

CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

IN ENGLAND there is a great discussion over the suggestion to class the publishing of books as a luxury trade and so to put a stop to it until

the end of the war. A milder version of the story is that it has been suggested to prohibit only the issuance of new fiction. Doubtless there is a great deal of fiction produced both in England and this country that can well be dispensed with, but the great surplus of worthless fiction seems to be necessary to produce the occasional masterpiece. No censor (nor even a Bureau of Public Information) can be sufficiently perfect to select the proper fiction to print in wartime, no more than the publishers can be relied upon to make adequate selection of fiction in war or any other period. Efficiency in the book-publishing business seems to be remarkably difficult of attainment, both in the selection of material and in the marketing of the finished product, so that mass production appears to be the only feasible method of achieving occasional quality.

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Anent the movement in England to put book publishing in the luxury trade class, *The New Statesman*, of London, has the following to say:

No nation can dispense with its authors and hold up its head in the world. It is in its literature that a nation becomes self-conscious and examines itself, learns manners and humanity and becomes initiated into truth through the imagination. The

spirit of man enjoys greater liberty as a discoverer of truth in literature than either in politics or in theology. Literature does not wear the chains of partisanship. It reminds man that he is something more than a voter. It liberates him from the spites and illusions of the moment and invites him into the world of realities. We do not claim that it is the only thing that does so. Religion, philosophy, music, idealism of every kind, have something of the same transforming and transfiguring power. None of these, however, is at the present stage of human progress a sufficient substitute for literature as the cultivator of human sympathies and, in consequence, the creator of a freer and friendlier world. When Shelley asserted that the poets were the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, he said the wisest thing that has ever been said in regard to the necessity of literature. The government that does not recognise the creative importance of books is a government fitter for rule over savages than over civilised men. . . . We contend that there never was a time when it was more important that the intellectual energy of the nation should be maintained in full swing. The nation which will be best prepared to reconstruct itself out of the ruins of the war will be the nation which has been able to retain the greatest energy of mind and character.

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In this country suspicion has been cast upon the business of publishing

books during war-time. For many months the Government has kept a close record of the amount of paper used in book publication and at present effort is being made to discover what grades of paper may be curtailed without serious loss to the publishing business. Certainly at no time in the history of the nation is it more important to maintain its morale than at the period of war,

and books are even more important in this service than the daily news. Journalism in these days, when incident crowds fast on incident, cannot have much inspiration, and it is therefore really through the stories of the men who have experienced the life of warfare, so many of which are now appearing in book form, that we can get an idea of heroism and self-sacrifice, the glory as well as the danger of the struggle. If we have to curtail the use of paper, surely the voluminous Sunday edition of the newspapers, containing about seventy-five per cent. waste matter, could well be dispensed with. Certainly they could be dispensed with in advance of books.

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In connection with "War Echoes," which we are starting in this issue,

Literary
"Pull"

Mr. Edward J. O'Brien, the editor of this department, wishes to make an announcement. Mr. O'Brien's address to which manuscripts should be sent is now Bass River, Massachusetts, and not South Yarmouth, as in the past. Mr. O'Brien has not moved, but it appears that his residence is two miles from the South Yarmouth post-office, and as there is no free delivery in those parts, he has found it an irksome matter to carry the quantity of manuscripts received for "War Echoes" over this intervening space of two miles. He has, therefore, arranged with the Government to open a new post-office at Bass River to accommodate his large quantity of mail matter, and if we may be permitted a suggestion, we advise all our readers who wish to communicate with Mr. O'Brien to use the Bass River address if they

wish their letters to reach him within a reasonable time. It is really astonishing what some people can accomplish with this United States Government.

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Mr. O'Brien has in this issue a brief paper reviewing the recent volumes of short stories. It is his firm opinion that the book of short stories is at last coming to its own, a conclusion he arrived at as a result of a questionnaire that he recently sent out to American publishers. He believes that the contemporary short story is really the best thing that American writers are doing, indeed the most individual thing in literature we are doing as a nation and about which we should be more self-conscious, more critical. In his review appearing in this number, he takes up all types of books of short stories, from those by Sir Rabindranath Tagore to *Great Love Stories of the Bible*, which is purported to be written by Billy Sunday, but concerning whose authorship it is interesting to note that a gentleman from New Rochelle, New York, instituted a lawsuit to recover royalties. One particular point regarding the volumes of short stories is their appeal to the soldiers at the front. In the active and interrupted life of the trenches and billets behind the lines, the reading of a long story or novel is very unsatisfactory, and it has been ascertained that the men much prefer short stories that they are reasonably sure of finishing before an interruption occurs. If you are sending books to the soldiers be sure to include some books of short stories.