

Booth Tarkington Critically Inspected

FROM *Booth Tarkington*, a study of the author of *The Turmoil* and his works, the reader learns to his disappointment or satisfaction that Mr. Tarkington's given name comes not from the actor family but from Newton Booth, an uncle. The creator of Penrod does indeed sign himself "N. B. Tarkington" in personal correspondence.

No Promise Here.

B. T. was precocious until he was four, slow at school and immensely popular in college. He was a town boy, therefore he knew Hedrick, Penrod and William Sylvanus Baxter. At college he used to sing *Danny Deever*, but the statute of limitation protects him on that score. His college friends expected him to "devote himself to literary work," so he idled for years afterward, or at least, even if he was all the time playing literary scales, "the



Booth Tarkington.

gross income from his first five years of effort was exactly \$22.50." He read forty books in the preparation of *Monsieur Beaucaire*. Until 1899, when Tarkington was 30, his fellow townsmen regarded him as a mere society person. "His principal visible business, according to old rumor, was gallant courtesy to every visiting petitioner of quality." How many of them had booful Flopits?

Certain Serious Charges.

Mr. Holliday intimates that his subject was influenced by Henry James—at times. He finds flashes of the Jamesian way in *The Gentleman from Indiana*, and Mr. Tarkington, confronted, admitted "with a sheepish look" that he had read a good deal of James "at about that time."

Of Tarkington's earliest work his biographer makes the somewhat serious charge that there is something Jane-Austenish about it. And "into his later books has come a good deal of the more pondering Conrad note." Maybe so, there is a Conradian smash at the end of *The Flirt*, but Joseph would have thrown in more gloom and perhaps less action.

Tarkington can no longer read Stevenson. "Nothing to-day apparently so much gives Mr. Tarkington the horrors as the idea of the 'literary.' He does not want to be 'taught,' he declares, writing 'prose.'"

Plots, No; People, Yes!

Mr. Holliday, a sincere admirer of Mr. Tarkington, does not so much admire this novelist's former choice of plots and his dependence upon the terribly long arm of coincidence. "The basis of practically every story he has written, down to *The Turmoil*, has been a misunderstanding of one kind or another, of identity, of purpose, of character. And in repeated instances this misunderstanding has been of the most elementary sort, that of mistaken identity." He has imagination, but lacks invention, is the critic's verdict. But his people are the thing, so who cares.

On the subject of Tarkington's characters Mr. Holliday's study is delightful. He collects them in groups and collates. The admirer of Tarkington is pleasantly reminded, for instance, of what a remark-

Lord Louis Lewis Tales.

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A Satirist Now?

Mr. Tarkington has grown, Mr. Holliday says, from a glowing romanticist to a searing satirist; there was a merging of

the two in *The Flirt*, but romance was barred from *The Turmoil*. Now, says Mr. Holliday, "he has found his true, rare vocation, that of satirist, critic. . . . By what he has now written we may know that he has not yet begun to write."

Perhaps, but if Tarkington has not begun to write a million fools who have howled over *Seventeen* hope he won't start.

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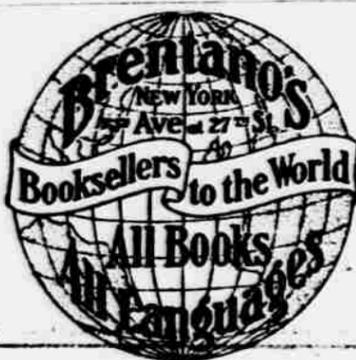
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