

BOOK REVIEWS

Edison a Student at Seventy-four

ABOUT AUTHORS.

Famous Inventor Works in a Library Which Records Achievement of Others

By THOMAS COMMERFORD MARTIN.

Illustrations by KARL ILLAVA.

EDISON pondered as he sat at his simple big desk in the laboratory at West Orange, New Jersey, and plucked thoughtfully at a shaggy eyebrow. Then he tilted his chair and his derby hat back a bit and looked around on the scene—a curious melange of science and business, of mechanics and museum—but over and above all is it a big library set around with many pictures and portraits—among the latest one from Joffre to his friend the "illustre Edison." Here for some twenty-five years its owner has been accumulating and discarding books, until he has a pile of some forty or fifty thousand of them on the shelves around him for swift and ready reference. The bright January afternoon sunlight streamed in on the lofty timbered hall, with its galleries and bays, all brimming over with books—and then more books. The remark had just been made to him that the Bolsheviks did not allow the private ownership of books and had no use for the writers of them.

Edison cocked a reflective eye at his treasures and beamed a friendly smile all over them. And then he grew sad. "Well,

through Gibbon, Hume and melancholic Burton, seized with avidity on Parker's natural philosophy and hurled himself recklessly against Newton's "Principia"—a boy who became "candy butcher" on Grand Trunk trains so that he could read all the new magazines free of cost. As he wrote the other day to *Leslie's Weekly* on its sixtieth anniversary, that was one of the papers he loved to handle as a newsboy, full of war news and pictures, as alas it still is, while he still waits with interest for the next number.

A curious side light on Edison's literary aptitudes is shown by the fact that in his early days as a telegrapher in the middle West he was known among his peers as "Victor Hugo" Edison, on account of his devoted passion for the works and heroes of the great French writer. But still more striking is the amusing little incident of his purchase in a grimy auction room at Cincinnati of a dusty stack of twenty unbound volumes of the *North American Review*. These when bound he had delivered at the telegraph office, where he was night news operator. Free as usual at 3 A. M. he started off one dim morning with the first batch of ten volumes in a package on his shoulder. His journey home was suddenly interrupted by a fusillade of pistol shots from an excited policeman, who grabbed him by the throat and made him open the suspicious parcel. The grumbling officer barely apologized to the scared deaf boy, whom he told it was a fortunate thing for him he had not been dealing with a revolver expert.

"Say, Meadowcroft, haven't we still got those *Reviews* around here?"

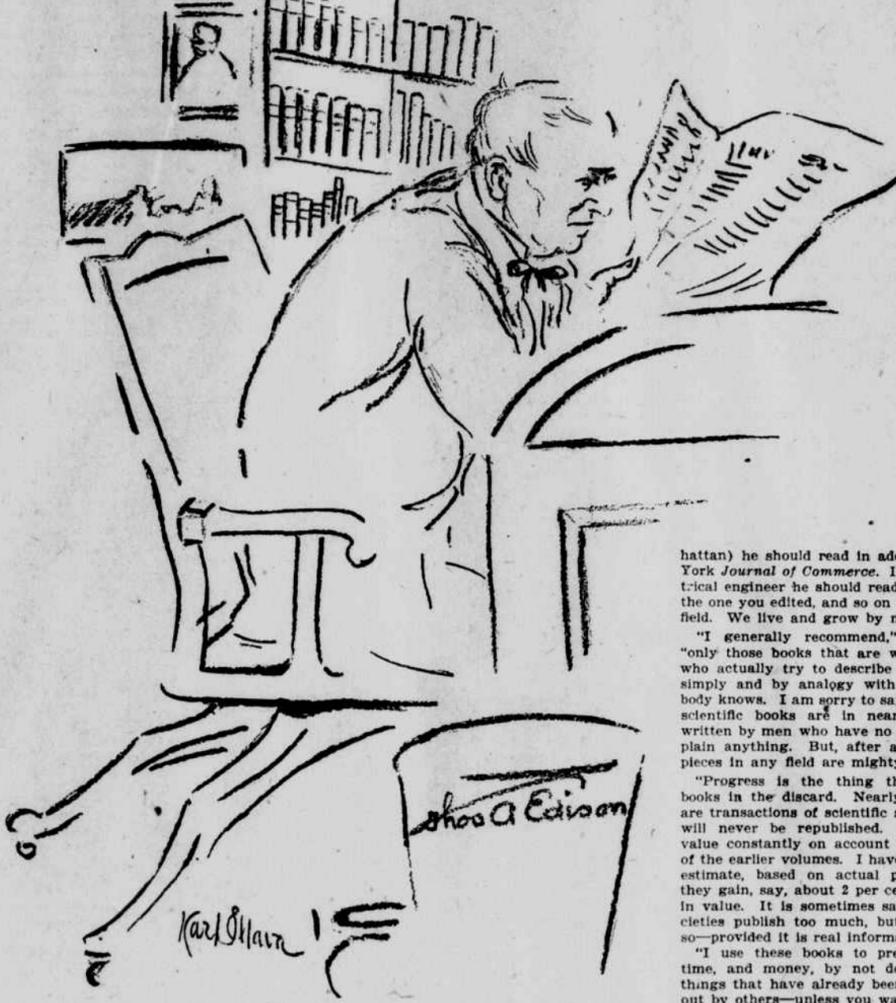
"Sure," said the devoted omniscient secretary, pointing to them on one of the shelves.

"And what is more," nodded the smiling inventor, "not only did I buy them, but I've read them, and since then once in awhile I've written a bit for the *Review* in days gone by. And it comes to the house right along."

Mention of this little episode turned the conversation toward such reading in general. Edison confessed he had little or no use for the lighter magazines, but he is keen for the newspapers, and illustrated their usefulness by stating that for a certain line of employment he had recently prepared a questionnaire, the answers to which brought out the revelation that of a hundred young men barely one could tell him certain conditions as to the precious metal market that anybody would know from reading the news of the day. In an apologetic way the interlocutor recalled the statement of the great physicist, Lord Kelvin, that he didn't bother with the newspapers and read only a little halfpenny evening daily, the *Glasgow Citizen*.

"I am sorry for that," said Edison. "There was no smallness about my old friend, but he made a great mistake. He shut himself off from the great world of action and progress and to that extent narrowed his mind."

"I'm free to confess that I read two morn-



Edison Himself Put the Signature on the Wastebasket.

ing papers and three evening papers, all the principal magazines, except the fiction part, and most of the scientific publications. Oh! yes, *HERALD*, of course. I am very much interested to see the kind of newspaper Frank Munsey is making. He's an old hand at it.

Sometimes when loafing I take a dip into a detective story. You know Macaulay did that, too.

"I do think that a young man should always read a daily newspaper. If he is going into business over there (indicating Man-

hattan) he should read in addition the *New York Journal of Commerce*. If he is an electrical engineer he should read a journal like the one you edited, and so on throughout the field. We live and grow by new knowledge.

"I generally recommend," said Edison, "only those books that are written by men who actually try to describe things plainly, simply and by analogy with things everybody knows. I am sorry to say that ordinary scientific books are in nearly every case written by men who have no capacity to explain anything. But, after all, the masterpieces in any field are mighty few.

"Progress is the thing that puts most books in the discard. Nearly all my books are transactions of scientific societies, which will never be republished. They gain in value constantly on account of the scarcity of the earlier volumes. I have made a rough estimate, based on actual purchases, that they gain, say, about 2 per cent. per annum in value. It is sometimes said that the societies publish too much, but I don't think so—provided it is real information.

"I use these books to prevent waste of time, and money, by not doing again the things that have already been done or tried out by others—unless you want to make the experiment again, just as you like to hear a piece of music again. See how Faraday's works are crammed with the simple report of tests and discoveries, his record being

like that in the very rocks. Look at the recent reprint in five or six languages, including the original Latin, of Oersted's great determinations in electro-magnetism. It's awfully short, but there is literally an experiment and a fact in every line. Such is truth forever.

"Would you apply such general comment to psychic literature? What do you think of it?"

"I don't think of it at all!"—and Edison rather abruptly declined to be led into any extended comment on Lodge and others, although he admitted he had tried some of it. He is, if anything, somewhat impatient of the time-consuming controversial entanglements that have woven around his efforts to grope if possible an "unseen way through the palpable obscure."

"The public has not quite yet caught the idea I have aimed to express. As I have recently stated, my theory is that the body of man is a machine, made of dead and lifeless matter, but operated by millions of small highly organized and intelligent entities; so small that they cannot be seen by the ultra-microscope. That when the machine (man) becomes inoperative these entities leave it as a swarm and are the real units of life. They are still animals, and are still a part of the animal life of the present world. Should this swarm of life units keep together and carry memory, then personality will continue to survive and is subject to scientific investigation the same as a butterfly is subject to investigation after it leaves the grub."

So far as he is personally concerned—and perhaps a few others—the present writer felt that he would have to let it go at that, entrancing as such reachings out of the human mind must be. The conversation was swung around to the phonograph and its marvelous immortality of voice and tone for those who have loved and lost. Edison was asked if he had taken any steps to carry out ideas he had long ago put forward of constituting a phonograph library of books, not less than of music.

Briefly, but with cheery optimism, came the terse reply: "Not yet," as though he who has done so much and is still "going strong," would almost involuntarily have added, "but soon." He will be only 74 next Friday, February 11, so can plan ahead as eagerly as ever.



Acting Plays That Read Well

MODERN AMERICAN PLAYS. Collected with introduction by George P. Baker. Harcourt Brace & Howe.

Reviewed by ELEANOR HAYDEN.

IN a city that lists, in something cryptically called a "Metropolitan Guide," "The Emperor Jones" as a "comedy" and "The Bat" as a "drama," any consideration of comedy and drama is bound to provoke discussion. Plays and playmaking will continue to interest as long as conflicting forces of emotion or character or idea can be presented upon the stage and as long as the diverting foibles of humanity can be turned into tragedy, comedy or farce to intrigue, entertain and amuse playgoers. As a sort of backward glance to indicate, perchance, where some intelligent and perceptive audiences were trained to insure the success of such plays as "Jane Clegg" and "Beyond the Horizon," George P. Baker, professor of dramatic literature Harvard University, offers this selection of "Modern American Plays"—a volume to be placed on one's book shelves beside "Chief Contemporary Dramatists" as a script or perhaps as an epilogue to that volume.

Professor George P. Baker Has Made Contemporary Drama a Living Thing

In the now famous "47 Workshop" Professor Baker has done more for Harvard students than to instill into them a profound appreciation of the drama of the ages. He has made of contemporary drama a living thing and has sent many young playwrights out into the playmaking world with understanding of the traditions of the past and the enthusiasm to break these traditions if the inspiration of the present makes the break necessary. Even such harsh critics as George Jean Nathan admit that Eugene O'Neill knows how to write, and Eugene O'Neill studied under Professor Baker at Harvard University.

The five plays offered in "Modern American Plays" were selected by Prof. Baker because they were eminently successful when produced, are among the American plays, according to his standards, that are worthy of revival and show the variety essential in any collection. The plays selected are "As a Man Thinks," by Augustus Thomas; "The Return of Peter Grimm," by David Belasco; "Romance," by Edward Sheldon; "The Unchastened Woman," by Louis Kaufman Anspacher, and "Plots and Playwrights," by Edward Massey.

If one reads plays simply for diversion any criticism of them is unnecessary. But Prof. Baker offers them not only for their intrinsic interest but also as a connecting link between the past and the present and as a proof that modern American dramatists have endeavored to keep pace to some extent with the thinking of the American people. That a play is amusing is no reason why it should not be a criticism of life at the same time.

Prof. Baker suggests "As a Man Thinks" as one conservative's response to the plea for the complete emotional freedom for woman. The play shows one woman's rather pathetic attempt to adopt a single standard

in marriage, and that the standard of the man. Of course this is a rather large order for any playwright who must apparently write with one eye on the box office and the other on the misty figure of truth. Playing such tricks with one's vision is apt to make one slightly cross-eyed!

Perhaps John Mason made "As a Man Thinks" convincing, and to the present generation divorce is not quite the appalling thing it seems to have been when Mr. Thomas wrote around it. But even so one fails to see why the *Elinor* of the play should be condemned by the playwright at the fall of the curtain to spend the rest of her life with any man as admittedly blind and stupid as her husband Frank Clayton. There is a good deal of popular psychology in the play projected in the character of Dr. Seelig, the ambassador between the members of the divided household, who helps Clayton and his wife patch up domestic differences. He suggests to the regenerate Clayton that most ills are mental and spiritual rather than physical; that yesterday is as dead as Babylon, and infers that forgiving one's wife for a sin she did not commit is a noble and purifying act. Yesterdays are as dead as Babylon, but the play, as written, fails to convince one that Frank Clayton's blindness of yesterday can be transmuted into any very blinding vision for to-morrow.

In "The Return of Peter Grimm" Belasco sensed the direction of the time and gave to the American public one of its first plays dealing with the borderland between the seen and the unseen world. "Only one thing really counts—only one thing—love. It is the only thing that tells in the long run; nothing else endures to the end." This is the thesis of the play. Mr. Belasco blandly disarms scoffers with his forward note: "The author does not advance any theory as to the probability of the return of the main character of this play. For the many it may be said that Peter could exist only in the minds of the characters grouped about him—in their subconscious memories. For the few his presence will embody the theory of the survival of the persistent personal energy. This character has, so far as possible, been treated to accord with either thought."

How Much of the Character Is Actor and How Much Is Part of the Play?

Adroitly constructed, the play has been written to meet either type of mind. One can believe if one wishes that the lovable Peter Grimm, made real and familiar by David Warfield, upon seeing after his death the havoc wrought by leaving no written document, returned to this plane to see that his wishes in regard to the people he loved were carried out. One can also believe that the subconscious mind of the sensitive small boy, who finally remembered the necessary details, began to function without influence from another sphere. The play offers a basis for either argument, and the avoidance of technical difficulties is mastery.

It is impossible to tell how much of the character of Peter Grimm is Mr. Belasco and how much is Mr. Warfield, so completely is the rapport between the character written into the script by one and played into the minds of the American public by the other. As an exposition of "Belasco the

showman" "The Return of Peter Grimm" is decidedly interesting.

"Romance," the third play in the book, depends for its appeal, according to Prof. Baker's preface, on the dramatic interest with which it tells its old story, that of a youth infatuated and charmed by a famous woman of the stage. Prof. Baker admits that "Romance" does not seek to move an audience to serious thinking about the social significance of the central figure. One rather suspects that the protracted run of the play in London during the war, with Doris Keane as *Mme. Margherita Cavallini*, was due in a large measure to Miss Keane rather than to the intrinsic merit, either as entertainment or as truth, of the play.

Even as read "The Unchastened Woman" offers a remarkably complete presentation of the type of presumably cultured American woman who plays with ideas rather than emotions, and who goes through life unscathed because she always plays safe and has no regard for the results of her experiments with the hearts and ambitions of the mentally unprotected rising geniuses who cross her path. *Caroline Knollys* does exist wherever women have been educated not to believe in real emotions and have found nothing better to do than play for sensations in a hunting ground that is world wide.

"Plots and Playwrights," a Lively Bit of Modern "Criticism Made Drama"

As a spiritual vampire Emily Stevens made *Caroline Knollys* a permanent part of one's mental content. Her complete retraction on paper of slanderous remarks regarding one *Emily Madden*, her subsequent verbal withdrawal of the retraction, after she had made it impossible for the withdrawal to touch her, and her sweep in opera clothes and his wife, *Hildegarde*, in the last act was a striking bit of stage business, "stagy," of course, but, after all, why not?

"Plots and Playwrights," an amusing little bit of "criticism made drama," is, perhaps, the raison d'être for the book. The Broadway playwright and the playwright of the newer school meet in a prologue in front of a boarding house on West Eleventh street. The conventional playwright searches for a plot. The new playwright without Broadway inhibitions promises to write a possible play about each floor of the boarding house. In three short scenes miniature plays are suggested, and the life on three different floors of the boarding house is shown up.

The Broadway playwright finds the sketches suggestive, but impossible as presented. In a long burlesque act he takes the human characters as presented in the first three scenes, treats them to a bath of Broadway conventional stage stuff and shows what he would do with the naive new playwright's creation. In an epilogue the two men defend their own work in a restaurant, each finding the other's solution impossible until a waiter who admits that he "once worked for Mr. Shaw" suggests collaboration.

Collaboration cannot be Prof. Baker's last word—certainly not when it means a compromise. And certainly there are few traces of either collaboration or compromise in the straight and original vision in "The Emperor Jones," for example—the "comedy" of the contemporary stage.

MacSwiney Left a Book on Freedom

PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM. By Terence MacSwiney, late Lord Mayor of Cork. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Reviewed by JOSEPH F. GOULD.

TERENCE MACSWINEY left behind him a collection of thoughts on freedom which gives us his credo. It enhances our admiration for his sacrifice. It shows that he had the capacity of a poet for enjoying life, and the ability of a clear thinker to face it. Yet he felt that he served a cause bigger than any individual. His voluntary death was the expression of a deep inner conviction.

There are those who might consider his sacrifice merely the enthusiasm of youth. He rejects such theatrical standards. He says, "What then is our claim to freedom? There are two points of view. The first we have when fresh from school, still in our teens, ready to tilt against every one and everything, delighting in saying smart things—and able sometimes to say them—talking much and boldly of freedom, but satisfied if the thing sounds bravely. There is the later point of view. We are no longer boys; we have come to review the situation and take a definite stand in life. We have had years of experience, keen struggles, not a little bitterness, and we are steadiest. We feel a heart beat for deeper things. It is no longer sufficient that they sound bravely; they must ring true."

The freedom for which MacSwiney sought was very lofty. He had pondered deeply and read much. Emerson and St. Thomas Aquinas seem to have been his chief interpreters. He says, "Neither kingdom, republic nor commune can regenerate us; it is in the beautiful mind and a great ideal we shall find the charter of our freedom; and this is the philosophy that it is most essential to preach."

Such a conception of liberty made MacSwiney international. He felt that the genius of England was akin to his own people. He felt that the independence of Ireland would make friendship possible between the two nations. He fought without bitterness. He also realized that his cause must not be furthered in any unworthy manner. He wrote, "If Ireland were to win freedom by helping directly or indirectly to crush another people she would earn the execration she has herself poured out on tyranny for ages."

Such a vision conferred a sense of responsibility upon MacSwiney. He knew that he must follow the gleam wherever it led. He saw the future very clearly when he wrote, "He is called to a grave charge who is called to resist the majority. But he will resist, knowing that his victory will lead them to a deeper dream than they had ever known. He will fight for that ideal in obscurity, little heeded—in the open, misunderstood; in humble places, seizing every vantage point, never crushed, never silent, never despairing, cheering a few comrades with hope in the morrow. And should these few sink in the struggle, the greatness of the ideal is proven in the last hour: as they fall their country awakens to their dream, and he who has inspired and sustained them is justified; justified against the whole race, he who once stood alone against them. In the hour he falls, he is the savior of his race."

and the multitude will break from lethargy or prejudice and march with a shout for freedom in a true, a brave and a beautiful sense."

MacSwiney has no patience with the time-server. Sincerity is the virtue he prizes most. He does not dodge troublesome questions. He believes that religion will cease to divide Ireland. This will happen not because of indifference, but because Catholic and Protestant will live up to the best of their creeds and not make them an excuse for hatred.

He feels that compromise is the death of a cause. Procrastination is the worst form of compromise. The present is the time to begin the struggle. He says, "On the understanding that we will be heroes to-morrow, we evade being men to-day. We think of some busy hour in the future when we may get a call to great things; we realize not that the call is now, that the fight is about that we must take the flag from its hidden resting-place and carry it boldly into life. So near a struggle may touch us with dread, but to dread provoking a fight is to endure without resistance all the consequences of a lost battle—a battle that might have been won. But confusion has been made in our time by the glib phrase, 'You are not asked now to die for Ireland, but to live for her,' without insisting that the life shall aim at the ideal, the brave and the true."

MacSwiney applied the test of sincerity to every phase of human endeavor. His opinions on literature throw a striking side-light on his personality. He wrote, "If we are to apply art to great work, we must distinguish art from artifice. We find the two well contrasted in *Synges' Riders to the Sea*, and his 'Playboy.' The first was written straight from the heart. We feel *Synges* must have followed those people carrying the dead body and touched to the quick by the *celine*, passed the touch on to us, for in the lyric swell of the close we get the true emotion. Here alone he is in the line of greatness. This gripped his heart and he wrote out of himself. But in the other work of his it was otherwise. He has put his method on record; he listened through a chink in the floor, and wrote around other people. It is characteristic of the art of our time. Let it be called art, if the critics will, but it is not life."

MacSwiney has a fine chapter on womanhood. He believes in real companionship between the sexes, and holds that the true basis of such a feeling lies in sharing ideals. He rebels against the dictum of Lord Bacon that children are hostages to fortune. Much as he admires Wolf Tone he realizes that an equal tribute is due his mate. He writes very touchingly of the way Mrs. Tone upheld her husband, and the devotion with which she carried out his work.

MacSwiney concludes his tribute to Mrs. Tone by saying, "We have cause for gratitude in the example before us. The woman can learn from it how she may equal the bravest man; and the man should learn to let his wife and children suffer rather than make of them willing slaves and cowards. For there are some earnest men who are ready to suffer themselves but cannot endure the suffering of those they love, and a mistaken family tenderness binds and drags them down. No one, surely, can hold it better to carefully put away every duty that may entail hardships on wife and child, for then the wife is instead of a comrade a burden, and the child becomes a degenerate creature, creeping between heaven and earth, afraid to hold his head erect and unable to fulfill his duty to God or man."



of course, such rabid mentality will soon pass away, the evil curing itself. But it will stop the publishing of any worth while books of any kind. And even if they hold public libraries, as the Bolsheviks get hold of them they will become things of the past—mere slag heaps."

Pausing to wonder over a country with no new books to buy, and no authors to write them, Edison allowed that also outside this great reference library he had a few more books at home, at Glenmont, high up on the Orange Mountain near by. He plays no games indoors and takes no hand of cards with the family around him, but settles back with his book and pokes quiet fun at their need of other amusement than that of the printed page or the handy phonograph. It must be borne in mind that in addition to a naturally studious mind and a preternaturally active hunger for facts and data, Edison has long endured a growing deafness that in itself would encourage reading. Be-



sides which he has the love of books that shows in the way a volume is handled, and the furtive casual dipping into unconsecutive pages. Here is a man who as a boy, with his mother's help and retaining pretty well all he read with prodigious memory, waded

At Candlemas

By ROBERT CARY.

THAT best prophetic of this many a year, The ground hog, sees his shadow and departs For thrice a fortnight ere my Queen of Hearts, All pied with mickle Violets, is near; Flow'r breathed, bird voiced, star eyed, the beauteous dear Pearls the green April moonbeams. Such be her arts That her I'll love till, struck by Love's last darts, Sinks my cold clay into Death's cavern drear.

What matters it, O fellow mortals! whether The little prophet sees the sun or shade? Have we not claimed the vernal hour together In winter's cold despite? All undis-mayed Have we not glimpsed, beyond the frigid weather, The raining petals of the fragrant glade?