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CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

When George III ascended the throne of England, one of his ambitions was to

**The Order of
Minerva**

establish an order for literary men. It was to have been called the

Order of Minerva. The knights were to have worn a star of sixteen points, and a yellow ribbon; and Dr. Johnson was talked of as President, or Grand Cross, or Grand Owl, of the society. The idea of an Order of Minerva struck Thackeray, writing nearly a century later, as being hugely amusing. "Consider," he wrote in the Roundabout Paper "On Ribbons," "the claimants, the difficulty of settling their claims, the rows and squabbles among the candidates, and the subsequent decision of posterity! Dr. Beattie would have ranked as first poet, and twenty years after the sublime Mr. Hayley would, no doubt, have claimed the Grand Cross. Mr. Gibbon would not have been eligible, on account of his dangerous free thinking opinions; and her sex, as well as her republican sentiments, might have interfered with the knighthood of the immortal Mrs. Catharine Macaulay. How Goldsmith would have paraded the ribbon at Madame Cornelys's, or the Academy dinner! How Peter Pindar would have railed at it! Fifty years later, the noble Scott would have worn the Grand Cross and deserved it; but Gifford would have had it; and Byron, and Shelley, and Hazlitt, and Hunt would have been without it; and had Keats been proposed as officer how the Tory prints would have yelled with rage and scorn!"

All of which led Thackeray to go on to play with the idea of an imaginary Order of Minerva in the England of 1860. "Which philosopher shall have the grand cordon?" he asks. "Which the collar?—which the little scrap no bigger than a buttercup? Of the historians—A, say—and C, and F, and G, and S, and T—which shall be Companion and which Grand Owl? Of the poets, who wears, or claims, the largest and brightest star? Of the novelists, there is A, and B, and C D; and E (star of first magnitude, newly discovered), and F (a magazine of wit), and fair G, and H, and I, and brave old J, and charming K, and L, and M, and N, and O (fair twinklers), and I am puzzled between three P's—Peacock, Miss Pardoe, and Paul Pry—and Queechy, and R, and S, and T, *mère et fils*, and very likely U, O gentle reader, for who has not written his novel nowadays?—who has not a claim to the star and straw-coloured ribbon?—and who shall have the biggest and largest? Fancy the struggle! Fancy the squabble! Fancy the distribution of prizes!"

Fancy the struggle! Fancy the squabble! But try to imagine the awful responsibility of any one of our own age and country who tries to establish an order of this kind! Think of the hoots of laughter, the blasts of scorn, that would greet every award. A ribbon for Mr. Indiana! A star for Miss North Carolina! When is the dismal farce to cease? Miss North Carolina is a veritable Will-o-the-Wisp, and as for Mr.

Indiana, even to call his reputation local is a splendid exaggeration. There is hardly a month in which this attitude of amused derision is not brought forcibly home to the Chronicler of a literary magazine. We review a book without positively damning it. We print a harmless, and we hope fairly entertaining Unconventional Portrait of the author of the latest best seller according to the lists of, say, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Portland, Me., and Portland, Ore. The voice of the self-constituted Censor literally sizzles with contempt, *O tempora! O mores!* Why do they give space to this sort of mediocrity? Why don't they confine themselves to the people who are really worth while? If that be the standard of THE BOOKMAN, and so forth, and so forth. But pause a moment, Mr. Censor, we beg, and consider conditions not as you would like to have them, but as they are. How many men and women are there writing to-day whose works, it is agreed, are of permanent and enduring nature? Ten? Twenty? Thirty? Certainly not more. We cannot be prating all the time about the Division Officers, the Kiplings, Jameses, Hardys, Howells, and Barries. Occasionally a word or two must be flung to the second lieutenants, and even to the non-commissioned officers and lowly privates in the ranks. Take the portrait gallery of the concededly great in contemporary literature. How many months do you think it would go around without repetition? Would not you yourself be the first to bring the charge of narrowness of range, to demand variety, and to offer the suggestion that there were readers who might be interested in literary persons of more ephemeral worth?

It is so easy to ridicule and so difficult to offer the practical remedy. We do not confine these pages exclusively to the doings and portraits of writers of enduring reputation. We have never made any pretence of doing so. On the other hand, the fact that we devote a paragraph or two to an anecdote about some young woman who has written a clever detective story, or a bright little tale of adventure after the manner of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, does not imply that we have

entirely forgotten that there once existed a Sir Walter Scott, an Honoré de Balzac, a Thackeray, a Dickens, and a Victor Hugo. After all, we do not think we have ever offended so very grievously. We cannot seriously be charged with finding *Vanity Fairs* and *Père Goriot*s in every batch of new novels, and if to some entertainingly written yarn that is read to-day and forgotten to-morrow we hold out for the moment the hand of kindly recognition, don't, Mr. Censor, fall into misinterpretation, and ascribe to us an exaggerated enthusiasm that we have never felt, and to which certainly we have never given expression.

The latest list of the "One Hundred Best Novels" has recently been issued by a Maryland library. The announcement of the list is accompanied by the somewhat astonishing statement that "before this there was no list in existence for the guidance of the uninitiated through the labyrinth of fiction." Without correcting certain errors in spelling we print the list as a curiosity. It is, in spots, so deliciously absurd.

Allen	Kentucky Cardinal, Aftermath
Alcott	Little Women
Austin	Pride and Prejudice
Balzac	Père Goriot
Barrie	Little Minister
Barrie	Sentimental Tommy
Besant	All In A Garden Fair
Besant & Rice	All Sorts And Conditions of Men
Black	A Princess of Thule
Blackmore	Lorna Doone
Bronte	Jane Eyre
Bulwer-Lytton	Last Days of Pompeii
Burnett	That Lass O' Lowries
Caine	Eternal City
Churchill	Coniston
Churchill	Mr. Crew's Career
Collins	The Moonstone
Connor	The Sky Pilot
Cervantes	Don Quixote
Cooper	The Deerslayer
Crawford	Saraceneca
De Foe	Robinson Crusoe
De Morgan	Alice for Short
Dickens	David Copperfield
Dickens	The Tale of Two Cities
Disraeli	Coningsby
Diver	The Great Amulet
Doyle	Hound of The Baskervilles
Dumas	The Three Musketeers
Eliot	Middlemarch
Eliot	Adam Bede