

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

ST. JOHN ERVINE AND AMERICA

THE impressions of America given to British newspapers by English literary men who have visited 'The States' are almost always full of interest. Mr. St. John Ervine has been lecturing on the common illusions about America, and the process of disillusionment. At a recent meeting of the Irish Literary Society he said:

'I thought of America as a country full of boasting, assertive, and rather mannerless people, closely intent on making money, and convinced that they had won the war. I discovered very speedily that the average American has far better manners than the average Briton, that he does not boast more excessively than he is entitled to boast, and that he is, on the whole, much more submissive to authority than Englishmen are. I did not find one man or woman in the parts of America visited by me, who had not got a very clear idea of the share of their country in the winning of the war.

'Love of money seems to me to be among the least of American characteristics. What one does discover in the whole population, rich and poor, is a real love of doing a job as well as possible. The American seems to like work, and he is fascinated by the power which control of industry gives to him. An American business man, even a very rich American business man, will be at his desk in his office, deeply engaged in his work, before an English business man has finished drinking his early morning cup of tea. I do not think that this is necessarily a virtue in the American business man — in

many respects, indeed, the English business man is his superior — but it arises, partly, from the fact that he must keep on the same level as his competitors, but more especially, from a genuine love of his job. A workman in America has much the same feeling. He would feel ashamed to demand increased wages at the same time that he was deciding to do less work and worse work.

'What we call American brag is the outcome of a quite laudable desire to see things better done in his country than they are done elsewhere. Civic pride is far stronger in American cities than it is in British cities. When I was in Chicago, I used to see banners stretched across the streets with legends such as "Boost Chicago" on them. The citizens were invited not only to brag about their city, but to make it worthy of brag. Something of the temper of Chicago at present was to be found in the people of Birmingham when Mr. Chamberlain was Mayor of that city.

'When I say that Americans are more submissive than Englishmen, I mean that they are more willing to accept the insolence of persons in office than we are. Walt Whitman referred to this aspect of their character more than once in his poems. We respect the law more than Americans do, but we have less respect for officials and politicians than they have. The American mind is more responsive to newspaper opinion than the British mind, and the American people generally are much more patient than we are. I have seen audiences in New York and Chicago

patiently waiting for half an hour after the advertised time of beginning, without emitting a murmur of complaint. A theatre-manager in this country who behaved in that fashion would be courting destruction. I suspect that much of this patience and submission is due to the fact that a very high percentage of the population has fled to America from oppression and poverty in Europe, and that some of the habits of servility learned in the Old World have been carried to the New World. At the same time, these people, in spite of their submissiveness to authority, have a zest for novelty and adventure and experiment which is not to be found in our population. They are more willing to try new things than we are.'

Mr. Ervine said that one of the illusions about America we must shed was the belief that the Americans are a homogeneous people. 'America may be the melting pot of Europe, but she has not yet fused the very intractable material she has received from the Old World into a new and united thing. Possibly she may do so, but it is equally conceivable that she will not.'

Bourdillon

At the age of sixty-eight Mr. F. W. Bourdillon, translator of 'Aucassin et Nicolette,' has died at Midhurst. As a poet he never achieved conspicuous success, despite a delicate talent and command of form, and despite numerous appearances at intervals since the 'seventies. A lover of Sussex, his native county, he perhaps was at his best in his Sussex verse; but he will be remembered as the poet of 'Aucassin.' In addition to his finely-felt and, to our taste, adequate rendering of the romance, he produced a photographic facsimile of the manuscript of the original. Later, he published a study of the *Roman de la Rose*. Mr. Bourdillon resembled in a minor degree the author

of *The Earthly Paradise*, and his knowledge of mediæval romances in general was wide.

Epigrammata

Shane Leslie, in the New Witness

VALE

Farewell to thee, Fair Chance, and
thee, Good Luck,

For I have found the One who does
not lie;

To other ones, with whom you play the
Puck,

Farewell I cannot say until they die.

SWINBURNE DEAD

By the pardon Gothic organs blow,

By the pitiful Gregorian Hymn,

Let the conquering Galilaean know

Lord Apollo slain by Cherubim!

*Heckling Bernard Shaw: A Note from
the London Daily Telegraph*

ADDRESSING a public meeting organized by the St. Pancras branch of the Independent Labor Party at the Public Baths, Prince of Wales-road, Mr. George Bernard Shaw remarked: 'As long as the country is in debt, no man, whether he is a capitalist or landlord, or prince, or duke, or beggar, has a right to spend a single day without work. What you want in this country is compulsory labor for everybody.' (Cheers.) If he were a dictator on the proletarian side, he would deal more mercifully with some so-called crime than the existing law. There were even murders with regard to which he should not be too hard on some people. If a man were not punished for murder, he did not believe he himself would do many murders; he imagined about half a dozen under existing circumstances would satisfy him. (Laughter, and a Voice: 'You will be retained as the communist jester!')

Mr. Shaw made no answer.

The Death of Nijinsky

THE premature death of Waslaw Nijinsky, the most wonderful of all the Russian male dancers, may serve to remind aspirants that dancing is the most exacting of the arts. The nervous breakdown, which was the beginning of his end, is a not infrequent result of the tremendous tax on the powers of action and emotion. Nijinsky had danced ever since he could toddle, his first appearance at the Imperial theatre in Warsaw being as a Chinese boy with a pigtail, when he was only six years old. His athletic agility was amazing — he seemed to abolish the law of gravitation and become an incarnation of space twist. But he was too much of an artist to be acrobatic, and he made his every gesture and movement a spiritual thing. The range of his art was wide, though he had not the impressive virility of Mordkin or even Novikoff, and even in *Scheherazade* could not express the fierceness of human passion. He was best in dionysiac parts, when there was an elfin touch in his joyousness, and in the academic fantasias, which ask for witty irresponsibility — indeed, he looked then as if he could translate La Rochefoucauld's 'Maximes' into terms of dancing. Modest and ingenuous, he lived for his art, and no doubt he died for it.

W. H. Hudson

READERS of Mr. W. H. Hudson will welcome Dent's publication of a new book *Dead Man's Plack* (Dent, six shillings). The book is composed of two long-short stories, 'Dead Man's Plack' being a good deal lengthier than 'An Old Thorn,' the story of an ancient and solitary tree on the Wiltshire Downs, with mysterious powers, to which poor Johnny Budd, in 1821, prayed when he was being carted off to Salisbury Gaol to be hanged for stealing a sheep. This story of tree-worship

is as strange and magical as the tree itself, but it is to 'Dead Man's Plack' as an exceptionally good and striking piece of work to a masterpiece. What a wonderful experience for the reviewer is the encountering of a masterpiece, a little crock of gold buried in a dustbin parcel of rubbishy minor verse, like finding some rare and delicate flower in a backyard, or bird among sparrows, or book on a barrow! For in its own luminously perfect and individual way, this story of King Edgar and Elfrida, for whom he killed Athelwold his friend, who deceived him, and took her for himself, is a triumphantly realized work of art.

Elfrida, Mr. Hudson tells us, 'albeit still in purgatory' expiating the sins of her pride and ambition, and her own responsibility for the death of her stepson, was yet able to revisit the glade in Harewood Forest, Hampshire, where the monument to Athelwold stands, and 'it does not seem to me altogether improbable that she herself made the revelation I have written.' Her character is, as Mr. Hudson himself says, 'veiled' in the narrative, and 'even after ten centuries it may well be that all the coverings have not yet been removed, although she has been dropping them one by one for ages.' Not yet is she able to reveal her inmost soul, for when that day comes her sufferings are over. But the calm, the transparently lovely art of Mr. Hudson should yet plead for her with an eloquence irresistible. At least, none can doubt that it all happened just as Mr. Hudson relates it, just as though his readers were not only living and present through all the phases of this Saxon tragedy, but had the mysterious power, through him, of reading the hearts of the actors.

The Passing of the 'Insane' Schools

A NOTABLE change is evident in British art. For years we have been

subjected to the dishonest work of lazy charlatans. These, backed by crazy cranks and easy-going critics, have swindled a public devoid of courage and conviction, or the power to distinguish dross from gold. Fortunately, the futurists, Cubists, and innumerable sects of incompetents are disappearing. The best of them represented a reaction against the Post-impressionists, which had its value; but movements which may have begun in all seriousness soon became the prey of the humbug and the self-advertiser. Posterity judges harshly the art of those to whom notoriety is more desirable than fame. The opening of the rearranged Wallace Collection at Hertford House, the loan exhibition of Spanish paintings at Burlington House, and the smaller annual amateur exhibitions, suggest on the part of the public a welcome return to sanity, and the appreciation of honest work and technical excellence. It is a refreshing change.

The Legend of Eugénie

THE *Manchester Guardian's* reviewer, rightly enough, refuses to have the Eugénie legend saddled on a credulous world, and takes M. Augustin Filon's new book to task:

'The legend of the Empress Eugénie is passing, and yet another lift on the way has been given by this book. M. Augustin Filon was an intimate friend of the Empress. During the Regency in 1870 he acted as her private secretary. And now he writes with the air of a man who would rather that a notorious figure in history went down to posterity as a woman of slight character who did no conscious ill, than as a woman of some character who did no good at all. The reader may cherish his sentimental picture of the Empress when first he comes to the book. Think of it. A beautiful girl, noble of birth

but impoverished, takes her place on a gaudy stage at the age of twenty-six, wife of a commonplace man whose great tragedy it was to have had a Napoleon in his name. She becomes the fascinating woman of her epoch, has her sinister share in the gigantic projects which filled the Europe of her day with the tragic irony of a scene from Mr. Hardy's *The Dynasts*; she acts as ruler of France in the hour of crisis, when her husband is fighting against impossible odds; she will not heed the warning of events, but, faithful to the old order, seeks to stay the tide of a new idea of government; she goes down in the subsequent wreckage, but escapes romantically to this England of ours, which has always doted on fallen greatness; she becomes a widow, loses the son on whom all her remaining hopes were set, knows and is loved by Queen Victoria, and enters the age of gray hairs in the respectable silence of Chislehurst.

'Here, surely, is fit matter for the spirit of irony. But M. Filon would shatter the story. He has little enough sense of life. Let us preserve the amenities; the discords of our existences are disturbing—such, one feels, is his philosophy. At any rate, he sets about his little puppet with comfortable whitewash; the gaudiness is hidden, and at the finish the aspect of the woman is indistinguishable from that of Winterhalter's painting of her. "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?"—can this cozy suburban lady have aided in the great blood-letting of 1870 and uttered the famous "*Celle-ci est ma guerre à moi*?" M. Filon's reply is in an outraged negative. One does not complain, of course, that he squashes the cruder slanders against Eugénie's name. Such a one is in the phrase quoted above. M. Filon quite rightly corrects it.'

[*The Dublin Review*]

LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY

BY E. M. TENISON

(Born 1861; died *All Souls' Day*, 1920)

'In the Royal Galley of Divine Love there is no galley-slave: all the rowers are volunteers.' This saying of Saint Francis de Sales, quoted by Louise Imogen Guiney, is significant of the gallant spirit, the steady devotion to high impersonal aims, which, combined with generous sympathies and spontaneous brilliance of expression, gave to her life and works a charm, an inspiration, a unity in diversity, difficult to sum up in an epigram, but vividly felt by all who came in contact with her.

Often, the lives of authors make gloomy reading, and sometimes an author when encountered in the flesh is less attractive than the creations of his muse. But admirers of Miss Guiney's poetry and essays, who knew her first through her published utterances and afterward won her friendship, would agree that her literary ideals and personal characteristics were admirably in accord. She did not conserve her most illuminating criticisms, her poetic imaginings, her frequent flashes of wit, to hoard them for print: her letters to her friends, even her most casual notes, all bear the stamp of a mind in which sincerity and graciousness, fastidiousness of taste and ardent enthusiasm, keen artistic sensibilities and pungent gaiety were irradiated by the steady light of a spirit uncompromisingly opposed to the superficial, half-hearted, or mercenary and self-seeking elements in life and letters.

Seldom has any author been more conspicuously free from vanity. Those who were privileged best to know her loved her for her blending of humility with robust moral courage, of refreshing 'common sense' with uncommon scorn of mere expediency; of deep piety with humorous horror of cant, of gentle manners and melodious voice with warrior-swift insight into the characters of saints, men of action, and heroic poets of different eras and races.

Whimsical as her talk and writing sometimes seemed — for she had certain antique principles and preferences which appeared to some prosaic persons scarcely consistent with her American citizenship — beneath the dancing play of her fancy there was a rock of immutable faith; and on this was built the fortress of her life. Her affection for the active saints, Saint Paul, Saint Sebastian, Saint George, Saint Patrick, Saint Martin of Tours, and the tardily canonized Jeanne d'Arc — saints who were not just edifying names to her, but perpetual 'fire and wings' to cheer and to inspirit — was characteristic of one who never forgot she was a soldier's daughter. Her father, General Patrick Robert Guiney, died when she was a young girl; but the happy memory of his companionship was with her always. The Boston home of her youth must have provided a stimulating *milieu* for a poetess who attained distinction when not long out of her teens; yet her main ideas seem to have been evolved more from devotion to her mental