

WHAT AUTHORS DO WHEN THEY SIMPLY TRY TO BE ENTERTAINING

BOOKS, INTERESTING BUT UNIMPORTANT

ABOUT twenty-five years ago there was a freak magazine published in the neighborhood which has since attained considerable notoriety as Green-wich Village. The magazine was called Five o'Clock, or was it Five o'Clock? It does not matter, for it was a late hour in the afternoon anyway. It was one manifestation of the youthful desire to show how things should be done that along about the same time found expression in the 'Chap Book in Chicago, which printed a ghost story by H. G. Wells that was one of the best of the stories ever written, and was also manifested by the publication in this city of Moods, an ornate board-bound monthly to which John Luther Long and Harvey M. Watts and John Sloan were contributors. If any memory of Moods contained a Japanese novel, it was the one which indicated that even then he had begun to experiment with the theme which he later developed in 'Madame Butterfly.'

In noticing Four o'Clock or Five o'Clock, or whatever o'Clock it was, one literary critic, after noting that it contained illustrations by N. Booth Tarkington, who since has become known by a shorter name, remarked that the magazine was interesting but unimportant. By holding this comment as the most discriminating that had been made on their venture, they were not pretending to do anything but interest those who were interested in the kind of thing they had to offer.

What was said twenty-five years ago of the efforts of a group of young artists and men of letters can with equal truth be said of two or three recent books of essays. There is now and then an essayist who thinks that what he writes is important, but such a man does not produce an ideal piece of literature. The test of a good essay should be ease and grace. No man who writes in a heavy, ponderous style, and who thinks he is laying down fundamental principles which his contemporaries must accept or enter on a path that leads him into a maze to which there is no clue. The man who writes an essay should be in the mood of a vivacious guest at a dinner table, tolerant of those who disagree with him, dealing unobtrusively with human foibles and making trifling, interesting and entertaining remarks on the light of his fancy and the resilience of his intellect.

TWO men who do this in a way that approximates perfection are Max Beerbohm and A. S. Mielne, both Englishmen. Perhaps America should claim part of the credit for Beerbohm, for he married Florence Kahn, of Memphis, an American girl who relieved some distinction on the stage before she was cast for the permanent role of wife to a brilliant man of letters. She must be playing the role successfully, for the married Beerbohm has not which with the same gentle but sophisticated tenderness that characterized his earlier youth. He exhibits this in 'And Even Now' (E. P. Dutton & Co.), a collection of twenty essays written during the past few years. The opening one, 'A Night at the Hotel,' is written by every youth anxious to learn the art of saying things. He would not discover that what is said in literature does not matter so much as the way it is said. There follows 'The Charm of the Neighborhood' and 'Watts-Dunton told with the charming informality that he might have adopted if he had been recounting his experiences to a friend across the table in the twilight. And, in 'Watts and Mary' he returns to the manner of the imaginary biographical sketch which he adopted with brilliant success in 'Seven Men.' Those whose taste runs to this sort of book will thank any one who may attract their attention to Beerbohm's latest.

MR. MIELNE'S essays as they appear in 'If I May' (E. P. Dutton & Co.) are slighter in form and substance than the essays of Beerbohm. He deals with even more inconsequential matters, but he succeeds in saying pleasant things about them in a pleasant and restful way. And now and then he deals in gentle satire, pricking with a needle of comment some bubble of fallacy or conceit that has been accepted too long. Only a sane and clear thinking man could have written 'The Honour of Your Country,' a little sketch in which a British officer is successfully forced into admitting that the honor of no nation is seriously injured if the nation is too weak to force a trespasser to make reparation, and there is no amiable citizen who will not admit that in 'Getting Things Done' Mr. Mielne has written most penetrating essays on the ways of the great. Mr. Mielne declares that he is capable of sitting in his office and saying with an air of de-

termination that thus and so must be done and then trusting to his staff to do it. No one can tell others what to do with better grace than he. In fact, the kind of a job that would please him most would be one in which he would only have to do the telling while others did the doing.

FRANK MOORE COLBY in 'The Mating of Heston' (Dodd, Mead & Co.) lacks the lightness of touch of most of the other essays. One feels as one reads as if Mr. Colby had in the back of his mind a didactic purpose. This is fatal to the light essay. By this I do not mean that there is not a place for essays frankly committed to advocacy of this or that worthy idea or cause. The most entertaining essays, however, are those which conceal their advocacy when it exists beneath a casual manner, the manner of the experienced diner-out at the table in the presence of persons frankly committed to advocacy of this or that worthy idea or cause. The most entertaining essays, however, are those which conceal their advocacy when it exists beneath a casual manner, the manner of the experienced diner-out at the table in the presence of persons frankly committed to advocacy of this or that worthy idea or cause.

But Mr. Colby is worth reading, even if he has to be approached in a different mood from which one approaches Mielne or Beerbohm. His comment on H. G. Wells, which he calls 'Thinking in Haste,' illustrates his manner and the quality of his thought. The title itself is a sort of accusation and what follows justifies it. He says in one place: 'Of course, Mr. Wells is not, in the austere sense of the term, a thoughtful person, and he does not make his characters engage in any such dry, lonely and unpopular process as thinking. If he did, they would be quite generally repulsive. But he does somehow contrive the illusion that a good deal is going on in their minds, and he makes them spit out between clenched teeth a platitude that you will often mistake for an assertion of truth. That is the measure of Mr. Wells' skill.'

When one is in the mood for such things Mr. Colby's book is just what one would read. Mielne's lighter trifling would irritate and Beerbohm's gentler touch would seem inadequate to the demands of the subject.

THE makers of light verse have a place as sure as the writers of light essays. Among the most proficient practitioners of this art in America are Herbert Taylor and Don Marquis. Although Taylor died within a year, his works are likely to live long after him. Arrangements have already been made to publish a series of volumes with his name on the title page. The first 'A Penny Whistle' (A. A. Knopf) has just appeared. The title was selected by Taylor before he died, and the order of publication, which he had arranged for him, Taylor's immediate literary progenitor was Eugene Field. And curiously enough, both Field and Taylor are of New England origin, and both did in Chicago the work by which they are remembered. Taylor, who was Field's friend as the condenser of a column in a Chicago newspaper. He plays with Horace as Field did, and he writes sentimental verse about little children and indulges in burlesque after the manner of Field. And now and then he touches a serious note which leads one to conclude that if he had been so disposed he might have written important, as well as interesting, verse.

It is not so easy to trace the origins of Don Marquis, who has just issued a new book of verse with his famous fishing poem, 'Noah an' Jonah an' Cap'n John Smith' (D. Appleton & Co.), giving it its name. There is more pungency and vigor in Marquis than in Taylor, and his humor is more amused and more biting. He is Thomas Hood with a sardonic grin, as Taylor might be called Calverley with an American twist. Marquis uses all kinds of meter, and occasionally drops into free verse, but Taylor abhors free verse. He writes:

The verses of the modern poets, 'The things he talks just issued, resembles much a little boat That's rudderless at sea.

And he always has a rudder of rhyme to be a lighter steer. The lightness and grace with which these two men handle verse and their refusal to take life as seriously, say, as Amy Lowell takes it, justify their existence and give to them what value they have among readers seeking for entertainment. G. W. D.



FREDERICK PALMER Who has studied war for twenty-five years and now writes a book demanding peace

POETRY AND REALISM They Blend Amazingly in Stephen Benet's First Novel

What might justly be called poetic realism marks 'The Beginning of Wisdom' (Henry Holt & Co.). It is the remembered for his collected poems, 'Heavens and Earth,' one of the really remarkable lyric utterances of the younger American school.

'The Beginning of Wisdom' is an impressive first novel. It rises far above the usual promise of initial fiction to decided achievement and fulfillment. Its substance, ripeness and fineness have won golden praise from qualified critics and co-workers. For instance, 'Christopher Morley says: "A beautiful book... The first appearance in prose of a genuine talent. It has the exuberant glow and freshness of a young man's body and soul there. H. L. Menckens prefaces: "There are plenty of capital things in it. It is an interesting and ingenious book."

'The Beginning of Wisdom' is poetic in manner, realistic in method. It is a mixture of the two, and the result is a work of art. The author, Stephen Benet, is a young man of letters, and his work is a masterpiece of the art of writing. The book is a collection of essays, and it is a masterpiece of the art of writing. The author, Stephen Benet, is a young man of letters, and his work is a masterpiece of the art of writing. The book is a collection of essays, and it is a masterpiece of the art of writing.

Mr. Benet is near enough to youth, as a man, to charge his pages with the most delicate and flashing currents of yearning passion, but emotions appear had been arranged by him, Taylor's immediate literary progenitor was Eugene Field. And curiously enough, both Field and Taylor are of New England origin, and both did in Chicago the work by which they are remembered.

THE news comes from England that W. H. Hudson, whose new volume of essays, 'A Traveller in Little Things,' will be published this fall by E. P. Dutton & Co., has resigned his civil list pension of about \$700 a year because he no longer needs it. That is gratifying proof that a public which long neglected him, both in England and America, has at last grown appreciative of the unusual and distinctive pleasure his books afford and is buying them, in both countries, as it should have bought them long ago.

To follow with interest and understanding the CONFERENCE FOR THE LIMITATIONS OF ARMAMENT, a thorough knowledge both of the complex points at issue and of the personalities of contemporary statesmen is essential.

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FOLLY OF NATIONS

Frederick Palmer Argues Convincingly That It Is War

Frederick Palmer, who has been a war correspondent for twenty-five years and has been a spectator of all the big and little wars of consequence in this time, has raised his voice against war in a book that he calls 'The Folly of Nations' (Dodd, Mead & Co.). He describes the various wars of the last quarter of a century, ending with our own in a chapter to the causes that lead to war. There are many of them. Fear, he puts first; the fear that one or another nation will invade one's country and deprive one of the familiar and accustomed things. This fear has many ramifications, and it leads a nation to invent another which it suspects of hostility. Then come the differences in language, race customs and habits, which lead to suspicion and misunderstanding. After this Mr. Palmer places the economic motives, to which he does not give so much force as other commentators. And so on down the list of minor motives, such as love of glory, admiration for physical valor and the like.

MISS BAILEY'S STORIES Clever Short Fiction Collected in 'Gay Cockade'

More than to Temple Bailey, is something to be injected into a story—short or long—at appropriate intervals. The male, Miss Bailey admits, is a necessary ingredient in a fictional mulligan, but for her "the girl's the thing."

And it must be admitted Miss Bailey has a clear insight into the character feminine as well as a deft touch in putting it in black and white. In 'The Gay Cockade' (Penn Publishing Company) Miss Bailey, a favorite novelist, has collected a baker's dozen of her stories that have appeared in the Saturday Evening Post and other magazines. Her versatility is shown by the locale, which ranges from the city to the country, always with the heroine as the chief of interest. One of her little stories, 'The Red Candle,' is a Christmas story, clear and distinct in its contrast of Victorian sadness and cheer. This is probably the best of the lot, although all are interesting as to plot and cleverness of ending.

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