

MR. MENCKEN REPLIES

MY dear Walpole:¹

The facts, alas, confound you. During the past year I have reviewed exactly 25 novels in "The Smart Set", setting aside mere notices. Of these, 7 were English and 18 were American. Of the English novels, I anointed 3 with praise, or 43%; of the American novels, 9, or 50%. Two of the English novels I denounced as garbage, and 5 of the American—28.5% and 27.7% respectively. Regarding two of the English novels and four of the American I was in doubt—28.5% and 22.3% respectively.

Certainly these figures show no chauvinistic bias. I receive about 350 novels every year—a great many more than any man could read. I pick out for review those that seem most likely to be interesting or significant. Is it remarkable that an American should find $2\frac{4}{7}$ times as many of these among American books as among English books? What English reviewer, in the other direction, shows a score so high, or even half so high? Or so close a correspondence between the two series of percentages?

The log-rolling I complain of has its chief scene in the United States, not in England. It takes the form of extravagant efforts to promote the American sale of books by Englishmen of a small group, most of them bad. It is carried on partly by publishing houses dealing in English goods, and partly by touring propagandists and literary bagmen. It is aided by certain Amer-

ican journals that practise a puerile and slimy Anglophilism. It has become a public nuisance, and when I deal with it at all I treat it as such. The English opinion upon which it is presumably based seems to me to be incompetent, and, in part at least, disingenuous. It is a body of opinion that is ignorantly and incurably anti-American.

I need not tell you, my dear Walpole, that when I chance to take a hack at such a fraud it is done without the slightest messianic purpose. I am entirely devoid of public spirit, and it would give me no more joy to see log-rolling stopped than it would give me to see baptism by total immersion stopped. But it diverts me to chase mountebanks, and so I occasionally yield to the vice. Now you jump into the arena and get in my way. Back to your place! Specifically, back to the bar under the grandstand, where I'll be delighted presently to join you and drink a *Humpen* with you, for you are not a mountebank but an honest artist (as I have more than once declared in print), and you no more belong among the zanies I pursue than I belong among the syndics of the Y. M. C. A.

I refuse absolutely to talk about the American novel when I get to England, or about anything else so depressing. But I have some amusing scandal for you, and you may rest assured that I'll not neglect your Irish *Schnapps*.

Yours ———

H. L. MENCKEN

¹ See Hugh Walpole's "Open Letter to H. L. Mencken" in the May BOOKMAN.

THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF WRITING

By Robert Cortes Holliday

IV: PUBLISHING YOUR OWN BOOK

(In connection with Mr. Holliday's series, THE BOOKMAN announces a new Bureau of Practical Advice to Writers. Any question regarding the mechanical details of authorship will be answered by the editor or referred to the proper authority. The best of these questions and answers will, from time to time, be published, for the information of those interested.—J. F.)

NEW YORK, May, 1922.

"To the Vanity Publisher, Sir," She Said:

"Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

"I'm going to publish, sir," she said.

"Perhaps you've a fortune, my pretty maid?"

"My verse is my fortune, sir," she said.

"Then you'd better not try it, my pretty maid."

There's an item for printing, and when it is paid

There's 'commission on sales'—O, innocent maid!

In your rural retreat have you heard of THE TRADE?

Oh, where are you going, my pretty maid?"

—Ernest Radford in "London Old and New"

A subject which has recently come up for rather active discussion here and there is that of what are known in the book business as "authors' books"—volumes the publication of which has been paid for in part, or in large measure, or vastly overpaid for by their authors. What, as well as the facts can be assembled, are the whys and wherefores of this matter?

Two quite contrary attitudes prevail toward the idea of an author's being involved in the financing of his own work. On the one hand there is the great army of unsophisticated souls so longing to have something

"published" in the form of a book that many of them, in their innocence of the procedure of legitimate publishing, readily fall the prey of the unscrupulous concerns which have come to be called "vanity publishers". These nefarious pay-as-you-enter "publishers" we'll examine presently.

Then there is the opinion more than a little current among people with a closer view of book production that there is something highly unethical, discreditable to both publisher and author, in an author's having anything to do with the cost of issuing his work.

There are a number of classic examples of books of a very distinguished character paid for by the authors. Among them Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" and Motley's "The Rise of the Dutch Republic". There is a legend that Longfellow insisted on owning his own books, paying for the plates and other costs of manufacture, though his publishers would have been very glad indeed to assume all risk in the issuing of his work. An edition of "The Education of Henry Adams" was privately printed long before consent was obtained by the publishers to issue the regular trade edition. I seem to remember that