

selves against the inevitable slump in stocks.

There still remain among us many newspapers that illustrate ability, courage, and independence. But they are diminishing in number every year as the syndicated type of journalism becomes more prevalent. Our journalists are losing their individuality and, what is worse, all pride in their own calling. You will hear them declare that the editorial page has no authority, and they are right; for the case cannot be otherwise when the editors themselves have no convictions. When the policy of a paper is dictated partly by the speculative interests of the owner, and partly by the commercial spirit of the counting-room, and when editors have no real belief save that the public is made up entirely of fools, then the day of the newspaper is over, so far as its influence and dignity are concerned. The man in the street knows nothing of how a paper is made, but in the long run he will detect the difference between what is genuine and what is a mere sham. A good illustration of this was given in the last municipal campaign in New York. The newspapers had not

dealt honestly by the public throughout Mayor Low's administration. They had suppressed all criticism of that administration, they had garbled reports, they had written down the opposite of what the editors thought and said in private. They seemed to think that three million people could be fooled by this ostrich-like proceeding. And practically every newspaper in the city supported Mr. Low in this puerile and disingenuous fashion. Nowhere could you read the other side. But when the election came, its result showed plainly that the newspapers had had no influence whatever.

The truth is that this new syndicate journalism is not a profession but a trade. It has neither the dignity, nor the independence, nor the originality which enter into the life-work of a professional man. A hundred schools of journalism cannot give it character under conditions such as I have just described. The earlier journalism was sometimes eccentric and sometimes bigoted; but at least its leaders were their own masters, working single-mindedly for a definite end, and back of it were always those qualities that go into the making of a man.

RECENT AMERICAN ESSAYS

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

The reading of some of the little volumes containing scattered papers, mainly about books, has given us an agreeable sense of being immensely respectable. It was like a week spent attending popular lectures in a college town, varied by an occasional talk with a clever woman. In one of her essays, Miss Agnes Repplier refers to a theory of civilisation "built up largely—and wisely—on suppression." That is the theory of current American belles-lettres, though no one acts on it consciously. On the contrary, there is not one of our writers, especially of our essay-writers, who would admit it himself. He, if anything, is too bold. He drowns over the writings of the next man, but he himself

is awakening, if there are any minds on the premises to wake up. No one understands a criticism based on the qualities that he lacks, because it appeals to a sense that he probably was not born with. What you regard as my spiritual limitations, I will promptly defend as intentional abstinences. I could do that sort of thing if I liked, but I consider it beneath me. Therein lies the essential futility of much book talk in a period of negative literature. Demand vivacity, and the writer thinks you want him to turn a handspring. Refer to style, and he thinks you are craving flashiness, preciousity and epigram, just the things he is trying to avoid. Current criticism is a fracas wherein we pelt each other with

quarter-truths. Indeed, the chief stimulant of literary discussion is the conviction that if a man asserts some neglected fraction of a verity he intends some indignity to the rest of it, so we hit him between the eyes with the aliquot parts. Hence, if we say that we miss colour, it will be inferred that we admire the style whose every sentence wears a red necktie, and if we say "form" we are knocked flat with "substance," and as to complaining of any lack of individuality, there will be no doubt whatever that we mean bumptious and ignorant self-display. Nevertheless, in most of our essays, we do miss all the qualities, whatever their names are, that make books remarkable. Nothing strange in that, as we have had no remarkable essayist since Emerson. But somehow these volumes lack a certain heartiness. Each writer must be so much more human than his book.

They are all journalistic and ephemeral, but with few exceptions very much above the level of current fiction or verse. They are all cheerful and well-mannered, written by persons of considerable reading and good memories, rather too prone, perhaps, to think that intercourse with books of itself confers distinction, a little proud of good schooling and other early advantages, but as pleasant an intellectual company as you will find anywhere in last year's American publishers' catalogue. Miss Repplier's *Compromises*, for instance, exhales an agreeable kind of book-vapour with the dust of an old volume in it now and then. Her quality is ornamented common sense—a point of view almost universal, but festooned so gracefully with literary allusion that it seems new. Her essays are literary graveyards where foregone conclusions are charmingly interred. Doubly convinced before you started, you still keep on to see the burial. It is a style which the book giveth and the book taketh away, but what of that, if it is agreeable? Read, for instance, the little paper on *Marriage in Fiction*, beginning with the quotation, "They fought bitter and regular, like man and wife." (She is always admirable in quotation.) From beginning to end it is merely a light expression of astonishment, of your and my and our great-grandfathers' astonishment, over the absorption of novelists in

pre-nuptial love. Why are novelists such careless match-makers, and why do they drop the hero and heroine at the church door? But there are the instances and the mention of characters of whom we are glad to be reminded; there is Thackeray's way, and Scott's way, and George Eliot's, and Barrie's and a dozen others, and the directly opposite French way, which would never, never do!

Why, asks Miss Repplier, was George Eliot so harsh with Mr. Casaubon in *Middlemarch* and so gentle with Dorothea, and why not more sympathy with Rosamond Vincy and less with Lydgate? "In reality, Dorothea was alone responsible; and it is hard not to sympathise with Mr. Casaubon, who was digging contentedly enough in his little dry mythological dust-heaps when she dazzled him into matrimony." There is much of this playing with an author's characters, and raising of questions to which no answer is desired. George Eliot, of course, hated Mr. Casaubon, not because he was culpable, but because he was limited. It is the dead-walls in character that most infuriate, not the things that people can help. The intelligent scoundrels who know what they are hanged for are not the best subjects for hate. As an ethical-minded writer, George Eliot would not have admitted it, but she made Casaubon hateful by leaving things out of him—which is nature's own way. Thackeray's "Campaigner," for instance, was hopelessly limited, and therefore beyond human vengeance. Burned at the stake, she would have died as a martyr. He knew that hatred for its artistic perfection needs always a touch of impotence. In the main, however, Miss Repplier provokes little argument and disturbs few whims. She is without dogma and she is not expository. She is allusive without pedantry, and the pleasure she has found in books is passed on to you undiminished.

This is hardly true of the *Studies of a Book-lover*, by T. M. Parrott, Professor of English in Princeton University, who, poor man, is so haunted by didactic duties that he must needs sprinkle his pages with information common to biographical dictionaries. But the subjects are Milton, Dr. Johnson, Gray, Goldsmith, Scott, Matthew Arnold and

Fergusson, and nobody minds hearing the same things about them a few more times. Such novelty as there is consists in a slight shifting of the emphasis which previous critics have laid on certain matters, or in defending some mild thesis which we would gladly accept without argument. Matthew Arnold will be remembered longer for his poetry than for his prose, for instance. Milton was not a demigod on the one hand or so bad as Professor Saintsbury makes him out to be on the other, and by consulting the autobiographical passages in his writings, more can be learned than from Masson's bulky life of him. Gray's unproductiveness was not due, as Matthew Arnold thinks, to the fact that "though a born poet he fell upon an age of prose," nor, as somebody else thinks, to his ill-health, scholarly temper and habit of reserve. Gray was unproductive, rather, because he lacked the impulse to poetic expression. Such is the spirit of these studies. They are all perspicuous, definite, full of illustration, and so reverent that the writer will often quote the commonplaces of his author with unfeigned enthusiasm.

But these smooth pebbles of criticism at least hold the attention more firmly than the moss and moonshine of Mr. Bliss Carman's *Friendship of Art*, wherein the author discusses such high themes as art in its relation to life, the artist's joy in his work, the note of gladness, the critical spirit, beauty, self-development and the possibilities of life. Love is the basis of art, says Mr. Carman, and individuality counts for everything, and every flower and bird song has its lesson, and so on from one large sweet statement to another—all conceived in a spirit of poetic reverie, but achieving mainly languor and monotony. In every chapter there is material for one good line of verse; in some chapters there is enough for a stanza, but it does not in its present form communicate any of the emotions that the writer feels.

"And then again it seems, at the end of summer, as if the true magic of the woods were only put forth after long reserve, slowly, timorously, shyly exerting over us its most potent influence. There are hints and signs, now and then, indeed, which make the careless wonder whether he has seen any touch of the true magic of the woods at all. Perhaps once

or twice, between August and December, the exact moment may occur for the tireless observer when glimpses of the unworldliness of nature may come to him, and he may hear, or think he hears, the glad oracular whisper of the universal message. He may then have the rare fortune (in perfect health, in perfect goodness, of a sound mind) to feel himself for an instant in complete harmony with all being. He is no longer a jarring note in a splendid theme; no longer knows himself somehow at variance with his surroundings; no longer perceives the gulf between ideal and fact, wish and performance; but from a profound inexplicable content is only able to say:

"Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole."

This passage taken at random, illustrates the quality of Mr. Carman's prose. No one can deny that a real feeling prompted him to write it, but somehow it is not shared by the reader. The prose of our modern nature-lovers is often like that. It is talk about emotions, not an expression of emotions. They have not learned from Thoreau and Emerson what not to say. Nor do they realise that there is no second-best in the class of writing. What is not best fails utterly. That is why some of us are inclined to implore many a literary woodman to "spare that tree" and not to put it in a paragraph.

In the first of Mr. Paul Elmer More's *Shelburne Essays*, he tells us of his walks in the "Cathedral Woods" and his thoughts on Thoreau. "Near the secluded village of Shelburne that lies along the peaceful valley of the Androscoggin, I took upon myself to live two years as a hermit after a mild Epicurean fashion of my own." But he read more than he observed, and was more bent on escaping human beings than in penetrating nature's secrets.

"I fear much of the talk about companionship with Nature that pervades our summer life is little better than cant and self-deception, and he best understands the veiled goddess who most frankly admits her impenetrable secrecy. The peace that comes to us from contemplating the vast panorama spread out before us is due rather to the sense of a great passionless power entirely out of our domain than to any real intimacy with the hidden duty."

These essays prove that he has read

much and thought honestly on many subjects. They are to be classed with the best of recent volumes, and they far surpass in quality of thought those which we have thus far mentioned. The essays on Emerson, Carlyle and Hawthorne are genuinely appreciative and keen in characterisation. Though reverencing Emerson, as he says, "this side idolatry," he is able to trace rather shrewdly the effects of misapplied Emersonianism as seen in Christian Science to-day and in other forms of "facile optimism." The final essay on "The Religious Ground of Humanitarianism" seems to us the best. It discusses the failure of humanitarianism "to discriminate between the ideals of religious and the ideals of the world." After discussing the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount he says:

"Buddha, even more than Christ, recognised and taught the evil and insufficiency of human society; and he saw also, as did

Christ, that the religious instinct, if followed out, must result in the abrogation of that society and not in any practical alteration of its laws."

He writes suggestively of this familiar antinomy. Not being omniscient he does not offer to solve the problem, and we noted with amusement the dismay of an uncommonly foolish reviewer, who blamed him for being inconclusive. But the essays as a whole are somewhat savourless and appear not to have been written with much zest. They have the air which we have learned to expect in the prolonged spinsterhood of American letters, wherein bloodlessness is taken for refinement and reduced vitality for a judicial mind. They have the quality, which we sometimes call "academic," by a slanderous perversion of the term, as if it were thought and reading that did the damage. What we really mean by it is a Philistinism in higher things.

F. M. Colby.



THE OLD TESTAMENT REALISED BY TISSOT

When, some six years ago, J. James Tissot, a French painter of considerable power, exhibited a large number of water-colour paintings dealing with the Life of Jesus, all observers were impressed with the sincerity of the artist and with his evident effort to give the world the True Jesus, as nearly as He could be realised in the nineteenth century. It was only after a preparation extending over ten years, including the careful study not only of the topography and landscapes of Palestine and the surrounding countries that Tissot undertook this work, but he had passed months and years in the study and sketching of thou-

sands of types which were to be the raw material out of which his pictures were to grow.

It was a source of continual wonder to the art-world of Paris that had known Tissot as a genre painter, one of the consistent pupils in the school of Ingres, when he exhibited four hundred pictures dealing with the life of Christ in the Salon, but the temerity of his enterprise was justified when men and women wept before the realism of his pictures, and the religious feeling of the populace was deeply stirred by the conviction that now at last the real historic Christ had been pictured for them.