

What the English Publishers Promise

THERE was, in the old *Academy* newspaper of about twenty years ago, a delightful game played just about this time every September. It consisted in giving lists of the publishers' autumn announcements and asking the readers of the paper to name the two books that promised to be to them the most interesting. I was a child of tender years twenty years ago, but my father took the *Academy* and I used to watch for that competition. I loved "Lists" then and I love "Lists" still. A publisher's announcement list is the most exciting thing in the world save only a second-hand Bookshop List.

The books that are "announced to appear" have a kind of shimmery glory about them. After all, who knows that the masterpiece of the century is not concealed under the modest announcement: "*Patience*: a Novel by Miss White"? Was there not once a publisher's list with the simple text *Pride and Prejudices*?—and did any one in the world expect what was so wonderfully given? Moreover in an announcement list there is great fun over the old hands. "So and So's at it again," we observe. "Same old thing, I suppose." Perhaps there is Mr. George Moore round the corner with a privately printed bundle of amorous confessions, or Rudyard Kipling with a volume of tin-brass poems, or Sir Rider Haggard with the thirty-second history of Allan Quatermain? Where would we be without these homely and familiar things?

With most of the publishers' Announcements for the Autumn of 1919 in front of me I can make my choice. I can ask myself delightful questions like—What will be the autumn book that will be to myself most thrilling? What will be my favorite new novel? What novel is likely at the same time to be the Best Seller and enrage the *Athenaeum*? Will there be any real contribution to English Literature? What entirely unexpected success is

A London Letter From Hugh Walpole

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there likely to be? Last night Joe Beckett knocked out Eddie McGoorty. Will next month Compton McKenzie knock out W. L. George? . . . And so on.

I don't know that the Autumn Lists promise at first sight tremendous excitement. The book that will be to myself by far the most thrilling will be *The Letters of Henry James*, edited by Percy Lubbock and published by Macmillan. I have seen a great many of these letters and I say without hesitation that I believe them to be the greatest exposition of the literary Art that there has been since the publication of the letters of Flaubert. Especially interesting are the letters to Robert Louis Stevenson; there are also during the last years some wonderful letters to H. G. Wells. Through them all breathes the spirit of one of the finest, noblest and bravest gentlemen the modern world has known.

A wonderful contrast to this volume will be the *Letters of Anton Tchekov* that Chatto & Windus are giving us. Most remarkable is Tchekov's artistic honesty, his utter sincerity, his modesty and his humor. It is a strange coincidence that his Letters should appear at the same time as Henry James's. I do not think they would have cared for one another's art, and yet they had many points in common. Their aim was the same—the aim of truth to life as they saw it absolutely—but they attained that aim from exactly opposite directions.

In History we are to have two important books: Ludendorff's *Memoirs*, now running in *Land and Water*—and a fascinating psychological revelation both of the man and his country it is—and Lord Kitchener's *Life*. The second of these should stir almost as much criticism as Lord French's book. One hopes that it will be written with more care than the other.

As to fiction, which is the novel that I personally look forward to with the most interest? As Conrad's *Arrow of Gold* appeared in the summer I have no hesitation in saying that Swinnerton's *September* is the novel of the autumn for me. Conrad, Wells, Bennett, Moore, Kipling, are giving us nothing; so one must look to the younger generation, and here I think that Swinnerton is the most interesting and promising man. He is as close to reality as any of them; and at the same time does not give us chunks of propaganda as do Cannan and George and some of the younger women. The interest of his books depends on the vitality of his characters, which is what I think the vitality of a novel ought to depend on. *Nocturne* was surely a little masterpiece. However, we will see.

That is of course a purely personal predilection. The sheer "Modernists" of whom I do not pretend to be one, will divide their interest, I suspect, between a book of Miss Romer Wilson's, the name of which I forget, Dorothy Richardson's *Interim* and Virginia Woolf's *Nights and Days*.

Of these three the last should be most interesting. I am not sure whether *The Voyage Out* has been published in America; if not I recommend it to Mr. Knopf, or some other eager searcher after new things. Mrs. Woolf has genius—her *Kew Gardens* the other day was a little gem. Her genius is erratic and at times unrestrained and she seems to be more

interested in the abnormal than the normal. She is of that school in whose eyes to be happy is the most in-artistic thing possible and to be original is of more importance than to be true—but she is greater than her school and will assuredly not be bound by its limitations.

And Best Sellers, what is the glorious prospect there? Three novels have about equal chances I think—Stephen McKenna's *Sonia Married*, Temple Thurston's *World of Wonderful Reality*, a sequel to *The City of Beautiful Nonsense*; and Compton McKenzie's *Poor Relations*. McKenna will have a rather difficult task—the success of *Sonia* was due very largely to the clever little summaries of the political world during the

years before the war. *Sonia Married* plays, I understand, in the war, and we are all rather tired of those presentations of English life in war time, with full length portraits of pacifists, bread queues and air raids. We have had so many of them. Perhaps McKenna's picture will be different from George's and Cannan's. It certainly ought to be.

I have said nothing about any poetry because I don't see the promise of any. Munro's *Monthly Chap Book* has made an interesting start, and there has just appeared a beautiful little book by T. C. Squire, *The Birds*. We are to have, I believe, Osbert Sitwell's collected verse, which is interesting, and there is sure to be something from Ezra Pound! Meanwhile what would one give for a volume from Robert Bridges! He produces very little these days. Mr. Bottomly thinks apparently that he ought to write a poem with that same regularity that produces leaders in *John Bull*.

Bridges, however, happens to be a great poet—a strange bird of whose habits Mr. Bottomly can naturally know nothing. HUGH WALPOLE.

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to be dead and therefore not in need of a surgeon's attention. *A Matter of Discipline* is a characteristically Irish bit of padre's wit in ragging a medical officer. And *Journey's End* is a very amusing love story. *Civilized War*, a Sinn Fein episode, is such a military episode as Bernard Shaw might have written if he could be continent in the use of words, for it is in the vein of *The Devil's Disciple* so far as the military viewpoint is concerned. In the two final tales we have Irish story telling of another day, *The Mermaid* being charged with folk tale atmosphere and *An Upright Judge* that of the familiar shrewdly witty Irish peasant. Here is a book rich in cheer and humor and delightful story telling art.

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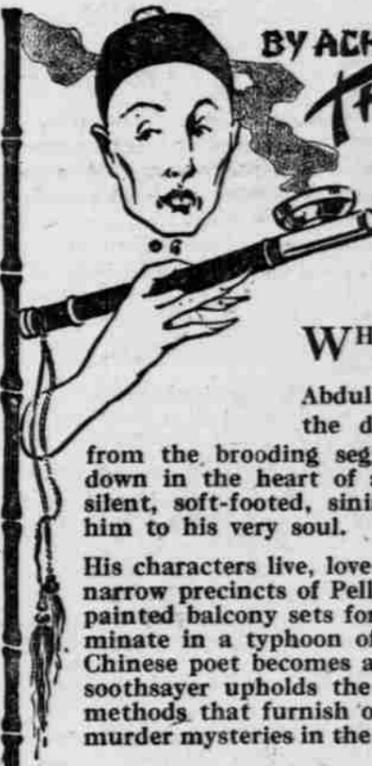
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