

There has just come to our attention a pamphlet containing the nominations for directors of the Harvard University Alumni Association. Some of the names are very familiar to us, but there are other names of which we have never heard. We have no doubt, however, that they belong to very estimable gentlemen, who move in the very best social circles of the Back Bay and march, no doubt, in the ranks of the Ancient and Honourable Artillery when that august body proceeds to the Parker House. That these gentlemen are highly appreciated in some quarters is evident from the glowing terms in which the pamphlet sets forth their "special qualifications." With one exception every candidate receives from two to five lines of eulogy. The exception is rather curtly dismissed with the words that his special qualifications are "efficient and valuable services as overseer during a previous term." The neglected one is "Theodore Roosevelt, of Oyster Bay, N. Y., Class of 1880." We think we have heard of him before.

We wonder how many of our readers are conscious of the comparatively little change in the personnel of the really successful novelists during the past ten, or at least the past six or seven, years. We wonder if the time is not near for a general appearance of new blood such as took place about the year 1900. The decade preceding that time was one of evolution. In the beginning we were clinging sedately to the old names and traditions. Then came the years of enthusiasms for single books, names and schools. First it was George Du Maurier's *Trilby*. That book sold widely, and, moreover, the sale of a single copy of *Trilby* had more significance than the sale of five copies of a book seven years later. Then followed Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*; and the Kailyard School, of which the late Ian Maclaren was the chief ornament; and then the furious vogue, half genuine and half affected, we think, of Rudyard Kipling. The country awoke to the call of fiction, fame and finance, a thousand—

nay, a hundred thousand pens leaped to action, and the deluge came.

Now that was a full ten years ago, and yet the names which then sprang into note have endured to an astonishing degree. While these paragraphs are being written we have not yet seen the lists that will go to make up the summary in the last page of this issue, yet we have no hesitation in predicting that Mr. Winston Churchill's *A Modern Chronicle* will be occupying the most conspicuous place. Ten years ago Mr. Churchill had just slipped into the first rank of popularity with *Richard Carvel*. Ten years ago Mr. Stewart Edward White first won the position in his individual field that he holds to-day. Ten years ago Mr. George Barr McCutcheon became a "best seller." Mr. Richard Harding Davis, of a slightly earlier promotion, and Mr. Booth Tarkington, have apparently deserted the novel for the play, but the chances are that they could have their places in the old field for the asking. John Fox Jr., Thomas Nelson Page, Jack London, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Gertrude Atherton, Owen Wister, Ellen Glasgow, Mrs. Burnett, Robert W. Chambers—these remain the undisputed leaders among our popular story-tellers. On the other hand, of the new men and women there are very few who promise more than an ephemeral popularity. From England we have had Mr. De Morgan and William J. Locke. Yet it is the latter's American success only that is of recent date. In the field of the American short story there have been countless innovations. With the novel, methods have in a measure changed, but not the men. It is time for the new school, and we await it curiously.

There are five elements in the spirit of America, according to Professor Henry Van Dyke. They are "Healthy Optimism" "the instinct of self-reliance, the love of fair play, the energetic will, the desire of order, the ambition of self-development." His lectures on these and on several "temperamental traits," such as our profoundly religious instinct, our sense of humour, and our love of nature, delivered on the Hyde Founda-

tion at the University of Paris in 1908-9, have been recently published in English under the title of *The Spirit of America*, the French translation, *Le Génie de l'Amérique*, having already appeared. Their purpose is indicated by the following passage in the introduction:

France and America must know each other better. They must learn to look each into the other's mind to read each the other's heart. They must recognise each other less by their foibles and more by their faiths, less by the factors of national weakness and more by the elements of national strength. Then, indeed, I hope and believe they will be good and faithful friends.

As lectures they must have been admirable. Professor Van Dyke is always admirable on the platform, well-poised, genial, reassuring, full of crowd-sense, never too fast or too slow for the general wits. Those French audiences must surely have left his amiable presence with much better feelings toward America than they had before. But that object having been attained, there the matter should have ended, for while it is desirable that France should feel more pleasantly toward us, it is not desirable that we should feel more pleasantly toward ourselves. It is carrying coals to Newcastle. Of course the country does, as Hannibal Chollop said, like to be "cracked up"; but can any patriot honestly say he does not hear enough of it? Not that Professor Van Dyke is a coarse flatterer of the Chollop type. There is no buncombe in the *Spirit of America*, but only that more elusive kind of humbug which with a show of casting up the good and bad brings out the predetermined balance always in favour of his countrymen. It shows how easily the foreign critic may be dodged. If he condemns the country as young and raw, you point to the antiquity of its European antecedents. If he says its art and literature are meagre, you date the country's birth from the landing at Jamestown.

For example, as against Dickens, Mrs. Trollope and other jaundiced observers who twitted us on our youth, Professor

Van Dyke cites Crèvecoeur on our antiquity—

"What, then, is the American," he asks, "this new man? He is either a European or the descendant of a European, hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now wives of four different nations. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour and industry which began long since in the East. They will finish the great circle."

This is the language of compliment, of course. It is the saying of a very polite prophet, and even in prophecy one is inclined to like pleasant manners. Yet that is not the reason why it seems to Americans to come much nearer to the truth than Dr. Johnson's remarks, or Charles Dickens's *American Notes*, or Mrs. Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. It is because the Frenchman has been clear-sighted enough to recognise that the Americans started out in life with an inheritance of civilised ideals, manners, aptitudes and powers, and that these did not all come from one stock, but were assembled from several storehouses. This fact, as I have said before, is fundamental to a right understanding of American character and history.

But if anybody says our literature has been of slow growth, let him remember how short a time it was between the savage whoops of the Pilgrim Fathers and the polished writings of Washington Irving.

If you ask me why a native literature has been so slow to begin in America, I answer, first, *that it has not been slow at all*. Compared with other races, the Americans have been rather less slow than the average in seeking literary self-expression in literary form and in producing books which have survived the generation which produced them.

How long was it, for example, before the Hebrews began to create a literature? A definite answer to this question would bring us

into trouble with the theologians. But at least we may say that from the beginning of the Hebrew Commonwealth to the time of the prophet Samuel there were three centuries and a half without literature.

How long did Rome exist before its literary activities began? Of course we do not know what books may have perished. But the first Romans who have kept a place in literature were Nævius and Ennius, who began to write more than five hundred years after the city was founded.

Compared with these long periods of silence, the two hundred years between the settlement of America and the appearance of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper seems but a short time.

And Rome, when you come to think of it, started with a she-wolf, while we had only a Puritan.

The same publishers, the Macmillan Company, who issue Professor Van Dyke's *Spirit of America* have given us another book on America by an American of a totally different type. Mr. Herbert Croly in his *Promise of American Life* is not trying to ingratiate himself with any country or any class. He is merely trying to think out for himself the answers to the many questions of tendency that occur to us even while we drift. It is a most conscientious and thoughtful study of the American social and political characteristics, aims and tendencies, as compared with those of the past and with those of foreign countries. Many years were spent in its preparation and six years were passed in the actual writing. It covers a very wide range and the results of his labours are so tightly packed that it is not easy reading. Hence it will be slow in gaining the recognition it deserves. Many reviewers have been quite nonplussed by it, and not knowing what to say, have taken refuge in those smooth, non-committal formulas which are as applicable to one book as to another. The Chicago *Dial* reviewer found himself in this predicament; so did a commentator for the *North American Review*. Each had to hide his head in the sand. It is

cruel to assign a book like this to these feathertops. It simply fells them to the earth. However, the *Promise of American Life* has already found its way to some of the persons for whom it was intended and by them it is generally recognised, despite its manifest faults and eccentricities, as the most remarkable book on this subject that has appeared since Bryce's *American Commonwealth*. If it lacks the foreigner's perspective, it displays an intimacy which the foreigner cannot attain, and it differs from its predecessors in that it has a direct application to the most important questions now under discussion. A critical discussion of the book must be left to the future reviewer, but whatever he may say as to the soundness of its arguments, he can hardly deny that it is an honest, independent and stimulating attempt to find in our chaotic, momentary concerns the forces or principles that give them a meaning.

The following anecdote which we heard the other day may or may not be new, but it is worth recording. A year or two before the appearance of *Trilby*, George Du Maurier, then known chiefly by reason of his work in *Punch*, went on a lecturing tour in the north of England. One evening he chaffed the English on the score of British contempt for all who were unlucky enough to be foreigners. After the lecture a young lady present was asked what she thought of Mr. Du Maurier. "Oh," she replied in naïve confirmation, "he is delightful, but what a pity he is a Frenchman."

We present the menu drawn by Starr Wood on the recent occasion when E. Phillips Oppenheim occupied the chair at the dinner of the Savage Club of London. The card depicts the Savages endeavouring to pull aboard their frail craft the captive Oppenheim, who is represented as an octopus with his many arms busy writing novels and playing golf, while fishes bearing the names of Mr. Oppenheim's many books are hovering around the net. In