

was to present a piece by Dickens himself, which he had played at home with his friends, among them Wilkie Collins. In Paris the play was called *L'Abîme*, and Dickens had made the trip from England for the express purpose of witnessing its reception by the French public.

He was there at the table, with a glass of whiskey before him, while the Parisian first-nighters entered the theatre, passing this man with the grey hat, the splendid head, the long hair, and the twisted chin beard, without realising that there in Paris, this summer evening, was one of the masters of the novel, the most original of writers, one of the geniuses of the nineteenth century. Dickens watched the people enter but did not enter himself. "I shall wait," he said to a friend, "until the first act is over. It is so delightful in Paris in the evening. How can any one willingly be shut up in a theatre? As a matter of fact, he was uneasy over the result of the evening. He feared the Parisian public. It seemed to him that he had become again the humble little newspaper reporter of other days, the little Boz (M. Claretie or the French compositor has made "Booz"). He sought a pretext for escape. This man, who ordinarily feared nothing, this lecturer accustomed to facing crowds, trembled before twelve critics and an audience of Parisian women. "Let us go to Mabilille," he said to his friends. "I will return to learn the result when the play is finished." So to Mabilille. But, while watching the celebrated dancers, he was thinking only of *L'Abîme*, and of his players and of the Vaudeville. The hour drew near when the drama must have either triumphed or foundered. Charles Dickens took a carriage and called to the driver, "Théâtre du Vaudeville! Place de la Bourse!" But halfway on the journey the special fear that agitated the author of *David Copperfield* increased to the point that he looked at his watch and changed his orders. "No. Gare du Nord, driver! We still have time to catch the train for Boulogne!" And he took the train, not without strongly urging his friend to send him a telegram at once announcing the result of the presentation of *L'Abîme*. And

it was from Boulogne-sur-Mer that Charles Dickens thanked the applauded actors in his piece, players that he did not know, in a French drama that he had never seen.

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Naturally, we resent a good many of the "best sellers." There is Mr. A. B. C. and Mrs. D. E. F., and Miss G. H. I., and again Mr. X. Y. Z.

What have they ever done that their books should have sold in the hundreds of thousands? Not that we begrudge them their prosperity in a profession that despite improved conditions is comparatively unprofitable. But it is just a little exasperating when we contrast their material success with that of such a writer as Joseph Conrad, for example, whose splendid invention and fine style have been thoroughly appreciated, but very inadequately rewarded. Yet there are indications that Mr. Conrad is finally coming into his own. New editions of *Youth* and *The Point of Honour* have just been issued, and we think that a courageous publisher would have no cause to regret the launching of a uniform edition of Conrad's works.

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Not the least of Joseph Conrad's achievements is that his splendid style is in an acquired language. He is a Pole by birth, and his early years were spent in Poland. From at least two generations he inherited a keen interest in literature, but his ancestors were men of action, too. His grandfather was in Napoleon's *Grand Armée*, and his father attached himself to the revolutionary movement in Poland and suffered imprisonment for his opinions. At the age of thirteen Joseph made his way to Paris, drifted to Marseilles, thence into a merchant house, and afterward to a seafaring life. As a merchant seaman he went through all the grades, finally becoming full captain of English marine. He served in most quarters of the globe, but chiefly in the Pacific and on the Borneo coast, and once commanded a steamer on the Congo.

Mr. Henry James has remained so persistently "modern" that one heard with something of a shock only the other day of his attainment to the mellow estate of the septuagenarian. Now he has written himself irrevocably into the ranks of the veterans of letters by indulging in reminiscences running back no less than

**The Brave
Old Years**

to the early forties of the last century. If it is difficult to conceive him as old, it is at least equally so to figure him as actually young. Even his earliest literary efforts betrayed a calm sophistication which belongs to no age. To evoke the childish lineaments of one who seems precociously to have been born grown up is, one might suppose, a feat demanding the finest literary gift. Well, Mr.



From the Drawing by Will Rothenstein
JOSEPH CONRAD