The World of Letters As Others See It

The Cave Man in Fiction.

SOME one may say that the cave man has been popular for many years; that Jack London and the multitude of red blooded Western tales prove it. That is different. The cave man of light fiction to-day is no sea wolf. Usually he is very civilized and sophisticated and moves in conventional society. Moreover, the earlier cave man treated his own sex rough, but was gentle as a child when it came to women. At least, that was the Western tradition, both in life and in fiction—from Bret Harte to Bill Hart. If he used cave man tactics with his women folk, that is, he was not a hero.—*From "Treat 'Em Rough." By Katherine Fullerton Gerould in Harper's Magazine.*

* * *

Dog and Horse Stories.

ALL Americans, and some Englishmen, are familiar with Alfred Ollivant's masterpiece, "Bob, Son of Battle," the best dog story I ever read. Although written by an Englishman and for Englishmen, it attracted little attention in the land of its birth, while selling by the hundred thousand in America. I have never met an American book lover who had not read it, but the average Briton looks blank when you mention it, even if you remember to call it by its English title, "Owd Bob." Mr. Ollivant has written many books since 1898, but the one that comes the nearest to "Bob" is not nearly so well known here as it deserves to be. This is "Boy Woodburn," the story of a race horse. Is it possible that John Masefield took a hint from this for "Right Royal"? He follows Mr. Ollivant in printing a map of the course. Alfred Ollivant is certainly more interested in men and women than in animals, and, unlike some novelists, knows the distinction; but his best two books are canine and equine.—*By William Lyons Phelps in Scribner's Magazine.*

* * *

Gilbert Frankau.

THE clever son of a clever mother—and yet not too clever. Frankau is a slim young man in the thirties, with a small mustache and a low pitched voice, fond of horses and the open air life, in obvious good condition, gifted with the power to tell stories and determined fully to exploit his gift. He does not talk about genius. He does not think much about inspiration. But every morning he begins to work at 10 o'clock (as a banker gets to work) in the manner of Anthony Trollope and Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins, and works hard for a definite number of hours each day.—*From "Little Portraits." By Sidney Dark in John o' London's Weekly.*

* * *

Frank Swinnerton.

IF Frank Swinnerton were not a successful novelist, with comfortably large sales in America, he could earn an excellent living as a mimic. He has an eerie gift for imitating other people's voices, his *chef d'œuvre* in this particular being his imitation of Arnold Bennett. Frank Swinnerton is fair and he wears a little red beard. I do not think that his beard is sufficiently emphatic to justify small boys calling "Beaver" when they meet him. The beard is confined to the chin in the manner of the third Napoleon. Swinnerton has a gentle voice and something like a genius for friendship, both Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells being numbered among his intimates.—*From "Little Portraits." By Sidney Dark in John o' London's Weekly.*

* * *

John Galsworthy.

JOHN GALSWORTHY looks like a family lawyer or a High Court Judge. He is clean shaven, urbane, genial, but certainly not expansive. His voice is low, and it is difficult to believe that he could ever be violent or provocative or even excited. He may find many things in life that are cruel and unjust, but he declines to be angry about it. There is an entire absence of "side" (I know no polite term as expressive as this vulgarism) about John Galsworthy. He is not effusive, but he is modest and gently kindly. He is precise is his dress, and neatness characterizes his appearance as well as his writing. I imagine that few people have ever called Mr. Galsworthy Jack!—*From "Little Portraits." By Sidney Dark in John o' London's Weekly.*

* * *

St. John Ervine.

WHEN I first knew St. John Ervine he was an extremely self-possessed, fair complexioned young man, with what young men call "advanced opinions," earning his living in a city office and writing in his spare time for periodicals with high ambitions and small circulations. He is an Ulsterman with few Belfast characteristics, though he vehemently determined not to allow Mr. de Valera to deny him the name of Irishman. Early in the war he left London to manage the Abbey Theater in Dublin, and his Ulster plays, "John Ferguson," "Jane Clegg" and "Mixed Marriage," have given him a distinguished position among living dramatists. Besides being a dramatist he is a dramatic critic, and he pontificates with a zest in the *Observer* (essentially, by the way, the organ of pontification). He fought in France as a Lieutenant in the Dublin Fusiliers and was unlucky enough to lose a leg.—*From "Little Portraits." By Sidney Dark in John o' London's Weekly.*

* * *

Another Voice on "This Freedom."

NOW the thesis of "This Freedom" is simply that a woman who continues her work in a bank perforce neglects her children, allows them to become little disbelievers, leads them to or lets them become forgers, victims of abortion and suicides, and generally smashes up the home. Lacking the slightest respect for Mr. Hutchinson as a creative artist, we are compelled to go directly to this thesis and to state it in these terms. Inasmuch as his characters simply do not live, he cannot pretend that he is describing their particular case; he is, and his somewhat sanctimonious air makes it obvious, describing the general case: Everywoman in Everybank. And in effect Mr. Hutchinson knows it—is well aware that he is making a Bold Stand against current morals and a Grave Plea for the morality of a Better Day.—*From the Dial.*

* * *

A Gentleman's Privileges.

WE have all been brought up on the axiom that whatever a woman does a gentleman may retaliate only verbally. Apparently the convention is changing. At least, there is documentary evidence now to prove that, according to standards prevailing in the magazines, a man may retaliate physically in one particular case. If she bites, that is. She may still, I suppose, throw a plate at him, or threaten him with a pistol, and his only reply must be a sorrowful word of reproach. But if she bites he may hit her. Whether this has become to any extent a convention in life I do not know. We will hope that, in life, ladies who are beautiful as the dawn and wear clothes to match their beauty, whose lives have been "sheltered" and whose mammas are the mold of form, do not bite, even when they are irritated by their husbands. The extraordinary thing is that they should be biting in contemporary fiction. In all Kipling I recall only one lady who bit her husband, and she was a native of Kafiristan, wedded amid much conch blowing, against her will.—*From "Treat 'Em Rough. By Katherine Fullerton Gerould in Harper's Magazine.*

* * *

Walter Scott, Poor Speller.

ONE of the earliest publications of "The Wizard of the North," and the first to bear his name, was a translation of Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen of the Iron Hand." It was as "Walter Scott, Esq., Advocate, Edinburgh," that in February, 1799, he made his bow to the literary public. My copy of the thin octavo is inscribed on the title page, "From the Translateer." One who is charitably inclined might account for the "e" in the ultimate syllable as a reversion to the old French, from which we derive the word, although it is well known that Scott in his early days was somewhat addicted to poor spelling. Bell, the publisher, paid the young writer twenty-five pounds for the copyright.—*From "A Book Hunter's Garner." By William Harris Arnold in the Century.*

* * *

Authors' Appetites.

CHARLES READE'S meals at the Garrick Club were extraordinary. "A cauliflower flanked by a jug of cream, as first course, and a great salad to follow, washed down by curious drinks of the shandygaff order. He would drink coffee associated with sweets, black puddings and toasted cheese, to the wonder of any spectators." The world and an overcoat, it is said, could hardly contain the glory of Victor Hugo's vast frame. And the frontal development of the author of "Les Miserables" was wholly deserved, for his plate was a conglomeration of veal cutlets, lima beans and oil, roast beef and tomato sauce, omelets, milk and vinegar, mustard and cheese, which he swallowed rapidly and in immense quantities, washing down the whole with huge drafts of coffee. The author of "The Three Musketeers" was almost himself equal in bulk to three men. He has been described as a "hogshead." He had an amazing capacity for work despite his bulk, but it required a vast amount of fuel to keep the engine going, and he would eat three beefsteaks where any other man of good appetite would eat one.—*From "Food of the Famous" in John o' London's Weekly.*

* * *

Rebecca West on Edith Wharton.

THE real misfortune of Mrs. Wharton's uprising is that it happened at a time when fastidious spirits of the kind to which she markedly belonged were obsessed by a particular literary method and in a place where every day revealed situations which were bound to attract an eager intelligence of the kind she undoubtedly possessed but which could not be appropriately treated by that favored method. The method was that of William Dean Howells and Henry James. The situations were those arising out of the establishment of the American plutocracy; and they were large, bold situations, blatancies in a marble setting, that could not be dealt with by the method that in Mr. Howells's hands was adjusted to the nice balancing of integrities in a little town, and in Mr. James's to the æsthetic consideration of conduct in a society where the gross is simply put out of mind. The moral problem in "The Glimpses of the Moon" is as coarse as one can imagine anything self-consciously concerned with morality possibly being. Nick and Susy are two penniless persons of charm who find it easy to pick up a good living by sponging on their millionaire friends. They fall in love and marry, and then their way of living suddenly fails them, for it involves them in actions which people in love cannot bear to see each other performing. They sulk over it. They separate. Each meditates divorce and a mercenary marriage.—*From the New Statesman.*

* * *

"Main Street" and "Babbitt."

MR. HUGH WALPOLE sailed the other day for America, where he is to lecture the Americans, as far as they will let him, on living English novelists. Before he sailed, by the same ship as it happened as Sir Harry Lauder, he wrote an introduction for "Babbitt," the coming novel of Mr. Sinclair Lewis of "Main Street" fame. He thinks that "Babbitt" is a better book than "Main Street," and Mr. H. L. Mencken, the American critic, who has been in London, agrees with him. If that be so some of us may be able to read it, and really "Main Street" was hard reading for a mere Briton.—*From the London Sphere.*

* * *

Marriage as an "Ad."

PUBLISHERS' travelers know how useful it is for an author of a new book to be in the papers about the time it appears. The ex-Kaiser may not have thought of that, but his decision to marry again is a handy advertisement for his literary wares. It may help them to that "best seller" stage desired by all writers, professional or amateur—a stage which is now a confirmed habit with Miss Ethel M. Dell. Why, her latest novel with the Royal Stuart title, "Charles Rex," has already sold 50,000 copies, and half the "bobbed" young ladies of England are asking for it at the libraries.—*From the London Sphere.*

Chronicle and Comment

Continued from Preceding Page.

former whom he so effectively lashes; that he is unwillingly occasionally to pause, discard passionate utterance and put himself for a moment in the position of the other fellow. We have had plenty of excitement. What the Republic needs now is amiability; not irritability. But that is straying from the province of the book section. Whether you agree with him or not, Mencken can write.