine-made pattern of the gas-bracket or the parlour fittings. There were exceptions, of course, but how few American novels were not run into popular market moulds and cast like a glazed drainpipe! The prepossessions and standards of taste of the respectable citizens of the United States were forming the bones and flesh of the novel in their own image. The American novel had long been lacking in beauty of sensuous apprehension, in emotional freedom, in artistic imagery. One knew, of course, the reasons given for this semi-inhibition of art, of gracious colour, of psychological originality. One had been told that the strenuous American pioneer had had little time and less thought for beauty and that

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Puritanism and utilitarianism had combined 'to lay preponderant emphasis upon morals.'¹ Just as in State after State the American landscape had yielded up its native charm to the axe and the saw and the shovel, and had been tamed and scarified out of knowledge, so human mediocrity had stamped its distressing features everywhere. Moral energy and the love of the dollar characteristically between them had cut the throat of artistic charm. So we were told. And of the six American writers, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Herman Melville, Whitman, who showed most originality, sensuous endowment or temperamental artistry, four had been derided, banned, or cold-shouldered by their grateful nation. But here was Mr. Hergesheimer with 'The Three Black Pennys' breaking all the furtive puritanic taboos against æsthetic beauty, sensuous charm and psychological depth. One rubbed one's eyes. One marvelled. Could Philadelphia have nurtured this cunning æsthetic instinct for visualization, for form and colour, this craftsmanship so sure of itself, so delicately bold and free, this psychological instinct so just and satisfying? And why not Philadelphia? Had not Richmond nurtured Poe? Salem, Hawthorne? Long Island, Whitman? and Newark, Stephen Crane? Why should not Philadelphia give birth to an artist of rank also? It had. Mr. Hergesheimer's achievement in 'The Three Black Pennys' was not the less interesting because he had evidently applied both a cosmopolitan outlook and a technique fortified by the study of European masters to conjure up this complex image of the life of his three American

¹ *A History of American Literature*. By W. P. Trent. Page 375.

TWO AMERICAN NOVELISTS

generations, 1730, 1840, 1910. An exacting task! to set down sharply and finely the social lineaments, physical and spiritual, of vanished generations, and merge them finally in the roar of our insatiable epoch. His feat of visualization seemed none the less interesting when one learned that the author had indeed trained his eye and hand to practise in another art. The vision of two of the societies of the past he had conjured up, recreated by his imagination from dusty piles of documents, from diaries and the faded contents of garrets, was a rich one and was saturated with his artistic qualities. He had individualized his subject by a manner truly original. What would Boston say?

It came as a shock delayed, when, two years later, after the appearance of 'Java Head' and 'Gold and Iron' in 1919, Boston, in the person of the accomplished editor of the most famous of American magazines, made a cryptic response to a suggested paper by this English critic, saying: 'Hergesheimer is an exotic, and I doubt whether he strikes root.' An exotic! And yet one was told that Mr. Hergesheimer was a Philadelphian, the descendant of a long line of Philadelphians. Clearly the old puritanic inhibitions against the witchery of art, the old fear of sensuous grace and the sin of originality were still working in the Bostonian marrow. It was amusing to reflect that the ban did not fall on that great class of *artistes* who minister to the luxury of the rich American and his wife, not on the opera singers and impresarios, the conductors and ballet-dancers, the violinists and actors, the great *chefs* who prepare his food and the costumiers and milliners and

FRIDAY NIGHTS

jewellers who decorate the bodies of his women, no! for such 'exotics' command their price, and 'take root' and flourish in New York; but the ban was suspended, so to say, over the head of one who dealt with beauty in the highest sphere, spiritually, emotionally, æsthetically. Such an artist, a literary artist, had but a doubtful market price in New York, and his wares could not be 'guaranteed' by the Bostonian footrule. He did not 'strike root' either in Washington or Chautauqua. He was a doubtful temperamental force, not hall-marked by professors or sanctified by public demand, and even as Poe, as Thoreau, as Whitman, as Crane, each in his day, his stone was not to be builded into the Bostonian Tabernacle. So that paper on Mr. Hergesheimer, suggested in 1920, was not written.

One must not dot the *i*. Naturally the success of 'The Three Black Pennys' in the best critical quarters was complete and unequivocal. Naturally all who can recognize the quality of rare imagination and rare technique grouped themselves at once to salute his pennon. No doubt Boston too, swaying delicately and balancing itself between two desires, not to be too early or too late in the field of recognition, has since come gracefully forward with murmured apologies. One knows how difficult it is for editors to march in the van and also with the main body of their supporters. And one cannot be too careful about admitting new 'exotics' into the herbarium of American culture. But the word 'exotic' applied to Mr. Hergesheimer's art, reveals indeed the formidable 'complex' in the American consciousness, which is one of the causes of the æsthetic starvation of the American people.

TWO AMERICAN NOVELISTS

It is not my intention here to do more than note Mr. Hergesheimer's achievement in 'Java Head.' The indubitable powers of imagination and of untiring research that have enabled him to create through the eyes of a dead and gone generation of American master mariners a mirage of the ancient life of the port of Salem, a hundred years ago, lies, perhaps, open to some criticisms from sailors themselves? It may be so. But of the cunning beauty and draughtsmanship of the picture there can be no question. It is a book for a literary connoisseur. The story of the intrusion of the Manchu lady, Taou Yuen, into the chaste, hard bosom of Salem society, and of the clash of two cultures, one very old and one youthful and raw, shows an uncanny wizardry which must, one imagines, have deepened Bostonian apprehension. For old Salem to go to the East meant profit in trade and in dollars, but to bring an Eastern woman into Salem itself seemed a singular proceeding. 'Java Head,' indeed, 'lays no preponderant emphasis upon morals,' in Mr. Trent's words, and, again, its only profit for us is beauty, sensuous and spiritual. Like Whistler's painting, 'The Blue Wave,' the virtuosity of 'Java Head' seems to us beyond criticism. One can only, indeed, criticize Mr. Hergesheimer's tendency to crowd his picture, which leads towards the close to a sacrifice of grace of line in the composition. So rich in chiaroscuro is the æsthetic scheme that one has to search long among the historical novelists to find a similar achievement. And the reader who wishes to 'place' 'Java Head,' to see where the novelist holds his own with a classic and where he falls short, must turn to Jacobsen's 'Marie Grubbe,' a master-

FRIDAY NIGHTS

piece finer in its æsthetic colouring, in its perfection of subtle simplicity.

II

Mr. Sherwood Anderson's fine achievement in 'Poor White' is a great advance as serious art on his three former books. In reading 'Windy Macpherson's Son' and 'Marching Men' one wondered whether the author would ever attain to a sense of perspective, whether he would ever get clear of his seas of human material, so to say, and not let the details smother the whole. In 'Winesburg, Ohio' one felt that, at last, the behaviour of the American shirt-front and cambric blouse, so long offered us by novelists as a substitute for the hearts they cover, was out of his picture. At least these people of Winesburg were simply human, and were not repeating like human clockwork the catchwords of the good American's creed – catchwords, moral, idealistic, ethical, and practical. Mr. Anderson was evidently educating himself in his art, and was breaking the twelfth commandment, by losing the world and gaining his own soul. His picture in 'Poor White' of the transformation of the leisurely, old-fashioned towns of the Ohio valley in the eighties, into ugly, clattering, industrial communities, through the coming of machinery and the factory system, has an atmosphere and breadth of vision which should give it a permanent place in literature. What is particularly interesting to this critic are the scope and depth of the author's creative resources. In the case of most authors one sizes up more or less quickly what each man is going to do, what he can do! His

TWO AMERICAN NOVELISTS

power and limitations become apparent to one, like the size and contents of a chamber. But in Mr. Sherwood Anderson's case one does not easily gauge the measure of his insight and emotional powers. The very defects of his technique, a slowness of approach, a certain awkward fullness, a disinclination to group his characters, and then a hurried drama, steep his scenes with a feeling of the restless fluidity and inconsequence of life. Is this by design or by instinct? One is impressed by his spiritual veracity and one can by no means measure what his brooding imagination will have further to reveal. A good example is the episode in 'Poor White' of the gentle old harness-maker, Joe Wainwright, ending with his sudden madness and a tragic murder. The triumph of machinery and unscrupulous commercialism have shattered the old man's world, and he strikes in his insanity at the mean, bragging Jim Gibson, the exponent of the new forces. It is profoundly human, this tragedy, and gradually, as Mr. Anderson introduces fresh individuals amid his groups of figures, and sketches their histories and characters, one perceives that his artistic method, however halting or awkward, has much in it of the slow, cumulative force of nature.

'Poor White,' indeed, has nothing of the surface facility of most American fiction. What is notable is that the author has succeeded in showing the relation the inner lives of his people bear to their environment. Our inner lives are both moulded by our environment and react against it. The figure of the plodding, hesitating, inarticulate inventor, Hugh McVey, the genius whose inventions are financed and pushed by the shrewd business men of

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Bidwell, is impressive by its isolation amid the racing tides of human energy he has helped to unleash. Remark how this shy, solitary figure gives perspective to the whole social picture. Again, one is impressed by the knowledge and insight with which the character of Clara Butterworth, the heroine, the rich farmer's daughter, is rendered. The puzzled, passionate moods of her budding girlhood, her emotional hunger for love and a fuller life, her ambitious nature, jarred and thrown back upon itself by the masculine clumsiness and self-centredness of the Bidwell men whom she attracts, all this forms the foundation of her capture of Hugh McVey. The account of Hugh's desperate bashfulness and escape on the wedding night, and of the wall of silence thrown down, later in his subsequent relations with Clara, has all the fluctuating logic of life.

Where the ordinary novel, American or English, depicts the individual commonplaces of thought and feeling and of social behaviour, 'Poor White' penetrates to the deeper strands and impulses of human nature. Life is always a strange affair despite the veneered conventionality of mediocre people. Mr. Sherwood Anderson's book breaks through the banal crust of conforming appearances, and this is itself a feat for an American to accomplish. An English critic has remarked that the artist's method in 'Poor White' is as though the doings in some stirred-up ant-hill were being noted and narrated by a passionless observer. A reader of the book, a Russian lady, has remarked on the hardness of all the citizens of Bidwell, and on the lack of tenderness with which Mr. Anderson's people all treat one another. It is indeed a little startling

TWO AMERICAN NOVELISTS

when one contrasts 'Poor White' with Tchehov's 'Tales' to see how lacking in soft kindly human warmth are the relations of these energetic Ohio people one with another. But this strange contrast, does it not, indeed, attest the national veracity of Mr. Anderson's picture?

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

I

IN considering the province of contemporary criticism it may be well to begin by examining how fundamental differences of mental attitude lead men into different schools. The watchword of one school is Authority,¹ the aim of the other is Interpretation.

First let us accept the critic's delicate position. It is no objection to him, as is confusedly felt, that he is a self-appointed judge. The value of his pronouncements lies in their *justice*, and not, as the vulgar hold, in their issuing from a high and impressive seat of judgment. But how if the word critic, down the long centuries, has attached to itself shades of meaning at odds with the idea of justice? Styling themselves the judges, the discerners (*κρίνω*, *separate*), have not the contemporary critics shown themselves, to the mind of disillusioned generations, kith and kin with the fault-finders? Is it not that the word critic, in general, suggests to men an inimical shadow hastening to run before slow-footed justice? and where are men more sure of disinterring old criticism than from the learned grave of error? A curious fact this, that when men hear the word Judge, their thoughts turn towards the justice administered, but when they hear the word Critic, they are simply apprehensive; they wait as men expecting *anything*. And they are rarely disappointed.

They are rarely disappointed because the critic's utility

¹ 'The first and most indispensable [condition] is the acknowledgment of the principle of Authority.' – Professor Courthope's *Law in Taste*, p. 431.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

and liberty of delivering judgment being conceded, and since his is the right to construe everything as he pleases, there remains only *his own relation to his subject* to be settled. Nothing can there be, or ought there to be, to prevent the critic from seizing those special vantage-grounds, whence his subjects, seen from above, or below, or askew, can be caught at some angle, in focus or out of focus, at his will, and so, either revealed or contorted, be thrust upon the watching audience. But the critic must vindicate his right to his supreme liberty of movement and use of vantage-ground, by proving to us that his formidable cleverness, his persuasiveness, his elastic manipulations, readjustments and interpretations are in the service of his passion for justice, or are inspired by his delicate sense of his relation to his subject. For this relation of the critic to his subject may be purely arbitrary. Anything he may draw from the deep wells of his misunderstanding, if delivered oracularly, is in fact the impressive judgment the crowd accepts! Is not the average critic's anxiety to show his superiority over his subject, at all costs, proof that his ideal of justice is justice for *himself*? And have not the majority of critics of every generation been thereby subtly led to commit critical *felo-de-se*? Therefore we may look curiously and with an intent eye at those hosts of critics who put themselves before their subjects, who put themselves first, a long, long way first, and their subjects last. Such critics may on occasion utter good and searching criticisms, but does not occasional justice bring the judges into contempt? Seeking a more convincing basis for judgment let us put the self-seekers for the time aside.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

II

But how can the critic be just? Just to *what*? It is by the world of standards that the critic carries within himself that he defines himself. And these standards imply his prejudices, his limitations, his partialities no less than his insight, his potency, his illumination of spirit. Of such a web is his judgment strangely woven; and by the respective worlds that this web stretches over to-day shall we define each modern critic as ranged in one of two classes — academic or contemporary. Each has his separate standards, each dispenses a different justice, the first the deferred justice of a Court of Appeal, the second that of an Arbitrator. Of the third, the journalistic pseudo-critic which our hasty age has fabricated to serve its hasty purpose, *his* justice is that of a crowd in motion. The Court of Appeal's justice springs from a resifting of accumulated evidence, the Arbitrator's justice from swift insight into contending forces—the age and the man. Whose task is more puzzling? If a strange darkness descends not rarely upon the academic critics, upon those elect men, privileged to judge the buried past, who cast their purged gaze towards the Olympian peaks of literature standing out clear and well-defined beyond the confused and shifting foregrounds of our age, if on *them* descends the darkness, what misty seas of error, continually sweeping up from the modern plains, must envelop the contemporary critic? How to be just to our contemporaries, when the 'movements' and the needs of the generation continually force the critic to shift his ground hastily, in order to keep the range of the advancing and passing

FRIDAY NIGHTS

contemporary crowds? What *standards* is the contemporary critic to be just to? Must not, after all, every critic's aim be to fight for his own special creed in the *mêlée* of contemporary movements, and must not he break lances with all men who bar his passage? If, for example, like Mr. Andrew Lang, he carry within himself a praiseworthy passion for what is 'old and seasoned,'¹ or like Señor Valdés² he mourn over the decadence of modern literature, must he not strive to close with his strait creed the mouth of this unworthy generation? The answer is – Assuredly he must, and by the nature of his insight into the movements of his day shall we class him as an academic³ or contemporary critic, or merely as an engrossed indefatigable journalist. Assuredly it is the honourable task of the academic critic, of the scholar, and of many a fine spirit to rally in the defence of 'the old and seasoned' and uphold the cause of great literature, and be deaf to the interested shouts of the marketplace and the present-day turmoil. So strong may that instinct be that we find Joubert, that finest of spirits, would admit to the shelves

¹ 'We ought to aim at excellence of matter and form, and we may be content to think that *all goodness of form is old*, and is not fantastic.' – *Literature in the Nineteenth Century*: Essay by Andrew Lang.

² 'I cast my eye over Europe, and I see nothing in poetry and painting but lugubrious and prosaic scenes, and in music I hear nothing but sounds of death.' – *The Decadence of Modern Literature*: Essay by Señor Valdés.

³ 'The ability and success with which the journalist discharges his functions naturally excite emulation among those who practise the fine arts. They imitate his methods. Hence they are led to Realism in the choice of subject, Impressionism . . .' – Professor Courthope, *Law in Taste*. (Fielding and Sterne we see are thus accounted for! – E. G.)

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

of his library neither Voltaire nor Rousseau, for fear of contamination! though probably Mr. Lang, who bars the great Russian author Tolstoy, and the great Scandinavian, Ibsen, has decided that Voltaire and Rousseau are 'old and seasoned' enough to be innocuous reading, both for the crowd and for himself. Certainly the academic critic, strong in every age, from the days of the Alexandrians to the days of M. Brunetière, will be always with us, and in this hour of commercialism in letters and of the Americanization of the world, he deserves that fine gold should be intertwined in his professional laurels. Whether he direct his age from an Oxford Chair, or whether he illumine the pages of illustrated 'weeklies,' his brave stand for good literature, for classic literature, for the literature that the happy inspiration of the ages has led him to reconsecrate solemnly, will see him enrolled, if not in the ranks of the immortals, assuredly in the ranks of their cupbearers and their torchbearers. 'They loved the old, good literature that the common man passed by.' That is in itself a just and noble epitaph for the true academic critic. But many are the methods of advancing the cause of good literature, and we humbly urge that the favourite method of the academic critic, that of refusing entrance to the spirit, taste, and tendency of his time,¹ would almost disqualify

¹ ' . . . the modern artist, in opposition to ancient practice, either ignores the necessity of finding his groundwork in the selection of a subject common to himself and his audience or insists on his right of treating his subject without regard to the public taste or experience. Every one can see for himself that this is the way in which an essentially modern artist like Ibsen constructs his plays.' – Professor Courthope, *Law in Taste*.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

the contemporary critic from exercising his functions.¹ The web of the contemporary critic's mind is otherwise woven. So complex and diverse are the worlds of modern tendency, which the critic's web must stretch to and embrace to-day, that one quality, receptivity, must be inherent in the fibre of the contemporary critic's mind. The critic who, in the cause of good literature, or in the cause of 'seasoned literature,' is fond of waving various manifestations of contemporary literature aside,² he who refuses to examine certain aspects, and he who forbids life to manifest itself in this or that fashion through literature,³ is in fact seeking to dictate to life the new forces of its growth and the new horizons. A serious, an invaluable academic critic he may be, but all the same a partisan of the classics, priding himself on fencing out from his palisaded enclosure that upheaving modern world which must evolve new forms in art, new ideas, formulas, styles

¹ 'It has been a great century in letters, but its earlier glories in letters are little studied (with a few exceptions), and the literature of the moment is only in one way encouraging. It cannot well be worse; it is the dark hour before the dawn.' – Andrew Lang, *Literature in the Nineteenth Century*.

² 'Meanwhile we must endure constant exhibitions of crude and one-sided experiments, "symbolism," adventures in odd metres, tales without beginning or end, or interest, uncouth attempts at phonetic reproduction of rude dialects, mincing euphuisms, miscalled "style," and many other tribulations, among them flocks of imitations of everything that has a week's success.' – Andrew Lang. *Ibid*.

³ 'Great stores of "realism," "naturalism," Ibsenism, decadence, and art according to Maeterlinck, have been unloaded on a public which, lectured out of its natural human tastes, is already reverting to them.' – Andrew Lang. *Ibid*.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

and jargons, or else drop back into scholasticism, imitation, and conventionalism of form. The academic critic's contention at bottom amounts to this – that life should express itself only by certain *authorized* forms of literature, and literature should not be free to work out new channels for life's expression.¹ So perchance ought it to be! but fortunately so it is not. How have the 'authorized forms' been attained, we may ask, if not through the uncouth beginnings, the ceaseless experiments of successive generations? And no amount of critically applying the standards of culture of bygone ages to the literature and art of a present generation can appreciably modify a 'movement's' evolution; every new literary movement, renaissance, or fresh departure in art and letters, whether fine or cheap, whether long lasting or transitory in its effects, must spring largely from fresh needs and outlooks, and from the new vistas opened by life to each successive generation.

This being so, in order to be *just* to any school of writers, to any literary movement of any period, must not the critic first try and investigate the mental outlook arising from the social conditions of the life of which any school is a manifestation? of which it is a revelation? to which it is a contradiction? Must we not first of all examine the author's attitude in relation to the prevailing tendencies round him? We may often, of course, not succeed in discovering how a particular writer has been fertilized by his

¹ 'The standards of poetry have been fixed long ago by certain inspired writers whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question.' – *Edinburgh Review*, No. I, p. 63. 'On Southey and his School.'

age, and certain writers seem to spring up independently of their environment; but, in considering the main body of the literature of the generation, will not the main proposition from which the contemporary critic should start be something as follows:

All literature is documentary evidence on mind or life. Every age seems to produce in the bulk of its literature, those varieties of special literary food which are best calculated to nourish the prevailing conceptions of life; and simultaneously from the community's ranks (always silently developing fresh unseen forces) constantly there emerge fresh men bringing with them new conceptions and new forms, which challenge the old forms and conceptions. Now when critics are found strenuously contending against new schools of writers, and new forces,¹ they are nearly always showing their blindness to the forces of life working in and behind these writers, and so they have not the scale by which to render justice to its literature.² Irritated by new methods, new ferments and uncouth experiments³ these critics do not understand that

¹ 'A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments.' — *Edinburgh Review* on Southey and Coleridge.

² 'From the steppes of Russia come delirious mystics who work up the country of Molière, Rabelais and Voltaire. From thence surge unwholesome analyses and scandalous improprieties, that corrupt the sons of Cervantes.' — *Señor Valdés*.

³ 'New sentiments and new images others may produce; but to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be effort of tedious toil, and needless curiosity.' — *Life of Pope*. Johnson's Works, xi. pp. 194, 195.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

even foolish fashions, if you will, of contemporary literature do 'show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.' The critic may indeed say to contemporary writers: 'By all the tests of good literature I find your standards execrable,' but should we not require from contemporary criticism a justice more explanatory and more penetrating? 'The law does not deal with a man's motives, but only with the result of his actions, is a principle in jurisprudence consistently set aside by all the great critics of human life. And certainly that finer justice by which the critic seeks to *place* each man's performance, will lead him first to inquire – what necessity in *you*, what inheritance, what outcome of what conditions give you your character, and make you the mouthpiece of the life which you represent to us? This is the finer justice, that which considers literature not as fruit detached from the tree, the soil, the climate, the influences which have brought it forth, but that which shows its human meaning, its curious value in relation to the contemporary attitude of mind it bodies forth. If the critic does not pursue this method, but seeks to fix the value of his age's literature by reference to the æsthetic standards of the literature of the past, we shall find him denying 'excellence' to whole schools of literature,¹ or disdaining to inquire into the

¹ 'The same rule applies to continental literature. "Decadence" and reaction from Decadence (as in M. Rostand); "Realism" and reaction from Realism; social philosophies, striving to take literary form (as in Tolstoy); theories and contending critical slogans meet us everywhere, but we find little spontaneous genius, little permanent excellence.' – Andrew Lang, *Literature in the Nineteenth Century*.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

significance of the really significant tendencies of his age.¹ We shall find him, in short, failing to show that *passion for justice*, that delicate sense of his relation to his subject, which should lead him to interpret his age's productions. We shall find him finally, ranging himself amidst that host of critics, who, avowedly fighting in the cause of good literature, often ignore, misread, and misinterpret in their day that very literature which is good.²

III

What, then, is the contemporary critic's duty? He cannot hope to do more than fix a provisional value on the literature of his day. But his aim must surely be (*a*) to discover in the great mass of literary 'matter' the fresh creative spirits bringing new illuminations, new valuations into literature and life; (*b*) to set down the characteristics of those contemporary documents which *do* betray to the age 'his form and pressure' and (*c*) to detect the forces underlying the literary movements, and explain the nature

¹ 'So when there appears one of these ostentatious, enormous, wearisome works, enveloped in vagueness and mystery, full of symbolical and mystical aspirations, like many of the Romantic Schools of the past, and nearly all of the modern naturalists, symbolists, and decadents, the public is delighted,' etc. — Señor Valdés, *The Decadence of Modern Literature*.

² 'Mr. Wordsworth's diction has nowhere any pretence to elegance or dignity. . . . Alice Fell is "trash." . . . The poem on the Cuckoo is "absurd." "The Ode on Immortality" is "the most illegible and unintelligible part of the whole publication. . . . We venture to hope that there is now an end of this folly." — *Edinburgh Review*. xxxiv. 203.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

of the life which determines their qualities. He aims at justice thereby; and though he rarely attains it, perhaps his verdict on the new-comers, whom he greets, is about as useful as that pronounced by the academic critic upon the ages which have fled far from him. Let us apply this humble scheme of the critic's duty to some of the literary 'signs and portents' on our horizon.

IV

What are the manifestations of contemporary literature? What does authority say? 'The literature of the moment is only in one way encouraging. It cannot well be worse: it is the dark hour before the dawn,' says the distinguished critic whom we have already quoted. But why, why are the critics always longing for the dawn instead of rejoicing in the deluge? For is it not the hour of deluge and of no dawn that arrives, and of a still more wonderful deluge to-morrow? Looking at the seas of modern literature before us, around us, advancing upon us, and recalling the text 'The fountains of the great deep were broken up . . . and the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth,' it may be asked: Is not this literary inundation indeed the uncontrollable expression of modern life, of its rushing volume, and is not the critic's vocation to face with a spirit curious, undaunted, free, this literature's far-circling expanse, rejoicing in ascertaining its depths and racing currents and all the portents of its babbling shallows? Can any agency assuage, or academic precept stem, this incalculable flood?

FRIDAY NIGHTS

What is the special note of this literature that 'cannot well be worse'? Vulgarity and banality, some will answer. 'The note of emancipation from certain human decencies,' Mr. Lang replies;¹ but does not a broader note in our literature's voluminous voice, one of a deeper import, force itself upon us? Shall we not rather recognize that modern life's fecundity, diversity, and complexity, along with its vulgarity, are being marvellously mirrored by the literature of our time,² that our literature breathes that spirit of expansion whereby the modern man's horizons are constantly enlarged, and whereby he is to-day, no less than yesterday, exploring, seizing, and developing the illimitable fields of life and thought stretching for his annexation and investigation. And is not our literature, in the main, one of sympathetic curiosity and keen inquiry

¹ 'The note of the early century was that of emancipation from rules which had always been conventional, the rules of French criticism under Louis XIV. The note of the closing century is emancipation from certain human decencies.' - Andrew Lang, *Literature in the Nineteenth Century*.

² To take only the fifty writers best known to us in England as creative artists who have produced their main work since 1860 (the year that marks for Mr. Lang 'the degeneracy of literature') we may cite: Meredith, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Tchegov, Björnson, Ibsen, Maupassant, Walt Whitman, Henry James, Anatole France, Howells, Nietzsche, Jules Lemaitre, the Goncourts, Zola, Bourget, Pater, Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, Maeterlinck, Heredia, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Serrao, Fogazzaro, Carducci, D'Anunzio, Negri, Sienkiewicz, Spielhagen, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Couperus, Verhaeren, Valdés, Jonas Lie, Jacobson, Hardy, Henley, Stevenson, Mark Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett, Miss Thackeray, Miss Wilkins, Daudet, Robert Bridges, Jokai, Orzeszko.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

as to the thousands of roads life is going.¹ Wherever the civilized man places his foot, in whatsoever spot of the globe he finds his habitation, there is contemporary literature speedily recording *him*, and so adding to the old world's realization of its new life.² Centuries to come, looking back on our generation's literature, will see in it the ceaseless movement and expansion that characterize our day. Now, if our literature brings to men's cognizance so fully the variegated life of European societies, its decadence in those 'centres' where decadence is³ and its vigorous expansion where growth is,⁴ does it not accomplish its mission? Can the literature of decaying communities and the literature of the new peoples beyond sea alike gain sincerity by their spiritual adjustment to classic models? Yet the academic critic's dissatisfaction with modern literature poises itself delicately on the vast and rounded contention that they can and should.⁵ If we have to endure, in Mr.

¹ 'I can at all events attempt without undue temerity to discover the common tendency of writers of to-day. You meet, I think, almost everywhere an aversion to the conventional, the artificial, and a patient and persistent search for Nature, reality and truth.' – Jules Pravioux. 'On Contemporary French Literature,' *Athenæum*, July 6, 1901.

² Stevenson in the South Seas; Pierre Loti in Indo-China; Stephen Crane in Mexico; Joseph Conrad in Malaya; Henry Lawson in Australia; Maxim Gorky in South Russia; V. Korolenko in Siberia, etc., etc.

³ Huysman, Eckhoud, Pierre Louys, Catulle Mendes, etc.

⁴ Bret Harte, Rudyard Kipling, Hamlin Garland, etc.

⁵ 'The most marked characteristic in the contemporary art and literature of every country in Europe is the pursuit of Novelty; by which word I mean not the freshness, character, and individuality, which are essential to every work of genius, but the determination to

FRIDAY NIGHTS

Lang's words, 'constant exhibitions of crude and one-sided experiments,' 'symbolism, adventures in odd metres, etc.,' may we not recognize that these 'one-sided' experiments cry aloud with the great voice of Culture which has taught the general public to become articulate, which has opened a way for the yeasty waters of popular literature and carried them over the breakwaters of the Academies and the 'literary men,' and over the quiet beaches sacred to the 'fine spirit'? Must we not recognize as kindred phenomena of one and the same great spectacle – the world's progress – the facts that, on the other hand, never was a generation more culture ridden than ours, never were there so many 'Classics for the Million' and 'World Classics,' so many 'Edited Texts,' 'Golden Treasuries,' and 'Globe Libraries,' so many 'Temple Shakespeares' and 'Century Scotts,' so many 'Manuals of Literature,' 'Literary Histories' and 'Histories of Literature,' so many 'Standard Editions' and 'Complete Works'; never were there so many 'Royal Roads' and 'Extension Lectures,' and certified professors of literature and language, so many registered teachers and scholarly expounders of all the standards that the academic critics deem to be 'old and excellent' – nay, is not the *Daily Mail* itself edited by young Oxford and Cambridge scholars? – and yet, yet on the other hand, this is the age of 'The Sorrows of Satan' and Miss Marie Corelli's other novels, of 'The Eternal City,' and Mr. Hall Caine's novels running into *their* millions of

discover absolutely new *matter* for artistic treatment. . . . The causes of Poetical Decadence . . . are moral not physical.' – Professor Courthope, *Law in Taste*.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

copies; and of Mr. Guy Boothby and *his* hundreds of thousands of copies. Does it not almost look as if it were the successful application of the 'sweetness and light' of the classics to the Philistine soul of our world that has aroused the great general public to manifest itself in literature, and to pour from the floodgates of its consciousness that whirling sea which 'cannot well be worse'? And while academic teaching and the literary deluge synchronize, is it possible that we shall not get rid of either in this inspiring modern world? Is it possible that we are merely viewing two phantasmagorical aspects of one and the same ingenuous spectacle?

V

In any case, whether it be the diffusion of superficial culture which assists the depraved human mind to produce the bulk of popular literature, must not the contemporary critic accept that wider standpoint which involves a recognition of the 'bulk' as 'the literature of the self-education of the crowd' – the mental food necessary to its present state of development? And will he not better seize its significance, and indeed render it absolute justice by treating it as *documentary evidence* of the community's mental outlook, needs, wishes, and states of feeling?¹ Is not the crowd trying to get into the whole

¹ For example, perhaps the fullest justice that we could render to that remarkable work *The Eternal City* would be by analysing its caricature of Tolstoyism and by considering its solemn projection of the Suburban Protestant lower-middle-class conscience through the airy medium of Fleet Street sensationalism into the indifferent corridors of the Vatican.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

house of modern literature, and find out its life there, and is there not to-day such a noise and confusion, such a banging of doors and opening of windows that the house is rendered temporarily uninhabitable to the 'fine spirit'? And are not the most 'popular' writers very, very insignificant as creators, but plainly significant as the instructors, the overseers, the spokesmen of the community's ignorance?¹ If the critics would only recognize as a national drama this surprising unlocking of the doors of our heterogeneous General Public's consciousness and its flinging itself outwards into literature, eager to bring its world into violent and familiar contact with the great stream of life flowing outside it, would they not 'fix the valuations of this literature, get all round it, see into its meaning, and thereby place it better than by simply condemning it as not in harmony with certain æsthetic canons. We are all witnessing to-day the phenomenon of the culture of the community not being *grown* slowly from the deep roots of its life (by which slow growth for example, flowered the exquisite poetry and exquisite arts of many old-world peasantries), but being transplanted, imported, and administered by the Press, the academies, and other wholesale agencies for indiscriminate consumption. And the unassimilated 'culture' of our modern

¹ 'Hall Caine's *Eternal City* is a great novel revealing the author at the very zenith of his gift. . . . The book's greatest wealth is its wealth of contagious and engrossing emotion. It is a triumph of imagination, of power over the feelings, as it is of dexterously used observation of an historic and most interesting and deeply agitated people . . .' - *The Liverpool Daily Post*.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

commercialized world is the ferment in the hasty brew of 'popular' work.¹ It is the chief source of very bad art. Accordingly the contemporary critic, seeing the relation this 'culture' bears to society's mental outlook, seeing inevitably why it is prevalent, and the purpose it serves, must discriminate most sharply between the comparatively small bands of artists whose creative instincts shape true works of art for us, and for posterity, and the running multitude of writers whose works reflect the common perishing valuations of our bustling and self-important time. Herein lies the distinction between living and dead criticism. For if the critic fails to detect in the deluge of his day the spirits that being finely creative open new windows for our consciousness, if he confuses what is significant with what offers us a mere face value, he fails. Weary of the deluge, he is in danger of rejecting his age *en bloc* or of hailing, let us say, the achievements of Mr. Rider Haggard, and of being critically disheartened by the 'symbolism' of Maeterlinck.

VI

Seeking then, in this weltering literary flood to-day loosed upon us, for talents of special originality which add something really living to literature, and for those documents of life which show the age in meaning outline, the

¹ For example, the rise to-day of a pseudo-realistic, pseudo-romantic school of fiction (examples, Mr. Anthony Hope's *Rupert of Hentzau*, Miss Fowler's *The Double Thread*) suggests that the great middle-class public is suffering from an indigestion of culture and a chaos of ideals.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

critic understands first that justice implies that receptive spirit, which hastens to recognize each writer's world, listens to his message whatever it be, and responds to anything individual he is privileged to reveal to us about which other men are dumb. Secondly the critic asks: 'Does this talent open to us a new window into the world of men, the world of the mind? Wherein lies the difference between this new window and all the other windows?' And, generally, in the case of those few windows opened for the first time, which are most strange to us, how apt are the critics to have an actual distaste for them,¹ at first refusing to look out of them, and even clamouring to have them blocked up altogether.²

But in the majority of cases since the windows, we agree, merely open into the commonplaces of the human mind, then the critic's duty is to see whether but one solitary face looks out or a multitude of contemporary faces. The majority of *littérateurs* in every age are as human wax on which are impressed individual records of the modes of thought, institutions, ethics, fashions, and general forms of life current in their day. The average mind having little original creative power, with which to resist, transform, or appraise the prevailing standards, gives

¹ The *Guardian* on Charles Kingsley's *Yeast*: 'It is the countenance the writer gives to the worst tendencies of the day, and the manner in which he conceals loose morality in a dress of high sounding and philosophic phraseology which calls for plain and decided condemnation.' Quoted by Mr. Basil Worsfold in *Judgment in Literature*.

² See Mr. William Archer's list of first English criticisms on Ibsen's plays, - *Carrion*, *Loathsome Putridity*, *Shocking Immorality*, etc., etc. No. 15. V. 3. - Dec., 1901.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

us the *face-value* only of the life around. And the critic, in dealing with this class of literature, will stamp it as the crowd's. Crowds, *en masse*, have too their literature, the writings in ogham, the rock-carvings of their mental state, and in order to do it justice the critic must fix in his criticisms these people's valuations of life, and he must try and get behind their literature and see what it falsifies as well as what it reveals in the nation's life.¹ To subject the bulk of contemporary literature to high æsthetic and literary standards is often simply to *suppress* its significance. As the majority of new works are but the age's ephemeral children they can only make an appeal to their parent age; the contemporary critic's duty, therefore, is to fix, in the significant documents of the life of his time, the *character* of his age; and to the majority of average works of literature he will do justice by treating them as revelations of the contemporary mind, knowing that though the inner individual spirit of these typical documents may be of very little significance, its testimony to the overlordship of the age may be of very much.

To come back to our starting-point: how can the critic be *just*? If we penetrate into the critics' camp do we not find it pitched at the meeting of many cross roads along which the various critics, asking, 'What is the value of this new literary field presented to us?' are seen taking each some individual path, some idiosyncratic lane of

¹ For example, the 'immoral passages' of a 'scrofulous' French novel often imply there is little to hide and much pretence of immorality. The English novel hides and assumes, equally, certain pretences of the national life.

FRIDAY NIGHTS

judgment, whence they obtain some special prospect, but rarely command a wide view of the main lie of the land. So trying to get nearer to just judgment we are led to criticize the critics' relative justice and we then see the critics as men fulfilling dissimilar functions. The rank and file of the army of critics would indeed seem to serve as the faithful janissaries of the main body of the public's prevailing concepts, ethics and mental outlook, janissaries whose function it is to attack all literature that is strange or rare, the assimilation of which may be held to be harmful to the national constitution. (Example. 'The general English criticism of the French 'naturalists.')

Other critics stand as the spokesmen of foreign or classic culture, the study of which in their judgment would bring to their nation a wider outlook, finer aims, and clearer self-knowledge, and such critics may be in their turn liable to misjudge the significance of 'new windows' opened at home. (Example. Matthew Arnold and his attitude to Tennyson, Browning, and other contemporary writers.)

Other critics again, enamoured of certain features in the national life may show little justice to writers, 'schools' or movements outside their own bracing programme. (Example. The critical policy of Mr. Henley's 'National Observer.')

The critics, in fact, perhaps, should be looked upon less as judges responsive to demands for justice at their gates, than as the priests of literature vowed to their special creeds, to their own particular altars, and deaf to all but the favoured communicants within their sacred walls. When a 'new window' is opened revealing a fresh territory of the mind, is not the average critic less anxious to find out

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

what are the special laws of its existence, of what life and what nature it is the outcome, than to establish that this new territory, this new mind, ought, according to such and such literary standards, to be something rather different from what it is. Undoubtedly this is criticism's chief work; the ushering of the great procession of æsthetic and literary standards to announce to each writer 'You have failed here; you have succeeded there; you are too much yourself, or you yourself are too little.' This is the daily work of criticism, the bringing of this Rhadamanthine court to throw its shadow over and efface all productions that are feeble and malformed at birth, the continued existence of which the critic deems injurious to literature itself and to the common good. But this formidable process explains also why most criticism has merely an ephemeral value and administers but partial justice; for in trying to judge where the work arrives in the great road of literature stretching before us, the critic is apt to discuss too much its transitory relations with the surrounding world to which it speaks, and too little its permanent relations with the world from which it has come. If we take up the sorriest pamphlet of (say) the eighteenth century we understand what it is, we see its value as literature and its relation to the life of its age. The critics of its day did not see what it was; they saw what it 'ought' to be and therefore their 'oughts' passed away in the pomp and show of transient superiority. The critic's 'ought' rarely *explains* the meaning of the writer's 'is'! The contemporary critic will therefore understand by justice that which explains the 'is,' finds the illuminating light it casts on life, and does not

FRIDAY NIGHTS

exclude it from its place, because it 'ought' to be rather different from itself.

Thus, looking at the relations of the mass of critics to the literature of their day, the contemporary critic aims first at *interpretation*, knowing that he must be prepared to controvert current opinion, and yet he must sympathize with his age in order to penetrate to its meaning. He is the arbitrator, just or unjust, between the individual men of his age and his age's prevailing tendencies, and accordingly he will prove himself less of the censurer and fault-finder the more he shows in his idea and in his practice that he is the explainer, the demonstrator of what writers introduce or reflect in contemporary life. His aim will be to *account* for authors, to explain them to their age, and their age through them – which will not indeed render them ultimately less dissatisfied with him. He will, however, understand that it is his duty to resist what is bad in literature chiefly by showing what tendency it represents, by tracing what is its relation to contemporary society and the contemporary mind from which it springs. And thus the critic, in inquiring into the significance of the really significant tendencies of his time, will leave to the academic school its watch-word of authority as applying to the past, and will find the weapon that can deal with the present, in his chief aim – *Interpretation*.

Finally, the academic and the contemporary critic may be said to rule over different provinces.

The function of the former may perhaps be defined as 'the interpretation of the literature of the past, and the promulgation of the highest literary canons (of the past)

THE CONTEMPORARY CRITIC

in order that good literature (as heretofore understood) may be perpetuated.' The academic critic, in any case, gathers in the honours of the last word. Willingly we leave the silent field to his impressive figure. He frowns at the birth of the obscure, but his sense of duty impels him to officiate at the obsequies of the illustrious dead. To him falls, after the lapse of centuries, the most delicate of tasks – the task of marshalling those writers who, by virtue of their qualities, have survived the censure of the academic critics of their own day.

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by Lafcadio Hearn

- ¶ Most books written about Japan have been superficial sketches of a passing traveller. Of the inner life of the Japanese we know practically nothing, their religion, superstitions, ways of thought. Lafcadio Hearn reveals something of the people and their customs as they are.

58. GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN. Second Series

by Lafcadio Hearn

- ¶ Sketches by an acute observer and a master of English prose, of a Nation in transition—of the lingering remains of Old Japan, to-day only a memory, of its gardens, its beliefs, customs, gods and devils, of its wonderful kindliness and charm—and of the New Japan, struggling against odds towards new ideals.

59. THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO

Edited by Manuel Komroff

- ¶ When Marco Polo arrived at the court of the Great Khan, Peking had just been rebuilt. Kublai Khan was at the height of his glory. Polo rose rapidly in favour and became governor of an important district. In this way he gained first-hand knowledge of a great civilization and described it with astounding accuracy and detail.

60. SELECTED PREJUDICES. Second Series

by H. L. Mencken

- ¶ 'What a master of the straight left in appreciation! Everybody who wishes to see how common sense about books and authors can be made exhilarating should acquire this delightful book.'

Morning Post

61. THE WORLD'S BACK DOORS

by Max Murray

With an introduction by HECTOR BOLITHO

- ¶ This book is not an account so much of places as of people. The journey round the world was begun with about enough money to buy one meal, and continued for 66,000 miles. There are periods as a longshore man and as a sailor, and a Chinese guard and a night watchman, and as a hobo.

62. THE EVOLUTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL

by J. Middleton Murry

- ¶ These essays were written during and immediately after the Great War. The author says that they record the painful stages by which he passed from the so-called intellectual state to the state of being what he now considers to be a reasonable man.

63. THE RENAISSANCE

by Walter Pater

- ¶ This English classic contains studies of those 'supreme artists,' Michelangelo and Da Vinci, and of Botticelli, Della Robia, Mirandola, and others, who 'have a distinct faculty of their own by which they convey to us a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere.' There is no romance or subtlety in the work of these masters too fine for Pater to distinguish in superb English.

64. THE ADVENTURES OF A WANDERER

by Sydney Walter Powell

- ¶ Throwing up a position in the Civil Service in Natal because he preferred movement and freedom to monotony and security, the author started his wanderings by enlisting in an Indian Ambulance Corps in the South African War. Afterwards he wandered all over the world.

65. 'RACUNDRA'S' FIRST CRUISE

by Arthur Ransome

- ¶ This is the story of the building of an ideal yacht which would be a cruising boat that one man could manage if need be, but on which three people could live comfortably. The adventures of the cruise are skilfully and vividly told.

66. THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN

by Winwood Reade

- ¶ 'Few sketches of universal history by one single author have been written. One book that has influenced me very strongly is *The Martyrdom of Man*. This "dates," as people say nowadays, and it has a fine gloom of its own; but it is still an extraordinarily inspiring presentation of human history as one consistent process.' *H. G. Wells in The Outline of History*

67. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK RUTHERFORD

With an introduction by H. W. MASSINGHAM

- ¶ Because of its honesty, delicacy and simplicity of portraiture, this book has always had a curious grip upon the affections of its readers. An English Amiel, inheriting to his comfort an English Old Crome landscape, he freed and strengthened his own spirit as he will his reader's.

68. THE DELIVERANCE

by Mark Rutherford

- ¶ Once read, Hale White [Mark Rutherford] is never forgotten. But he is not yet approached through the highways of English letters. To the lover of his work, nothing can be more attractive than the pure and serene atmosphere of thought in which his art moves.

69. THE REVOLUTION IN TANNER'S LANE

by Mark Rutherford

- ¶ 'Since Bunyan, English Puritanism has produced one imaginative genius of the highest order. To my mind, our fiction contains no more perfectly drawn pictures of English life in its recurring emotional contrast of excitement and repose more valuable to the historian, or more stimulating to the imaginative reader.' *H. W. Massingham*

70. ASPECTS OF SCIENCE. First Series

by J. W. N. Sullivan

- ¶ Although they deal with different aspects of various scientific ideas, the papers which make up this volume do illustrate, more or less, one point of view. This book tries to show one or two of the many reasons why science may be interesting for people who are not specialists as well as for those who are.

71. MASTRO-DON GESUALDO

Giovanni Verga. Translated by D. H. Lawrence

- ¶ Verga, who died in 1922, is recognized as one of the greatest of Italian writers of fiction. He can claim a place beside Hardy and the Russians. 'It is a fine full tale, a fine, full picture of life, with a bold beauty of its own which Mr. Lawrence must have relished greatly as he translated it.' *Observer*

72. THE MISSES MALLETT

by E. H. Young

- ¶ The virtue of this quiet and accomplished piece of writing lies in its quality and in its character-drawing; to summarize it would be to give no idea of its charm. Neither realism nor romance, it is a book by a writer of insight and sensibility.

73. SELECTED ESSAYS. First Series

by Sir Edmund Gosse, C.B.

- ¶ 'The prose of Sir Edmund Gosse is as rich in the colour of young imagination as in the mellow harmony of judgment. Sir Edmund Gosse's literary kit-kats will continue to be read with avidity long after the greater part of the academic criticism of the century is swept away upon the lumber-heap.' *Daily Telegraph*

74. WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS

by Christopher Morley

- ¶ A delicious satirical fantasy, in which humanity wears a dog collar.
'Mr. Morley is a master of consequent inconsequence. His humour and irony are excellent, and his satire is only the more salient for the delicate and ingenuous fantasy in which it is set.' *Manchester Guardian*

75. JAVA HEAD

by Joseph Hergesheimer

- ¶ The author has created a connoisseur's world of his own; a world of colourful bric-à-brac—of ships and rustling silks and old New England houses—a world in which the rarest and most perplexing of emotions are caught and expressed for the perceptible moment as in austere delicate porcelain. *Java Head* is a novel of grave and lasting beauty.

76. CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN

by George Moore

- ¶ 'Mr. Moore, true to his period and to his genius, stripped himself of everything that might stand between him and the achievement of his artistic object. He does not ask you to admire this George Moore. He merely asks you to observe him beyond good and evil as a constant plucked from the bewildering flow of eternity.' *Humbert Wolfe*

77. THE BAZAAR. Stories

by Martin Armstrong

- ¶ 'These stories have considerable range of subject, but in general they are stay-at-home tales, depicting cloistered lives and delicate finely fibred minds. . . . Mr. Armstrong writes beautifully.' *Nation and Athenæum*

78. SIDE SHOWS. Essays

by J. B. Atkins

With an Introduction by JAMES BONE

- ¶ Mr. J. B. Atkins was war correspondent in four wars, the London editor of a great English paper, then Paris correspondent of another, and latterly the editor of the *Spectator*. His subjects in *Side Shows* are briefly London and the sea.

79. SHORT TALKS WITH THE DEAD

by Hilaire Belloc

- ¶ In these essays Mr. Belloc attains his usual high level of pungent and witty writing. The subjects vary widely and include an imaginary talk with the spirits of Charles I, the barber of Louis XIV, and Napoleon, Venice, fakes, eclipses, Byron, and the famous dissertation on the Nordic Man.

80. ORIENT EXPRESS

by John dos Passos

- ¶ This book will be read because, as well as being the temperature chart of an unfortunate sufferer from the travelling disease, it deals with places shaken by the heavy footsteps of History, manifesting itself as usual by plague, famine, murder, sudden death and depreciated currency. Underneath the book is an ode to railroad travel.

81. SELECTED ESSAYS. Second Series

by Sir Edmund Gosse, C.B.

- ¶ A second volume of essays personally chosen by Sir Edmund Gosse from the wide field of his literary work. One is delighted with the width of his appreciation which enables him to write with equal charm on *Wycherley* and on *How to Read the Bible*.

82. ON THE EVE

by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett

- ¶ In his characters is something of the width and depth which so astounds us in the creations of Shakespeare. *On the Eve* is a quiet work, yet over which the growing consciousness of coming events casts its heavy shadow. Turgenev, even as he sketched the ripening love of a young girl, has made us feel the dawning aspirations of a nation.

83. FATHERS AND CHILDREN

by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett

- ¶ 'As a piece of art *Fathers and Children* is the most powerful of all Turgenev's works. The figure of Bazarov is not only the political centre of the book, but a figure in which the eternal tragedy of man's impotence and insignificance is realized in scenes of a most ironical human drama.' *Edward Garnett*

84. SMOKE

by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett

- ¶ In this novel Turgenev sees and reflects, even in the shifting phases of political life, that which is universal in human nature. His work is compassionate, beautiful, unique; in the sight of his fellow-craftsmen always marvellous and often perfect.

85. PORGY. A Tale

by du Bose Heyward

- ¶ This fascinating book gives a vivid and intimate insight into the lives of a group of American negroes, from whom Porgy stands out, rich in humour and tragedy. The author's description of a hurricane is reminiscent in its power.

86. FRANCE AND THE FRENCH

by Sisley Huddleston

- ¶ 'There has been nothing of its kind published since the War. His book is a repository of facts marshalled with judgment; as such it should assist in clearing away a whole maze of misconceptions and prejudices, and serve as a sort of pocket encyclopædia of modern France.' *Times Literary Supplement*

88. CLOUD CUCKOO LAND. A Novel of Sparta

by Naomi Mitchison

- ¶ 'Rich and frank in passions, and rich, too, in the detail which helps to make feigned life seem real.' *Times Literary Supplement*

89. A PRIVATE IN THE GUARDS

by Stephen Graham

- ¶ In his own experiences as a soldier Stephen Graham has conserved the half-forgotten emotions of a nation in arms. Above all he makes us feel the stark brutality and horror of actual war, the valour which is more than valour, and the disciplined endurance which is human and therefore the more terrifying.

90. THUNDER ON THE LEFT

by Christopher Morley

- ¶ 'It is personal to every reader, it will become for every one a reflection of himself. I fancy that here, as always where work is fine and true, the author has created something not as he would but as he must, and is here an interpreter of a world more wonderful than he himself knows.' *Hugh Walpole*

91. THE MOON AND SIXPENCE

by Somerset Maugham

- ¶ A remarkable picture of a genius.
'Mr. Maugham has given us a ruthless and penetrating study in personality with a savage truthfulness of delineation and icy contempt for the heroic and the sentimental.' *The Times*

92. THE CASUARINA TREE

by W. Somerset Maugham

- ¶ Intensely dramatic stories in which the stain of the East falls deeply on the lives of English men and women. Mr. Maugham remains cruelly aloof from his characters. On passion and its culminating tragedy he looks with unmoved detachment, ringing the changes without comment and yet with little cynicism.

93. A POOR MAN'S HOUSE

by Stephen Reynolds

- ¶ Vivid and intimate pictures of a Devonshire fisherman's life. 'Compact, harmonious, without a single—I won't say false—but uncertain note, true in aim, sentiment and expression, precise and imaginative, never precious, but containing here and there an absolutely priceless phrase. . . .' *Joseph Conrad*

94. WILLIAM BLAKE

by Arthur Symonds

- ¶ When Blake spoke the first word of the nineteenth century there was none to hear it; and now that his message has penetrated the world, and is slowly re-making it, few are conscious of the man who first voiced it. This lack of knowledge is remedied in Mr. Symonds' work.

95. A LITERARY PILGRIM IN ENGLAND

by Edward Thomas

- ¶ A book about the homes and resorts of English writers, from John Aubrey, Cowper, Gilbert White, Cobbett, Wordsworth, Burns, Borrow and Lamb, to Swinburne, Stevenson, Meredith, W. H. Hudson and H. Belloc. Each chapter is a miniature biography and at the same time a picture of the man and his work and environment.

96. NAPOLEON: THE LAST PHASE

by The Earl of Rosebery

- ¶ Of books and memoirs about Napoleon there is indeed no end, but of the veracious books such as this there are remarkably few. It aims to penetrate the deliberate darkness which surrounds the last act of the Napoleonic drama.

97. THE POCKET BOOK OF POEMS AND
SONGS FOR THE OPEN AIR

Compiled by Edward Thomas

- ¶ This anthology is meant to please those lovers of poetry and the country who like a book that can always lighten some of their burdens or give wings to their delight, whether in the open air by day, or under the roof at evening ; in it is gathered much of the finest English poetry.

98. SAFETY PINS : ESSAYS

by Christopher Morley

With an Introduction by H. M. TOMLINSON

- ¶ Very many readers will be glad of the opportunity to meet Mr. Morley in the rôle of the gentle essayist. He is an author who is content to move among his fellows, to note, to reflect, and to write genially and urbanely ; to love words for their sound as well as for their value in expression of thought.

99. THE BLACK SOUL : A Novel

by Liam O'Flaherty

- ¶ '*The Black Soul* overwhelms one like a storm. . . . Nothing like it has been written by any Irish writer.' "Æ" in *The Irish Statesman*

100. CHRISTINA ALBERTA'S FATHER :

A Novel

by H. G. Wells

- ¶ 'At first reading the book is utterly beyond criticism ; all the characters are delightfully genuine.' *Spectator*
'Brimming over with Wellsian insight, humour and invention. No one but Mr. Wells could have written the whole book and given it such verve and sparkle.' *Westminster Gazette*

102. THE GRUB STREET NIGHTS
ENTERTAINMENTS

by J. C. Squire

- ¶ Stories of literary life, told with a breath of fantasy and gaily ironic humour. Each character lives, and is the more lively for its touch of caricature. From *The Man Who Kept a Diary* to *The Man Who Wrote Free Verse*, these tales constitute Mr. Squire's most delightful ventures in fiction ; and the conception of the book itself is unique.

103. ORIENTAL ENCOUNTERS

by Marmaduke Pickthall

- ¶ In *Oriental Encounters*, Mr. Pickthall relives his earlier manhood's discovery of Arabia and sympathetic encounters with the Eastern mind. He is one of the few travellers who really bridges the racial gulf.

105. THE MOTHER : A Novel

by Grazia Deledda

With an introduction by D. H. LAWRENCE,

- ¶ An unusual book, both in its story and its setting in a remote Sardinian hill village, half civilized and superstitious. The action of the story takes place so rapidly and the actual drama is so interwoven with the mental conflict, and all so forced by circumstances, that it is almost Greek in its simple and inevitable tragedy.

106. TRAVELLER'S JOY : An Anthology

by W. G. Waters

- ¶ This anthology has been selected for publication in the Travellers' Library from among the many collections of verse because of its suitability for the traveller, particularly the summer and autumn traveller, who would like to carry with him some store of literary provender.

107. SHIPMATES : Essays

by Felix Riesenberg

- ¶ A collection of intimate character portraits of men with whom the author has sailed on many voyages. The sequence of studies blends into a fascinating panorama of living characters.

108. THE CRICKET MATCH

by Hugh de Selincourt

- ¶ Through the medium of a cricket match the author endeavours to give a glimpse of life in a Sussex village. First we have a bird's-eye view at dawn of the village nestling under the Downs; then we see the players awaken in all the widely different circumstance of their various lives, pass the morning, assemble on the field, play their game, united for a few hours, as men should be, by a common purpose—and at night disperse.

**109. RARE ADVENTURES AND PAINFULL
PEREGRINATIONS (1582-1645)**

by William Lithgow

Edited, and with an Introduction by B. I. LAWRENCE

- ¶ This is the book of a seventeenth-century Scotchman who walked over the Levant, North Africa and most of Europe, including Spain, where he was tortured by the Inquisition. An unscrupulous man, full of curiosity, his comments are diverting and penetrating, his adventures remarkable.

110. THE END OF A CHAPTER

by Shane Leslie

- ¶ In this, his most famous book, Mr. Shane Leslie has preserved for future generations the essence of the pre-war epoch, its institutions and individuals. He writes of Eton, of the Empire, of Post-Victorianism, of the Politicians. . . . And whatever he touches upon, he brilliantly interprets.

111. SAILING ACROSS EUROPE

by Negley Farson

With an Introduction by FRANK MORLEY

- ¶ A voyage of six months in a ship, its one and only cabin measuring 8 feet by 6 feet, up the Rhine, down the Danube, passing from one to the other by the half-forgotten Ludwig's Canal. To think of and plan such a journey was a fine imaginative effort and to write about it interestingly is no mean accomplishment.

112. MEN, BOOKS AND BIRDS—Letters to a friend
by W. H. Hudson

With Notes, some Letters, and an Introduction by
MORLEY ROBERTS

- ¶ An important collection of letters from the naturalist to his friend, literary executor and fellow-author, Morley Roberts, covering a period of twenty-five years.

113. PLAYS ACTING AND MUSIC

by Arthur Symons

- ¶ This book deals mainly with music and with the various arts of the stage. Mr. Arthur Symons shows how each art has its own laws, its own limits; these it is the business of the critic jealously to distinguish. Yet in the study of art as art, it should be his endeavour to master the universal science of beauty.

114. ITALIAN BACKGROUNDS

by Edith Wharton

- ¶ Mrs. Wharton's perception of beauty and her grace of writing are matters of general acceptance. Her book gives us pictures of mountains and rivers, monks, nuns and saints.

115. FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS

by Constance Sitwell. With an Introduction by E. M. Forster

- ¶ Mrs. Sitwell has known India well, and has filled her pages with many vivid little pictures, and with sounds and scents. But it is the thread on which her impressions are strung that is so fascinating, a thread so delicate and rare that the slightest clumsiness in definition would snap it.

116. THE MOON OF THE CARIBBEES: and Other Plays of the Sea

by Eugene O'Neill. With an Introduction by St. John Ervine

- ¶ 'Mr. O'Neill is immeasurably the most interesting man of letters that America has produced since the death of Walt Whitman.' *From the Introduction.*

117. BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY. Stories of Gypsies

by Konrad Bercovici. With an Introduction by A. E. Coppard

- ¶ Konrad Bercovici, through his own association with gypsies, together with a magical intuition of their lives, is able to give us some unforgettable pictures of those wanderers who, having no home anywhere, are at home everywhere.

118. THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS

by George Douglas. With an Introduction by J. B. Priestley

- ¶ This powerful and moving story of life in a small Scots burgh is one of the grimmest studies of realism in all modern fiction. The author flashes a cold and remorseless searchlight upon the backbitings, jealousies, and intrigues of the townsfolk, and his story stands as a classic antidote to the sentimentalism of the kailyard school.

119. FRIDAY NIGHTS

by Edward Garnett

- ¶ Of *Friday Nights* a *Times* reviewer wrote: 'Mr. Garnett is "the critic as artist," sensitive alike to elemental nature and the subtlest human variations. His book sketches for us the possible outlines of a new humanism, a fresh valuation of both life and art.'

120. DIVERSIONS IN SICILY

by Henry Festing Jones

- ¶ Shortly before his sudden and unexpected death, Mr. Festing Jones chose out *Diversions in Sicily* for reprinting in the 'Travellers' Library from among his three books of mainly Sicilian sketches and studies. The publishers hope that the book, in this popular form, will make many new friends. These chapters, as well as any that he wrote, recapture the wisdom, charm, and humour of their author.

121. DAYS IN THE SUN: A Cricketer's Book.

by Neville Cardus ('Cricketer' of the *Manchester Guardian*).

122. COMBED OUT

by F. A. Voigt

- ¶ This account of life in the army in 1917-18 both at home and in France is written with a telling incisiveness. The author does not indulge in an unnecessary word, but packs in just the right details with an intensity of feeling that is infectious.

★

Note

The Travellers' Library is now published as a joint enterprise by Jonathan Cape Ltd. and William Heinemann Ltd. The new volumes announced here to appear during the spring of 1929 will be published by both firms. The series as a whole can be ordered through booksellers from either Jonathan Cape or William Heinemann. Booksellers' only care must be not to duplicate their orders.

