

LITERARY NEWS, VIEWS AND CRITICISM

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS BLIGHTS MODERN ART

Age Will Make a Poor Display in Chronicles of Beauty.

ROMANTIC REVIVAL AHEAD

Everything a "Problem" and Everybody Busy Hunting a Solution.

By COMPTON MACKENZIE.

I think I wish that there were no currents in contemporary creative art. Personally I very much doubt if there exists anything so drearily obvious. By ocean currents travel forever aimlessly wreck and driftwood, derelicts, flotsam and jetsam. I would rather behold literature as a placid sea, where poets may suddenly leap like flying fish. I would like to see the glassy silver whipped into foam by some portentous whiplow of a revolutionary artist to whose rough onset succeeds a new and more gracious calm. I am covetous of such conditions for literature as those which allow any phenomenon by mere contrast with serenity to astonish the dull spectator.

It is really necessary to assert that many of our contemporary writers, famous and honorable, are hampered by tendencies and directed by currents.

The inquisitive observer who glazes over classification, who greedily licks labels to secure his specimens from his own mental confusion, is the product of a dangerous point in the development of the human race. I sometimes fancy we have at last reached adolescence, with its burden of bluish self-consciousness. Humanity nowadays is apt to stand under the humorous stars like a child's school. Fled are the robust babies of Greece, primitive singers; gone are the mischievous ten-year-olds of the Middle Ages, and long since grown up are the cynical school-boys of the eighteenth century. Now we have discovered how clever we are, and, for the sake of variety, must parade our currents of public opinion whose blighting promiscuousness it is surely the artist's duty to escape.

I am so glad that I cannot detect any intellectual kinship between Arnold Bennett and Bernard Shaw, or discern an editorial alliance between H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy. Nor will I ever admit that Galsworthy is dancing round Compton Mackenzie like a cork in a puddle, with Kipling bobbing between them. If we accept the arrangement of certain consciousness our present age will make a poor display in the chronicles of beauty; for I cannot call to mind any great period of English literature produced by the group and in making this statement I do not forget the Lake school of poetry.

For my part I distrust that little group with sympathetic assertions and English literature is the glory of individual art. Great men are solitary men.

It is, to be sure, a later habit, this formation of schools of thought and of societies of opinion. In France we have seen Parnassians and Symbolists; from Italy we are compelled to hear the vocal Post-Impressionists, who, claiming to recreate painting, most paradoxically depend on their tongues to gain their audience. I do not, of course, deny that it is possible to trace, at any period in the history of art, certain broad tendencies, whether of realism, or romanticism, or classicism, or whatever debased piece of nomenclature is selected by the Quindines, the Hownows and the Whatnots of judgment to characterize their discoveries. Indeed, I firmly believe that we are even now on the verge of a great romantic revival. I do think that there is apparent in art a new forcefulness, a more passionate sincerity, a less deliberate artificiality; yet I should be very sorry to say that the exponents of these tendencies were swirling along a current in a confusion of self-conscious unanimity.

Indeed, I would like to paint on the aspiring walls of the young writer's library, "Beware of currents! Only strong swimmers are advised to bathe in the Perian spring." It is to me always a depressing experience to visit haunts of enthusiastic conversation like the Parisian cafes or the Oxford common rooms or the polytechnic gymnasiums. I dislike the sight of young men madly desirous of identification with older writers. I hate her worship without the decency of a lapse of years between the idol and the worshipper.

At the present moment in England we are suffering from a debauch of altruism. The gross unselfishness of the man in the street is positively unpleasant. Altruism is an admirable pastime for politicians; for it is profitable, obvious and effective, and therefore equips the politician with all he requires. But I imagine it will be a poor day for art, when artists to-bogged down Parnassus into politics. I have very little respect for a member of Parliament. So many of my friends could rule a country; so few of them could write the Odyssey, or even the Divina Comedia.

It is lamentably characteristic of modern self-consciousness that most of our contemporary men of thought are leaden eyed with despair because they are not men of action. And the honor of knighthood consoles the practical ability of very few. Most of them in their hearts would prefer to demonstrate the solution of a problem with the accessories of popular applause rather than create an immortal type. Once the Musee joined labors with well known gods. Nowadays they slope with wandering pamphleteers. From these casual and precarious unions have sprung problem plays and problem novels—novels with a purpose, plays with a mission, poems with foot notes.

Art is smothered with the discarded awadding clothes of Science and Science is tricked out with the meretricious tinsel of Art. Every human emotion is falsified with the pomps and vanities of theory.

time is shown the alphabet, subtle, alluring, mysterious, terrifying, is given at that moment the keys that will open the doors of his pilgrimage through life. Poverty will never be solved by the pat tongues of politicians; vice will never be cured by the pince-nez of royal commissions. Labor owes no jot of its interest and dignity to the impudent patronage of an English exchequer.

By a romantic revival I mean a new force that will obliterate through the sanctity, the responsibility and worthiness of the individual the old wives who would make childbirth a copybook maxim, turn love into a medical prescription and finally arrive at death as something not ultimately impervious to municipal effort. I should be glad to see every young writer careless of institutions, but a great cherisher of humanity.

We live in an age of stupendous backgrounds, greater than any the world has ever known. I wish that every artist would use them for the little figures of mankind who struggle round their base.

As I look out from my window at New York the city appears to me like a gigantic fleet at anchor. I know that buildings will vanish and in their place of their own fashioning. I know that the proudest skyscraper has only a little time for its pride, a short space for its majesty. Yet by their towering sides, hurrying hither and thither round their base, go men and women, more perishable than these monuments of their own fashioning. I know that if one ship sails out another will presently anchor under the tranquil constellations, and high above the highest ship I would like to set for a symbol of Art the Winged Victory of Thrace, headless indeed, but winged immutably. That would be almost more romantic than life itself.

ROBERT HALIFAX IN THE SLUMS.

Tells What He Saw of the Seamy Side of Life in London.

Robert Halifax, whose "A Whistling Woman" is at present arousing considerable comment in this country, devotes himself to observing and depicting the seamy side of London life. Although he is termed a new Dickens and a new Balzac, he bears a striking physical resemblance to an author as far as possible removed from these in the nature of his work, our own Mark Twain as he looked in his forties. In a recent letter written to a New York acquaintance Mr. Halifax tells many interesting things about his work and himself.

"How the Other Half Lives" may be said to be my keynote," he says. "And in my two forthcoming novels I have shirked nothing in the way of detail. The utter depths of the social ocean teem with unconscious heroes and heroines, as well as with unspeakable slimy things."

"I can go safely down London streets where policemen go in pairs and where a burglar, active or potential, stands on a nearby, every doorstep. I have found that the majority of the submerged are not 'scum,' but martyrs to environ-

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OWEN JOHNSON BACK IN TOWN.

Author, Who is Convalescent, to Write New York Novel.

Owen Johnson has just got back to town after a several months typhoid convalescing sojourn with a tale of industrious achievement that is startling his friends who have been waiting their sympathy on the desert air, so to speak. And all thought of sympathy melts away at the first glimpse of the convalescent author who looks huskier and broader shouldered, if possible, than when he was taken ill last May.

For all that Mr. Johnson maintains that he was ill, terribly ill, so that he couldn't eat at all—and he has his doctors and wife to corroborate him—and that when he managed to crawl up to Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, to recuperate, along in the middle of July, he thought he was nearly done for, and the doctor forbade a stroke or thought of work for three months.

"But heavens!" says Mr. Johnson. "How could I lie around for three months? I had a contract with McClure's Magazine for the serial 'The Sixty-first Second,' to begin in the fall, and only one installment had been written when I was taken ill. I knew I had to get to writing, so I did."

"At first it was hard work, and things didn't go so well. But after two or three weeks I got into a swing that made me accomplish more than I ever had before. I got up early, wrote all the morning, played golf all the afternoon and went to bed at 8 o'clock. And I finished that novel in three months—over 85,000 words."

Pretty good for a sick man—what? Mr. Johnson has now got the industrious current so strongly switched into his system that he can hardly wait to get over to Italy and into work again. For he and his wife are sailing in a few days to spend a year in Italy, where Mrs. Johnson is to sing in grand opera and he is to write two new novels already completely planned. He was not averse to telling a bit of what concerns the new novel dealing with New York life, for he says that he has been observing and experiencing all these years so that he might eventually begin his real literary career with portraying New York life; and now he is ready to begin his literary career. Begin it, observe, after the Lawrenceville stories and "Stover at Yale" and "The Comet" and some others.

"The Salamanders"—that will be the new novel's title," he began.

"Salamanders? What kind of a novel can you write about salamanders?"

He laughed with satisfaction at the interjection.

"It's what makes it a good title," he said. "You know the type of human salamander that can go through the fire without being burned, a type peculiar to American cities and especially to New York. You see them here every day; they play one of the most characteristic roles in our American life, and are a source of never failing and never ending wonder and misapprehension to the foreigner."

"I mean the girls who come to the big city from the small town and country districts, drawn by a love for change and excitement and chance. They may say that they come to earn their living, but that's not the real reason. They want a taste of what the big city has to offer them, and they get it."

"Of course they play at earning their living, often more or less connected with the stage, sometimes in other directions, but generally the purpose of a definite career is not in their heads. They come and live their transitory gleams of such a life, and eventually really drift into a serious career, or marry, or go back home. Seldom they cross over into the demi-mondaine track, and that is what makes it impossible for the foreigner to understand them. He sees them, the precarious sort of existence they lead, the chances they take, and having never seen anything of the kind at home, he naturally classifies them undesirably in the place they would hold in his own country."

"I've been interested in watching this type of girl for a number of years, seeing her scheme and joining her way through difficulties and rejoicing in her little victories. It's amazing some of the things some of them do and get away with."

"What are some of them?"

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Johnson. "You wait and read about that in the book. I'm not going to give away too much."

The second book he has contracted to write will abroad is to be called "The World That Dances," but the author refuses to give away anything about the title. He sees that it is such a good one that he couldn't resist. He wouldn't even hint whether or not it would follow his two precedents, "The Sixty-first Second" and "The Salamanders," in dealing with New York life. It likely will, though, for several years Mr. Johnson's friends have been looking

BOOK FOR THE BLIND.

Third Edition of Miss Winifred Holt's "Life of Henry Fawcett."

A third edition of "A Short Life of Henry Fawcett, the Blind Postmaster-General of England," has just been called for. The book, which is by Miss Winifred Holt, the secretary and founder of the New York Association for the Blind, is sold for the benefit of the New York Association from its headquarters, at 118 East Fifty-ninth street.

It is interesting to note that there has been a demand for this book in England. Miss Beatrice Taylor, the originator of work for the blind through the Sunbeam Mission and an important member of the International Congress of the Blind and the Union and Unions of the Blind, has acted as its voluntary agent. In "The Blind," a periodical published by Gardner's Trust for the Blind, in London, the following interesting remarks are made about Miss Holt's monograph:

"It will be appreciated by children of all ages," and it cannot fail to attain its object of proving that—given a high courage, a steadfast will, and a true devotion to the good of his fellows—no blind man need be hindered by his lack of sight from doing a splendid work in the world and leaving behind a name that ranks with those of the greatest benefactors of the human race. No one can read even this brief and simple account of Henry Fawcett without feeling stirred and incited to renewed endeavor, while at the same time the story of his wonderful triumphs over difficulties puts to shame our talk of 'insuperable difficulties,' our faint hearted struggles, our easy despair."

The British and Foreign Blind Association, of which King George is the chief patron and which Queen Victoria was deeply interested, has brought out a Braille edition for the blind and the little book made its debut the other day with some enthusiastic blind children in Africa. The story is one of so much interest and adventure that it seems as popular with the sighted children as with the blind.

AUTHOR WEAVES RUGS FOR REST

Miss Kortrecht Finds it a Change From Writing.

Miss Augusta Kortrecht, author of the "Dixie Rose" books for girls, says that she finds two idiosyncrasies growing upon her—first, the necessity of a bare, undecorated, locked up room to write in, and second, the need of a piece of handicraft work to rest her from writing. While engaged on her latest story, "Dixie Rose in Bloom," she invented a new employment, weaving rugs without a loom.

"I didn't know or care what it might turn into," she explains. "I tacked a big piece of fish net, a peculiar Jersey kind, with a small but loose mesh, on my wall, and worked off steam threading old ribbons and silk scraps in and out with a bodkin, letting my purple and reds run out. To my surprise one day the whole canvas was filled up solid and there was a woven rug! I made several others. A Tiffany studio friend pronounced one the best color scheme she had ever seen accomplished in such materials and on her opinion I rushed into print. A photograph with brief explanation appeared in a prominent fancy work magazine, and 'And you have been weaving rugs ever since?'"

"I haven't had time to so much as cut a strip of silk since that article came out. I am too busy answering letters from ladies who want to know how to do it, and where they can buy the net."

Miss Kortrecht lives in the quaint Jersey shore hotel where Robert Louis Stevenson spent his last American month.

HARRY A. FRANCK AFOOT AGAIN.

Author on Trip in Central and South America.

Harry A. Franck, author of "A Vagabond Journey Around the World" and "Four Months Afoot in Spain," has just returned Central and South America. He reports in a recent letter that he covered the 850 miles from Bogota, Colombia, to Quito in fifty-seven days, spending fifteen of them in the cities through which he passed and forty-two days on the road, making from seven to forty miles a day. From what he had been told he expected to find that the inhabitants of Colombia were not cordial to visiting Americans, but he says: "The risks we ran as Americans in a 'Yanqui' hating land was about equal to that of a trip down Broadway on a Sunday morning; once a Colombian cried out loud to us sarcastically as we passed, 'America for the North Americans!'" And this was the extent of the insults or ill treatment received from the inhabitants of Colombia.

PRICE COLLIER'S NEW WORK.

Begins in "Scribner's" a Series on "Germany and Germans."

Price Collier, author of "England and the English From an American Point of View," and now beginning a similar treatise dealing with the Germans, was educated at Geneva, Leipzig and Harvard. He has been a great traveller, a lover of outdoor sports and served as an officer in the United States Navy during the Spanish-American war. His new work, "Germany and the Germans From an American Point of View," created an international sensation when it was published in London and the Germans From an American Point of View begins in the November Scribner's.

"The Indiscreet," a name that has been applied to the German Emperor.



ROBERT HALIFAX



JOSEPH C. LINCOLN



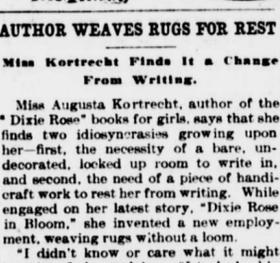
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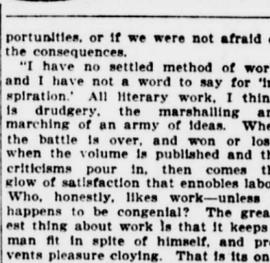
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