

that score? Without denying that Meredith was greater than Flaubert, that Dickens was mightier than George Eliot, that Thackeray's contribution to the wit and wisdom of the world exceeded Jane Austen's, we may yet in each case admit that the lesser writer was the greater artist. Can your promised bomb shatter this paradox?

I should like to learn (and none is better able to tell me than THE BOOKMAN) what spirit animates your serious novelists of to-day. The movement of a nation that seeks to ignore, rather than follow, tradition is significant, and it would be interesting to know what your best writers of fiction affect in theory and practise in form. Do they recognise technique or laugh at it? Do you find severe detachment to be the guiding principle of their art, or does the living American novelist display his personality upon his page, after the manner of the mighty Victorians?

Do you meet him walking among his men and women—as God with Adam in the Garden—or does he hide himself? To achieve an absolute concealment is, of course, as Mr. Howells points out, not possible; but it must probably be the ideal of not a few among your leading artists.

That he may present a glass of crystal clarity, through which his pictures of life shall be observed, is surely the highest aim for a novelist; though we know too often how the faltering workman must a little obscure that glass, if only with his own hard breathing in the struggle to keep it clear. To prefer a medium stained—even though it be with delicate rose, tender green or heavenly blue of the artist's mind—is, I submit, a retrograde step. We recognise a great artist's work of course, and that instantly, but it is the magnitude or symmetry of his edifice that proclaims him, not that he is standing at the front door.

Hear Nietzsche. "Humanity," he says, "can no longer be spared the cruel sight of the psychological dissecting-table with its knives and forceps. For here rules that science which inquires into the origin and history of the so-called moral sentiments and which in its progress has to draw up and solve complicated sociological problems."

Now serious modern novelists are engaged upon this high business and have no time to think about themselves, or air their predilections, hobbies, or opinions. The men who paraded themselves, consciously or unconsciously, were actuated by the old values, held in check

by religion or herd morality and a thousand other conventional restrictions; but we feel that all these things are only so many bars and hindrances to that pure, scientific curiosity whose goal is the stark truth of human nature. An absolutely impersonal attitude is what we seek.

A good surgeon in the midst of a life or death operation has no time to demonstrate or advertise. And we, who try to make live men and women—for novel writing is a life or death operation too—are similarly far too concerned with the enormous difficulties to intrude our own personalities or play showman.

It is unnecessary that a great artist should be a great poet, or a "social moralist," or a "great soul," or a great anything else. Indeed the great artists who have also been what is understood by great men are rather rare.

Do, dear sir, explode your threatened bomb that we may see if it can shatter the "tidy little theory" of Mr. Howells, which is also the theory of Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant and every working artist of fiction in our country who counts to-day.

I pray you ventilate this interesting subject and discover how many of your first-rate men defer to and how many differ from your most famous living novelist.

Most sincerely and heartily yours,

EDEN PHILLPOTTS.



Every utterance of Mr. Chesterton, no matter on what subject, is a contribution to the gaiety of nations; but the gaiety is perhaps increased in proportion as the subject is one which has apparently been worn threadbare by every reviewer and would-be critic. Then is Mr. Chesterton most fresh and engaging, since he begins where the others leave off. Not since he wrote his book on Dickens has he had a more congenial subject than in the introduction which he contributes to a volume of selections from Thackeray, one of a series called *Masters of Literature*. Obviously, Thackeray is the last novelist in the world to be adequately represented by extracts. Mr. Chesterton not only admits the fact; he emphasises and illustrates it with one of his amusing parodies. Thackeray, he says, worked entirely by diffuseness; by a thousand touches scattered through a thousand pages:

Even the bodily description of his characters is scattered and disseminated. The Dickens method is to say: "Lord Jones, a tall man with a hook nose and a white pointed beard, entered the room." Thackeray's method is to say, in Chapter I: "Lord Jones, being very tall, had just knocked his head against the chandelier, and was in no very agreeable temper"; in Chapter VII: "What jokes *Jemima* made about Sir Henry's bald head, Lord Jones's hooked nose, and so on"; and in Chapter XXIII: "Little Mr. Frizzle, the hairdresser, had pursued Jones for years, advising his lordship to blacken artificially the white pointed beard that he wore."

Of course, Mr. Chesterton, himself one of the most rigid and persistent of moralists, likes to regard Thackeray as a moralist. He is not a cynic, save in a wholly honourable sense of that word. The whole point in the contrasted careers of *Amelia* and *Becky* is "that there is a certain sanative and antiseptic element in virtue, by which even a fool manages to live longer than a knave." He remarks that at the end "the energy of *Becky* is the energy of a dead woman; it is like the rhythmic kicking of some bisected insect." Major Pendennis prompts the reflection that "worldliness and the worldlings are in their nature solemn and timid. If you want carelessness you must go to the martyrs." Thackeray was, moreover, according to his critic, not only a moralist; he was a romantic—a retrospective romantic, as it were. "He loved all fresh and beautiful things, like other romantics; but loved them with a deliberate recollection of their eternal recurrence and decay." In short, he was nearly all that we usually think of as the reverse of cynical. "He falls away into philosophising not because his satire is merciless, but because it is merciful. . . . He often employs an universal cynicism because it is kinder than a personal sarcasm. He says that all men are liars, rather than say directly that Pendennis was lying. He says easily that all is vanity, so as not to say that *Ethel Newcome* was vain." And concerning his last books it is remarked: "There are moments in the last days of this cynic when we have almost to pardon his pointless and flowing piety

as we should pardon it in saints or innocent children."

Concerning *The Book of Snobs*, Snobism in general, English Snobism in particular, and Thackeray's hatred of it, Mr. Chesterton says certain things which illuminate the present political situation of the House of Lords:

The true source of snobs in England was the refusal to take one side or the other heartily in the crisis of the French Revolution; the English attempt to have what Macaulay called (with unconscious but awful irony) "the most popular aristocracy and the most aristocratic people in the world." Those words would make another good definition of snobbishness. We have a popular aristocracy; it consists chiefly of brewers. We have an aristocratic people; that is, it consists chiefly of snobs. If we had made our system sincere, if we had conformed to either of the two great models of government, we might have had the vices involved in them, but we should have been free from this fever of worldliness, this vulgar unrest. Aristocracy does not have snobs any more than democracy. But we have neither securely closed our house nor boldly opened it. We have merely let it be whispered that a window is unbarred at the back; and a few burglars break in and are made peers. But the thought of that possible entrance rides all men's fancy like some infernal love affair, and enfevers and exhausts England.

The following note we find in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, in the issue of January 26th, in the department devoted to The Law and Literature "The Alumni." The *Weekly* took it from the *Washington Star*:

'91

With Edgar Allan Poe arguing a case before Oliver Wendell Holmes the clock in the United States Court room seemed to have turned back several decades to-day. But it was so. Oliver Wendell Holmes was on the bench; Edgar Allan Poe was at the bar. Counsellor Poe is a member of the famous Poe family of Baltimore. Mr. Justice Holmes's pedigree also is well known.

Mr. Henry C. Rowland, whose new novel, *In the Service of the Princess*, is