

The World of Letters As Others See It



Live Boys in Fiction.

“ARE there any other live boys in fiction besides Huck Finn?” inquires “C. G.” in his article published last Saturday. Surely Mr. Hugh Walpole’s Jeremy deserves to rank as a live boy; so does Jules Renard’s Poil de Carotte. A Dutch author, Jac van Looy, who is also a distinguished painter, has written a book about a boy, Jaapje, which is a real gem of its kind (writes a correspondent), but which, so far as I know, has not been translated. Some of the passages, such as that describing Jaapje’s method of removing his warts, and another giving an account of Jaapje’s revenge on his master for disappointing him of the rabbit he had promised him, are as good as anything in “Huckleberry Finn.” One could much extend the list, but at least, even in a brief count, it should surely contain Stalky and his companions.—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

More Live Boys in Fiction.

BOOTH TARKINGTON’S Penrod, his friend Sam and their colored contemporaries Herman and Verman, should certainly be included (writes a correspondent) in any list of “live” boys in fiction. As the subject of “C. G.’s” article has come under discussion, may one criticize another statement of his—that he is tempted to suspect women of the authorship of the sentimental school tales he condemns? Now is this fair? Are not men at least equal offenders? Thomas Hughes began it in “Tom Brown’s School-days,” which is packed with sentiment and even includes, in the person of George Arthur, the blue eyes, golden curls and ready blush of “C. G.’s” abhorrence. Vachell’s “The Hill” deals entirely with the romantic side of schoolboy friendship; so in a slighter degree does E. F. Benson’s “David Blaise.” The fact is a school story that lacks sentiment lacks truth. Boys are generally more sentimental, though less articulate, than their sisters. Sentiment in schoolboys can be naturally described. It is the false sentiment stopped over them that renders a book nauseous.—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

Chinese Verse.

CAN poetry be translated from one language to another? This is a question which is constantly asked, but it seldom receives the only kind of reply that is convincing, namely, a sustained example of successful accomplishment. As I am not a Chinese scholar it is impossible for me to say how far Mrs. Florence Ayscough’s and Miss Amy Lowell’s partnership has achieved success, but I imagine it comes very near it. In “Fir-Flower Tablets” what seems to be a very successful collaboration has been systematically carried out. Mrs. Ayscough, who knows Chinese backward, has furnished Miss Lowell with elaborate literal translations of Chinese poetry, and Miss Lowell, studying with her friend fine shades of meaning involved in Chinese accents or inflections, has reproduced in English what the two together decided to be the nearest attainable rendering of the original poetic idea.—*From the Saturday Review.*

Shelley’s Elopement.

SHELLEY eloped with Mary Godwin, then but a girl of sixteen, on July 28, 1814. She left her father’s shop in Skinner street, Holborn, and a few steps brought her to the corner of Hatton Garden, where Shelley was waiting with a post-chaise. Skinner street was completely destroyed in order to

erect Holborn Viaduct, and with it Godwin’s shop, which was largely associated with Shelley. Shelley and Mary returned to London on September 13, 1814, and lodged at 56 Margaret street, Cavendish Square. They then occupied lodgings in various houses during that winter of poverty in London. On March 29, 1816, Shelley wrote from 26 Marchmont street, Russell Square. It was a lodging house (and is still standing), which was patronized on more than one occasion by Shelley, and that address is mentioned in his will.—*From “Shelley in London.” By Roger Ingpen in the English Bookman.*

Shelley First Editions.

NO first edition of Shelley, or, indeed, of any other author of his period, possesses so much romantic interest as “Original Poetry: By Victor and Casire.” Worthing, 1810. The very existence of this book was unknown, or rather forgotten, until it was discovered by Dr. Garnett and announced in *Macmillan’s Magazine* of June, 1860. But thirty-eight years elapsed before a copy of the book itself came to light, and of this Dr. Garnett edited a reprint for Mr. John Lane in 1898. According to the London publisher, Stockdale, 1,480 copies of the “Original Poetry” were printed, and almost the whole of the impression appears to have been destroyed. Five years later the discovery of a second copy was announced in the *Times* (September 28, 1903), and in October, 1903, it fetched £600 at Sotheby’s. The *Book Monthly* of December, 1903, announced the discovery of a third copy, with an inscription showing that it was given by Shelley to an Eton schoolfellow; and so far, apparently, no other copy has come to light.—*From the London Times.*

Wells’s ‘Kips.’

IT seems possible (writes a correspondent) that I have discovered, purely by chance, where Mr. H. G. Wells obtained the name given to the best known of his creations. Looking through the list of bygone players appended to Lord Harris’s “History of Kent County Cricket,” I noticed the following entry: “Kips of Eltham played for Kent vs. England in the Artillery Ground, London, 1744. James Love, in ‘Cricket: An Heroic Poem,’ published 1774, says: ‘Kips is remarkable for handing the Ball at the Wicket and knocking up the Stumps instantly if the Batsman is not extremely cautious.’” Now, Joseph Wells, the novelist’s father, was also a Kent county player (he once took four successive wickets for his county with four successive balls). He lived at Bromley, quite close to Eltham, the birthplace of Kips, and was for many years professional coach to the West Kent Club, whose headquarters at Chislehurst are also close to Eltham. Thus the names of Kips was almost certainly known to Wells *per se* and may have cropped up occasionally in his conversation and imprinted itself on the brain of Wells *fil.*—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

Cyrano: Real and Legendary.

EVERY modern writer who attacks the subject of Cyrano de Bergerac is met at once by a difficulty which causes him some perplexity. There is a real Cyrano, one of the most brilliant and fantastically imaginative authors of the middle seventeenth century; and there is a legendary Cyrano created by Edmond Rostand. To

destroy the legendary Cyrano is to destroy the most patent source of public interest in him as a romantic figure. To accept the legend to ignore the destructive and erudite criticisms on Rostand’s Cyrano as a legendary figure and to graft upon this fabulous creation the works of the real Cyrano is to do something grotesquely false, to betray his confidence that posterity would comprehend his efforts to discover truth or to create beauty.—*From the London Times.*

Mocha Dick.

MOBY DICK, the hugest character in American fiction, had his original in a whale which Melville’s biographer does not even mention but which must have been known to Moby Dick’s. The name of the creature, according to the principal authority, was Mocha Dick, and he was first seen and attacked near the island of Mocha about 1810. For years he resisted capture. “Numerous boats are known to have been shattered by his immense flukes,” wrote J. N. Reynolds a dozen years before “Moby Dick” was published, “or ground to pieces in the crash of his powerful jaws; and on one occasion it is said that he came off victorious from a conflict with the crews of three English whalers, striking fiercely at the last of the retreating boats at the moment it was rising from the water in its hoist up to the ship’s davits. . . . From the period of Dick’s first appearance his celebrity continued to increase until his name seemed naturally to mingle with the salutations which whalers were in the habit of exchanging in their encounters upon the broad Pacific, the customary interrogatories almost always closing with ‘Any news from Mocha Dick?’”—*From the Nation.*

Again Dumas-Maquet.

M. SIMON tells some remarkable stories of how the Dumas-Maquet collaboration worked. In 1849 “Le Vicomte de Bragelonne” was appearing serially in the *Siecle*. Dumas was then living at St. Germain, and one night his copy failed to arrive. Maquet, whose share in the work was known to the editor, was in Paris, and on receipt of an urgent message arrived at the newspaper office. Installed in the editor’s room, and with a cup of bouillon and a glass of Bordeaux provided by way of refreshment, he rewrote the missing chapters and the paper was able to get to press at the usual time. Next day Dumas’s missing manuscript arrived, having been picked up on the St. Germain road. According to a letter from the *Siecle* editor, quoted by M. Simon, it “did not differ by more than thirty words” from the manuscript of Maquet!—*From the Manchester Guardian.*

Posthumous Books.

I HAVE no fixed opinions as to the question now being debated as to whether R. L. Stevenson’s “Monmouth” should be printed or not, but the world has long decided that an author’s opinions as to whether a book he leaves behind him should be destroyed or no should be disregarded. The leading case on the subject is of course the “Aeneid,” which Virgil left instructions to burn. If his orders had been carried out it is no exaggeration to say the whole course of Western literature would have taken a different form from its present one. An author may, if he so desires, burn his own work, but no one else has any right to impose

his personal judgment on posterity without an opportunity for revision. As an example of juvenilia which the author did not reprint in his life time but for which all lovers of literature are grateful, I always think of the volume of extracts from William Morris’s unfinished poems. Of course when the author has used his early unprinted work as material for a later one the interest is of a different kind.—*From the Saturday Review.*

Amenities of British Journalism.

HOW amazingly sensitive our authors are! The other day I reviewed with qualified praise Mr. Arnold Bennett’s novel, “Mr. Prohack.” The author has doubtless been surfeited elsewhere by pots of honey, jars of treacle. I told the truth. Now a “d—d good natured friend” calls my attention to a line in a letter from Mr. Bennett to the *New Statesman*, which I should not otherwise have seen, in which Mr. Bennett refers to the Atlantic Ocean as “as flat as a page by C. K. S. and as beautiful as a poem by Hodgson.” I do not think Mr. Bennett can appreciate a beautiful poem any more than he can this page, but how rude and crude he is. One famous woman novelist, who had made the “hero” of one of her books a successful novelist of appallingly crude manners, told me she had Arnold Bennett in her mind.—*By Clement K. Shorter in the London Sphere.*

English Novels in America.

A NOVEL by W. J. Locke, for example, generally has a first printing in America of 50,000 copies. Mr. Joseph Conrad’s publishers tell me that at least 40,000 people in the United States will buy any new novel from his hand. We read Galsworthy largely, and a book by H. G. Wells is an event in the lives of our reading public. And since the publication of “The Old Wives’ Tale” almost the same thing may be said of Arnold Bennett. From “Nocturne” on Mr. Frank Swinnerton has been able to sell 20,000 to 30,000 copies of any of his novels in America, and the popularity of Mr. Leonard Merrick’s works in the new edition with the prefaces can be attested by his publishers. I believe I remember seeing the eighteenth printing of “Conrad in Quest of His Youth.”—*From “English Authors and American Readers.” By Henry James Forman in John o’ London’s Weekly.*

American Novels in England.

WHICH American authors enjoy the same or at least a proportionate popularity in England? Except for a certain number of short stories and Western stories occasionally published in magazines there is virtually no such thing as serialization for an American author in England. As to books, Jack London had a modicum of popularity here owing to his treatment of the more brutal sides of life. And owing to the excitement of the war, when short, pithy, humorous tales were much in demand by a public with naturally distracted attention, O. Henry began to enjoy a certain vogue. A few, very few people, mostly critics and writers, sometimes mention Sherwood Anderson and James Branch Cabell. But these writers I am bound to admit are not generally accepted as yet even in America. The fact remains that “Main Street,” a book of genuine merit, widely popular in America, a highly interesting realistic picture of American provincial life, could achieve nothing more than a success of esteem in Eng-

land. And so we come back to the question, Why?—*From “English Authors and American Readers.” By Henry James Forman in John o’ London’s Weekly.*

Bohemia: Old and New.

I USE the term “romantic Bohemia” to distinguish the various Latin quarters of to-day from those of former ages; from the society of old Grub Street, of Villon, or of “Le Neveu de Rameau.” These older Bohemias were not excessively self-conscious. They were ragged, but not deliberately ragged, and irregular in their habits more from necessity than choice. They followed a manner instead of a theory of life. But another distinction is more fundamental; this old Bohemia was only a temporary expedient. As Murger himself said, “It is a stage of artistic life: it is the preface to the Academy, the poorhouse, or the morgue.” The new Bohemia, on the contrary, is an end and not a means; it is an esoteric cult, like Theosophy or New Thought, to which a man may adhere throughout his life.—*From the Freeman.*

The Expansion of Bohemia.

HOWEVER, if it has not changed, romantic Bohemia has most certainly expanded. One observes that the Bohemians of Murger’s romance are French without exception; to-day they would belong to all nations and every color. Murger thought Bohemia could exist only in Paris. It has now extended to New York, London and Berlin, with branch offices in Marseilles and Chicago. It possesses its own summer resorts in the Forest of Fontainebleau and in the Hudson Valley. It has its own clubs, restaurants, and magazines; its own theaters; its own stores and trades people; and its Bohemian landlords (who revert not seldom to the ridiculous type of M. Benoit). It has even its accredited Mæcenases, not less naive than Carolus Barbe-muche. Bohemia is a vast enterprise which could be capitalized at several millions. Starting as a revolt against the bourgeoisie, it has become as much the property of the bourgeoisie as any other business venture.—*From the Freeman.*

Famous Names of English Fiction.

PICKWICK, Tom Jones, Becky Sharp—in this order does Mr. Harold Brighouse (in Saturday’s *Manchester Guardian*) range the three most famous names of English fiction. I cannot think (a correspondent writes) that many people will agree with him. If “famous” in this connection means, as of course it must mean, known to the greatest multitude, then none of Mr. Brighouse’s names has a place in the first three. The one universally known name in English fiction is that of Robinson Crusoe. Oliver Twist is infinitely more famous than Mr. Pickwick; Sam Weller and Bill Sikes also are both far more celebrated. Neither Tom Jones nor Becky Sharp is qualified for a place even in the ten. Thackeray’s public has always been comparatively small while Fielding, for all his absolute Englishness and his fame among the critics, has neither been vastly read like Dickens and Scott, nor has he with or without being read, created a character who has become a common possession. This latter, of course, is the rarest of all literary achievements. I believe, for instance, that during the last half century only one English writer has accomplished it—the creator of Sherlock Holmes.—*From the Manchester Guardian.*