

# The World of Letters As Others See It

## When Tennyson's Was "A Young Man's Fancy."

TENNYSON first met Emily Sellwood when he was 21; she was 17, a lovely girl of much charm. Emily was walking at the time with Arthur Hallam in the "Fairy Wood" of Somersby. To Alfred she appeared "like a light across those woodland ways." He said to her: "Are you a Dryad or an Oread wandering here?" After this first meeting they saw little of one another for six years. Then the young poet escorted the fair one, a bridesmaid, at the wedding of her sister Louisa to Alfred's brother Charles. From that day friendship quickly ripened to deep affection, but after three years, as there seemed to be no prospect of marriage—Alfred's income being too small for the greatest of all ventures—communication between the lovers was forbidden. There were ten long years of separation before the engagement was revived. This was in the spring of 1850; in June the patient pair were happily made one.—From "My Tennysons." By William Harris Arnold in Scribner's Magazine.

## Stevenson's Posthumous Fame.

SOMETHING undoubtedly took place after Stevenson's death to sky the balance; he was held in a different estimation altogether. His works became apparently classics. Two collected editions of them appeared, and at this hour a third is being added to them. I am not at all in his publishers' secrets, but I should say that since his death the sale of his books rose steadily until somewhere about 1912, and has since then begun perceptibly to decline. But that is mere guesswork. His, then, is a more curious case than that of Tennyson, whose fame was well established long before his death, and yet enormously increased by the universal loss which that event proved to be. It was a loss felt personally, as the loss of Dickens had been, the same in kind, though less in degree. I was 10 years old when Dickens died; I remember the sort of hush which fell upon our house and village, and no doubt upon the whole country. People went about looking seriously at each other, saying, "Charles Dickens is dead." An illustrated newspaper—I think there was only one then—had a two page drawing called "The Empty Chair." That was the death of a king of men. Tennyson's made less of a stir, certainly; Stevenson's, in 1894, had been almost nothing.—From "The Renown of Stevenson." By Maurice Hewlett in the London Times.

## The American Language.

GOOD-BY to the land of split infinitives and cross-bred words; the land where a dinner jacket is a "Tuxedo," a spittoon a "cuspidor"; where your opinion is called your "reaction" and where "vamp," instead of meaning an improvised accompaniment to a song, means a dangerous girl! Good-by to the land where grotesque exaggeration is called humor, and people gape in bewilderment at irony, as a bullock gapes at a dog straying in his field! I am going to a land of ancient speech where we still say "record" and "concord" for "recud" and "concuad," where "necessarily" and "extraordinarily" must be taken at one rush, as hedge-ditch-and-rail in the hunting field; where we do not "commute" or "check" or "page" but "take a season" and "register" and "send a boy round"; where we never say we are glad to meet a stranger and seldom are; where humor is under statement and irony our habitual resources in danger or distress. Good-by, America! I am going home.—By H. W. Nevinson in the London "Nation and Athenaeum."

## The Original Don Juan.

WHEN the power of the Inquisition was at its height early in the seventeenth century the outspoken satires of Quevedo suffered no injury at the hands of the Holy Office, while the dramatic work of Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderon circulated without hindrance. One dramatist, Tirso de Molina, as popular at the time as any of these great masters, long and successfully doubled the roles of dramatist and ecclesiastic. His main title to fame

rests on his creation of the witty freethinker and profligate Don Juan, who later became a hero of literature in every country of Europe. Yet Tirso's frank interpretation of human nature failed to disqualify him for occasional service as censor of books for the Inquisition.—From "Shakespeare and the Inquisition." By Sir Sidney Lee in the London "Times."

## Dissecting Joseph Hergesheimer.

HE is a most frightful liar. That is one of his chiefest virtues. He bathes and basks in flattery, and from the reticent he provokes it by the odd, ingenuous way he has of piling compliment upon compliment. He is extremely sensitive to criticism, and this sketch will make him hopping mad. It shouldn't, because it is written by one of his most loyal admirers, by one who thinks that, without question, Hergesheimer is one of the finest novelists now writing in English. But it will. To him there is no other occupant of the peak of Teneriffe, and his most amusing weaknesses are by groundlings to be condoned. Four years ago he talked entirely about himself, and the subject became a little shopworn after two hours and a half. But of late he has got about and has achieved a more general fund of ideas. His conversation is brilliant and witty, keen, amusing, and to the point. He talks less about himself, and even when he is his theme, he endows it with a glamour and an interest that is stimulating and entertaining. He is an impatient auditor, but a perfect companion.—From the "Literary Spotlight," in the "Bookman."

## Petronius the Arbitrator.

WE have only a fragment of what Petronius wrote. Even so, he has given us two admirable stories—concerning the werewolf and the matron of Ephesus—the most satisfying criticism of Horace, enough "horse sense" to please the modern advertiser, and puzzles enough concerning his purpose and meaning to keep scholars busy forever. He was a realist, but he was also a parodist. That, we think, is certain, and it is quite possible that he was taking off the extravagances of the Greek romances. His rascals have the cool impudence of Gil Blas without the occasional qualms of conscience. He is strangely modern in the suppression of his own views. He neither approves nor condemns, and the most that we can say of him is that he was an inimitable observer of the human comedy and a lover of poetry. Was he, like Mæcenas, a man of proved ability, who sank into the refinements of luxury and patronized poets? Such guesses are attractive but not likely, with the materials we possess, to be raised to probabilities.—From the "Saturday Review."

## A Plutocrat in Florence.

ONE reason I was never altogether liked was because I had come to Florence with a commission to make etchings. They, inspired three years before by Whistler in Venice, were occasionally doing them. I had money; it worked out at \$50 a month. That is what I spent, and that \$50 included everything—railway journeys to Siena, Pisa and finally Venice. Some months I saved a lot, but the others mostly lived on the future and hope and their friends. In the future they would all become, and some are, known. There was the hope of a Giotto, or that a Roman Cardinal or an American millionaire would discover them, or rather they would discover him, and they went into all sorts of adventures with this in view. The most popular, or rather the simplest method, and the most successful, was to marry a rich girl, and this all tried, and a few were chosen. But with my \$50 a month I was an outsider. I had certainty; they had faith in themselves.—From "Adventures of an Illustrator." By Joseph Pennell in the "Century."

## American Novels and British Readers.

THAT brings me directly to your charge that the English critics are neglecting the more recent American novelists. You except

Edith Wharton and Joseph Hergesheimer, so I will not speak of them, only hinting in parenthesis that if you imagine that Hergesheimer's art is European rather than American you are making the greatest mistake of your young critical life; but is it true for a single moment that Cabell, Booth Tarkington, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Miss Cather and the others are passed over here? That their novels do not command great sales here is perfectly true. For some reason the American novel presents English readers with conditions that are very difficult for them to understand. Part of the difficulty is beyond question this problem of the new American language. Take "Main Street" or "Three Soldiers" or "Moon-Calf" and you will find pages of those books peppered with phrases that to nine Englishmen out of ten are quite unintelligible. When you get to the words of Don Marquis or Ring Lardner they might, for most English readers, be just as readily written in Russian or Chinese. But it is not only difficulty of language. American conditions simply have no parallel in this country. The majority of Englishmen have not visited the United States, and many of those who have been there have penetrated no further than the wilds of New York and Chicago.—From "An Open Letter to H. L. Mencken." By Hugh Walpole in the "Bookman."

## Hawthorne at Home and Abroad.

HAWTHORNE, indeed, succeeded in doing what many a larger genius has never done: he added to literature a new small perfect thing, entirely his own, derived from nothing else. It was a form, it was a model, it was a style—it was a fusion of these in his writing, with a scrupulous suppression of any turn or thought or phrase that was alien to them; and the result was a body of work that is thoroughly consistent and original. He sat aloof in his simply furnished life, feeding his imagination upon the mild diet that alone apparently suited it, turning even petulantly from richer fare when he might have had it; and clearly he understood the needs of his talent, for it grew steadily to full maturity and was never disturbed in its placid advance. Hawthorne's singular power and the conditions of his life in New England were in harmony with each other; it was only when he came to Europe and saw England and Italy in his later years that he was vexed and distracted in his fine spun ruminations. Europe did indeed give him "The Marble Faun," but "The Marble Faun," with its lapses and its incoherencies is much the most imperfect of his novels.—From the London Times.

## The Variety of J. C. Snaith.

FROM any one of Mr. John Collis Snaith's novels a new experience may be expected. His works are not merely a succession of variations on the same theme, but successive themes of infinite variety. Unlike history, the author seldom if ever repeats himself. In one book he gives us romantic comedy ("Lady Barbarity") in another comedy of manners ("Araminta" or "Broke of Covenden"); at one time it is comedy of adventure ("The Great Age"); again it may be realistic comedy ("The Sailor"), or pathetic comedy ("Love Lane"); or, as his latest, downright melodrama. With the exception of the last named, the only repeated element is that of comedy. This dominant note of the comic sounds continuously through all the variety of Mr. Snaith's works. Like a true artist Mr. Snaith is reticent about the personal side of his career, and prefers to leave his work to represent what he is. If you talk to him of the man behind the books you will learn little more than that he is of Yorkshire extraction. "I began writing novels as a boy," he told me, "mainly the result of a broken leg playing football." Though he was engaged upon good apprentice work for some years, he made what he considers his "real start," with "Broke of Covenden," the brilliance and high promise of which were promptly recognized by all critics who know fine work when they see it.—From "J. C.

Snaith." By W. M. Parker in the English Bookman.

## What Baltimore Does Not Know.

IN Baltimore lives Lizette Woodworth Reese, perhaps the finest poet of her generation yet alive in America. Some time ago a wag-gish newspaper man there had the thought to find out how Baltimore itself regarded her. Accordingly he called up all of the town magnificoes, from the president of the Johns Hopkins down to the presidents of the principal women's clubs. He found that more than half of the persons he thus disturbed had never so much as heard of Miss Reese, and that all save two or three of the remainder had never read a line of her poetry! Edgar Allan Poe is buried in the town, in the yard of a decrepit Presbyterian church, on the edge of the old red light district. It took sixteen years to raise enough money to pay for a modest tombstone to his memory; it took seventy-two years to provide even an inadequate monument. During that time Baltimore has erected elaborate memorials to two founders of tinpot fraternal orders, to a former Mayor whose long service left the city in the physical state of a hog pen and to the president of an obscure and bankrupt railroad. These memorials are on main streets. That to Poe is hidden in a park that half the people of Baltimore have never so much as visited. And on the pedestal there is a thumping misquotation from his poetry! — From "Maryland's Apex of Normalcy." By H. L. Mencken in the Nation.

## The Incense Burned for Hugo.

NEVER, I suppose, was literary man so smothered in thick sweet fumes of incense as Hugo during his long and marvelously prolific career, and never was human being endowed with more capacious nostrils for snuffing it up. There is a story of him (you must imagine him standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece surrounded by adorers) murmuring, "Ca viendra, ca viendra," when some one had capped the suggestion that the street in which Hugo lived should be renamed after him, by saying it would be more fitting if Paris itself were renamed in his honor. This is probably an exaggeration; founded, say, on some one actually having declared that Victor Hugo ought to require no address, "Victor Hugo's house" being sufficient, and then on some one else having added that it was monstrous one should not be able simply to say, "drive me to Victor Hugo's street." But that murmured "Ca viendra, ca viendra," sounds authentic, and it is expressive of Hugo's immense, solemn, unshakable confidence in the permanence and inevitable increase of his resounding fame.—From the "New Statesman."

## The English Laureateship.

ON Cibber's death it was offered to Thomas Gray, who, comparing the post to that of a rat catcher to the king, incontinently refused it. William Whitehead, however, made something of the post, made it indeed respectable, and one that Thomas Warton could accept in 1785 and Henry James Pye in 1790. Pye was succeeded in 1813 by Southey, and he has been followed by Wordsworth, Tennyson, Austin and Dr. Bridges. What the future of the post may be it is difficult to say. It would be a pity for it to disappear, and yet the fact that it seems to impose silence or nonsense on the holders will probably not encourage the maintenance of a tradition that has done very little for literature and even less (except in the case of Tennyson) for patriotism.—From the "Contemporary Review."

## Moore's "Irish Melodies."

THE most famous of Moore's works was suggested to him by William Power, a Dublin music seller, who asked him to collaborate with Sir John Stevenson. The result was the "Irish Melodies," which were issued in ten numbers irregularly over a number of years. Moore's remuneration was £500 a year. It was a poor bargain for the poet, a good one for the publisher.

Alone among the poets of modern times Moore gave his poems to the world with his own voice. His mission was to make the sorrows known and felt in English society, and his equipment for this task was most remarkable. This small, plain Irishman, the son of a Dublin grocer, had social gifts which would welcome everywhere. The diaries and memoirs of the time are full of tributes to his wit, good humor and personal charm.—From "The Poetry of Thomas Moore" in John o' London's Weekly.

## An American Eugene Aram.

MEMORIES of a Cornell colleague of Goldwin Smith are recalled by the report that a true bill for attempted murder has been returned against a professor of modern languages at McGill University. In his "Reminiscences" Goldwin Smith gives a vivid sketch of Ruloff, "a counterpart of Eugene Aram, whom we had on the staff at Cornell. He combined in a remarkable way criminal propensities with literary tastes, being a great philologist and engaged in the invention of a universal language. He committed a series of robberies and murders, the murders beginning with those of his wife and daughter. On that occasion he escaped justice through the absence of a corpus delicti, Lake Cayuga, into which he had thrown the bodies, being undredgable." After this Ruloff wandered into Virginia, where he committed other crimes, all the time working at philology and his universal language. "Returning to his old haunts, he again committed robbery and murder, and again fell into the hands of justice. There was a petition against his execution on the stock plea of insanity and on the somewhat inconsistent ground that by hanging him a light of science would be put out. The State Government issued two commissions of inquiry, one to report on each plea. Both reported in the negative and Ruloff was hanged."—From the Manchester Guardian.

## "Gyp's" Latest Indiscretion.

THE sensitiveness of the Frenchman of to-day on the subject of nationality is illustrated by a little incident which has just occurred in Paris. It would hardly have happened, or at all events have happened in the same way, in any other capital. The Comtesse de Martel, better known to the novel reading public as "Gyp," in an article in a daily newspaper described M. Binet-Valmer, himself a novelist of some distinction, as "a foreigner." Now M. Binet-Valmer was born in Geneva, and his family had been settled in Switzerland for a generation or two, but were undoubtedly of French Huguenot origin. There is no reason to suppose that "Gyp" meant to cast any aspersion on M. Binet-Valmer, but no sooner had the articles appeared than two Generals of the French army waited on Comte de Martel and demanded a rectification. The Comte considered the matter so serious that he sought out two friends, choosing persons no less important than M. Maurice Barres of the Academie Francaise and Prof. Jean Louis Faure, the well known hospital surgeon, to confer with M. Binet-Valmer's Generals. A duel did not result, but it was agreed that MM. Barres and Faure should insert in certain newspapers a lengthy statement setting forth M. Binet-Valmer's descent from la haute noblesse of France, and not forgetting to mention his brilliant war record.—From the Manchester Guardian.

## Modern Grub Street.

IN fact, the payment for writing in general is ridiculously small. Five cents a word is high pay, indeed, for a writer with more or less of a name. Anything over two cents a word is doing pretty well. Many magazines pay one cent a word or less. Some actual prices paid by well known publications are here given: \$12 for a 2,500 word story; \$12 for a 1,200 word story, paid on publication; \$16 for a 4,000 word story that had been rejected by more than a score of editors; \$25 for a 4,000 word story.—From "The Practical Side of Writing." By Robert Cortes Holliday in the Bookman.