

Editor's Study

THE distinction made by De Quincey between the literature of power and that of knowledge—that is, of information,—though often quoted by writers of to-day, was more pertinent to his own generation than to ours. He began his literary career when in poetry a new creative era was at its height, while in prose the didactic habit of the preceding century still persisted, especially in the writings of philosophers and men of science, whose speculations and discoveries were conveyed in strictly formal terms as much in contrast with the quaint and imaginative discursions of Bacon and Sir Thomas Browne in the sixteenth century as with the illuminative expositions of Clerk-Maxwell, Faraday, Tyn-dall, and Herbert Spencer a generation later. With the writers of our own time in the same field, such as John Fiske and William James, the contrast is still more striking.

It would never occur to us to call a formal treatise literature in any sense. Yet analysis, description, scientific exposition, criticism, and narrative, which, as formally presented, do not belong to literature, may by imaginative power and insight be lifted to that dignity, while the novel, which ought always to have that exaltation, may be an utterly feeble and insignificant production, or, even if interesting and important in its matter, being devoid of imagination, may fall short of the distinction.

There is really no literature but the literature of power, which in our day covers an immense and varied field. The thoughtful reader finds himself engaged, during every waking moment he can spare for books and periodicals, by some embodiment or interpretation of life which has imaginative value, appealing to his higher curiosity and to his most widely varied tastes. His newspaper is not merely a chronicle; it charges the day's doings with their meaning and tendency, investing incident and circum-

stance with the guise of fancy and humor; even the reporter—who may be a budding novelist—does not fail of the picture; and well equipped critics disclose with varying degree of charm the freshly emergent novelties in science, literature, society, art, and even archæology. His magazines, of which there are so many, and so many that are good, deepen the best of these satisfactions and offer him, in fiction and essay, a store of imaginative literature, richer, more diversified, and of a higher order than was ever before thus current in the world. In books, the whole treasury of human literature is at his command, and so much of the best of it is of his own generation that he will find in this alone the full complement of his culture, including the truest interpretation of the past.

All this is literature with the stamp of imagination upon it. Very little of it that is contemporary will ever meet the eyes of a future generation. The eminent writers of the past who have won immortality did not strive for it; they were helped to it through features which our writers have missed or repudiated—impressive accessories, association with heroic or religious themes, and, in times when there were few authors of any note, a singular assurance of prosperity with many generations. Their intrinsic excellence, which is undisputed, while an indispensable condition to lasting fame, would not alone have sufficed to save them from oblivion.

Our writers, unconsciously, it is true, but perseveringly, court evanescence. That is the course of evolution in Nature. The inorganic endures, but all living things pass, and return only in their successors. Never the same harvest blooms again. As literature comes nearer to life it partakes more of its evanescence, which, in the case of humanity, is more pronounced than it is in Nature. This comparative disadvantage, as it seemed to our predecessors, found a partial compensa-

tion in the durable monuments of art. But we do not look upon it as such a disadvantage, and instead of seeking durability we promote mutation and expedite the passing.

The word "duration" suggests hardness, immovable permanence, the stability of Cathay. Men were used to think of eternity as endless duration. Now we have come to think of it as a quality of the psychical life. Water wears away and outwears the rock. Only that which freely flows, which is mobile, quick in change and passage, can have real stability. Our modern conservatism is not a clinging to old modes, a plea for stereotyped fashions; it is rather a plea for time—however brief the moment—in which to change. The obstinacy of the old conservatism, a protest against mutation, insured the ruin, through brittleness or rot, of all it sought to preserve, leading the way to precisely the same meaningless dust or refuse that iconoclasm leaves in its wake. Iconoclasm, therefore, belongs wholly to the past—to those periods in which its precipitate corrosions were invited; in our day the general sense waits upon conservatism and deprecates destruction of values. The stability of our civilization is secured by those mutations which are a distinctive feature of modern constructive organization. The destruction of values by war is coming to be looked upon as an intolerable barbarism.

To expedite the passing is the law of our modern life. We reinforce all sane and wholesome currents, all that are not impelled by rages and hatreds, and in time shall thus prevent the waste and futility of attempts to sustain decrepitudes. Even in our pathology we stimulate fevers and send after disease its own specific virus or, what is better, conveniently anticipate it by the same means—so clearing the stream.

All of our life which has for us beauty, interest, and meaning is made up of evanescences, of things that are passing and which we willingly let pass. This is as true of past generations as of our own, and those generations found in the shifting scenes and situations a by no means stinted share of human delights and satisfactions; but for us the phenomena are different. Life, so generous for them, is yet for us far more abundant and varied

in its bounty, and we have quite another perspective of its real values. They were more exacting, formal, and tenacious in the outward conduct of life, and more jealously guarded a visible integrity. We have more faith in life, confident of its inward harmony, and let it freely flow, seeking its own levels; we are not afraid of inconsistency, and readily give up the outward for an invisible integrity. We are sure of our harmony and do not strain to keep it at high pitch; chaos will not ensue upon our relaxation. Ours is not the burden of Atlas. Souls will not be lost for lack of our inquisition. Yet the currents of the world's life, thus freely flowing, are strong enough for their own issues and for the salvation of all who yield to them. Response to the truth is more important than that old mistaken sense of responsibility to which more than half of the almost unthinkable cruelties of the past were due.

Literature as well as life has been released from an unnatural strain through our new sense of values. Walls are for the garden, not the garden for walls; and our real life, certainly our real literature, is wholly concerned with the garden and with its living and evanescent flowers and fruits. Formerly the imagination dwelt in the house of Fame, exalting heroic or saintly deeds and personalities; now it is not busy with things that are memorable or monumentally lasting; it dwells in the house of Life. The phenomena which appeal to it and which engage its powers do not crystallize in fixed external features or traits, are always in flux and have no permanence, are, therefore, not matters of record in memorial, but, being moments of mind and heart or, at their firmest, moods that take shapes as clouds do in the sky, have no statics and are caught only in passing. Such moments or moods have, in all times, made the best part of human life—the very life of life—but not the best on the same psychical plane as ours, and, therefore, not having the same high esteem in critical appreciation or in imaginative selection. The values which our present generation most cherishes in literature have not distinguished the literature and, still less, the art of former ages.

Even in our interpretation of the past we seek, as far as possible, to get back

of the memorial, back of those things which formerly seemed most worthy of record, and so made up the body of human history; yet if we were successful, we should not find psychical phenomena of the same order as those which abound in our modern life, and which have our preference as imaginative motives because of their higher interest and excitement—more than compensating those we have surrendered. If every part of the world's life were brought within the full operation of this dynamic psychical harmony, we should have as reasonable a millennium as we could hope for—and should no longer make history, certainly not after the manner of former generations. Already we are puzzled how fitly to commemorate a three hundred years old poet, we are so tired of outward monuments. For records shall we hereafter be obliged to content ourselves with those of commerce and industry and athletics, of the best sellers in the book market, of the speed of automobiles and ocean liners, the flights of air-ships, and the long-windedness of Congressional speech-makers, or of the applause given to Presidential candidates in political conventions? All these are fluctuating enough to meet the modern note of change and of absolute contemporaneity, but have no psychical significance and no imaginative value; they belong to the mere routine of journalism.

Each new generation suffices more and more for itself, and, whatever regard it may have for antiquity, it has little for an invisible posterity—none at all for any glory that posterity may confer upon it. It is faithfully reflected in its imaginative literature—in that portion of it which is either an interpretation or representation of contemporary life. What matter if the next generation, in its own self-sufficiency, is oblivious of the reflection, and treats this passing literature as in a palimpsest, writing its own above it?

There is another portion of literature in each generation, not so entirely contemporary in its aim, but, as in the case of Mrs. Humphry Ward's fiction, linking itself with the past, while wholly modern in its psychical method and meaning. We should say that modernity is with Mrs. Ward a passion, whatever the background of her work. This class of lit-

erature is especially important for its culture-values. Whether on that account it will last any longer is by no means certain. It may be that we have reached the time when even the torch-bearers are illuminated only by the passing flame.

But there remains still another kind of imaginative literature—a more unconscious, indeed an absolutely spontaneous, manifestation of genius, and more distinctively creative than any other. In our day it is sure to be fiction, and just because it is so purely creative it is profoundly and inevitably interpretative. We speak of it as if it were actually in evidence, but we should rather say that there are in certain works of fiction of our time, beginning with the early novels of Thomas Hardy, indications of it, samples showing its kind rather than works fully illustrating its possibilities. Thus we have in one writer a native quaintness of characterization which has fascinated European as well as American readers, but lacking in might of thought or feeling; in another, might enough of humor and fancy to have made his name known in the most secluded nook of Christendom; in another, the power beyond any one in her generation to create living men and women; in another, just beginning her career, a plain portraiture which sometimes seems like a bravura of realism; and in still another, this realistic representation made especially significant by a subtle imagination. In all the work coming within the class now under consideration perhaps that of Thomas Hardy and Mark Twain comes nearest to a large and significant realization of the possibilities of the new literature.

This kind of imaginative creation we do not associate with culture-values. It is all modern—could indeed only spring up in our time; but we do not look upon the creators of it as passing on the torch—they have no place in that light-bearing procession. When we read Conrad's *Lord Jim* or Kenneth Grahame's *Golden Age*, we do not give them a definite place in the course of human culture, as we do the writings of Thackeray, George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and Henry James. This kind of work seems, in a way, almost dateless, as Mrs. Mary Wilkins Freeman's stories seem.

If we are to be surprised by some new

Immortal, he will come in this dateless fashion, like a Melchisedec, "without generation or length of days." And we are, not altogether without hope, looking for him, or, it may as well be, for her. This coming author will be a modern of the moderns—it is only thus that he can surprise his contemporaries, ourselves or those who come after us. His genius may remind us of the greatest of the old Immortals—of Shakespeare or, as Hardy's did when it first dawned upon us, of the Greek masters of tragedy; but it will not come in the guise of any of these. He will not be compared as to excellence with writers past or present so that criticism can point out that in this or that respect he is in the advance. He will not be praised for his subtle analysis or his exquisite art. Without any of the tricks of the showman, any theatrical poses or effects, or any such masterfulness as will lose him the reader's intimacy, he will have the large appeal and be popular.

We cannot give away the secret of such an author's charm, or combination of charms, since he is to be a surprise, the Unprecedented, dealing with the unprecedented phenomena of the new world which his creative and interpretative imagination shall discover. Psychical phenomena, surely—that way must lie the supreme excitement, play, humor, and enchantment.

In the mean time—that is, while we are still awaiting the emergence of a genius which shall fully illustrate the possibilities that we hopelessly attempt to define—we must listen to the tiresome complaint of the mediocrity of contemporary literature

Every modern advantage which we may reasonably consider an excellence, as indicating an advance in our departure from the life and literature of the past, seems to involve just that kind of disadvantage which makes for mediocrity. We might therefore infer that mediocrity itself is the distinctive excellence of modernity. And such it is negatively—that is, as precluding certain kinds of superiority. But it has only this negative virtue. Mediocrity invites disaster to literature and to every other human interest not sordidly material. Our hope is in our belief that the mediocrity characterizes only the outward fashions of our life;

that the appearance of a dead level is due only to the absence of the kind of eminences which we have repudiated; that some new psychical sovereignty or compulsion—more native to life, more vitally uplifting and significant—has displaced that mock show of mastery which, in the past, has proved wholly inadequate to a full realization of humanity.

The manifestation of this less obvious but only real aristocracy seems to us to be shown in our life and in our literature. But there is room for its more buoyant expression, for the ampler expansion of its power—such as shall expel the word "mediocrity" from the critic's vocabulary. This consummation cannot be reached in our fiction—and it is there that it must be realized—by *finesse* of art or any masterful legerdemain of treatment, by study or by mental or emotional stress, and, least of all, by reversion to old methods and motives. It may come, as we have intimated, through some exceptional genius which will give to our era such distinction as Shakespeare gave the Elizabethan and Dickens the Victorian; or a group of writers may emerge, each in his separate and distinct eminence, whose genius shall fully illustrate the imaginative values of the new order with such creative power as shall bring on the Summer of our literature, in its glowing light and brooding heat; its expanse and abundance as well as variety and free play under loftier skies; its natural excess, through reinforcement without exaggeration—showing that a psychical realism involves supreme excitement and passion; dramatic movement without theatrical show; the pulsation, vibrancy, and full volume of life.

We are not confessing to the weakness of our new literature, which we do not regard as either mediocre or anæmic, though we are looking for better examples of its strength. Probably the complaining critic might more justly be brought to the confessional, so blind does he seem to values not meeting expectations based on an old habit of judgment. Criticism is apt to lag far behind creative power, as it did in the days of Jeffrey and Keats. Ours is not a period of transition, in respect of the attitude of the imaginative writer, but one of waiting for his mightiest achievement.

Editor's Drawer

Mr. Flickinger's Vacation

BY BESSIE R. HOOVER

"I COULD have an arm broke as well as not now," said the head of the Flickinger family, jovially, to his wife one night after supper.

"What fool notion's took you now?" inquired his wife, sharply.

"My money's in," cried he, jubilantly.

"In where?"

"The bank—my bank."

"What's that got to do with havin' an arm broke?" questioned his wife.

"Why, I could have an arm broke now and stand the expense," explained Pa.

"We've got thirty-five dollars in the bank."

"I dun'no' but you ought to 'a' kept it out'n the bank," worried Ma.

"Where'd you 'a' put that much money in this house?"

"I'd 'a' found a place."

"Name one," grunted Pa, incredulously.

"I'd 'a' put it in my Mother Hubbard pocket."

"A fool 'd find it there," jeered Pa.

"Who'd ever expect to find even a penny in a woman's pocket; and who could find a woman's pocket, anyway?"

"There's summat in that," admitted her husband; "but I couldn't have my money in a safer place than the National Merchants'."

"I dun'no'," said Ma, anxiously: "it kinder seems to me as if we was goin' to lose it—since it's gone into a bank."

This somewhat dampened Pa's ardor, though he had unlimited confidence in the National Merchants', which he proudly called "my bank." And his account slowly crept up to five hundred dollars; for he had finished paying the instalments on his home and was out of debt.

"My rheumatism is a-grumblin' again," he announced one night, "and the boss says I oughter git into a warmer climate for a few months."

"But the expense—" began Ma.

"We've got the money in the bank," he reminded.

"And there's the place we want to keep it," put in his wife, prudently.

"Bistle's folks is goin' to Californy this winter, and I half promised we'd go with 'em."

"We won't do no such thing," contradicted Ma; "it 'd eat up all we've saved."

"But it might cure my rheumatiz. Besides, I need a vacation."

"Then take a few days off and rest up," advised his wife.

"It's a-seein' new things and a-gettin' new thoughts that rests a feller," maintained Pa. "I've been peggin' along in the factory and never had no vacation in all my life."

"But it worries me to think of usin' up what little we've got, on a foolish trip."

"Nothin' to worry about; you take a vacation to git away from worry," stated Pa.

The next morning his wife said: "I dun'no', Pa, but if your rheumatiz don't let up, and you still have a hankerin' to go, but what you'd better; for if you'd git sick for lack of a vacation, how'd I feel then? It's your money."



"HURRAY!" HE SHOUTED, "CALIFORNY FOR ME!"