

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

American Humor Appraised

To be forced to treat certain Americans as humorists when our whole country provides so many laughs is one of the more painful duties of the English critic. This year has witnessed the introduction of Ring Lardner to the British public. Sir James Barrie has pronounced him 'the real thing,' and some years ago Virginia Woolf chanted the praises of his ball-player's diary, *You Know Me, Al*. This book has not yet been published over there, and, to judge from the reception accorded *Gullible's Travels* and *How to Write Short Stories*, Lardner will never enjoy the vogue abroad that he has at home. The slang, so often derived from baseball, is the chief barrier, but even when that is left out he somehow fails to take. The characters are evidently too local, and only the critic whose sympathies are wide can feel the human quality that so many of them possess. Gerald Gould, writing in the *Observer*, says that Lardner does not exaggerate unduly. He finds him versatile and effective, and ranks him in the company of Mark Twain and Artemus Ward. But most critics pronounce him flat and incomprehensible.

This is by no means the case with Miss Anita Loos, whose *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has duplicated its American success. It is compared by nearly every reviewer to *The Young Visitors*, and its peculiar lingo seems to withhold no mysteries even from British intelligence. Indeed, the style of this admirable little volume is so infectious that Mr. P. C. Kennedy,

writing in the *New Statesman*, found himself running on as follows: —

I mean it is very difficult for gentlemen like I to review a book like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. I mean it is quite true that gentlemen do prefer blondes. So I mean gentlemen like I are just the same as other gentlemen, and would like to go shopping with blondes, but it seems as if blondes would rather go shopping with gentlemen who have got money than go shopping with gentlemen like I who have got brains. So I mean it seems as if there was a limit to almost everything.

In spite of Mr. Mencken's faith in Cabell's prose, the British still seem to find some of his periods exasperating. *The Silver Stallion* has, for the most part, been obscurely praised, though Mr. Gould cannot find much to say in its defense. Under the general title, 'Some American Humorists,' he hands Mr. Cabell this little bouquet: —

As for *The Silver Stallion*, it simply makes me wonder afresh where, how, and why Mr. Cabell attained the reputation he certainly possesses. It has a tremendous apparatus of Rabelaisian mediævalism; but its wit is thin, its cynicism obvious, and its pretentiousness intolerable. Whence comes the belief that a shallow joke becomes profound by being surrounded with such names and titles as Gonfal of Naimes, Margrave of Aradol, and Kerin of Nointel, Syndic and Castellan of Basardra? Is that sort of thing amusing, or beautiful, or even very clever! Then Mr. Cabell is oh, so naughty and daring! He writes, for instance, about 'the leering, high-nosed strumpet at Asch, who was reported to be rivaling even that poor Kerin's widow, Saraïde, in the great number of her copartners in lectual exercise.' To say 'lectual' is 'intellectual,' I suppose; but somehow it does n't seem so to me.

T. S. Stribling comes through the ordeal in much better shape. He, says Mr. Gould, is 'a very important writer,' and more than a humorist, although *Teetfallow* is reviewed along with Cabell and Lardner. Booth Tarkington and Stephen Leacock, the other two victims of the same review, have already made places for themselves, and their two latest books, *Women* and *Winnowed Wisdom*, are rated as distinctly below their previous averages.

Polluted Paris

THOSE coarse American tourists are not the only disturbers of the peace in Paris. Only the other day a Ukrainian Jew murdered General Petlura, and almost simultaneously another political murder was held at the doors of the Palais de Justice, when a bunch of Georgians—the Russian kind—broke most of the chairs, windows, and siphons in a Latin Quarter café while they were arguing out the relative merits of Liberalism and Bolshevism.

Perhaps these riots would be less resented if the foreigners kept to themselves, but when they begin to make themselves felt by the man in the street that is going a little too far. Some of these men in the street—the native taxi drivers, to be precise—have been especially aroused by the competition of Russian grand dukes and generals to which they are subjected. The natives now show tricolored enamel plaques on the fronts of their cars, which indicate that they are not only able to speak the language of the city but are also able to find their way about.

Nor has the Russian invasion confined itself to the humbler ranks of society, as the exploits of one Alexander Stavisky testify. This gentleman, though born a Russian, has become naturalized, and now devotes himself to financial swindles in the

grand manner. His father, having become too deeply involved in one of his son's schemes, committed suicide. The son, sought after by the police, attended the funeral unmolested. Recently Stavisky has restored much of the money that he has stolen, and has even swung his influence into the scale of virtue so far as to institute legal proceedings against two bankers. It was hoped that he would present himself in court, but he stayed away. All this does not make foreigners any more welcome in Paris, and may even lead some cynical natives to suspect that the intellectual centre of the world is not what it is cracked up to be.

Rehearsing Stravinski

DURING the recent rehearsals in London of Stravinski's *Les Noces*, Mr. Trevor Allen of the *Westminster Gazette* was fortunate enough to get in behind the scenes and discover how the Russian ballet warms itself up. Among those present were Grigorieff, the stage director, Eugene Goossens, Diaghileff, and Lopokova, who is Mrs. John Maynard Keynes in private life. Misunderstandings are the order of the day. First the buzzer sounds and several Russians plunge out on the stage. But the curtain has not gone up, and Mr. Goossens explains that the first buzz is a warning, the second the signal to commence. So they are off again, but not for long. Grigorieff waves his arms, the orchestra stops, and directions are shouted in staccato Russian syllables. The girls begin arguing with their director; Goossens leans back and waits with resigned patience. Diaghileff is the brains of the management, Grigorieff the voice, and between them they keep breaking into the music, explaining and giving directions. During the second act only one girl is on the stage; the rest

are strolling through the audience with set, serious faces. It is a scene for Degas.

During this act the excitement of the actors and the directors reaches its climax. Grigorieff keeps breaking into the music, which is frenzied enough itself, with even more frenzied directions. The men are now forced to lie back prostrate, one over the other, pyramid fashion, while Grigorieff manhandles them like sofa cushions, laying them in what he conceives to be their proper order. But a more peaceful spirit has stolen into the audience; Lopokova, with small straw hat and dark tailor-made suit, has slipped into the stalls, and the men are bowing to her, kissing her hand. They ask her if she is glad to be back in the ballet again. 'Very,' she assures them.

Meanwhile Grigorieff is at it again, hammer and tongs. But nobody minds. 'When there is a row at the last rehearsal there is a great first night,' says one of the old-timers, 'and when everything goes smoothly the performance is a dull one.'

Ashes and Aussies

AUSTRALIA and England are now playing their first Test Match of cricket since 1921. This corresponds as closely as cricket can to our own World's Series in baseball. Since each game requires several days, and since the Australian team is allowed to have a crack at almost every important outfit in England, the series consumes the better part of the summer months. To date, Australia has not proved itself as unbeatable as heretofore.

The first of these test matches was played in England in the summer of 1882, when Australia won the first game. The *Sporting Times* at once published a cartoon representing the death of English cricket, saying that

the deceased had been cremated and that the ashes were to be taken back to Australia. But since England won two out of three of the matches played in Australia that fall, they succeeded in 'fetching the ashes,' which was the way they had defined their task. To commemorate this victory some Melbourne ladies gave the Earl of Darnley, then the Honorable Ivo Bligh and captain of the English team, a small urn containing ashes and bearing the following inscription:—

When Ivo goes back with the Urn, the Urn,
Studds, Steel, Read, and Tylecote return, return,
The welkin will ring loud,
The great crowd will feel proud,
Seeing Barlow and Bates with the Urn, the Urn,
And the rest coming home with the Urn.

The urn is still in Lord Darnley's possession, and during the present match has been placed on public exhibition.

Quelle Scandale!

WHEN M. Herriot is not absorbed by cares of State he busies himself, as his book on Madame Récamier testifies, with polite scholarship. *Figaro* announces that he has just made a discovery regarding a legitimized son of Pascal which will interest all foreign students of French literature and delight all Frenchmen. In the Bibliothèque Nationale he found an old bundle of records of legitimizations dating from the seventeenth century. We do not know how many other famous names he consulted before he was rewarded by finding that a child called Jean Pascal, the son of the famous Blaise and Anne Charmont — 'not married' — was legitimized in December 1653. Imagine M. Herriot's delight when he discovered that not only was this the time at which Pascal revoked a handsome gift to an abbey, made on the condition of his having

no son, but it was also just the period during which he wrote his *Discours sur les passions de l'amour*. It has previously been imagined that this document was inspired by Mlle. Roannez, but in the light of Herriot's discovery we must either alter our ideas of Pascal's love affairs or widen them.

Censoring London's Stage

THAT stainless body of moral champions, the House of Lords, has lately been attacking the present debased condition of the London stage. Lord Morris has challenged the Lord Chamberlain, who is the guardian of this particular citadel of public purity, to explain why the British theatre has been allowed to sink into its present state of moral turpitude. There is no difficulty in the provinces, where local town councils are on the alert, but the capital is very lax indeed. The Bishop of London supports Lord Morris, but he refrains from attacking the Lord Chamberlain, and feels that his native city should follow the example of the lesser cities of Britain and put the licensing of theatres under the eye of the London County Council, not so much to suppress strong language as to prevent the young people from enjoying iniquitous entertainment.

Definitions of censorship are always unsatisfying. Perhaps one of the most stupid is that advanced by the Lord Chamberlain, to the effect that he aimed to stop the kind of plays that nobody wants. In this effort he would surely not find it difficult to secure the coöperation of the managers. On the other hand, the *Daily Telegraph* — a highly respectable sheet — has no sympathy for the type of person who believes that managers should be allowed to produce whatever they

want. This would never do. What is proposed is to have the Lord Chamberlain take steps only against such plays as arouse violent language among the critics or such plays as people think are bad for little children. Were this rule to be strictly enforced the British stage would soon and irrevocably expire.

A Lucky Name

A GREAT French critic once pointed out that nothing was luckier for a novelist than to have the two letters Z and A in his name, and cited Balzac and Zola as proofs of the dictum. In our own time d'Annunzio and Ibáñez inherit the alpha-omega tradition, and only the other day a Paris jury awarded the Prix de la Renaissance to a young novelist named Émile Zavier for his volume, *La Maison des Trois Fiancées* — on the ground, it is alleged, of his alphabetical prerogatives. Since, however, the prize, now awarded for the sixth time, was formerly conferred upon such writers as Alexandre Arnoux, Pierre MacOrlan, and Paul Morand, the charge would seem not to be an unanswerable one.

Page Doctor Frank Crane

BECAUSE the French authorities censored its leading article out of existence, an Arabian newspaper recently endeavored to substitute the first chapter of Isaiah for the offending matter. The passage runs on in this fashion: 'Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence.' No wonder the French felt that things were going from bad to worse and came down on this one too. Possibly the paper needs a new editor.

BOOKS ABROAD

Stanley Baldwin, by Adam Gowans Whyte.
London: Chapman and Hall, 1926. 5s.

[*Daily Herald*]

THIS book has one merit. It makes no attempt to misrepresent Mr. Baldwin as a man of exceptional ability or interest. It tells rather dully about one who is admitted to be a dull person.

When he was at school some Harrow master said of the future Prime Minister: —

'You will never do anything wrong, you have n't brains enough; but you will never do anything big either.'

So far that prophecy has been fulfilled.

No one ever got into a great position having done so little to attract public attention. In Parliament he sat for twelve years without saying anything in particular. Then he very nearly 'chucked' politics altogether. He took a line against Mr. Lloyd George; he was in favor of breaking up the Coalition. He thought he would be defeated and driven out.

He wrote to his wife at this time: —

I do not know what you will think of me, or what you will say about it. I have made my decision this time without consulting you. But I could do nothing else; I am going out of politics for good. We shall have the long holiday that we have promised ourselves for so long. We'll go to the South of France for two or three months. Then I shall go into business again, though I don't exactly know who will give me a job. Anyway, we shall live our own lives.

However, the Coalition *was* broken up, and in less than twelve months he was Prime Minister. Even in this great office he does not seem to be satisfied.

'I look forward to the time,' he says, 'when I can pick up the books in my library that are now covered with dust, which I never have time to look at, when I can devote myself to studies and to delights of that kind from which I have been too long alienated.'

Yet his reading does not seem to have given him a just view of history. He can write, for example: —

I suppose the gifts of rhetoric have been responsible for more bloodshed on this earth than all the guns and explosives that have ever been invented. If we look back over the last century, was there anything more than the literary rhetoric of Rousseau that started the French Revolution, fanned by the verbal rhetoric of Robespierre and others, just as the Russian Revolution was due to the rhetoric of Kerenskii — rhetoric which filled the bellies of his people with east wind?

The 'rhetoric of Kerenskii' was a joke in the Duma. It had very little indeed to do with the Revolution. And in France the causes lay far deeper than *The Social Contract* and *The Causes of Inequality among Men*.

The truth seems to be that Mr. Baldwin is both unimaginative and yet given to posing. His remarks about going into business again and not knowing who would give him a job are transparently insincere. Mr. Whyte tells us that in 1919 he made an anonymous gift of one fifth of his fortune to the Treasury for the extinction of the War Debt. This came to £120,000, leaving him £360,000. A man so well provided for as that does not have to look for jobs!

So one is led to suspect that the longing for his library is a pose too. In his recent volume of speeches and addresses there was little to show that he had really ever made use of books to widen his outlook and steady his judgment. He can string together quotations and allusions, — a secretary can look them out for him, — but shallow thinkers can do that even better than profound ones. Mr. Baldwin must produce thoughts of his own which shall be worth something more than the usual stuff of political oratory if he wants to persuade us that he really delights in books.

Milestones, by the Marquis of Huntly. London: Hutchinson, 1926. 24s.

[*Spectator*]

LORD HUNTLY was born in 1847, so it is easy to imagine that his reminiscences will have an interest to students of the Victorian Age. He has written a large, talkative, and discursive book which is rather a storehouse of anecdotes and scenes, characteristic of their time and place, than an ordered history of his times. The book is