

A HALF HOUR WITH THE WRITERS.

De Maupassant, a Rare Artist

BY ROBERT W. RITCHIE

GUY DE MAUPASSANT is being revived. A translated edition of his complete works has appeared in London and another complete edition is for the first time on the American market. Lovers of literature outside of France seem to have just awakened to the fact that in that peculiar genius who died in a madhouse ten years ago there abided a wonderful endowment of true artistic genius.

De Maupassant is the peer in the short story. There has never been a master of this difficult art such as he. Remarkable it is that with the sudden phenomenal jump into popularity which this form of literary expression has made during the last fifteen years such a writer as De Maupassant should have been known in this country at least, only by the unfortunate pirated yellow back penny catchers which flaunt their highly colored covers of erotic design from the news stands. The worst of his writings only have passed current in this country and those of the sort which have difficulty in passing through the mails.

But De Maupassant deserves a higher niche than that awarded him by readers of this sort of stuff. Because the author was himself so frankly an animal and hesitated not to mirror his own self in some of his stories his works have all come under the significant condemnation of being "French novels"—a class tabooed, and rightly so, by the honest reader. Aside from these lapses into the extreme, however, De Maupassant has written some stories which should be read by every one who appreciates delicacy of conception and finish of technique. They are perfection in the short story.

In an essay upon "The Tale" De Maupassant enunciates the fundamentals of his art—the art of a teller of real stories of real life. He says:

"The storyteller who pretends to give an exact image of life must avoid with care all the enchantment of incidents which would appear unusual. His aim is not to tell us a story to amuse us or to make us sad, but to force us to think, to understand the profound and hidden meaning of everyday occurrences. It is a personal view of the world which he endeavors to communicate to us by reproducing it in his book."

A personal view of the world, an insight into the life of every day—these, then, are the bases of De Maupassant's tales. By temperament, by the effects of environment, by the early teachings of Flaubert he was pre-eminently a realist. He was not of the Zola naturalistic school, which does not fail to make note of the fact that a green and gray fly walked over the butter on the breakfast table. Care for multitudinous details did not intrude upon his keen sense of the real. Not the mass of irrelevant details meaning nothing nor the useless meanderings of the naturalists were De Maupassant's, but only the outward, symmetrical, of inward impulses; not a representation of life, but life itself.

De Maupassant's conception of life as reflected in his tales is probably the most thoroughly Gallic of any in French literature. Life to him is but the futile battle against the mysterious forces of the eternal fatalities—not a battle, maybe, but a blind groping. How pitifully insignificant are human joys, sorrows, vanities, follies—what count they? Instinct alone rules the actions of mankind. There is no soul. There is no heart. Love is but the impulse which draws together two healthy animals. Death is ever at the elbow and that is the end. Life is ridiculous.

Pessimism this is to be sure. A not very pleasant or healthy inspiration. But it is not the pessimism which led the philosopher to commit suicide because life was worthless. It is not a scholarly pessimism nor yet the lyric variety of the Byronic school. If the term may be used it may be stated that De Maupassant's was a passive pessimism—the kind which merely shrugs its shoulders and turns to the apathetic glass. De Maupassant was too much the man and too little the philosopher to be of a pugnacious bitterness.

This trend of thought of the French story writer produces in his tales a charm which is felt, but which baffles definition. All of his stories reflect a commonplace existence; into these humdrum lives the author reads the pitiless workings of fate which makes a mockery of all efforts. The catastrophe has none of the melodramatic clash and roar of the romanticists; it is not precipitated by the fall of duty before temptation. The tragic element is rather reflected by a wholly physical emotion of utter helplessness before the hidden terror of unseen powers. It is subdued, though poignant. It induces in the reader an indefinable, sweet melancholy.

The characters of De Maupassant's stories are, for the most part, simple unlovely bourgeois, government clerks or soldiers. He pictures their lives truly; he reflects their emotions. But in all of his stories the writer remains aloof from his characters. There is no injection of a part of himself into them. He maintains a cold, sometimes a sneering distance. By no words of his are any sympathies aroused for the people of his pen. He does not make life, but simply reflects it.

Of a necessity the style of De Maupassant cannot be maintained in the translation. For those who cannot read the original there is a loss, for his per-

fection of vocabulary cannot be reproduced in the English. There is a rigid simplicity about all of his diction which comports admirably with the Boeotian style of his tales. The simplicity of his style is the tragedy more manifest. The tale is told directly, impersonally. There are no digressions, very little descriptions other than those of physical manifestations and nothing like a moral can be read either in or between the lines.

As long as the great study of life remains the mainspring of literature, De Maupassant's works will live. Should the vogue of the short story pass away De Maupassant's tales must mark the high water of that movement in the nineteenth century.

Novel Without Even an Excuse

REALLY, it is sometimes difficult to take some of these novels seriously. One catches himself saying: "Does the author actually mean that I should accept this or that sentiment or situation as being 'worth while'?" Thus, trusting that better is to come and dutifully following the story through to the end in the hope of catching something real good, the reader suddenly turns, the last page and lo! it was not that. "The Spirit of the Service," by Edith Elmer Wood, whose picture, decollete, adorns this page.

If one is thoughtful and reads with any degree of appreciation he must necessarily ask himself what the theme of the book is. What excuse had the author for writing it? How well or how ill did she succeed in developing the central idea of the story? The theme of "The Spirit of the Service" might be the making of a hero; it might be what I (the author) think of life in the navy; it might be a brief review of the navy in the Spanish War. Each of these three ideas is partially developed in the story, but none of them are brought to a very definite conclusion.

We learn from the literary reviewer's notices which accompanied the publication of the novel in question that Mrs. Edith Elmer Wood, decollete, is the wife of a naval officer, and is therefore especially well qualified to give a picture of life in that branch of a service. But it is not the role of a stenographer can write a good story about a marble quarry. Neither does it follow that a naval officer's wife can write a good story of the navy.

Mrs. Wood follows the fortunes of a certain Captain Cartwright from the position of commandant at a navy yard up to the position of hero of a devoted nation. At first blush he falls afoul of a low-browed political boss; the boss sets in agitation several strong centers in Washington and the captain finds himself before a court of inquiry. But the captain is a Democrat and he escapes.

At this juncture the love element becomes timely and Sue and Barbara are introduced. Sue is big, wholesome and Californian; Barbara is wizened, pessimistic and New Englandish—of course folks, the one to the other. The girls sit up in bed in their robes de nuit and philosophize upon certain weighty matters.

"Do you believe in divorced people marrying?" exclaimed Sue, turning to Barbara.

"I'm a Catholic," said the girl quietly.

"Of course I know your church doesn't allow it, but—"

What settles it for me. "Oh, what nonsense!" groaned Sue. "You've got a brain of your own, haven't you?"

"But Barbara wisely refused to be lured into controversy."

And the poor fellow who has been divorced and about whom this discussion is waged hears all this too—from the hallway.

Captain Cartwright has a brood of a time of it getting himself into line for the command of a ship when war breaks out. Finally he is dispatched to Dewey's fleet in China waters. Then follows a description of the battle of Manila Bay, now old in song and story. Captain Cartwright's ship is the first to return to New York harbor after the war, and the brave commander here is merged into the actual living character of Captain Coghlan of the Raleigh, or maybe Admiral Dewey—it is hard to discern which the author has in mind. The story ends with the captain leaning upon a sword of honor.

(The Macmillan Company, New York; price \$1.25.)

Quiller-Couch in Short Story

IN another part of this page there is an attempt to analyze the work of the peer among short story writers. De Maupassant is an author who is known best for his tales; his novels fall far short of the standard set by his other writings. With Arthur T. Quiller-Couch a different condition obtains. In the novel and the short story alike this versatile young English writer seems equally proficient. Following closely upon the publication of his novel, "Hety Wesley," comes a collection of his short stories under the caption "Two Sides of the Face."

Although Mr. Quiller-Couch seems to have chosen an enigmatic name for his book of tales, there being no apparent applicability of it to any or all of the stories, he has without question produced a collection which deserves high mention. Stories which do not rely upon dialect for their cause of being, stories which are free from the stereotyped historical setting, stories which do not breathe an evident cynicism, such as do so many of the current magazine type—these are Quiller-Couch's.

In this collection of eight short tales the author has presented as many widely differing romantic conceits. The majority of them are stories of mystery, a fact which should at once recommend them to all who have read "Dead Man's Rock," for instance. Two of them are cast in the humorous vein. With one exception they all hark back a hundred years or so to gain the hallowed touch of the past.

One reading these tales cannot fail to find a resemblance to Stevenson in them. It is not a direct copy by any means, but a certain indefinable touch of R. L. S. which is evident. In "Stephen of Steens" there is something of the masterful, devil-may-care spirit of "The Master of Ballantrae" and "The Horror on the Stair" finds almost its exact counterpart in that terrible

"Thrawn Janet" of Stevenson's, even down to the grim, hanging body of the suspected sorceress. In truth Quiller-Couch shows that he, too, loves what the master Scotchman used to fondly designate as "craviers."

The stories are all crisp, clear cut and dramatic. The author has the blessed faculty of getting to the heart of his tale very speedily and never digressing once from the weaving of the plot. There are no overburdened passages telling how this or that character felt at such a crucial moment, how his eyes dropped to the ground and he would have fallen had he not clutched the stair balustrade, etc. On the contrary, the story is told with a brevity which only hints at certain unimportant discussion and leaves the imagination of the reader some play.

(Charles Scribner's Sons, New York; price, \$1.50.)

Kobbe Writes About Players

WHAT indefinable air of mystery is that which closes down around actor folk and hedges them off from the world on the other side of the footlights? From the fluffy matinee girl up to her blandly smiling papa there is everywhere that spirit of curiosity which wishes to know just what the staze people are when they have rubbed off the grease paint. As if the matinee idol lived in a dark castle upon a diet of chewing gum and breakfast food!

About these mysterious creatures whose goings and comings are like the wind which bloweth where it listeth there have been many volumes written to sate the crying demand. The last of these and the one which could be called up-to-date is that of Gustav Kobbe, entitled "Famous Actors and Actresses and Their Homes." Gathered from a popular home periodical into a good binding and illustrated by numerous snap shots of these people of consequence, these sketches by Kobbe make a book of strong fascination to the theater-goers.

Miss Maude Adams is the first of the noble company to be introduced to the reader. The details of her farm at Ronkonkoma, Long Island, are faithfully reproduced. Miss Adams holding center stage in a barnyard and all that. Then follows a pen sketch of the charming Ethel Barrymore and of her uncle, the perfectly correct John Drew. Miss Barrymore's passion for good books and the immaculate John's fondness for the social whirl the author faithfully chronicles.

Then follows Richard Mansfield, that interesting character whose temper has sometimes been called boorish. Sarah Frances Frost, otherwise known as Julia Marlowe; Annie Russell, William Gillette, Virginia Harned, E. H. Sothern and Francis Wilson are each given a chapter of anecdote and sprightly characterization. The book closes with something about the Lambs and the Players' clubs, the two well-known stamping grounds for members of the profession.

Mr. Kobbe's volume will not go a-begging. The present-day interest in things of the stage is so strong that such a closely personal sketch of the various celebrities as Kobbe has written will find ready readers.

(Little, Brown & Co., Boston; illustrated; price \$3.00.)

Powerful Tale of Old Sweden

OUTSIDE of the hallowed circle of Ibsen and Bjornsen there have been practically no Swedish stories written which have found appreciation at the hands of English readers.

There is a Swedish author, Viktor Rydberg, who has for many years stood as the popular story teller of Scandinavia, but whose works have never been translated for English readers. A young Swedish attorney of Washington, D. C., Axel Josephson, has just completed the task of presenting "Singoalla," Rydberg's best novel, in English. It is a great boon to readers of this country that they are thus enabled to read a remarkably fine story.

"Singoalla" is a tale of the thirteenth century. The scene is laid in the heart of the Swedish forests, where baronial customs were not yet far removed from the pagan society of the post-Christian era in Scandinavia. The whole atmosphere of the book is of the wild and savage; it nearly approaches the spirit of a saga or ancient folk song. Its very primitive concept exerts a charm which holds the reader.

The story has to deal with a certain Erlend, the son of a baronial lord, whose manner is in the fastness of Smaland. While yet a youth the hero falls in love with Singoalla, a beautiful gypsy girl, who returns his passion and unites him to herself in marriage according to the mystic ritual of her people. Through the treachery of her own father Singoalla is separated from her boy lover, never to see him again until he has learned to forget her. Then by the mystical influence of the son which is born to her by the Swedish youth she comes to gain again the ascendancy in Erlend's affections, but only by the darkened way of tragedy. The coming of the Black Death forms a terrible climax to the plot and the story ends in the midst of general wreck and ruin.

The chief merit of the book lies in the powerful way in which the author casts his tale into the grim mold of legendary romance. The weird influences of the forest, the storm, the brooding crags of the mountain peogoblins such as are found in the ple the tale with sprites and unseen pagan sagas. There is the eerie spirit of the occult about it which makes the reading fascinating. It seems to be a fairy story meant for grown children.

(The Grafton Press, New York; illustrated; price \$1.25.)

What Is Doing in Book World

JACK LONDON'S sea story, "The Sea Wolf," which began its serial publication in the January Century, promises to bring forth some surprises to those who have followed his literary work. Back in his schooldays the author, who had not then been off the sea for a year, confided to the editor of these columns his ambition to write a story which would smack of the sea. "A story which will make you glad that you are in front of your own fire at home," said the enthusiastic young fellow; "a story which will make the sea roar in your ears when you go to bed."

Few may know, possibly, that London himself was once a member of the crew on a sealing schooner, and therefore knows his "Ghost" at first hand. The writer of this notice would like to take a sly wager with his readers that the Bonin Islands will appear in London's story. He thinks he knows.

Professor Lounsbury has no fears as to the future of the English language. In a vigorous attack in Harper's he answers with refreshing common sense the question, Is English becoming corrupt? He holds that the largeness of the number of words struggling to be brought into use is a sign of the health

of a language, not of its decay, and he recalls many changes attacked in past centuries as excruciating vulgarisms and now counted justly as valuable additions to our tongue. "The final decision," he concludes, "as to propriety of usage rests not with individuals—neither with men of letters, however prominent; nor with scholars, however learned. It is in the hands of the whole body of cultivated users of speech. They have an unerring instinct as to its necessities. They are a great deal wiser than any of their self-constituted advisers, however prominent. Fortunately, too, they have the ability to carry their wishes into effect. They know what they need, and they can neither be persuaded out of it nor bulldozed out of it. If, in spite of clamor, they retain a word or construction it may be generally taken for granted that it supplies a demand which really exists."

Mr. Howells writing in Harper's Weekly advocates a publishers' syndicate, or an authors' union, for the purpose of improving the present unsatisfactory relations between the two. As to the recommended labor union for authors, Mr. Howells outlines a scheme for a schedule of prices for fiction, history, poetry, psychology, travel, sketches, reviews; and penalties, direct and indirect, for rating authors. Of course, the same prices must be paid to poor authors as to good ones when once they are members of the union. As to the publishers, Mr. Howells suggests that they should form a syndicate "pledged among its own members to the payment of such and such prices to authors, and bound to an absolute constancy in one another's behalf."

Robert Grant, in his new novel (the opening chapters of which appear in the current Scribner's), has taken for a hero a sort of "smart" young man, who served to make "A Modern Instance" the best of Mr. Howells' stories. Like Bartley Hubbard, Mr. Grant's hero, Emil Stuart, is a cheap soul, full of fine phrases and a rasal at bottom. Where Mr. Grant is diverging from the plan of his brother novelist is in giving the creature a young wife of type infinitely superior to that of silly Marcia Hubbard. The action upon one another of these two matrimonial factors is enough to make "The Undercurrent" an inviting story, but it is easy to foresee that it is to have a larger interest as a study of American life and of American tendencies.

Beatrice Harraden's recent novel, "Katherine Freshman," is having a marked success in England, and, indeed, in Europe, it having already been translated in French, German, Danish and Norwegian. Its success has probably been due to the undertone of tragedy and pathos that gathers about the figures of Clifford and his son. The book has the right, healthful and courageous outlook on life; and the story holds the interest of the reader because of the mingled humor and anguish that it contains.

A beautifully illustrated and comprehensive article on "French Sculpture of To-Day," by C. Yarnall Abbott, appears in the January issue of the Booklovers' Magazine. Mr. Abbott, who is himself an artist, states that the tendency of French sculpture today is toward "naturalism," exhibiting a decided reaction from the "cold and dreary classicism" that was its dominant note not many years since. Eleven full page reproductions in half-tone illustrate the text and are beautiful and varied examples of the work of leading French sculptors of to-day. There are also full-page portraits of Louis Ernest Barrias and Denys Puech.

Carl Snyder's successful book, "New Conceptions in Science," has been very well received in Germany. Johann Ambrosius Barth, the German publisher, has now opened negotiations with Harper & Bros., who publish the book in America, to translate it into German and issue it at Leipzig. As the firm of Barth has high standing in Germany, and particularly as publishers of authoritative books of science, their appreciation of an American work like Mr. Snyder's is the more notable. The book is also published in England by the Harpers and has passed through several editions there.

Mrs. Deland's satisfying stories, entitled "Dr. Lavender's People," are taking their place among classics of a similar character. The London Athenaeum compares the book with the best English models of its kind and says, "From beginning to end this book forms delightful reading, in the sense that 'Pride and Prejudice' and ' Cranford' are delightful." The thousands of readers who know their Jane Austen and Mrs. Gaskell will be thankful to add the American Mrs. Deland to that charmed circle.

The "Lounge" in the Critic says: "Charles Battell Loomis has been rather annoyed by being accused of the authorship of 'The Literary Guillotine.' He requests me to say that he has had nothing to do with that book and has no knowledge of the guilty parties. Any one familiar with Mr. Loomis' gentle wit knows that there is none of the sharpness of the headman's knife."

In concept the thing is unique. Offending authors are held before a high court of literary equity, where their sins against the ethics of literature are made to rise up and face them. Their foibles are then exploited by testimony of witnesses.

Nothing is so dreary as to find the place for a laugh in a piece of humorous writing all marked out with stars and yet to have no laugh forthcoming. This happens, as said before, in about one half of the sketches comprising "The Literary Guillotine."

(John Lane, New York; price \$1.)

Two volumes, "American Humorous Verse," and "American Prose Humor" are published in octavo size by Herbert S. Stone & Co., Chicago. They are of 250 pages each, and are collections of humorous and witty verses, tales, sketches, etc., composed by the best known American writers. Their chief excellence lies in the fact that in volumes of convenient size there are grouped one or more examples of the work of laugh-producing writers of the last fifty years. The book of prose selections gives sketches of Artemus Ward and Josh Billings, which are fair specimens of the humor of nearly half a century ago, and Mark Twain, Bill Nye, Josiah Allen's Wife, E. W. Townsend, John Kendrick Bangs, Henry M. Blossom Jr., George Ade, F. P. Dunne, Hayden Carruth, George V. Hobart and Billy Baxter show the remarkable versatility of their powers of expression, and whose most appeals to the risibilities of the public of to-day. All the selections are genuinely funny, but perhaps the reader may, according to his sense of humor, question the choice of some of them as being the very best examples of the author's wit. The volume of verse is, on the other hand, much more satisfactory, and here one finds a large number of funny rhymes with pointed wit by such humorists as Burdette, Will Carleton, Holman F. Day, Eugene Field, Joel Chandler Harris, Bret Harte, John Hay, Charles Battell Loomis, James Russell Lowell and many others, who, while not well known, are piquant verse makers.

(Herbert S. Stone & Co., Chicago.)

Ray Stannard Baker, the well-known contributor to Eastern magazines upon scientific subjects of timelessness, has collected nine of his sketches into a volume, which he calls "The Boys' Second Book of Invention," a complete volume to a similar book issued last year. Let no one take the title strictly and feel that boys alone are to read the book, for the romance of science, which is every day becoming more and more an open book, is here told in a manner which will attract the elders as well as the young folks.

The book is sufficiently up-to-date to include an article upon the remarkable element, radium. Another chapter is devoted to Santos Dumont and the problem of aerial navigation; the electrical furnace at Niagara receive attention; Marconi and his wireless telegraphy is the subject of another sketch. The book is the last word upon popular science.

(McClure, Phillips & Co., New York; illustrated; price \$1.50.)

When Brentano's changed the name of Helen Beekman's book from "Dainty Devils" to "Mrs. J. Worthington Woodward" they doubtless did so to placate the ultra-Presbyterian readers. In a little note on the fly page of the rechristened novel Brentano's states that the original title was found to be misleading as expressing the character of the book, hence the change. Certainly the present non-committal title remedies the difficulty: it expresses nothing.

Helen Beekman certainly takes a very gloomy view of New York society, for its feminine half furnishes the "dainty devils" of taboos memory. They smoke opium, drink whiskey straight before breakfast and gamble their sweet lives away according to Helen Beekman. Like some famous painters, the author has mingled dirt with her dull tints to make the pictured dirt more realistic.

The author takes a pretty, naive little country lass and drops her down in the whirlpool of New York's creme de creme, then watches her through a reading glass and records her wanderings in the present book. It cannot be said that the net result is very startling, nor yet cheering. (Brentano's, New York; price \$1.25.)

New Books Received

MRS. J. WORTHINGTON WOODWARD, Helen Beekman; Brentano's, New York; price \$1.25.

SINGOALLA, Axel Josephson, translated from the Swedish of Viktor Rydberg; Grafton Press, New York, illustrated; price \$1.25.

THE WHITE CASTLE OF LOUISIANA, M. R. Allenor; John P. Morton Company, Louisville, Ky.; illustrated; price \$1.25.

THE ROVER BOYS ON LAND AND SEA, Arthur M. Winfield; The Mershon Company, Rahway, N. J.; illustrated; price 60 cents.

WOMAN'S UNFITNESS FOR HIGHER CO-EDUCATION, Ely Van de Warker; The Grafton Press, New York.

FOSTER'S BRIDGE TACTICS, R. F. Foster; Frederick Warne & Co., New York; illustrated; price \$1.25.

CHARACTER, A MORAL TEXT-BOOK, Henry Varnum; Hinds & Noble, New York; price \$1.50.

THE FEDERATION OF RELIGIONS, Rev. Hiram Vrooman, Nunc Licet Pastor, Philadelphia; price 75 cents.

HOW TO MAKE A FLOWER GARDEN, edited and published by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York; profusely illustrated.

STATISTICIAN AND ECONOMIST for December, Louis P. McCarthy, publisher, San Francisco; price 25 cents.