

The Whispering Gallery

In Which We Offer a Conjecture About the Great American Renaissance, and Are Mystified by a New Plan for Physical Culture by Invisible Exercise.

By DONALD ADAMS.

CRITICISM of American literature until recently was commonly fixed in the note of expectation. We were always about to do something really fine. The day was always coming, and not far distant, when American writers would grasp the possibilities of their country in literary material and proceed to do something about it. We do not know when the Great American Novel was first dangled before us, but it must have been a long time ago. Sometimes we think James Fenimore Cooper spoke about it hesitatingly to a few close friends.

At any rate the phrase long ago came to typify our national attitude toward our literary achievements. They might not amount to very much just now, but some day, by heck, we were going to show them. Most people have given up hope of ever meeting the Great American Novel between book covers, but there are many who believe we have already entered on a new level of achievement.

We feel that way ourselves, and it distressed us somewhat to find Norman Hapgood in *Hearst's International* for June still holding the note of expectancy.

"It may be a long time," he writes, "before an American Dickens emerges to mix up for us the little shopkeeper, the young sport from a Fifth Avenue family, the tense captain of industry, the farmer's wife, the Southern negro, the immigrant in the mine. When he comes he will be heard. . . . The trouble is that the writers of this generation have not been encouraged to use their minds. They have been encouraged to manufacture articles and stories as they might manufacture shirtwaists or candy. A Great American Renaissance may be standing just around the corner."

Our own feeling is that the American Renaissance has turned the corner and is stepping down the street. True, we cannot point to an American Dickens. Neither can we point to an American novelist who measures up to the stature of the earlier Wells, of Conrad, of Galsworthy, of Knut Hamsun or of Romain Rolland. We do not think there is a poet in America to-day who can be placed in the same class with Massfield.

But we think the American Renaissance is here. What Mr. Hapgood says about manufactured articles and stories is of course true. And yet anybody who takes the trouble to dip into the periodical literature of the civil war period and later will find the level of writing in a dozen magazines to-day immeasurably better. We turn out a great mass of mediocrity, but so did the Elizabethans, and so did eighteenth century England, and so did the Victorian Age. We remember only their splendors. The rest is dust.

The American Renaissance is here because the pulse of American letters was never so vigorous before. And it is certain of fulfillment because there is a great reading public here to welcome it. The United States to-day contains the largest intelligent audience a writer ever had. Our Dickens, when he comes, need have no fear of his reception.

Invisible Exercise.

It would strengthen our case, we suppose, if we could point to the books we have been reading this week, and produce from them incontestable evidence of what is happening to American literature. As it happens, we cannot. The first book we mean to mention falls outside the range of the discussion altogether.

It is a curious volume called "Invisible Exercise" (Dutton), by Gerald Stanley Lee. Mr. Lee at least possesses the self-reliance which is one of the characteristics of the Great American Renaissance. He abjures, completely to his own satisfaction, the usefulness of all physical exercise beyond that which may be obtained standing, sitting, walking and while fast asleep.

Most of us, according to Mr. Lee, are standing, sitting, walking and sleeping ourselves into the grave much faster than we need to go

there. We don't do these things right. The kernel of his advice appears to be to rely more on one's spinal column. He exhorts us to learn the technique of standing, sitting, &c., all over again. Mr. Lee has made such a good job out of standing that when he has been working hard in the morning and needs a bit of exercise to freshen him up, he goes outside and stands still for twenty minutes.

We were amazed at Mr. Lee's description of his book as "the story of one man's experience in coming through to a new kind of exercise—a setting-up exercise taken without getting up ten minutes early—an exercise that can be taken in half a minute without interrupting one's work, while sitting at one's desk,

while standing and talking in the street, or lying back in an easy chair—taken without anybody's knowing one is taking it, and eventually without even knowing it oneself."

It was not clear to us, and is not now, why anybody should be so secretive about exercise. Why should we mind somebody's knowing that we are exercising, and why of all things should we want to become unconscious of it ourselves? Half the fun we get out of playing tennis is in the consciousness that we are playing tennis and not working at our desk.

And it would be necessary, we found, before getting the hang of the thing, to give oneself a lot of orders as we prepared to take our exercise. Suppose we were about to try a few minutes of strenuous sitting down. We should have to say to myself, "I relax my neck in order to let my head go up and forward in order to let my back widen and lengthen in order to learn forward a quarter of an inch," and a lot of other things like that.

Mr. Lee's exercises, we fear, are

not for us. His book offers interesting evidence of the way in which the germ of an idea, which may not be a very big idea, may take possession of a man and tyrannize over him.

In Romantic Vein.

WE liked the spirit of Gilbert W. Gabriel's "Jiminy" (Doran), although we found its flavor a trifle sugary. Perhaps that appears like a contradiction. We mean that we found enjoyment in Mr. Gabriel's pursuit of romance, and in his ability to make it bloom behind the shabby brownstone front of a boarding house in West Fifty-fourth street.

He tells a pretty story of how Benjamin Benvenuto Reni, a newspaper artist with a painter's ambitions, and his bride, Jennie Raftery, who writes verses for children, determine to find Raphael's lost sonnets to his Margarita. They find them and lose them, and find them again. There is a genuine feeling for beautiful things in this book which lifts it from the level of most romantic stories that find their way into print nowadays. Our realists, on the whole, are a lot better at their job than our romanticists.

Italy Seen by a Journalist

A Review by

ALLEN W. PORTERFIELD.

IMMORTAL ITALY. By Edgar Ansel Mowrer. D. Appleton & Co.

LESS than a century ago Lorraine in France and Niebuhr in Germany, the one a poet of undying fame the other a historian of world renown, taunted Italy with being the land of the dead. In 1922 the staff correspondent of a Chicago newspaper assembles the facts and publishes them under the caption of "Immortal Italy." It is not a case of greater political astuteness on the part of an American journalist who sold what he saw to a purveyor of news in the biggest town on Lake Michigan. It is merely proof that you never can tell.

Who could have foreseen, sixty years ago, that the "Italy" of free cities and Austrian provinces, fighting duchies and pin-headed dukes, an obstinate church and an oppressed people, beggars, bigots and bishops could be hammered into the united Italy that went through the trial by fire at Caporetto and then drowned the Austrians on the Piave in June, 1918? No one; but a keen observer—which is the nearest synonym I know for a good newspaper man—can write the history of it all. And having done this, he is virtually forced to work the adjective "immortal" into the title of his studies.

Mr. Mowrer loves Italy and therefore he chastens her. His catalogue of the weaknesses of the Italian

people is truly pompous; it takes up nearly one-fifth of the book. He has correlated and correlated his data with inimitable conciseness. Temptations to irrelevancies he has avoided. He tells, by way of illustrating the Italian lack of business conscience, the story of the repudiation, only the other day, of the "several million dollar contract with a Philadelphia coal company," and then appends the statement, in a submerged foot note, that "since the war, strict honesty in international commerce has become rarer in all countries." It is a true observation but impertinent to a book on Italy's immortality. Hence the foot-note.

Throughout Mr. Mowrer writes with the compression of a seasoned journalist who has oft been obliged to tell a story in one column which he could easily have expanded into a magazine article, or defended a principle in the poor space of the editorial page which he could have elaborated into a university thesis. What effect H. G. Wells may have on the writing of history cannot at present be determined. But it should be written by men of newspaper experience. Mr. Thayer's "Cavour," for example, is so wordy, digressive, distended.

The outstanding lesson of this volume is the value of a few level heads. At any time before the '70s of the nineteenth century Italy's case looked hopeless. Politics, poverty and passion stalked abroad like the three Furies of Greek mythology by day and the Witches of Shakespearean drama by night. Each province or city was fighting for its own hegemony, feeling ran high, the rascals were numerous.

Yet 15,000 has been given as the total number of those who died in battle for Italian unity and independence. The losses in our own civil war were 660,000. And the entire campaign was managed by four men: Its outer visage was Victor Emmanuel II., its brain was Cavour, its right arm was Garibaldi, its soul was Mazzini, from whose faith, said Swinburne, Italy "caught the faith to save." That, it would seem, was a campaign of really Tayloresque efficiency, particularly for a nation that is a half century behind in plumbing, finds it difficult to execute speed laws, and lives on macaroni where other nations consume the juicy cuts of corn feed beves.

On page 195, exactly midway, we reach May 23, 1915, the day on which Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary. From then on the story, never slow-going, picks up like a roadster that has just emerged from the crowd on the speedway. Mr. Mowrer gives a detailed account of Italy's part in the war, and charges the Caporetto debacle largely to the rivalry between Gens. Cadorna and Capello. He rehearses the peace conference and dissects the personalities of Sonnino and Orlando with the respect for minutiae that smacks redolently of the seasoned psycho-analyst. Of President Wilson's Fiume message he says it was "an inconsistency, an insult and a mistake." He devotes a luscious chapter to "Fiume: a Mediaeval Medley," and contends that "the raid of D'Annunzio and Major Reina of the Second Grenadiers was a revolt of the best elements in Italy against the bullying of Wilson and the secret hostility of the Allies." He presents a moving picture of the

The Ulenspiegel of De Coster

An Appreciation by

E. DE CARTIER DE MARCHIENNE,

Belgian Ambassador to the United States.

THE LEGEND OF ULENSPIEGEL AND LAMME GOLDZAK. By Charles De Coster. Translated by F. M. Atkinson. Doubleday, Page & Co.

IT is indeed with the greatest pleasure that I have read Mr. Atkinson's sympathetic translation of De Coster's "Legend of Ulenspiegel," for which the English speaking world will owe him a debt of gratitude. This legend may be considered one of the greatest Belgian Epics. Its "dramatis personae" are cast as characters of the sixteenth century, but in reality it is the story of many centuries of suffering which our liberty loving people were compelled to endure in their struggles to maintain their rights against their Princes. "Ulenspiegel" is the story of the indomitable resistance of the Belgian people against all efforts to encroach upon their hard won communal prerogatives.

No doubt the actions and expressions of De Coster's characters are sometimes marked by a certain disregard for modern conventions and trend of thought—but let us remember that such also was the case in the works of Shakespeare and of

other authors of the Elizabethan Age. This same disregard can also be observed in some of the masterpieces of our Flemish painters of that period. Mirth, even very boisterous mirth, helped our ancestors, as it did their children's grandchildren in 1914 to keep their spirits up, in times of oppression; but through all this merriment runs a deep and melancholy vein of poetry to which give tongue and wings the chimes of our dear old carillons which not only inspired Longfellow but were also so charmingly depicted by Mr. William Gorham Rice. These Belgians of old laughed loud and made merry, but when the occasion arose they knew how to stand firm for their principles. Recent events seem to show that the old spirit has not quite died out yet.

I most heartily congratulate Mr. Atkinson on the possession of a talent which has enabled him to embody the original spirit of the author into the English version, and I wish to express my great pleasure in knowing that the thoughts and sentiments so well expressed by De Coster may now be appreciated by American readers in the beautiful form the writer has given them in his own language.

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