

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

ON FINISHING FRAGMENTS

THE publication of Jane Austen's unfinished novel, *The Watsons*, has been hailed with delight by most admirers of that prim but excellent novelist. Not so Mr. Edmund Gosse, who takes issue, not with the publication of the novel, but with an attempt to conclude it made by Miss L. Oulton. The publishers, who evidently admire their writer's handiwork, declare that 'members of the Austen family' are unable to recognize the place where the original story ends and the conclusion from a second pen begins. Mr. Gosse observes, brutally and indignantly, that he has 'no difficulty whatever in discovering the place where the divine author dropped her work. Miss Oulton has chopped into chapters what Jane Austen left undivided, and the new portion begins in the middle of chapter six. It is the opinion of the publishers that Miss Oulton has carried out "her difficult task" very successfully. I am reminded of the piece of music played to the unwilling Dr. Johnson, and excused as being "very difficult."

"Would God, madam," the sage replied, "that it had been impossible!"

'Was there nothing else which this ingenuous lady could have taken up by way of exemplifying her zeal and her prowess? The reader may judge of her capacity by reading almost any page of her continuation of *The Watsons*. Here, for instance, is a passage which must indeed have convinced "the members of the Austen family" that they possessed the real thing at last! Lady Osborne and Mr. Howard proceed to Florence.

Later on, as she sat beneath Botticelli's Fortitude, with her hand on her parasol, the likeness between them (*sic*) struck him with almost a sense of dismay. Her bright

color had faded, and there was a look of weariness and lassitude on her face. As in the picture, it was the face of one who had suffered, and would again suffer, before she had laid her head on the quiet pillow of her grave.

'Jane Austen and Botticelli! With what a mixture of laughter and indignation the great spirit of our most faultless satirist must greet this attempt to reproduce her style and her spirit!'

Mr. Gosse, in reviewing these fragments, works himself into a really fine frenzy. Such attempts are, he insists, made only on two grounds, neither of them justified, for, as he says: 'Such a "continuation" of a precious fragment is not less ridiculous than useless. If it is a publisher's speculation, it cannot escape severe reproof. If it is the mistaken effort of an enthusiast, the ill-advised admirer must be entreated to do this sort of thing no more.'

However, he is not too indignant to recall a number of similar attempts. Mrs. Gaskell, now best remembered as the author of *Cranford*, died suddenly in 1865 while her story, *Wives and Daughters*, was running serially in the *Cornhill Magazine*. The story had gone so far that its dénouement was clearly in view. The author indeed died suddenly while sitting at tea with her family and talking about the characters of this very novel. Nevertheless, a suggestion that one of her daughters should 'finish it' was indignantly refused, although the daughters were not unwilling to give information as to their mother's intention.

Dickens's *Edwin Drood* is perhaps a still more famous case. The sudden breaking-off of the story caused a sensation in Victorian England. Steven-

son's *Weir of Hermiston* was left unfinished by the author in the middle of a sentence, but his friend, Sir Sidney Colvin, refused to tamper with it and insisted on publishing it just as it stood on the ground that 'the plan of every imaginative work is subject to change under the artist's hand.' No less a writer than Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, however, undertook to finish another Stevenson novel that was left incomplete, *St. Ives*, with which he succeeded far better than the unfortunate lady who is the object of Mr. Gosse's ire.

Mr. Gosse concludes his article with a faint note of apology for the people who like this 'finishing' of fragments. He does it with an ill grace, however, that is rare enough from his hand. It is easy enough to see his ill taste for the business.

'It is natural to ask why there should ever be a question of "finishing" fragments left by illustrious hands. But to this an answer may be found. All depends on the relation of the author to his readers. A very large, probably the largest, class of novel-readers does not come into any contact with the author at all. This is invariably the case with children, who read a book with excitement or fatigue, but give not a single thought to the person who wrote it, or to the mode in which it came into the world. They read for the amusement or instruction which they receive from the printed page, without any further preoccupation.

'We must remember the mental attitude of this large class of readers, and conceive that when they read *The Watsons* what they are really interested in is not the art of Jane Austen, but whether Emma married Mr. Howard or became the victim of Musgrave. When we confess that what attracts us is the movement of Miss Austen's mind, they stare; they have no idea what we mean.

'Yet this reflection does not excuse the laying of profane hands on the writing of Jane Austen, because *The Watsons* is not in any sense a tale which can excite popular curiosity, as do fragments of Dickens and Stevenson. In *Edwin Drood* the story had proceeded to a point where the questions who killed whom, and why, and when, had become unendurably thrilling. The crisis of *Weir of Hermiston* was scarcely less exciting, and the temptation to know what happened next was extreme.

'But the case with *The Watsons* is quite other. Miss Austen had obviously not made up her own mind about the conduct of a tale which, if she had consented to pursue it, might, and I think probably would, have proved one of the longest of her works.'



ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

THE English scientific monthly, *Discovery*, publishes a conservative note on the *Daily Mail's* somewhat sensational report of a dolmen with human remains probably dating from the late Neolithic Age found near St. Ouen in Jersey. The discovery was made by workmen excavating in the rear of a modern dwelling. Beneath the surface of the ground they found a well-preserved dolmen, a chamber of large upright stones with a flat stone cap. Near it was a kitchen midden full of limpet shells, a stone for grinding wheat, and a human skull. The latter was very much flattened and hence an effort was made to give it a very high antiquity. This, however, is probably not the case, and its curious shape is more likely to be due to pressure after burial.

The writer is somewhat more enthusiastic over the 'new' Patagonian skull, which is supposed to be one of the most ancient ever discovered. The English anthropologist says:—

If investigation of the details of discovery, and of the geological conditions in which it was found, confirm the view that it belongs to the third great geological epoch into which pre-recent geological time is divided, and if an examination of the form of the skull shows that it is really of primitive type, it would mean that the oldest known human remains have been discovered in South America, antedating by many thousands of years *Pithecanthropus erectus*, the earliest ancestor of man at present known, and the fossil tooth said to be human or subhuman in type and of Pliocene Age recently found in Nebraska. It is hardly necessary, however, to remind our readers that evidence for the existence of man in Tertiary times in South America, which has been brought forward up to the present, has not hitherto withstood criticism.

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‘DRESS DRUNKENNESS’

THE financial difficulties of a lady who aspired ‘to be the best-dressed woman in London,’ and ended in going to court for an enormous modiste’s bill which her husband declined to pay, leads Mr. E. T. Raymond into some salutary reflections in the columns of the *London Outlook*. Mr. Raymond sets up a distinction between genuine good taste and mere vulgarity which is worth considering. In the course of his argument he has occasion to quote some severe comments by Lady Bathurst, the proprietress of the *London Morning Post*. But let Mr. Raymond speak for himself:—

‘It was truly remarked of the nineteenth-century Englishman that he had a defective taste for pleasure, and a most marked taste for expense. The peculiarity was doubtless due to the coincidence of a Puritan religion and an aristocratic polity in a country of rapidly expanding wealth. The one indulgence Puritanism does not deny is pride and vainglory; and since the rich Puritan had little chance or temp-

tation to spend money in the ways of the wicked he naturally inclined, being bound to advertise his wealth somehow, for solemn stateliness of living. Hence the acres of Victorian mahogany dining-tables and the elaboration of the gold-and-marble console tables of fifty years ago.

‘With the decline of Puritanism the taste for pleasure has grown, but the taste for expense is still more notable, and there are multitudes of people who even estimate their pleasure in terms of expense. They enjoy a dear bad dinner much better than a cheap and good one. Like Elagabalus, who would only eat sea-fish at immense distances from the sea, they value luxuries merely because they are costly; they rush for tasteless strawberries in February, and scorn the full-flavored fruit in July. One often hears such a remark as “We had such a night, and did n’t get out under ten pounds”; and perhaps a majority of people will smoke a bad cigar at three-and-sixpence with more reverence and satisfaction than a good one at eighteenpence.

‘Thus with the frank Hedonists. When we go higher, of course, expense is the accepted standard of desirability. Rembrandt or Velasquez would still be eagerly sought if good examples fetched from five to twenty guineas at Christie’s. But it is certain that few rich men would buy them. Somebody would still want a Shakespeare folio if the market price were half-a-guinea, and the first edition of the *Compleat Angler* if it appeared in the booksellers’ catalogues for ninepence. But no ordinary millionaire, here or in America, would give such valueless rubbish houseroom.

‘All this must be remembered in justice to the lady whose gigantic dress-bills moved one of our most cultured judges to a fine piece of comminatory prose. Mr. Justice McCardie’s condemnation has been echoed by no less a

social authority than Lady Bathurst. Mrs. Nash spent from two to three thousand a year on dress. Her craving for self-embellishment, according to the judge, was insatiable; dress and dress alone was her end in life; she sought felicity in the ceaseless change of trivial fashions; self-decoration was her vision, her aim, and her creed. "How very foolish," says Lady Bathurst in effect. "The silly woman wants to be the best-dressed woman in London. Was there ever such futility? Nobody who is anybody in London ever heard of her, and would not have been at all impressed by all her finery if she had happened to penetrate to the *beau monde*."

'But clearly the case is not, as the judge assumed, one of simple passion for dress. Nobody with a passion for dress would have sixty evening gowns at a time, or order boots by the gross. No woman can conveniently wear more than one dress at night, or more than one pair of boots. Reckoning six nights to the week, sixty dresses would last ten weeks. Some of them would inevitably become a little old-fashioned — as things go in the world that takes such things quite seriously — before they were worn at all. Moreover, a woman who really loved dress for its own sake could hardly find it in her heart to discard something which thoroughly suited her after only one or two wearings.

'This lady's trouble was not, as the judge thought, an abnormal and even crazy desire to express her personality in clothes. Personality would have been better expressed by half-a-dozen well-meditated gowns. Nor was the extravagance necessarily incurred, as Lady Bathurst suggests, to impress the *beau monde*, or what the lady thought was the *beau monde*. What Mrs. Nash really suffered from was an extreme

form of the very common taste for expense, taking, through some failure of imagination, a concentrated and monotonous expression. . . . If Mrs. Nash had really belonged to the *beau monde*, if her husband's income had been fifty thousand a year instead of a poor twelve hundred or so, she would still be criminally foolish and vulgar to spend more than, say, six hundred a year on her personal adornment.

'Why? Why should there be especially "something so selfish and mean, apart from vanity, in spending enormous sums on clothes"? What differentiates such expenditure from the waste of money in any other direction — growing orchids or begonias in vast hothouses one visits only once a week, or accumulating great collections of books one never reads, pictures one rarely looks at, or china one never uses? Is there essentially, for that matter, more folly or vulgarity in overdressing than in overhousing one's self? A house may be regarded as a larger dress, clothing a family instead of an individual. Its primary purposes are those of clothes — protection, warmth, and decency. Its secondary purposes, which — as with clothes — become the more important the higher the status of the owner, are a satisfaction of pride and æstheticism. Philosophically it is no more vulgar to be overfine in one's dress than in one's rooms and furnishings. The one thing may seem more trivial than the other, but the essence of the matter is the same.

'Dress, in short, is subject to the same rules of taste that apply to everything else; and the ridicule which rightly attaches to the dress drunkard is simply the ridicule which should attach to any other form of the vulgarity which associates the idea of expense with the ideas of beauty, dignity, or enjoyment.'

BOOKS ABROAD

Il Mio Diario di Guerra, by Benito Mussolini.
Milan: Casa editrice Imperia, 1923. Lire 15.
[*Corriere della Sera*]

NATURALLY, knowing that the soldier who wrote this diary is to-day the head of the Italian Government, the reader will look for 'politics' in his notes. But there are none. If any political ideas are to be found, they are so closely connected with things of war and patriotic passion that one is unwilling to apply the term 'politics' at all. These short notes make the impression of pencil sketches, nervous but firm, through which the future complete picture can be guessed. The author remembers Mazzini's words: 'Great things are not accomplished by means of protocols but by divining the spirit of the age. The secret of might is will. . . .' He says further: 'To-day the dirty and bloody trenches engulf human lives. But the Europe of to-morrow will see the flower of greater liberty grow from these pathetic furrows.'

Mussolini, the soldier, is skeptical of amulets and says that 'one is just as good as another in the trenches.' When the chaplain presents him with a pious booklet of religious instructions for soldiers, he faithfully copies these in his diary, adding: 'I do not comment upon this, I merely transcribe,' and further adds: 'Who has not paid his tribute to the superstitions of trench life? I confess: I also wear on my little finger a ring made from a horseshoe nail.'

But the true value of the book is in the austere and ardent sense of war for a right cause that emanates from the simply and vigorously written pages. He is a soldier who sees the drawbacks but knows that he is not there in order to criticize. He makes his observations but does not press them. The thing that matters is for everyone to do his duty. His notes make the reader feel the supreme significance of the wounded men's stoicism, to which he alludes with manly emotion. His characterization of the fighters' morale is always short, but gives a complete psychoanalysis that would require pages by another writer.

Once in a while a note reveals sentiment — not sentimentality — always discreetly worded and never affected, as when, on a rainy Christmas morning, to the accompaniment of incessant cannonade, Mussolini sits down to write a few fragmentary childhood reminiscences.

Recent Revelations on European Diplomacy, by G. P. Gooch. London: 1923. 1s. 6d. net.

[*Times Literary Supplement*]

THE proceedings of the British Institute of International Affairs, a society which was

founded shortly after the conclusion of the Peace Conference, are, we understand, generally kept strictly confidential. An exception, however, has been made in the case of this paper by Mr. Gooch, which was read at a meeting of the Institute and is reprinted from the *Journal*. Mr. Gooch has managed within a comparatively short space to give an admirable critical survey of the more important foreign books which have appeared during the last few years. The whole literature is one of great interest and importance; never before have we had so full a revelation as to great events so soon after they took place. The literature is also of immediate and real value for its bearing on the problem of what is called 'responsibilities,' which is still exercising, to a degree perhaps hardly realized in this country, public opinion in Germany and abroad.

It is inevitable that Mr. Gooch should indicate the conclusions which he reaches; he does so, as all who know his other writings would expect, with a singular freedom from partiality, in a few carefully phrased sentences. He completely exculpates France, and in particular M. Poincaré, from the charges frequently made, not only by German but also by English and American writers: —

'If it is impossible to concede his claim, that for many years France had done everything possible to avert the cataclysm, there is no foundation for the widely held belief that the President desired war.'

His general conclusion is: 'Though the conduct of each of the belligerents appeared to its enemies to indicate a double dose of original sin, it was nevertheless in every case what might have been expected.'

Egypt and the Old Testament, by T. Eric Peet, Professor of Egyptology in the University of Liverpool. London, 1923. 5s.

History of Roman Religion, by W. R. Halliday B.A., B.Litt., Professor of History in the University of Liverpool. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923. 5s.

[Edward Shillito in the *Sunday Times*]

THESE books are not meant to be 'popular' in the sense in which that word is commonly used. They are written for thoughtful readers who wish to keep in touch with lines of study which are not their own peculiar concern. This end these two books will serve excellently.

Mr. Peet has been fortunate in his hour. Everyone is talking Egypt; and almost the first thing the reader will do in opening the book will be to look for Tutankhamen. He will find him