

From Shakespeare to O. Henry

A review of a curious book by S. P. B. Mais, just published by Grant Richards, in London. . . . Some kindly satire, and views on literary criticism.

(From The Saturday Review)

MR. MAIS possesses the principal and most necessary qualification of the modern reviewer of current literature—an absolutely indiscriminate enthusiasm for books of the day. For Mr. Mais it is bias in these times of wholesale publishing to be alive. Never was England so vocal a nest of singing birds. There were never so many astonishingly great novelists. Even the theatre, though it be for the moment under a revue cloud—occulted by the rosy mists of the Venusberg—was yesterday a repository of great names, and after the war (for Mr. Mais enjoys the books which are going to be written as well as those which are already written) will again concern itself with the grand realities, as in the days of Barker and Galsworthy.

Nor is Mr. Mais alone enthusiastic concerning his contemporaries. The modern reviewer must love the classics as well as the neo-classics; otherwise how could our centenaries be celebrated with so punctual an exultation? The modern reviewer, to give him his due, really thinks Shakespeare and Swift and Jane Austen as worthy of our admiration (at the proper time) as Mr. Bennett or the late O. Henry. Homer also was a genius and Milton, like Mr. Masfield, wrote immortal lines. Not even the dead need feel neglected in these enthusiastic days. We will not weary the reader with Mr. Mais's opinions. Suffice it that he exuberantly peppers his pages with glad illusions to books of every age and kind, and that he obviously loves them all, and, so far as we can ascertain, loves them all equally well.

He confirms a suspicion which we have long held concerning the fate of Shakespeare, say, or Bunyan if they were suddenly to appear among us to-day. These great ones would not die of neglect or be killed by the critics. They would be accepted as original writers of great genius along with Mrs. Wilcox and Sir James Barrie. Our criticism has ceased to suffer from the paralyzing judgment of a Jeffrey. It suffers instead (and pray heaven that it be not a worse affliction!) from the desolating catholicity of taste which gorges indifferently upon Blake and Miss Corelli, upon Goldsmith and Mr. E. F. Benson. Most people know the story of the candidate for reviewing honors who in recommending himself stated that his specialty was invective—general invective. That story has unhappily lost its point and is no longer relevant. The necessary gift to-day is not general invective but general approbation.

The old critic who brought to bear upon contemporary literature a taste tempered by the classics, who had definite standards and exacted them, has become a legend. There is a flavor about him of Fee-faw-fum or Who Killed John Keats? There are no standards to-day. The critics are merely required to like what other people like, and the critic who likes such matter best is the best critic.

THERE is a good as well as a bad reason for this state of things. The good reason is that criticism has ceased to be formal. The romantic critics have taught us that forms and metres do not make poets and novelists, but that poets and novelists make forms and metres. No critic after Lamb or Coleridge could go about his business quite in the fashion of Dryden or Johnson. We hesitate to slay a poet to-day simply because his lines do not scan or because his rhymes are uncertain. The modern critic is nervous of applying the rules of art, and has even hinted an occasional doubt of their existence. This makes the critic modest and careful—which is no bad thing. But unfortunately criticism has not only ceased to be formal. It has also ceased to be discriminating—which is quite another matter.

Dryden made some bad mistakes in applying the seventeenth century formal discipline to sixteenth century literature. A schoolboy is able to make fun of Dryden's preface to "The Tempest" as improved by himself and d'Avenant. But Dryden if he were alive to-day would make short work of many established literary reputations "swollen with the rank mist they draw" from the lavish praise of the reviewers. For Dryden had the power to distinguish. His mere literary common sense would have told him there was something wrong in using exactly the same language in appreciating Keats or Swift as in appreciating Mr. Walter de la Mare or Mr. Gilbert Chesterton.

One of the blunders of modern criticism is to assume that because criticism has ceased to be formal it has ceased to be difficult. The old formal criticism was really absurdly simple as compared with the task of the modern appreciator. It is true it required scholars, prosodists and grammarians for its practitioners—men who had studied literature and knew the rules.

But literature can be studied and rules can be mastered, whereas the modern critic is apparently required to tell the false from the true, the first from the second, by sheer process of divination. Where Dr. Johnson would by rule of thumb, by the application of certain universally accepted standards, have been able to put Mr. Masfield in his place (whatever that may be) the modern critic is left with nothing but his instinct to guide him. It sounds simple enough, for "instinct" is easily said and stands for something to which we all lay claim. But we suggest that in this case it stands for nothing less than the rarest quality in human nature—the ability to move with ease and rectitude in regions where taste and imagination see the impossible abiders.

HOWEVER, the large body of readers who pretend to criticise or notice books have swallowed the assumption that modern criticism, being a matter of taste, can usefully be pursued by the unassisted light of nature; that there are no rules; and (since this is a democratic age) that one man's opinion is as good as another. There is accordingly no longer any reason why books should be damned, unless it be that the critic is a sour, ill-natured fellow who has not learned that to read all is to forgive all. When a reviewer is not bound by any accepted standard to be hard upon the book of the week, there is obviously no reason why he should not praise it, unless he happens to dislike the author, or to be neglected by the publisher, or to have a naturally inhumane and limited nature.

Clearly the more a man can find to approve in the work of his fellow men the more liberal, sympathetic and discerning he must be. Admittedly there are scores of clever writers of prose and verse to-day who are read by scores of thousands of people. To be blind to their merit is to be bilious in mind, body or estate. And so it comes about that praise, universal and intense, has come to be recognized as the sign of the good critic.

Every day new poets, new novelists and new dramatists are discovered and discussed in terms which Johnson would have hesitated to employ of Homer himself. Mr. Mais, who has been a schoolmaster, has an unfair advantage over the ordinary reviewer in that he is not even limited to the fully fledged works of genius which issue monthly from the presses. He can tell us of young Masfields not yet out of MS., of sucking Keatses of whose work "I can only murmur to myself, 'Exquisite,' 'Beautiful'—young poets of sixteen years or so who prompt in Mr. Mais the staggering reflection "that there are probably hundreds of poets at this moment working quietly in this country as good as these, of whom we have heard literally nothing."

Of his more ordinary opportunities Mr. Mais avails himself to the full. Though we disclaim any intention of dealing with Mr. Mais's opinions in detail, we are bound in fairness to ourselves to indicate the intensity and scope of his enthusiasm. Among the novelists he finds a "score or so of great writers, of whom ten at least stand right out from their generation and deserve to live so long as English literature is read. . . . Mackenzie may or may not [Mr. Mais has here an unusual access of caution] be one of those ten," but he has a "claim to greatness," and of "Guy and Pauline" Mr. Mais proclaims that "there is nothing like it in the language."

Of the poets Mr. Mais is even more assured: "There has never been an age so rich in poets in history as our own. . . . We live in a time of amazing literary geniuses." To the theatre before the war "most of the leading geniuses of our time had contributed their quota. . . . There were also meteoric flights of poetic geniuses who neither followed nor founded any school, but flashed brilliantly for an hour and then swept by."

THERE is matter for reflection in this book of Mr. Mais. It is too typical a work to be passed over as merely indicating a habit of self-indulgence upon the part of a literary glutton. We are glad to think that Mr. Mais and his like really enjoy Shakespeare and Swift and Fielding; but we remember Wilhelm Meister at the play. He was enchanted when the audience applauded a tragedy. How glorious to be a tragedian and to move the multitude to such noble ends! But after the tragedy came a professional contortionist who pleased the multitude even better than the tragedy had done. Whereupon Wilhelm began to have his doubts concerning the precise value and quality of the multitude's affection for the tragedy. The celebration of great men by critics who use almost precisely the same language concerning every third book which issues from the publishers may be less significant of taste and judgment than it seems. We may be moved to remember the saying of La Rochefoucauld concerning those whose praise of others is really intended to proclaim their own discernment. Critics who write like Mr. Mais often intend no more than to say: "I see great merit here of which a less alert and imaginative man might excusably be unaware."

The Nightingales of Flanders

"Le rossignol n'est pas mobilisé." —A French Soldier

THE nightingales of Flanders, They have not gone to war: A soldier heard them singing Where they had sung before.

The earth was torn and quaking, The sky about to fall; The nightingales of Flanders, They minded not at all.

At intervals he heard them Between the guns, he said, Making a thrilling music Above the listening dead.

Of woodland and of orchard And roadside tree bereft, The nightingales of Flanders Were singing, "France is left!" —Grace Hazard Conkling, in Everybody's.

Historical Panel by Edmund Garrett



THIS panel is part of a series done by Mr. Garrett for the country home of William Hall Walker, at Great Barrington, Mass. The panels are said to be remarkable for their rich ornamentation and the admirable rendering of Tudor dress, textiles and woodwork of sixteenth century England. "Many years of study in the alluring domain of English Renaissance have enabled the artist to perform a most difficult task with great historical accuracy and with befitting dignity," says "The International Studio," from which the above reproduction is taken.

"Chu Chin Chow" Dazzles and Delights

"Chu Chin Chow," a musical play of the East, told by Oscar Asche and set to music by Frederic Norton. Presented at the Manhattan Opera House, by William Elliott, T. Roy Comstock and Morris Gest.

A Catalogue of Superlatives

The Morning Papers Times—It sets a new mark. Sun—All New York will have to see it. Tribune—A show of magnificence. World—Intoxicating loveliness. Herald—Exquisite harmonies. American—The purple realm of fantasy. Telegraph—Great, glittering, marvellous.

The Evening Papers

Evening Sun—Glowing pictures. Post—Most gorgeous. Globe—Sheer mechanical perfection. Evening World—A glorious triumph. Journal—Wonderful. Mail—A spectacle of spectacles.

FROM the above phrases it becomes quite evident that "Chu Chin Chow" is no ordinary piece of stage clap-trap, but something of unusual interest. The New York critics nearly met their Waterloo this time. There must have been rather a good deal of feather duster work on that seldom-disturbed dictionary of sheer out-and-out superlatives. One thing, though, is particularly noticeable in the reviews of this new spectacle: they are all written with conspicuous enthusiasm; the critics behaving much in the manner of children who have seen something breathless and extraordinary and can scarcely wait to communicate the new wonder.

Louis Sherwin, in "The Globe," pointed out that "Chu Chin Chow" "belongs to no known genus, type, form or style of drama," and he adds: "Polonius, that most tedious of dramatic critics, would have had a deuce of a time classifying it. It is partly Arabian fairy tale, partly comic opera, partly straight melodrama and partly Hippodrome ballet and riotous pageantry. It is altogether one of the most beautiful shows I have seen on the New York stage."

Ralph Block, in The Tribune, describes the magic ingredients thus:

"It is the perfumed Orient of romance you will find in 'Chu Chin Chow,' the East of echoing silver bells, of mosques and the muezzin's call to prayer; the Orient that Marco Polo discovered; a land of spices and Grecian gold, of bazaars laden with rare silks and cloth of gold, of beautiful women with hidden faces, of riches undreamed of by any vision of avarice and of daring schemes of men to win them. It is an Arabian night's entertainment, without the dissonances of color and sound of 'Scheherazade,' untouched by the sometimes acid Russian mood of tragedy, and with a show of magnificence wisely attuned to such a time as this, when the theatre becomes a refuge from the pressure of reality without."

In "The Journal" one finds this expression of delight: "Think, if you will, of a glorified Ali Baba—of the famous Aladdin and his wonderful lamp—of Haroun Al Raschid—or Thalis—of the great carnivals of Babylon, Byzantium and Bagdad—of the fetes of Cairo and Constantinople—of the bacchanals of Rome, Rastaman and Ruritania. Roll them all into one, multiply them by ninety-two and add the



FLORENCE REED In "Chu Chin Chow"

1917 idea of gorgeousness as supplied by those masters, Gest, Comstock and Elliott. Then, by stretching the imagination, you may get a scarcely adequate idea of the effect of 'Chu Chin Chow.'"

Louis De Foe, in "The World," frankly admitted that he just couldn't find any adequate comparisons to help convey the "pictorial loveliness," the "marvellous effects of color and light," the "exotic beauty" and the continuous assaults upon the senses.

To John Corbin, of "The Times," it seemed that—

"Perhaps the finest feature in so much gorgeous brilliance is in the costumes designed by Percy Anderson. None of the men of his craft has a finer or a richer sense of color, or a greater grace and suavity in line. And now he has undergone the inevitable influence of Leon Bakst and blossoms out in effects that are as bizarre as they are wild."

And Lawrence Reamer, in "The Sun," suggested that, in connection with the succession of beautiful scenes—

"Perhaps in the manner of their divulgence was the novelty most striking. Only the glaze market, which basked under the midday sun and the steel blue sky, was diffused with

light. In the other acts the concentrated illumination fell directly on the moving character in the picture. If the backgrounds were lit up, whether it be in the cactus grove or the cave of the robbers, the illumination never penetrated further than the character it was supposed to follow and bring into the view of the audience. It was a novel and artistic detail."

One fact, in particular, did not escape the notice of Charles Darnton, who said in "The Evening World":

"Incidentally, there was a fashion show in little old Bagdad that will make big New York open its eyes."

Alan Dale, in "The American," said:

"You feel tremendously pleased with yourself as you realize the facility with which you are able to get into this atmosphere, right from the odious drabness of the outside. From the abyss of the everyday to the summit of romance! This is the climb you make, and—really, you are charmed with your own limbo ability to scale the heights. Some climber, you say! But isn't it nice to get a thousand years away from to-day and to escape from the Forty Thousand Thieves of New York to the Forty Thieves of the Arabian Nights?"

"Story, God bless you, there is none to tell, sirs!" This fact troubled J. Ranken Towse, of "The Evening Post," a little. But one found the same Mr. Towse, further down in the column, admitting that "nothing mattered much, except the scenery, the costumes and the dancing." And one was told at the very end of this review that "a better show no one could wish to see," even though there be "precious little of the drama in it."

Must praise went to the large cast. Mr. Corbin, in "The Times," said:

"Tyrone Power plays the title rôle, chief of the forty thieves; and, when opportunity affords in the simply told and briskly moving story, he endows it with no small terror, not only from his commanding physique and voice, but from a really vigorous imagination. Henry Dixey is Ali Baba, skipping about the stage in his familiar grace and miming in a manner grotesquely humorous. The brace of lovely heroines are played (and sung) most charmingly by Tessa Costa and Florence Reed. As Ali's son, George Rasley sang a high tenor that was generally effective. The dancers were competent and many minor character parts were delightfully rendered. Everywhere there was evidence of a management that was as intelligent and tasteful as it was competent."

Reviewing the Reviewers

VIII CHARLES DARNTON Dramatic Critic of The Evening World

MR. DARNTON was born in Adrian, Mich., where he began newspaper work. A few years later he joined the staff of "The Detroit Evening News" and was a fellow reporter on that paper of Eugene Walter, who, says Mr. Darnton, was then showing his first symptoms of the playwright fever.

In the course of six or more years he served also as sketch-writer, legislative correspondent and dramatic critic.

Fifteen years ago he came to New York to write about the theatre for "The Evening World."

"And that," in his own words, "is all there is to tell."

Feodor Dostoevsky

TOMORROW is the ninety-sixth anniversary of the birth of Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, Russian author, born at Moscow October 30, 1821. Though his funeral, on February 12, 1881, was the occasion of a remarkable demonstration of public feeling in the Russian capital, his death was not even mentioned in the London press. It is only since 1885, when "Crime and Punishment" first appeared in English, that his name has become at all familiar in England and in this country. The greater part of Dostoevsky's life was an overwhelming struggle with ill health and poverty. This burden, together with the sufferings of ten years of exile and enforced army service for alleged political agitations, robbed him of the joy of life, filled him with bitterness and morbid imaginings. All of his writings exhibit a rare mastery over the emotions of terror and pity and a marvellous analytic power. Such are the outstanding critical valuations of Dostoevsky.

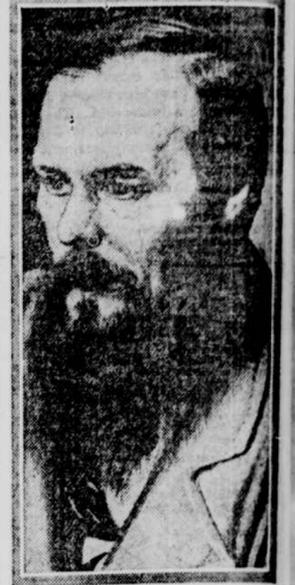
"The Dream of a Queer Fellow," from his journal, has been called an epitome of the problems that tormented him. In the first few pages, what is really the introduction, are revealed the tragedy and its pathos, though later, through the visualization of a marvellous dream, life took on a wholly new, a brilliant and optimistic aspect. The dream itself is, unfortunately, of a length which prohibits reprinting here. But the opening paragraphs will give a poignant picture of the groping, solitary, distracted dreamer.

A Fragment From "The Dream of a Queer Fellow"

I AM a queer fellow. They call me mad now. That would be a promotion if I were not still the same queer fellow for them as before. But I'm not queer with them any more; now I love them all, even when they laugh at me—somehow I love them more than ever. I would laugh with them myself—not at myself, but for love of them—if it did not make me so sad to look at them—sad, because they do not know the truth, and I do. How hard it is for one man who knows the truth! But they won't understand this. They won't understand it.

Before I used to suffer deeply, because I seemed queer. Not seemed, but was. I always was queer; perhaps I've known it from the day of my birth. Perhaps when I was only seven I knew that I was queer. Afterward I went to school, then to the university, and—well, the more I studied the more I discovered that I was queer. So that finally it seemed to me that all my university knowledge existed only to explain and prove to me, the deeper I plunged into it, that I was queer. Each day increased and strengthened my consciousness that I looked queer in every way. Everybody always laughed at me. But not one of them knew or guessed that if there was a man on earth who really knew how queer I was that man was myself. Their not knowing that was quite the most insulting thing of all, but there I was to blame. I was always so proud that nothing would induce me to confess that to any one. My pride increased with years, and I verily believe that if it had happened that I had allowed myself to confess that I was queer to any living soul I would have blown out my brains with a revolver on the spot. Oh, how much I suffered as a youth for fear I might not be able to hold out and might suddenly, somehow, confess to my comrades!

But since I became a young man, though each year I realized my awful nature more and more, for some reason I have been a little calmer. For some reason or other, I say, for even now I cannot define it. Perhaps because a terrible anguish has been born in my soul of one thing which was infinitely higher than the whole of me—it was the conviction that had descended upon me that it is all the same, everywhere on earth. It is all the same, everywhere on earth. I had suspected it long before, but the full conviction came somehow suddenly last year. It suddenly felt that it would be all the same to me if the world really existed or if there was nothing



Feodor Dostoevsky

anywhere. I began to feel with all my being that there had been nothing behind me. . . . Little by little I became convinced that there never would be anything. Then I suddenly stopped being angry with people and began almost not to notice them. It died, that was shown in the most trivial things. It would happen, for instance, that I would walk in the street and knock into people. Not because I was lost in thought—what had I to think about? I had utterly ceased to think by then—it was all the same to me. And as for solving questions—oh, I didn't solve one, yet what thousands there were! But it had become ALL THE SAME TO ME and all the questions disappeared.



Godowsky

LEOPOLD GODOWSKY, the first of the season's important instrumentalists to be heard, gave a concert at Carnegie Hall, October 20, which attracted an audience that overflowed upon the stage—an audience that followed the long and varied programme intently, and whose applause insisted upon frequent encores.

The programme, pronounced by "The Sun" "generous and well planned," began "with Beethoven's A flat sonata, opus 110, and leaped thence to the Brahms A flat intermezzo and rhapsody in E flat. Then followed a miscellaneous group in which Godowsky, Lully, Rameau and Scarlatti were the composers. Chopin contributed the next section and a miscellany made the conclusion."

To "The Sun" Mr. Godowsky appears as "the von Bülow [pianist, not Prince] of his time.

"His recitals are educational. They are the summit of all achievement in the domain of the lecture recital, for the recital is in this case the lecture. It is a pianist's commentary on the way things should be done. The artist played the Beethoven sonata in a manner that proclaimed its own academic correctness in incontrovertible manner. As an analysis of the composition it was faultless. But except in the slow movement, which was admirably played, there was little to warm the imagination of the hearer.

"Mr. Godowsky has a remarkably fine technique and a beautiful command of touch, but his moods are essentially reflective and penetrating rather than impressive. He is a master pianist, viewed as a pianist exclusively. As an interpreter he is intellectual and instructive, but not touching. Much profit can be obtained by studying his readings."

Most of the critics commented upon the Godowsky intellect as conspicuous in a setting of temperamental coolness. "The pianist for pianists" he is termed. However, it remains to reckon with the big audience, which, on this occasion, was undeniably stirred. And this fact moved Sigmund Spaeth, in "The Evening Mail," to observe:

"Leopold Godowsky has always been regarded as essentially a pianist's pianist, one whom the greatest would gladly call master, but who somehow failed to touch the heart of the public intimately. His recital of Saturday afternoon indicated that a revision of this stock judgment might soon be necessary, for both in numbers and in enthusiasm the audience was overwhelming.

"The perfection of art and the flawless technique which Mr. Godowsky brings to his interpretations of Beethoven, Brahms and Chopin should in truth inspire something of awe and reverence, and almost lead one to believe that those pianists who achieve a more popular appeal do so by some trick or distortion of reality rather than through the legitimate playing of their instrument."

"The Globe," though insisting upon the glacial attribute, conceded fine taste:

"Mr. Godowsky is not only an intellectual and analytical player, he has carried so minutely the piano technique to the uttermost degree of glittering perfection. And it is 'legitimate' piano playing he offers. New does he condescend to the glad, bad riffs of the 'orchestral' school of performers; new to the pigimentary orgies of the colorists the know no shame. Human warmth is scarce to be met with, but neither is human fallibility. As a rule Mr. Godowsky's playing is the icy regularity of a jeweller's show window, the splendid nullity of Cleopatra mummy. On Saturday it was perhaps in two Brahms pieces and a few passages of Chopin that the eminent executive stage-furthest from his glacial solitude."

"The Evening Post," though admitting the existence of saving exceptions, likened his work to "a rose without fragrance" while another paper, "The Journal," said it was like "watching the manifold flickering of sunlight on the waters and thinking the while of nothing at all"—a re-velation to which "The Times" by a means is ready to subscribe. For, writes that paper, though Godowsky's playing "is apt to be more interesting than deep moving," it nevertheless reflects the "of one who has consummately mastered the mechanism of pianoforte playing whose performance has the exquisite contour, the perfect chiselling, the finishable surface of a cameo."

Christine Miller

ON TUESDAY evening Christine Miller, "mezzo-contralto," sang for a large audience in Aeolian Hall. Her programme was composed entirely of songs in French and English.

"The Times" wrote: "Miss Miller's rich and powerful voice is beautifully managed, with fine technique; it is spontaneously and easily produced, and it is put at the service of a taste, a penetrating feeling of the poet's, the fervent, the dramatic, the pathetic. There is a wide range of expression in her singing, and she got the most out of her programme not uniformly of the highest musical value."

In The Tribune it appeared she was praised as an artist, "possessed of certain sterling qualities"—an artist who "sings with intelligence, if with no great amount of fire or emotion." It was regretted, however, that her programme wanted "more gratifying."

"The Sun" pronounced Miss Miller "a full command of her fine voice," while "The American" wrote: "Miss Miller's art as an interpreter of songs has ripened and broadened with experience. It may be doubted whether she has ever sung with more warmth and intensity of feeling. And rarely, indeed, has the rich middle tones of her mezzo-contralto, 'mezzo-contralto,' as she chooses to call it, sounded as full, mellow and vibrant."