

by a man before." We see only her photograph; we only know that she has made of possible revelation banal nonsense. Grish Chunder was right. "Charlie had tasted the love of women that kills remembrance, and the finest story in the world would never be written."

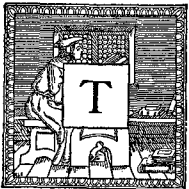
Arnold Bennett, in the first volume of his tremendous trilogy, *Clayhanger*, turned the trick of employing an unseen protagonist in the person of Hilda's unknown husband. Purists may call this instance beside the mark as a trilogy is one continued story and *Hilda Lessways* takes up the husband's side of it. But to carry one character through some seven hundred pages, with Edwin's whole life influenced by the love he had for this girl whom he met so unexpectedly, loved so swiftly, kissed so shyly, and found himself betrothed to almost whether he would or no—then a few weeks later to

learn that she is married, and to a man who never appears in the hundreds of pages that follow—it is safe to say this method of construction and creating of suspense is original with Mr. Bennett.

As was suggested earlier, it is more often than not likely to be the unlawful love, the other sinner, or the hidden figure that all lives hold, that plays its part through the individual, yet itself does not appear. The men and women that have moulded the lives of others in the essential sense, and have made them ready to play their real parts with others, in books and plays, as in real life, are the ones absent from the visible cast. But the lure of the unknown is about them, and their appeal to the imagination is often more vivid than that of the visualised people whose lives have touched their flaming or tarnished ones.

## THE MANTLE OF THE GREAT

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN



HE managing editor of one of the metropolitan magazines leaned far back in his chair at eleven o'clock of the morning of December 29th, 1911, read again the letter he held before him and laughed. Lest the reader argue that an introductory sentence of this kind is immaterial and irrelevant, let it be recorded that two facts are present which render it of comparatively large import. In the first place, the simple fact that a managing editor of a New York publication has laughed at all must be possessed of a sufficiently considerable degree of news and surprise for such persons as are acquainted intimately with the affairs of the magazine world. And in the second place, we submit the fact that anything that can succeed in making a managing editor laugh is worthy of ample chronicle. The secret of the

editor's merriment, therefore, is herewith offered:

— *Magazine*

— *Fifth Avenue New York.*

GENTLEMEN: Do you need any of our productions? We can write for you upon any subject you may desire—essays, novels, storys, in fact anything you want. We appreciate the high standing of your publication. For that reason we solicit a share of your patronage. You can see from our letter heads that we are the successors to one of the oldest authors an writers in the World. In 1907 we acquired the titles an Government trade mark of Samuel Clements (Mark Twain). You can understand that an article from our pen carrys with it the highest literary value of any living author. Trusting that we may hear from you at once with a share of your patronage, we remain

(signed)

DAVE WILSON.

The letter head mentioned in the document carried at its top the name of Mr.

Wilson in "scare-head" type. Under this name in brackets was the pen name, "Willie Green." Below were these words, "Author and lecturer—successor to Samuel Clements (Mark Twain). Country Address: Curryville, Mo." To the left of this imposing array of type might be seen a picture of the modest gentleman who had taken upon his shoulders the mantle of the creator of Huckleberry Finn. The wording and spelling of the letter written by Mark Twain's successor have been reproduced exactly.

Despite the laugh that was evoked in the instance of this particular editor by the letter quoted, it is a matter of record that the receipt of documents of a like order is by no means unusual in the editorial rooms of the magazine offices. Such documents, curiously enough, as has been discovered in long experience, are not the products of what might, as may be inferred by the lay reader, be termed a coterie of "cranks." Neither are they missives sent in a spirit of jest to the editors nor, on the other hand, are they the offerings of individuals who are suffering from mental aberrations of a more or less marked degree. To the contrary, it can be learned from the consensus of editorial opinion on the subject that such letters and the contributions that follow in their wake are more usually the work of thoroughly well-meaning and sincere persons possessed of an enormous and astounding faith in their own talents and of a perfectly honest, even if unfounded, belief in their ability to carry upon their shoulders the mantles of fame that death has left tenantless. By just what process these enthusiastic men and women reach their conclusions is a problem for some other psychologist than the present writer. In place of a scientific analysis of the question, however, there may be offered in quasi-explanation two well-known magazine editorial room axioms that may satisfy the less querulous. These axioms are: I. Nine persons out of ten believe deep down in their hearts of hearts that, given the opportunity, they can "write"; and II. Ten persons out of ten believe down in their hearts of hearts that, given the opportunity,

they can write "just as good stuff" as those magazines are printing." From these two steps, as may be observed with a moderate stretch of the imagination, it is not difficult for the more zealous individuals to proceed to the third step and take voluntary rank with Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and the other established contributors of their hallowed day.

It is the sincere faith that Mr. Dave Wilson and his comrades show in themselves that makes this chronicle worth fleeting study despite its superficial qualities of what may be misinterpreted as humour. Look, for instance, at this letter received some months ago by the associate editor of one of the general magazines:

DEAR SIR: For years I have believed in myself as a writer; for years I have written and written—always keeping my stories to myself and never submitting them anywhere, because I wanted to make myself truly great and perfect before I gave my work to the world. Now, realising that at last I have arrived at the notch occupied in authorship by Tolstoy and other realistic writers, I send my greatest story, *The Triumph of the Peasants*, for your acceptance. Kindly send me a cheque immediately. You must realise when you read my story that while Tolstoy may have equalled its masterly qualities, he did not excel them. If there is to be a Tolstoy of America, I hereby lay claim, via *The Triumph of the Peasants*, to that title.

This letter was the work of an "author" in a small town in Arkansas. Unfortunately, his tale has not yet seen the light of type. We have the word of its reader, however, that it was not really quite up to some of the best things Tolstoy wrote. Let us turn to a concrete product from one of these magazine axiom-abiders. First, his letter:

— Magazine.

GENTLEMEN: I am an author, a fine one, a universal one. If you want me to write for you famous things I will send you somme words at one cent each. I have a \$3.00 story right here. Will you look at it and what about it.

Yours very truly,  
(signed) L. VAN M—

CEDAR BAYOU, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS.

The title of Mr. Van M——'s story was "The Need to Talk Languages." Permit its quotation:

America is on the head of the world—only one thing for which she goes back, it is that she thinks that with English she can go every where. I think that this is wrong. The more you no, better it is; it is the same about languages. You will see that if you take ten Frenchs, Englishs, Germans, Belgiums, Italians and Spanishs,—on these ten five will talk four of these talks. If you would not need to no how to talk it, surely I would not learn it, but how many times business men have to go to Europe and make business. It is not so hard to learn to talk languages. Get acquainted with somebody who is foreign and talk with him only but his language. You will see that in three month you will no it just as good as he does. In Europe they have made schools for this and also associations where parents send their children in other states for them to learn quick and easy place's language. If I could I would learn any language I could even Asiatic. You don't know but one day we might need it and then we will no it. More talks you know, better it is. They have been trying already to make a universil talk, but can you learn the Russian, the Japonese, the Chinamen, and many others talks that they could not aloud? Well, I now try to talk other's idiome and you will be surprised how quick you will no their talk.

Of course, this piece of "universal, famous" writing is somewhat more extraordinary than most of the contributions that are sent to the magazines by the inheritors of the robes of genius, but it is not without its relevant portion of meaning in the present statistics. About two years ago there were received in several of the magazine editorial rooms circular letters from Chicago that read as follows:

DEAR SIR: We (two young men were referred to) are now prepared to supply your publication with poetry, short stories, articles and novels written to your order on any topic, subject or theme you wish. We guarantee our workmanship to be of the first water. Our quality of poetry has been compared by splendid critics to be as good as James Whitcomb Riley's; our short stories have all the thrill and fine conception of Poe's; our articles are fresh and compelling; and the novels we can turn

out in a rush you will find to be the match of the best of modern writers of fiction. We know our ability to serve you and trust you will give us an opportunity to please you.

This document that offered literature for sale in the same terms that baking soda or overalls are sold, is not especially unique in magazine records. There have been many such. Within the year just passed, a circular letter that read as follows was delivered in most of the magazine sanctums:

"Who is there but admires Anthony Hope's tales of daring, kings, queens and romance? Do you not want such in your valuable magazine pages? If so, why pay the big rates that Hope demands for his work when you can get something just as good for much less money? I have practised Anthony Hope's style so long that I cannot only equal him, but in many cases actually surpass him and I am willing to sell you the results at two cents a word. I have just finished a really excellent story, more vital in every way than *A Prisoner of Zenda*, that I will send you if you so desire.

Conan Doyle, of all living writers, has, however, probably the most "successors." Scarcely a month goes by but witnesses the receipt in some magazine office of a letter that offers for sale a story that, in the argot of the missive, "beats Sherlock Holmes." The fact that Sherlock Holmes is undoubtedly the most widely known of the characters of modern fiction seems reason enough for the existence of the vast army that tries to create a successor that will outdo the original. Sir Arthur Doyle's skilful share in the original case, of course, is never taken into consideration by the courageous letter writers, who seem to imagine that all that is necessary to a surpassing effort is a detective with a whim or habit other than that of the hypodermic needle, a mystery centring about some Lady Something of Sussex Downs and a tried and true friend to whom the detective may talk confidentially. As regards the numerous letters bearing on the case in hand, the quotation of one will suffice:

I am certain that I have it in me to succeed Conan Doyle as the writer of short detective stories. In the way of suspense, I have trained myself to the point where not even the best

guessing reader can figure out the mysteries in my stories until I myself explain them in the very last paragraph. My detective's name is Holbrook Sherman, which, as you will note, is modelled after Sherlock Holmes. In most of the Sherlock Holmes stories there is one big defect which I have eliminated in mine. Holmes, as you remember, traces his cases step by step, a fact which lets the reader begin to suspicion the solution of the mystery a bit ahead of time, a bit previous, so to speak. This may be "scientific," but it kills a lot of interest on the part of the reader and diminishes the breathless quality. In my writing I have Holbrook Sherman tell his friend, Dr. Williams, about his deductions step by step early in the story, but I mislead my reader by showing subsequently that Sherman only

fooled the doctor in his first analysis of the crime and kept his real analysis a secret until the last page. Thus, you will observe, I give the story an O. Henry quality, certainly an improvement over the Doyle method.

Said Ruskin, "All great art represents something that it sees or believes in: for instance, Dante's centaur, Chiron, dividing his beard with his arrow before he can speak, is a thing that no mortal would ever have thought of if he had not actually seen the centaur do it." By virtue of this classic definition, in the face of a thousand patronising smiles, may we not call such as take upon themselves the mantles of the great—great artists?

## THREE BOOKS OF THE MONTH

### I

#### "FROM IBSEN'S WORKSHOP"\*

No other "world-historic" artist—to use his own wide-winged adjective—was ever more secretive about the methods of his workmanship than Henrik Ibsen. To his translator and interpreter to the English-speaking peoples, Mr. William Archer, he never said more about his projects than that he was "preparing some devilment for next year"; "even his wife and son knew nothing of what he was meditating and hatching out, until each new play was polished to the last syllable"; and there is an anecdote of his "apparently disproportionate anger when he learned that some loose scrap of paper had revealed the fact that the hero of *An Enemy of the People*, the play on which he was then engaged, was to be a doctor."

But very few loose scraps of paper seem to have escaped from Ibsen's sanctum. He made many notes, scenarios, and drafts for all his social plays, except-

\*The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen. Volume XII. From Ibsen's Workshop: notes, scenarios, and drafts of the modern plays. Translated by A. G. Chater. With an introduction by William Archer. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

ing only *An Enemy of the People*, which was written at white heat and with extraordinary speed; and instead of tossing these odds and ends of manuscript into the waste-paper basket upon the completion of a play—which is what any ordinary playwright would have done—he treasured them with considerable care and left them, after his death, to be dealt with by his literary executors. In this reverent preservation of the chippings from his chisel, it is difficult not to recognise a trait of that extreme personal vanity which was characteristic of Ibsen in his later years, and in witness of which many anecdotes have been recorded; but it is highly fortunate for students of the master-builder's art that his waste-paper basket has survived him. These "foreworks" of his plays, as Ibsen called them, were published in Scandinavia and Germany in 1909 under the editorship of Halvdan Koht and Julius Elias; and now they have been translated into English by A. G. Chater and set forth with an illuminative introduction by the devoted and indefatigable Mr. Archer.

Even a hasty glance at these fragmentary foreworks dispels forever the illusion that Ibsen was "one of those playwrights who have their plays clearly