

class life stands out less vividly, but this may be explained by the comparative lack of data; for the middle classes seldom write memoirs, and are not made the object of commissions and investigations by social students.

The illustrations, from prints, photographs and silhouettes, are excellently selected, and cover a wide field, including fashions, sports, social assemblies, vehicles and decoration. The most delightful of all is a plate reproduced from "The Proper Deportment of Schoolboys," showing two well-dressed young prigs in the act of being "affable and condescending" (according to the precepts of the primer), while a country lad with bared head dutifully pulls his forelock!

The repulsion which is aroused in the modern mind by the snobbery of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers is perhaps as good an index as any to the spiritual progress we have made in the century 1820-1920. There is still far too much snobbery, but it has become somewhat furtive and apologetic, and no longer stalks among us unashamed, as it so patently did among the ancestors whom Mrs. Peel calls up before our astonished gaze.

HERBERT B. GRIMSDITCH.

THE MODERN SHORT STORY.*

That the prejudice of the reading public against the short story is rapidly passing is sufficiently evidenced in the recent experiments of two well-known English publishing houses. (I am not concerned here, of course, with the standardised magazine type of short story, whose only interest, apart from the speeding of an idle hour, would lie in the indication it offered of the psychology of the mass of modern readers.) The first of these experiments comes, with commendable audacity, from the house of Jonathan Cape, who has embarked upon a "Story Series," each volume of which is to consist of a bunch of short stories by a single author; and eight books of the series have already appeared. The second experiment comes from the house of Heinemann, in the shape of a beautifully produced volume of over a thousand pages, consisting of nearly two hundred of the "great" short stories of the world; and at the extraordinarily low price of eight and sixpence.

The prejudice against the modern short story is a little difficult to understand. So far as I grasp it, it seems to be based upon two grounds: (1) that the modern short story is gloomy, and (2) that it ends, so far as it can be said to end at all, unsatisfactorily.

I have seen dozens of letters to the editor of an enlightened weekly review (where one good story is printed in each number) bitterly protesting against the sombre nature of the fiction he publishes. "Give us," they say in effect, "as much of the gloomy state of affairs to-day as you like in your pages upon current events; but for mercy's sake give us lighter reading in your literary pages." The implication is that a man turns to art for an escape from the tragic nature of the life he is compelled to lead. Which is a fallacy. No man yet truly escaped from the tragedy of his life by rushing into a glittering orgy of "lighter reading." If modern life hurts you, you cannot really be rid of that hurt by running away from modern life; your only hope of release is by coming to some understanding of it. And who can help you to a better understanding than the artist? Would you place his position so low, once more, as the jester of olden times, and give him cap and bells and a painted bladder?

If the modern short story, then, has tended to be gloomy that is no reason for desecrating it, unless of course that

gloom is nothing finer than a morbid self-indulgence of the writer himself, intent only on working off his own black bile. If on the other hand the tragedy presented provides also an *interpretation*, we have every reason to be grateful; since through the seeing eye of the artist we have envisioned a harmony where before we saw only a chaos, and found a true escape at last in understanding.

So much for the first ground for prejudice. The second, though this may seem strange at first, is allied to it. To complain that the modern short story ends unsatisfactorily implies, I take it, that the reader likes a good honest plot. I sympathise with him, whilst at the same time reminding him that the short story is not necessarily the place for a plot at all, at least in the old sense of the word. For the modern short story is more akin to poetry than to the novel. Where ninety-nine writers can spread themselves attractively over three hundred pages of a novel, only one can discipline himself into the three thousand words of a short story; the short-story writer must be more strict in his selection, more sensitive, more loaded with vital images and, like the poet, more able to flash his interpretation in a single line. Also (and here lies the reason why he abandons the plot as such) he must realise that, since interpretation is his aim, and since no living interpretation is possible where the reader does not do half the work with the writer, he has to evoke the imagination rather than supply it. What he excludes therefore is as important a concern of his craft as what he includes. You have only to study the work of such recognised masters of the modern short story as A. E. Coppard, T. F. Powys, D. H. Lawrence, Martin Armstrong, Liam O'Flaherty and John Metcalf to see how carefully they study this art of selection.

The result upon the reader of such methods as I have outlined is that, whereas the story with the slick plot may just as well be thrown away once you have robbed it of its only surprise, the modern selective story, wherein method and poetry have taken the place of plot, can be read over and over again and with a new enrichment every time.

The one writer of to-day who is exploiting to the full the best possibilities of the short story is Mr. Coppard. The title-story in his new book is a little masterpiece, his best yet, and as fine as anything Maupassant ever put his name to. The conversation of those three country women out gathering "kindling," revealing as it does not only their own pathetic histories but the way in which they echo the plight of all their multitudinous sisters, shows the fine insight into the peasant mind that is one of Mr. Coppard's greatest assets. His power of setting down peasant conversation, in all its raciness and native wit and rather inconsequent senselessness, is another; and such a piece of conversational writing as that in "The Old Venerable," in which he reports the talk of an old man of the woods with an unsympathetic gamekeeper, makes one almost regret that Mr. Coppard should sometimes give his tales a more sophisticated setting in which he is not so clearly at home. It is significant that Mr. Coppard insists on calling his short stories "tales." In them is no intruding moral; their plot (if such it may be called) is quite as natural as the plots of everyday life itself; they mingle the rough and the smooth, the crude and the poetic, as life will capriciously do; they are told with all the sensitiveness of a poet's power over word and image and they evoke one's imagination to a larger scope than their immediate theme, by unobtrusively widening out from the particular to the universal. The best of the world's tale tellers have done more. "The Field of Mustard" is (I use the word carefully) a beautiful book.

Perhaps the three examples of Mr. Jonathan Cape's "Short Series" that lie before me do not comprise the best selection. I hope not, for they hardly represent the modern short story at its best. Though many readers will revel in the stories of Mr. Edmund Candler, for the amazingly clear glimpses they give of remote lands and remoter people, this does not make them good stories. Indeed they are more than half travel sketches, as one might perhaps expect from the pen of one of the most gifted travellers of our time. The long title story—in

* "The Field of Mustard." By A. E. Coppard. 7s. 6d. (Jonathan Cape).—"The Emergency Man." By Edmund Candler. 7s. 6d. (Jonathan Cape).—"The Grace of Lambs." By Manuel Komroff. 7s. 6d. (Jonathan Cape).—"Doorways in Drumorty." By Lorna Moon. 6s. (Jonathan Cape).—"Georgian Stories, 1926." 7s. 6d. (Chapman & Hall).—"Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka." By Nikolay Golgol. 7s. 6d. (Chatto & Windus).—"Great Short Stories of the World." 8s. 6d. (Heinemann).

which, rather to the detriment of our own generation, two heroes, one of the Great War and another of an earlier day, are contrasted—is easily the best; but even there the combination of travel and pure tale spoils our enjoyment. Mr. Komroff's stories, I can well imagine, might even meet with the approval of the reader spoon-fed on the American standardised magazine story. Their only difference is that they are well written and often built round an "idea." But to be able to write well is only half the battle of the short-story writer; and Mr. Komroff's "ideas" are of a deceitfully portentous nature that half a minute's real thinking would puff away into thin air. Miss Moon's tales are but another version, of course, of "A Window in Thrums," but she has not always the magic of Barrie to keep her homely sentiment from slipping into sentimentality.

A book better designed to illustrate what I have written is the "Georgian Stories, 1926," and the most apt of the whole bunch for the purpose is William Gerhardi's perfect short story, "The Big Drum." Here is no plot and only the briefest of incidents; the casual eye would have passed it by; but the artist takes it, by his craft moulds it afresh, by his art blows new life into it, and behold! our sleeping imagination is suddenly awakened, and we know we are in the presence of a drama touching the very core of life. Such a story—and Mr. Coppard's "The Higgler" and Mr. O'Flaherty's "The Tent," both included in this collection—can be read a dozen times and each time with that fine renewal that comes of the reading of a pregnant poem.

Some of the best of modern short stories come from Russia, whose writers seem specially endowed with the power of revealing, under the flash of their words, the permanence that lurks beneath the most trivial incident. If Nikolay Golgol's "Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka" do not always maintain the level I suggest, that is perhaps because they are extremely early work. Nevertheless they give vivid glimpses into Ukrainian peasant life, with all its queer lore and Slavonic fatalism; and such a tale as "St. John's Eve" is amongst the best even of Golgol himself.

To write adequately of Messrs. Heinemann's wonderful book would be to embark on a history of the short story. I can do no more than congratulate the publisher and recommend the book to the attention of every reader. The selection is good; here are stories from ancient Egypt, from Greece, from Rome, from Persia and China, from the Bible, and from the whole literature of the modern world. The translations have on the whole been wisely chosen. The book should surely be one of the successes of the season; and what is more important to most of us, it should do much finally to reinstate the short story as one of the most adequate and beautiful art-forms that literature has yet evolved.

C. HENRY WARREN.

FRANCISCAN STUDIES.*

Here is yet another book on St. Francis. It differs, however, from most of the volumes produced for the recent seventh centenary celebrations in that it is not a "popular" account of the Saint's life or teaching for the general reader, but a work of investigation and learned criticism for the serious scholar who is concerned with the "problem" of Assisi. Here, in this handsomely produced and illustrated book, to which Professor Paul Sabatier contributes a brief preface, are eleven chapters on different aspects of St. Francis and his influence upon the world by eleven writers who have made a special study of their respective subjects and approach, in a spirit analogous to that of the "higher criticism" of the Bible, the task of disentangling the Francis of reality from the Francis of legend. The task is, the eleven writers agree in admitting, a difficult one. It is not merely, as Professor Burkitt's intricate chapter shows, that the original sources from which our

* "St. Francis of Assisi—1226-1926: Essays in Commemoration." Edited by Walter Seton, M.A., D.Lit. 16s. (University of London Press.)

knowledge of St. Francis is drawn are themselves contradictory on many points, but that St. Francis, like the Christ Whom he served, is apt to be interpreted by His followers or admirers to suit their own inclinations and ends—certain aspects of his character and message being emphasised to the exclusion of others.

The problems of Franciscan criticism are many. But one of the central controversies is between those who regard the Saint as a contemplative and those who insist that he was an apostle. In "The Dilemma of St. Francis and the Two Traditions," Mr. Harold Goad suggests that the rival claims of prayer and preaching, of contemplation and action, caused at first much perplexity in the mind of Francis, but that the apostle in him won the conflict:

"A careful examination of the sequence of his life reveals a certain inner rhythm, wherein periods of solitary prayer lead up to vivid flashes of illumination, followed by periods of intense apostolic activity, thus proving that the first of the series are preparatory and subsidiary to the last. At times the flash is so vivid as to dazzle us even to-day and to be in itself a supreme apostolic act. For symbols and parables embody for all mankind doctrines or spiritual lessons in strangely dramatic or imaginative form. What could be more apostolic than the scene of the Renunciation of the World, the parable of the Marriage with Lady Poverty, the preaching to the birds, the Christmas crib at Greccio, the miracle of the Stigmatisation, and indeed all the chief actions of the last years of the marvellous life? The appeal of these symbolic *gestes* is to all the world and to all times; they are not the deeds of a contemplative, but of an apostle."

Mr. Goad goes on to claim that St. Francis never wished his example to be literally followed by his adherents. He was essentially the apostle, whose inspiration could most fruitfully live by absorption and adaptation:

"Most men regard the gifts of God as living principles, capable of development and self-adjustment to life around. Others, however, seem to consider inspiration as a single transcendent creative word, immutable for all eternity. They distrust and betray the law of life through a mistaken loyalty to origins. Not so St. Francis, who, as we have seen, constantly read in the response of circumstance to his efforts at right service, the indications of God's Will as to what he should do next. Following his principle, we prefer to see in the immense success of the Franciscan ministry, in its missions, its great friaries and its theological schools, proof that this was its true line of development—rather than cavil, as many critics seem to do, at modifications of the Rule that this development implied."

Mr. A. G. Little, almost alone among our eleven contributors, combats this view. The main weight of these various studies falls in favour of the organised developments that have embodied, if they have also somewhat obscured, the simplicity and inspiration of St. Francis; and if I have concentrated on Mr. Goad's chapter, it is not because the other writers are less worthy, but because Mr. Goad has perhaps most concisely summarised the central tendency of the team. For myself I confess that the volume runs counter to my own prejudices. I own to a "loyalty to origins," and, just as it seems to me that St. Paul too often hides rather than extends the teaching of his Master, so the essential St. Francis appears to be lost in the organisations that have sprung up in his name. Yet I admit that this very able and interesting book has at least converted me to the view that, the world being what it was and is, the actual developments of the Franciscan ministry were all but inevitable. What we seem to need is a constant renewal of inspiration—a fresh St. Francis every century!

GILBERT THOMAS.

LAMPMAN.*

I had not thought to be called upon for a review of Archibald Lampman's poems, so secure is his place in the national Pantheon: it is with calm satisfaction that I have watched both his fame and his popularity grow side by side and steadily, decade by decade. No Canadian writer who ever lived holds at the moment a more stable

* "Lyrics of Earth." By Archibald Lampman. Edited by and with Introduction by Duncan Campbell Scott. \$2.50. (Toronto: Musson.)