

# LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

## AMERICAN BOOKS AND FOREIGN REVIEWERS

It takes time, even for a book of genuine significance, to get about the world, but in the end what one half the globe finds interesting, or beautiful, or amusing, the other half is likely to find so too. Mr. Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* is no longer the chief topic of conversation in what the book reviewers call 'literary circles' in the United States, but by this time Australia has discovered Gopher Prairie. In a late issue of *Stead's Review* a critic who signs himself 'A Friend of the Author' devotes three pages to a review of the American novel. Mr. Lewis's 'friend' finds his novel 'powerfully told,' and has only praise for his story of Carol Kennicott's bitter protest against the life unintellectual as it is lived along the Main Streets of America. But he has one serious fault to find with the novel. 'A "happy ending" is impossible,' and the novel does end happily — at least, so thinks the Australian critic who bids us

Think how one of the great Russian writers would have left the story running out beyond the horizon of inscrutable tragedy. Our young author has ruined it. This heroic Carol is shamed into a neurotic young matron with too little to do and with a bad liver.

No, my friend Sinclair, though you and I might weakly abandon our protest against the ugly and the inane, against the parasites, the pharisees and the boosters, though we might return as a dog to its vomit, settling ourselves to live apart from the Bzornstams, to patronize the submissive poor while training our children to be super-parasites, the Carol Kennicott with whom you took us through those tragic years could not. She did not. Those last three chapters are not true.

The *Nation*, and the *Athenæum* finds

*Three Soldiers*, by Mr. John Dos Passos, somewhat puzzling. By no means disposed to condemn, the English critic cannot bring himself to praise without qualification, and as usual in such cases, the meat of the criticism is in the qualifications: —

In his not readily classified book, — his second emanating from war-experience, — Mr. Dos Passos presents a view of the war-experience of three American soldiers. He has, quite plainly, written with fiery ardor and almost savage energy; at times his observation of detail is intense. He is making war on war with all the fury which words of his can direct; and in this he does well, for, as we have said, there are those who cannot regard the apparent inability or unwillingness of the age to measure its experience, without some sinking at heart. In how great a degree he succeeds is another question; and, indeed (apart from the advice on the dust-cover), his precise plan of campaign is obscure. He at any rate attacks the war by way of the American army and the influence which it exercises on the three soldiers.

Another American novel which has received attention by British reviewers is Mr. Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*. Mr. Anderson was recently in England and his novel has been republished in a new foreign edition. The *English Review of Reviews* finds *Poor White* a deeply interesting story, and the story of Bidwell, Ohio, — that other middle-western town of recent fiction, — a vivid and clever study. It is the structural weakness that this critic finds in the novel which leads him to his only adverse comment: —

The passion with which Mr. Anderson studies it has rather injured his novel as a novel. First Bidwell, and then Clara But-

terworth, the typical new woman, shove Hugh off the canvas, with the result that the crucial incident of his personal life — his marriage, the consummation, at last, of an actual and close human contact — fails, because Hugh has faded.

It is a far cry from these popular novels to one of the books which seems far more certain to take a permanent place in American literature. The *Education of Henry Adams* is to be found more often nowadays on the bookshelf than on the library table. We have done reading it and put it aside with the other classics. Probably nobody has put it aside for very long. We shall be reading it again. But it is still a new book — or at least new enough for critics to discuss — abroad. Europe, though perhaps not quite so quick as America to recognize the unique quality of the *Education*, is far from neglecting it. A French critic writes: —

His book, *The Education of Henry Adams*, . . . is the work of a Montaigne who tells us his story with this negative conclusion as his sole result: that all the effort of an entire century is a signal failure to adapt the thoughts and acts of a well-intentioned man to the exigencies of modern life. To prove it, Henry Adams describes his experiences as diplomat, scholar, historian, and philosopher with complete sincerity and consummate art.

In questions of philosophic and religious faith, he has suffered more than anyone else from a tormented search for oneness in the universe. For him, as for Emerson, the problem of supreme importance for us all is that of the one and the many, the universe and the individual. Adams seeks for unity in a world of increasing complexity. Neither history nor science gives him this, and in religion, he remains a skeptic. Like many moderns, he had faith in evolution, but he carried out on his own account certain observations made by Darwin and found his faith upset. . . .

It is a curious book in which the author, himself an example of that complexity which he would say is that of his century,

presents himself to us now under the guise of a Hamlet, now of a Montaigne, and sometimes, one would say, of a Nietzsche, and a Charles Sorrell from America. A striking spectacle this of a Yankee turning his back on modernism and seeking the solution of the problems of our epoch in a return to scholasticism.

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#### THE COLLECTED PLAYS OF BRIEUX

THE first volume of a collected edition of the plays of M. Brieux has been issued by Stock in Paris, and is to be followed by others until the author's twenty-five plays have all been reprinted. This first volume contains: *Ménages d'artistes*, *Blanchette*, *Monsieur de Reboval*, and *l'École des Belles-Mères*.

The dramatist has written a short preface for the new edition, rather melancholy in tone; but with characteristic daring, he does not hesitate to attack the most difficult questions of the aesthetics of drama. According to a French critic the preface is typical of the abundant and powerful, although frequently unequal talent of M. Brieux.

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#### CHINESE QUOTATIONS

THE *North-China Herald* tells an amusing anecdote of General Wu Pei-fu which illustrates a characteristic of the Chinese soldier. General Wu commanded the Peking government troops in the fighting at Wuchang. The story goes that he arrived on the battlefield just as the enemy were reaching the last lines of defense. With his bodyguard, only one hundred men, he dashed into the breach and personally directed the counter-attack that repulsed them. When he was congratulated on his success, General Wu, who is a scholar learned in the Chinese classics, as well as a soldier, replied that he did not mean to make a counter-attack,

but had merely advanced to get a good view of the front.

The Chinese general's remark is not so naïve as it may seem to an Occidental; for the Confucian *Analects* tell the story of an officer in command of the rear-guard in a sortie from a beleaguered city, who distinguished himself by dashing through the city gates after the last of his troops had entered and the gates were being shut in the face of the approaching enemy. When this hero of classic times was congratulated on his gallantry, he made the reply which General Wu's remark recalls: 'I did not mean to be the last man; it was only that I had the slowest horse in the troop.' No Chinese ever makes an original remark when there is a quotation from the classics that will suit the case as well.



#### PIERRE LOTI'S 'SUPRÊMES VISIONS'

LOVERS of the East, and of M. Pierre Loti's interpretations of its mystery, will have no reason to regret the illness which overtook the author in Constantinople a few years ago. *Suprêmes Visions d'Orient*, the book in which he offers his readers the daily journal of a part of his life in Turkey, had been already begun when he was taken sick; but it was during his convalescence at Ortakeui, in the house of the French consul, near the Bosphorus, that M. Loti came to feel more deeply than ever the charm of Turkey, so many memories of which are wrapped up in his life; and here much of the work was written. The Turkey to which he takes his readers is not the land of *Azyiade* nor that of *Désenchantées*; instead, it is the Turkey shaken and weakened after the Balkan wars.

M. de Régnier, of the French academy, has written a long and enthusiastic review in *Figaro*, in which he says: —

The customs and the manners of Islam have become more and more familiar to him, and what was at first youthful fancy has become a ripened and reasoned conviction. I do not mean to say that M. Loti has become a devotee of the Koran; but he cannot feel himself a stranger in a Mussulman land. He is bound to it heart and soul. Moreover, has he not been willing to give Islam a place in his own home? His house at Rochefort contains a little mosque with its falenecs, its *meimier*, its inscriptions from the Koran, its rugs and lamps. There M. Loti, with a fez or turban on his head, goes to dream of Moghreb and Stamboul. . . .

These admirable pages are among the most beautiful that have come from his pen, although M. Loti is one of those authors in whose work it is hard to prefer one thing to another. Everything that he writes is of a peculiar unity; everywhere you will find the same sincerity, feeling and expression, the same hopeless melancholy before the flight of time, the same prodigious faculty for calling up pictures and mystery, and the same sad passionate feeling which has led M. Loti as a wanderer across the world. No place is with him more propitious for the exercise of his gifts than those where he takes us once more in his *Suprêmes Visions d'Orient*.

The name of the author's son, M. Samuel Viaud, appears on the title-page; but this does not signify a genuine collaboration. The book is wholly from the hands of M. Loti, but some pages of the journal have been revised by M. Viaud.



#### WET AND DRY

IN the overseas observation of the working of prohibition in the United States, there is nothing half-seas-over. It is all extremely sober and serious. Two Labor Members of Parliament have recently visited the United States, to investigate the actual processes of prohibition, and have drawn up a report on what they saw and heard. It contains little of which most thinking Americans are not painfully aware, and

ends with the following sentences: 'We have honestly endeavored to describe the conditions in America as we found them. We went with open minds, although we had been impressed with the idea gathered at home that prohibition had proved an unmixed blessing to that wonderful country. With this we do not agree.'

The New York correspondent of the London *Telegraph* sends to his paper a similarly discouraging report upon the results of prohibition legislation. It is not ordinarily in a London paper that we look for items which might be found in our own *Congressional Record*; but the *Telegraph* correspondent quotes some pungent lines repeated by Senator Stanley of Kentucky, in urging the adoption of a bill to authorize the sale of light wines and beer. The national anthem of the 'bootleggers' appears to run as follows:—

My country, 'tis of thee,  
Land of grape-juice and tea,  
Of thee I sing.  
Land where we all have tried  
To break the law and lied.  
From every mountain-side  
The bootlegs spring.

My native country free,  
Land of home brewerie,  
Thy brew I love;  
I love thy booze that thrills,  
And thy illicit stills.  
Thy moonshine runs in rills  
From high above.

The stranger's eye often sees things most truly as they are. If the vision is disheartening, at least the knowledge of it should be awakening.



#### A DISCOVERY IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

THE cleaning of the exterior of some of the early tombs in Westminster

Abbey has led to an interesting discovery, which may enable modern visitors to form a new conception of its ancient grandeur. It has long been thought that the brown-black color of the monuments was due to the dirt and wear of centuries. It has now been discovered that it is really caused by a heavy coat of opaque varnish, applied many years ago, which covers a wonderful display of Gothic heraldic-design work in gold and brilliant coloring. The tomb of Edmund Crouchback, Earl of Lancaster, one of the three fine monuments on the north side of the sanctuary, and those of Aveline, Countess of Lancaster, and Aymer or Audomar de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, are being relieved of the disguising varnish.

The painting that has come to light on the Crouchback tomb was partially described about one hundred years ago, but it will soon be possible to gain a vivid idea of the whole decorative scheme. The tomb is exquisite in color and rich in pattern. The sculptured figures on the canopy were painted in the old days, and some of this coloring survives in the small figures of the Earl in the effigy, garbed in a surcoat emblazoned with his arms, whose color is so fresh that the complexion of the face is actually visible. The heraldry which covers the moulding is now uncovered, revealing brilliantly painted coats-of-arms. A complete set of drawings in color is being made, to serve as a record for research in the future.



#### BOOKS MENTIONED

- Brieux. *Théâtre complet de Brieux*. Paris, Stock, 9 fr.  
Loti, Pierre. *Suprêmes Visions d'Orient*. Paris, Calmann-Lévy.

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