

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

THE 'WHY' OF GRAY HAIR

To a recent number of *T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly* Professor J. Arthur Thomson—who is a kind of self-appointed British pope of popular science, and a very good one too—elucidates the causes that make people's hair turn gray. The subject was dealt with very successfully a number of years ago by Professor Poulton, the Oxford entomologist, in his book, *Animal Colouration*, on which Professor Thomson is evidently basing his own ideas.

The story of the responsible bankers whose hair turned gray in a single week during times of crisis like the World War is probably quite true. Such cases are not uncommon in history. Marie Antoinette's hair, for example, is said to have turned white in a very short time as a result of emotional distress; and similar instances are recorded by a number of mediæval writers.

The sudden change of color is due to the intrusion of little bubbles of gas into the substance of the hair, which reflects the light and prevents the pigment, which is still present, from showing. When hair goes gray more slowly, it is—or so Metchnikoff believed—due to the officious activity of white corpuscles which have got into the bad habit of prowling up into the hair and devouring the pigment. Many fur-bearing animals change color with the weather, and the mechanism involved in these changes appears to be very much like that which affects human hair.

A NEW RAPHAEL?

WHAT the discoverer believes to be the lost original of Raphael's 'Madonna del Popolo' has turned up in the Ural Mountains in a little town known as Nijny Tagil. Throughout the nineteenth century the Madonna was in the possession of the Demidov family, who owned an ironworks at Nijny Tagil, whither it had been carried by a favorite of Tsar Nicholas I, who had been sent into exile there. It disappeared in the confusion attending the revolution, and has now been brought to light by Professor Grabar. The picture is said to be in fairly good condition, and the work of restoration is to begin at once. How surprised the painter would be if he could learn the adventures and misadventures of his work.



THE INCONSTANT MOON

JULIET knew what she was talking about when she urged Mr. Romeo Montague of Verona to 'swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,' though it has taken astronomical science several centuries to catch up to her. For a long time it has been observed that the moon is frequently ahead of time, and sometimes behind time, in reaching the position assigned her in the heavens by the all-powerful astronomers. And now comes Dr. Innes, Director of the Union Observatory, South Africa, to suggest in the *Astronomische Nachrichten* that the earth is at fault. Our clocks are adjusted to the rate of our own planet's

rotation, which undergoes a slight alternate diminution and increase. This, Dr. Innes believes, leads to an error, not in the moon, but in our standardized clocks.

The subject was long ago studied by Newcomb, but Dr. Innes has carried out a long series of investigations and points out numerous facts to sustain his view. In solving one problem, however, he raises another which the astronomers will have to tackle. What is causing such large fluctuations in the rate of the earth's rotation? Can this be part of the devilish machinations of the wicked Bolsheviki?

ANOTHER NEGRO NOVEL

THREE years ago literary Paris was amazed by the news that René Maran, a full-blooded Negro, had carried off the Goncourt Prize with his novel *Batouala*. Disgruntled competitors, and even some critics who must have been disinterested, complained that the prize had been awarded as much upon political as on literary grounds; for it was notorious that France was eager to win the hearts of her black subjects. But others pointed out that M. Maran, whatever his race, was after all a French government official and had had a sound education in the French schools.

Now comes another Negro novelist who has been scarcely touched by the white man's culture, unless we are to include under that broad term service in a Negro regiment on the Western front, which may have been cultural but certainly was not very literary. His name is Afim-Assanga, and he is a Negro from the French Sudan with no education whatever, although he has traveled as a day laborer from African Holland and from Holland to South America. The book appears in a German version published in Regens-

burg. The Negro writer discusses the possible results that will follow if his race awakes to modern technology, to modern methods of warfare, and demands an equal place with the white man. The book is represented as a human document, but its political views sound as though the human document had had a bit of editing. It is called *The Black Wave*.

THAT GREEN HAT

THE dramatic endeavors of Mr. Michael Arlen may quite probably be successful in this country, but they are meeting with no unanimous or overwhelming applause in Great Britain. 'This is a dull play, but not so dull as the novel from which it has been adapted,' says St. John Ervine acidly in the *Observer*. But then Mr. Ervine is himself a dramatist, who may be a trifle irritated by the immense commercial success of a fellow practitioner. He finds in the play one merit, which he mentions at the close of his article:

I ought to add that Mr. Arlen gave an original touch to the play by omitting to mention cocktails in it. One of the characters, the degenerate brother of Iris (somewhat noisily acted by Mr. Eric Maturin), frequently referred to strong drink, but in spite of this no one asked for, or got, a cocktail, a drink which is fit only for women and Americans. I wish to pay a public tribute to Mr. Arlen for this remarkable fact.

James Agate in the *Sunday Times* raises ironical memories of Rosalind and *As You Like It* when he heads his review, 'The Forest of Arlen.' Mr. Agate is not impressed with the moral implications of the play, and goes Mr. Ervine one better by observing: —

So far from having the moral force of *Ghosts* or *Damaged Goods*, this piece has no significance of any kind.

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN DRAMA

MR. EDWARD SHANKS, who combines the post of assistant editor of the *London Mercury* with that of dramatic critic for the *Outlook*, describes in a recent article the theatrical invasion of London by American plays. The two most recent, which he discusses, are *Tarnish*, by Guilbert Emery, and *Dancing Mothers*, by Edgar Selwyn and Edmond Goulding, at the Queen's Theatre. Mr. Shanks observes that in addition to these two plays there are two musical comedies running at the moment in London, that two other American plays are meeting with success, and that one of the plays he now discusses has just been preceded by another American play at the same theatre, and with all a Briton's apprehensiveness he inquires 'Why?'

American magazines gain ground here every day [he says], and American short-story writers are forcing their way into our magazines. It seems that the same thing is happening in the theatre. Now there is something to be said for the view that the Americans do these things better than we. In the sphere of commercial entertainment, which is a respectable commodity, a great deal can be done by the judicious and far-seeing use of money. From this argument, of course, I omit such forms of literature as are not primarily commodities: I refer only to those practised for a livelihood, not by reason of an ineluctable vocation. Now into this sphere the prospect of a good and fairly stable livelihood will draw the best and most suitable brains available. That prospect exists in a greater degree in the United States than it does here. The population is greater; therefore the field is wider. Also (what cannot be disputed) the attitude of capital both in the theatre and in literature toward the author is far more enlightened than with us. The American manager and editor intend to have only the best that can be got, but they are ready to pay for it when they get it. Their English colleagues have a tendency to expect not very much, and a preconceived notion

that it is not necessary to pay very much for it.

The result is (we will now confine our argument to theatrical matters) that the average American play is a thing much more neatly and competently done than the average English play. It is theatrically more effective in those ways which can be learned by observation and consideration, and also in many of the tricks of mechanical construction.

But it is also a fact that the English public is, in an ever-increasing degree, curious about life in America. The cinematograph, as I believe, first fully revealed to us the existence on the other side of the Atlantic of a social order having so much in common with our own and yet so perplexingly different. Behind this first realization, as I further believe, loomed a consciousness, however obscure, that the two countries are not actually drifting apart into different types of civilization but are destined to come closer together. The tendency of our age is not to divergence, but to coalescence, and the rapid improvement of communications between England and America gives our community of language a weight that in the end, and before long, will have a deciding effect.



SCIENCE IN CHINA

THE editorial pages of *Discovery*, that indispensable English monthly which contrives to make science both popular and scientific, describes the extraordinary field for scientific research which China offers, or will offer as soon as political conditions quiet down enough to permit scientific men to go into the field. Just enough is known of what there is to be discovered to tantalize the scientists. Stories about blue tigers, for example, have been coming out of the interior for many years. Some adventurous souls have even claimed to have seen this mysterious beast, but so far not a specimen has emerged, although native toys representing blue tigers have been brought out of China, which seems to indicate

that the Chinese honestly believed the beast existed. This is not what one would call a scientific specimen.

There are also giant salamanders, sturgeon, and a small alligator who make their home in the Yangtze. These are extraordinarily interesting, not in themselves, but because their only living relatives occupy the Mississippi basin and a few other parts of the United States. Here is a first-class mystery which an opportunity for research might solve, but while China remains in her present turmoil neither Chinese nor foreign scientists can carry it out.

WHAT ARE CRITICS GOOD FOR?

IN the *London Evening News* Mr. St. John Ervine, the dramatic critic, suggests some limitations on the possibilities of criticism. His ideas are not new. Indignant publishers whose books have a bad press have been furiously pouring them out for centuries, but they deserve attention, if only because they come from a critic who is also a famous dramatist: —

Are we not taking too much upon ourselves when we set out to form opinions, not only for our contemporaries, but for posterity? If Dr. Johnson had had his way, neither Fielding nor Dean Swift would have been allowed to live.

A person called Greene, who was something of a dramatist in his day, had singularly little use for Shakespeare, and managed to make a number of his friends take sides with him. George Meredith thought that *Pickwick Papers* was a vulgar book which could not possibly survive. To-day Meredith's own novels lie stagnant on the booksellers' shelves, but *Pickwick Papers* continues to be popular. Henry James thought little of Mr. Hardy. I can't read Henry James! . . .

All that the critic can do for you is to

tell you as well as he can what he likes and dislikes, and why. That may be a help to you in forming your own opinion, but in the end you'll have to be your own critic. And really that's rather better fun.

Why shirk the adventure of discovering things for yourself? Why let yourself be put off with the fallible opinions of other persons when you are as capable as they are of forming fallible opinions of your own?

THE ANIMAL INVASION

PARIS is puzzled because its streets suddenly and mysteriously have been transformed into a very fair imitation of a menagerie. Zizi, the famous leopard which escaped into the Bois de Boulogne, was the first and most ferocious of a long series, but now that he has gone to the happy hunting-grounds a veritable zoölogical invasion has begun. That a swan should turn up was not so very surprising. A fox was not quite so amazing as the leopard. But when that grotesque bird the calao appeared, the services of a zoölogist were required to identify the creature. Presently it was followed by another bird whose species had not at the time of this writing been discovered, and by a garrulu — whatever that may be.

Not only is Paris startled by the appearance of these strange beasts, but everyone is at a loss to understand whence comes this sudden migration. Is there a practical joker at work with large means and a zoölogical imagination? Have the animals brought in on boats escaped by accident? Or, as the *Journal des Débats* inquires: 'Must we see in the exodus evidence of the effervescent condition of our planet — a force driving these creatures from their native soil and forcing them to seek more clement skies elsewhere?'

BOOKS ABROAD

The Great Pacific War, by Hector Bywater.
London: Constable; Boston: Houghton Mifflin
Company \$2.50. 1925.

[*Sunday Times*]

MR. HECTOR C. BYWATER, whose book, *Sea Power in the Pacific*, was perhaps the best of the class to which it belongs that has been published since the appearance of Mahon's monumental work, proves in *The Great Pacific War* that he possesses, in no small measure, the gift of 'scientific imagination.'

[*Outlook*]

It says much for Mr. Bywater's skill in narrative that, exciting as he makes his naval operations, neither the successes nor blunders he describes put probability to any great strain. The blocking of the Panama Canal is followed by the capture of the Philippines and Guam by the Japanese. An ill-fated, because ill-conceived, American expedition to Bonin teaches the States a salutary lesson, and thereafter the fortune of war sways against Japan, until at last by an ingenious ruse the Japanese main fleet is decoyed into action and defeated though by no means annihilated. This last great battle, leaving technical details to the expert, must be accepted as a really fine piece of descriptive writing; and read, as it was on this occasion, to the tune of a great thunderstorm, it leaves nothing in the way of excitement and verisimilitude to be desired. Thereafter comes peace, in the conclusion of which the States exhibits a financial forbearance beyond praise but curiously at variance with anything in the nature of precedent that can be discerned in American history.

[*Daily Telegraph*]

DESPITE its severity of style, *The Great Pacific War* is far more interesting than the average novel.

[*Morning Post*]

IN making 1931-33 the period of the struggle Mr. Bywater forgets that the terrible Japanese earthquake has, in the opinion of all competent witnesses, rendered any great military undertaking on the part of the Island Empire impracticable for at least twenty years to come.

[*Times Literary Supplement*]

THE book, as the author points out, has not been written to support the view that such a conflict

is either likely or inevitable, but because it remains a contingency that cannot be dismissed as wholly impossible.

Up Hill, Down Dale, by Eden Phillpotts. London: Hutchinson, 7s. 6d.

[*Outlook*]

A STORY beginning 'When Solomon Blight killed his wife a good few people in Daleham took a dislike to him' is pretty sure to be read. All Mr. Phillpotts's short stories are sufficiently readable. He does not attempt in them any large effects. The ambition revealed in his novels is quite laid aside. What he wants to do is to amuse for the time it takes to read him, and when, as very rarely happens, his usually neat invention fails him—in 'Percy,' for example—his picturesque phraseology retains the attention of the reader. In the collection called *Up Hill, Down Dale* all but one of the stories are supposed to be told, in some bar or elsewhere, by the natives of Dartmoor. And you do receive an impression of rustic shrewdness, of slightly malicious cunning, and of a simplicity that may be wisdom and may be imaginativeness. 'She died saying her evening prayers, you see, and she'd been kneeling there quite dead since nine o'clock the night afore and she was as stiff as a board, poor dear. A beautiful end, but very difficult for the undertakers.' But what is the sense of trying to pick out the plums? They are too many; and the rest is good honest pudding.

[*Times Literary Supplement*]

MR. PHILLPOTTS has in a peculiar degree the power of engaging our simpler emotions in the interest of his characters; we delight in their adventures and mourn their sorrows, merely because their humanity is so artlessly convincing. The ease and naturalness which Mr. Phillpotts puts into his description of a wooing, a parting, a quarrel, or a reconciliation can scarcely be too highly praised; his complete absence of affectation is evidence of the instinctive understanding and warm sympathy he extends to the men and women he visualizes. And Mr. Phillpotts's humor often has that spontaneous quality which establishes intimacy between the writer and the reader, no matter how unfamiliar the imaginative experience may be.

Nevertheless, in spite of the confidence with which Mr. Phillpotts handles every situation, one