

# The Sun.

## BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

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TO WILLIAM GRIFFITH.  
HE THAT IS PIERROT.

By David Morton.

I THINK your soul goes clad in dominoes,  
Haunting old gardens that are always June,  
To sit within the shadow of a rose,  
And strum and sing your every fragile tune.  
For all we meet you where the great world rides,  
You have no league with anything we are:  
Your life is all entangled in the tides  
Of goblin moons and musics and a star.

You talk to us of cabinets and kings,  
Of earnest men and worlds of workaday,  
Of stocks and stores and half a hundred things—  
And all the while your soul is leagues away,  
Troubling old leafy gardens where it goes,  
Motlied with moonlight and your dominoes.

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### ON CLIPPING WINGS: COLLEGE.

NOT long ago a commentator published parallel lists of leading contemporary English language authors, those who had been to college set against those who had not. The Nots had a majority, and the conclusion was drawn that college is bad for the writing talent.

The explanation, as we remember it, was that college develops the Critical Faculty at the expense of the Creative. It seems to us a hollow and rumbling sort of an explanation, and then Critical Faculty and Creative Faculty, discussed as if they were mutually exclusive, are abracadabra. What d'ye mean, Critical Faculty? If you mean artistic conscience, then this faculty is the very best tool an author has on his bench. Even MARK TWAIN, ruggedly impatient of literary niceties as he was, knew his own mind about his own work, and once got up a glorious rage against a literary whippersnapper who offered to correct his unorthodox but lovingly considered punctuation.

This sort of critical faculty received a testimonial in THE SUN a few weeks ago from an authority no less practical than Mr. GEORGE HORACE LORIMER, who insisted like any STEVENSON that good writing is "hard writing, slow writing, rewriting."

But if you mean an impossibilism, an aesthetic superciliousness, if you mean just what WILL IZMIS meant when he struck off the epithet *high-brow*, then that is not a faculty, but a disease, one to which weak constitutions are subject and which results from injury in youth. We concede that the average college English course, administered by a certain type of professor, probably inflicts such injury on a certain percentage of the subjects. Not, however, on the students whose welfare interests us here, those who have a marked bent for writing and some character behind it. They may be affected, both ways, for the time being; but later, if they are worth their salt, the effects should be thrown off.

### Come. Let Us Read.

The average college English course, to the extent of our knowledge of them, is an effort to make the student write and to form his hand on academic models, combined with a more or less wily effort to see that he reads the neglected English classics—BEOWULF and CHAUCER, the dramatists of ELIZABETH'S time, the novelists and poets of ANNE'S, and so on up. There is also a good deal of stuff and nonsense derived originally from men like SAINTE-BEUVE (who had small use for BALZAC) and his successors (who think *Esmond* a better novel than *Vanity Fair*, because it is better constructed), and of late years loaded with German silver, to the effect that Mysticism by reaction begat Classicism, and Classicism Romanticism, and Romanticism Naturalism, &c.—while the Protectorate and the French Revolution and such things acted as fairy godmothers, if not as accoucheurs.

We doubt that this does much real harm, except to the forests that yield the paper pulp. Good reading done under compulsion may be better than none at all. As for the precious dicta of the continental oracles, the only students who take them with even momentary seriousness are the grinds, and with permanent seriousness the particular grinds who hope to be professors of English Literature. If anything is certain about the begetting business it is that one closet entomologist misplaced in a chair of English begets another after his own kind; if anything connected with literature can be taught it is how to lecture on the subject; if any kind of

writing can be taught it is the writing of footnotes to college texts of masterpieces. We are not forgetting the unusual professor who, working one-fourth on equipment and three-fourths on personality and undying fire, succeeds in stimulating instead of curbing young minds.

Where a curriculum risks doing specific harm is, unhappily, where it leaves the beaten path to do specific good and offers a sort of vocational training in authorship, an elective or selective course in short story writing or playwriting. Such a course conducted by a genius could conceivably be a boon, and one or two of them have that reputation.

But the supply of geniuses is limited. We have read a whole shelf of books by divers conductors of these courses, books that may be assumed to represent what is done in class. Almost all we found fearsome productions. They go at a model story or play as if it were an automobile engine. They name all the parts and show how to assemble parts like them, but neglect to furnish the working plans for spark plugs or the formula for a substitute for gasoline. We recall one book in which the great short stories were actually diagrammed, as sentences used to be diagrammed in the sixth grade!

When PAUL ARMSTRONG advised a beginner who had a dramatic tale to tell to get a pad and a pencil and sit down, the advice was an honest lumberful.

### Oh, to Write Greatly!

However, most of the wing clipping justly attributable to college experience must be extra-curricular. "In my youth, as I was then ambitious to be considered a fine writer"—thus, or to like effect, RUSKIN, in the preface to *Sesame and Lilies*. There's the bedevilment!—the fostering, in an academic atmosphere, of the ambition not to write well but to be considered a fine writer.

It is the tragic paradox of all the arts, under any circumstances, that youth, which has the ardor, the inspiration for which gray haired master craftsmanship would give its eyes, must be painfully preoccupied with learning the craft. Up to a certain point the preoccupation is good. When it is overdone and the novice is led to mistake things like PATER'S incantation before La Gioconda for the ultimate goal and to labor to string words together finely, greatly, the consequence is mischief.

Several things are potentially mischievous in this way. The college "Lit." is always edited with a sublime disregard of everything but Literature. The finest writing submitted appears in it and is complimented by well meaning professors, and the pleased contributor imagines that the Best Magazines will prove bigger but otherwise similar worlds to conquer. Almost anything presentable in the shape of poetry gets printed and commended. Since our own day this has gone a step further; there are now College Anthologies, and books of the best college short stories of Nineteen-Umpteen, compiled from the "Lits." by compilers who ought to know better.

The interiors of the Greek letter fraternities, so far as we have been able to penetrate their mysteries, are as solemnly and loftily "literary" in nature as anything else.

And then the casual mischief:

"What are you going to do after you graduate?" the clever Senior is asked on all sides. "Going into business! Why, a fellow of your ability ought to Write—"

The Senior protests that he will have to make a living. We hope he does, at least.

"Why, a man my father knows gets \$1,000 a story! Your things are ever so much better than half the stuff they print."

And there is the sternest and coldest of all the issues confused at the start. To be sure, some writing students won't have to worry about their living. Whether their independence will be good for them or not depends on their own constitutions. Mr. GALSWORDY seems to typify the author of distinction who, without private means, might have done nothing. But on a majority, if we know the writing temperament, the effect of private means would probably be narcotic.

The problem before those who lack private means—and would they might every one be made to see it!—is to get a living by some occupation that will permit a good deal of temporarily avocational writing. If our Senior has thought about this at all, ten to one he has decided to begin as a newspaper man. Newspaper work may be excellent for him—it will knock the fine writing obsession out of him, and it will never pay him enough to lull him in luxurious ease—and then again it may be the worst thing possible. This also depending on himself. To take a second liberty with Mr. GALSWORDY, it would kill his kind of talent as dead as a herring. But that is another topic and deserves more space than we have just now to give it.

Next week we shall end this series with a sketch of the young writer's predicament after the professors have turned him over to a monster first described by the eminent zoologist IBSEN, who named it *The Boog*.

## The Librarian's Corner

CONDUCTED BY  
FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE.

### IN PRAISE OF CATALOGS.

CONSIDER the mail order catalog.

Consider it not merely as a repository of mercantile information, a compendium of crass facts and figures, but also as a work of art, a piece of literary workmanship. Consider it, too, as a valuable work of reference for the student of economic history; if it be not, indeed, equally valuable to the student of sociology as a mirror of the nation's changing standards of taste. And by no means fail to consider it in its role of educator of the masses, the connecting link, and often the only link, with the great world that lies somewhere at the other end of the star route carrier's journey.

I do not know of any library that makes a point of keeping in its book stacks a complete file of mail order catalogs, but I do not know of any library whose collection would not be enriched and rounded out if it had the general catalogs for the last five years, say, of the half dozen biggest establishments doing a national business exclusively by mail. These would include the three great "general stores" that among them sell annually somewhat more than \$200,000,000 worth of merchandise, the two largest dealers in clothing for men and women, respectively, and the biggest house that sells every sort of building material and hardware to customers it never sees.

Of course the small town library would run up against the opposition of its local merchants if it undertook to aid its patrons to purchase their goods away from home. The small town shopkeeper still regards the mail order house as his deadly enemy, notwithstanding the fact that he still gets all the profitable credit trade; it can be demonstrated, too, that the decided improvement in country store methods, which has benefited the merchant no less than his customers, has been largely due to the competition of the mail order houses.

### As a Picture Book.

Here is a big book, a thousand pages and more. It is full of pictures. These pictures are precise illustrations, exact in every detail, of the things that are told about in the text. Bathtubs and portieres, canned goods and carpets, boots and buggies and bedsteads—all something more than mere commodities of commerce. These are the elements of civilization, the material aids to finer living, to get which for their children men and women gladly toil without ceasing and nations wage war upon their neighbors. They are the things one reads about in stories of the rich and great, translated into terms that bring them within the means of common people. The catalogs' stories are simple, concrete, brief, but they fire the imagination none the less for not being couched in metaphor and garnished with rhapsody. What stories the files of the mail order houses might tell of stimulated ambition, satisfied longings, gratified pride!

One may live a hundred miles from the railroad, yet for the price of a hundred bushels of wheat fit out his farm with electric lights. For another hundred bushels he can put in a steam heating plant; for yet another hundred a complete outfit of plumbing, bathtub and all. What more could he get from a Manhattan landlord? Two barrels of apples buys the wife a pair of shoes as modish as any on Fifth avenue; a carload of potatoes furnishes the family with every refinement of luxury. Who shall deny a place in the ranks of literature to works that can conjure up in the minds of the unlettered visions like these?

### Real Economics.

As a reference book for economists, what can equal the mail order catalogs of a given series of years? Governments keep tally on the prices of the staples—wheat, corn, cotton, potatoes; the files of the commercial newspapers provide a record of the fluctuations in copper, butter, hay and lumber. But what do these changing prices mean until they are translated into terms of the goods for which their producers exchange them? It is no great matter whether wheat is \$1 or \$3 a bushel; the important matter is how many bushels of wheat the farmer has to pay for a suit of clothes, a yard of carpet, a dress for his wife, a new harness for the work team. And nowhere else is there such an exact index of the actual cost of everything people want to spend money for.

Not less accurately do they reflect the changing fashions and tastes, the succession of Mission to Golden Oak and the gradual penetration of Adam and Heppelwhite; the rise and fall of the puffed sleeve and the peg top trouser; the decay of croquet and the expansion of golf; the supplanting of the horse by the motor tractor.

The historian of the future can recreate the present according to the dates on our annual mail order catalogs.