

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

FOUR VICTORIAN LETTERS

CARLYLE, Dickens, Disraeli, and Cobden were the authors of four hitherto unpublished letters recently printed in the *Manchester Guardian* and all addressed to a Manchester dignitary of Victorian days, Sir Edward Watkin. This gentleman was in the latter part of his life a great railway-magnate, and became successively chairman of the South-Eastern Railway, the Metropolitan, and the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire, and later president of the Grand Trunk Railway in Canada. In his youth — that is, in the forties — he was the founder of the Manchester Athenæum, an institution that like many of its kind was designed to meet the awakening demands of workingmen for education and enlightenment.

In this rôle Watkin had the friendly interest and support of many of the famous radicals of his day. The first of the four letters in point of date is from the hand of Carlyle, writing on January 26, 1843 — the year of *Past and Present*. It is richly characteristic both in manner and in sentiment.

Your institution, if I rightly understand it, is one to which all rational men will wish success. To provide the working people with a place of reunion, where they might enjoy books, perhaps music, recreation, instruction; and, at all events, what is dearest to all men, the society and light of one another; this is a thing of palpable utility, a thing at once possible and greatly needed; it is a thousand pities this were not brought to pass, straightway, in all working towns! I have regretted much, in looking at your great Manchester, and its thousandfold

industries and conquests, that I could not find, in some quarter of it, a hundred acres of green ground with trees on it, for the summer holidays and evenings of your all-conquering industrious men; and for winter season and bad weather quite another sort of social meeting places than the gin-shops offered! — may all this, and much else, be amended. May good and best speed attend you and your benevolent associates in your attempts to amend some part of it.

The second letter, written in the same year, is from Dickens, who had given a lecture at the Athenæum, and who had not forgotten his own days in the Press Gallery of the House of Commons.

Many thanks to you for the Manchester newspapers, in which the proceedings of the other night are remarkably well reported. If you should see, or know, any of the gentlemen who attended for the press I wish you would say as much from me, in common justice.

Disraeli, writing in 1844 to discuss arrangements for a meeting at the Athenæum, mentions two personalities — Smythe, the model for Disraeli's Coningsby, a leader in the Young England movement, and Monckton Milnes, later Lord Houghton, the biographer of Keats — who a few years after this came to blows with each other over political questions. No one, it seems, ever mentioned Monckton Milnes with unqualified respect, — not even Swinburne, whose meeting with Landor he arranged, — and the young Disraeli is no harsher than many others.

I received your note yesterday. Mr. Smythe will positively come, he assured me a few days back. He is at present in Germany but will return in a month. His last words were that nothing should prevent him being at Manchester, and I authorise you, therefore, to announce his presence as a certainty.

Lord John Manners you will probably hear from in the course of a few days. I know he is involved with engagements in which he had entered before he received your invitation, and probably is endeavouring to extricate himself from them.

Mr. McGeachy assured me when I saw him last in the House that he should make every possible exertion to be present, and little doubts of being there.

Mr. Milnes will shilly-shally, as is his custom — but it is of no great moment. The most important point is Mr. Smythe, who is a young man of brilliant genius and a capital speaker.

Cobden's letter, dated July 9, 1844, at the Fleet Street office of the Anti-Corn Law League, is amusing for the cavalier manner in which he speaks of the man who was later to be Lord Beaconsfield, and for the apprehensiveness with which he views the tactics of the Smythe faction.

MY DEAR WATKINS, —

Those Young Englanders are sad political humbugs; but nevertheless, if you think an importation of them will help the Athenæum, I can't quarrel with your tactics — Ben D'Israeli will make a good chairman. If Lord John Manners and Smythe accompany him, you should take care to have an admixture of native and liberal talent so as to prevent the appearance of onesidedness. If Mr. Robert Gregg could be induced to take a prominent part it would be desirable. I confess I don't like the idea of Manchester throwing itself too exclusively upon the patronage of the landed aristocracy. But you are not to blame. The fault lies with the 'aristocracy of industry,' who are wanting in self-respect and do not stand by their order. I shall, of course, be entirely at the disposal of the Committee.

PERSIANS IN CHINESE GRAVES

MR. C. M. BOWRA, a fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, is the owner of a Chinese figurine of the Tang Dynasty (618-905) that presents an engaging problem in archæological interpretation. In spite of its Far Eastern provenience, this clay figure, about ten inches in height, represents a human type — as to both facial traits and costume — that is anything but Mongolian. 'The figure has a beaky nose and a beard,' says Mr. Bowra in *Discovery*; 'it wears a conical hat that swells out round the temples into a thick band, and it is clothed down to the knees in a tight-fitting frock-coat; the legs are covered with loose-fitting boots, rather like snow-boots.' A similar figurine in a private museum in Peking has the same large nose, the same boots and conical hat, the same full beard — and, in addition, front and back flaps to his hat (folded up), and a pestle and mortar in his right hand.

Who ever heard of a Chinese, even of the Tang Dynasty, with a moustache and beard, snow-boots, and a fur cap? Yet Mr. Bowra's own figurine came from a grave at Lo-yang in Honan, and the other is undeniably local in origin. The answer to the mystery is that both figures are of a marked Western Asiatic type, not unlike the modern Kurd, and that during the period in question there was constant intercourse between China and the west of Asia, particularly Persia. The Parthians, as they then were, sent ambassadors to the Tang emperors, and royal presents of lions, ostriches, and the like.

The Westerners who served as models for these figurines 'were probably servants of some Chinese nobleman, and their gesture of obsequious servility points perhaps to their being butlers. When Confucius abolished the custom

of human sacrifice on the death of any rich person, clay or wooden models of retainers were substituted for living victims, in the belief that they would attend to the wants of the departed. Our figures are of such retainers.'



HAUPTMANN ON BOOKS

It is a rare thing for a man who has spent his life among books to speak of them with unqualified enthusiasm: Dr. Georg Brandes's modified and guarded esteem is typical of his guild. A conversation with the dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann reported by Josef Chapiro in the *Neue Freie Presse* reveals him as an exception to this rule. 'The art of writing,' says Hauptmann, 'is perhaps the most stupendous invention of the human spirit'; and books seem to him the most solid bulwark between man and savagery. 'When I hear it said that a cultivated man lives according to the rules of his books, not according to the experiences of his life, I don't understand what it can mean. Books are themselves life — an older, richer, deeper, wiser kind of life than our own. They are a part of the vast whole, and therefore I cannot see what serious objections are to be made if great spirits live "bookishly." Can you imagine Spinoza without books, or Kant, or Lessing — or indeed any of us? When I reflect that Spinoza went hungry, and yet managed to accumulate a hundred and fifty books; when I remember how Kant suffered when he was forced to sell his library; when I recollect that Lessing, after he found himself obliged to auction off his book collection, was so unhappy living without books that he became a librarian in Hamburg, and squandered his time cataloguing musty old tomes just for the sake of breathing the dust and odor of yellowed paper and ancient print — then I understand how truly books are nature itself; even

when they are, as Goethe said of his novels, only a "courtly allusion" to it.'



RECENT LOSSES TO LITERATURE

SIR EDMUND GOSSE observes in the *Sunday Times* that the recent death of René Boylesve, the novelist and Academician, is but the latest of a series of losses that in the last three years have set a record in French literary history. The successive deaths of Pierre Loti, Maurice Barrès, Marcel Proust, Anatole France, and — only this winter — Élémer Bourges, have left only M. Paul Bourget to represent the elder school of creative writers in prose. René Boylesve had never enjoyed so wide or so noisy a reputation as some of his predecessors in death, but he was cherished by French *littérateurs* as a writer of exceptional delicacy, austerity, and finish, aristocratic in a peculiarly attractive way. Most of his novels deal with cultivated life in Touraine, and are in the psychological tradition.

Within a few days, English literature lost representatives of the elder and middle generations in the persons of C. M. Doughty, at the age of eighty-two, and W. L. George, at the age of forty-three. No greater contrast could easily be imagined, however, than that between the patriarchal, aloof, and somewhat haughty figure of the author of *Arabia Deserta* and the thoroughly contemporary feminist author of *A Bed of Roses*. Doughty's death, following those of Wilfrid S. Blunt and Austin Dobson, leaves Mr. Hardy, Dr. Bridges, and Professor Saintsbury practically alone in the generation born in the early forties.



A MINER-ARTIST

THE caricatures of Sir James Barrie and Sir Edmund Gosse, from the *Westminster Gazette*, that have appeared re-

cently in these pages were the work of a young English miner who was discovered by a member of the *Gazette's* staff working as a 'pavement artist' in Southampton Row, off Holborn. Mr. Sidney Lowe started life as a pit-boy in Nottinghamshire, where he was born in the village of Eastwood. 'After my first shift,' he says, 'I vowed that at the first opportunity I would lay down pick and shovel and take up pen and brush. I had always been fond of drawing, and decorated a whitewashed wall with all kinds of sketches. Miners from all round used to come and criticize my work.' It took him eleven years to save enough money to get to London, and even then his troubles were not over. After a good deal of struggling, however, he has at last 'arrived,' and the seal will have been set upon his arrival by an exhibition of his work at the Abbey Gallery during March.

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LOCATING BABBITT

A HANDSOME gesture of friendly criticism has been made by Herr Anton Erkelenz, a member of the German Reichstag, recording in the *Berliner Tageblatt* his travel impressions of America. Sinclair Lewis's imaginative creation, George Babbitt, has become, says Herr Erkelenz, the type to which all European critics point when they speak of 'the menace of Americanization.' 'But is there really,' he asks, 'more Babbitt in America than elsewhere? Is the life of our own lower classes, intellectually and materially, so clearly admirable that we can look with scorn on the newly rich and imperfectly cultivated Americans of a certain type? Is the German bour-

geois, of moderate income, who sits in a public-house drinking beer and mousing all kinds of inanities, which he calls politics — is he really so superior?'

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THE WAY OF ALL FRENCH

WHEN one language borrows heavily from another, neither the borrower nor the lender can feel highly flattered, for the words in question most frequently belong to the vocabulary of sport, high society, gaming, and cookery. It has more than once been pointed out that the most widely used of English words are 'high life,' 'beefsteak,' to 'black-ball,' 'club,' and the like. A writer in *L'Ère Nouvelle* bewails the inroads upon the French language of the English vocabulary of sport as illustrated in a report of Miss Helen Wills's tennis passage with Mlle. Vlasto. He quotes the following phrases with a kind of austere grief: '*En attendant ce match,*' '*les courts du Métropole,*' '*sur son mirador trône un speaker,*' '*la mode des tennis women,*' '*un sweater,*' '*un round ou deux de sparring,*' '*elle drive avec brio,*' '*les undercuts de Jack Dempsey.*'

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A COMMUNICATION

The Editor of the *Living Age*
DEAR SIR, —

Issue of February 13, 1926, page 359.
'Winter Moonrise,' lines 2, 3, and 8.

When we see the new moon, it is
always setting.

Probably others have written about this. Goethe said somewhere (and probably in German), 'Let your imagination illuminate the facts.'

Very truly yours,

J. ROWE WEBSTER

BOOKS ABROAD

The Crime at Vanderlynden's, by R. H. Mottram. London: Chatto and Windus; New York: The Dial Press. \$2.50.

[*Observer*]

WITH *The Crime at Vanderlynden's* Mr. Mottram completes his trilogy of war novels. In *The Spanish Farm* — which, by the way, won the Hawthornden prize in 1924 — the central figure was Madeleine Vanderlynden, the silent, courageous Frenchwoman of the soil, stolid and yet capable of passion both in love and resentment; in *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four* it was Skene, the volunteer officer, to whom, at the start, the war was an adventure and, at the end, a business; and now in this last book it is Dormer, who, as the wrapper says, 'presents the barely articulate view of the masses in the ranks.'

The actual crime at Vanderlynden's was the destruction of a shrine by a British soldier who wanted shelter for his mules. Madeleine — the shrine was on the land of the Spanish farm — claims compensation, and for months afterward Dormer, who has the case in hand, is trying to find the guilty man, keep headquarters quiet, and pacify the claimants. We imagine Mr. Mottram has chosen his instance carefully to emphasize what a nightmare of futility the war was to the average man. It was not the break-up of empires, the struggle between moral principles, the possible wrecking of Western civilization, that worried men like Dormer. The war to him was not a gallant tilting of right against wrong — although, to be just to Dormer, he felt instinctively that he was on the right side; it was an affair of pink slips covered with words such as 'Passed to you, please, for necessary action,' 'Kindly refer to A.Q.M.G.'s minute dated July 1916.' Dormer's job was not, to paraphrase Mr. Chesterton, to remember that he was a Christian man and stand where his fathers had stood before him; it was to track down the unfortunate wretch who had broken into the shrine to get shelter for his mules. The lessons from Mr. Mottram's unemotionally told parable are easy enough to draw.

It is enough here to say that there are signs in *The Crime at Vanderlynden's* that Mr. Mottram found his material running out, — a fair amount of it is more or less vain repetition of *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four*, — but it is distinguished by that same austerity of feeling and economy of expres-

sion that made *The Spanish Farm* such a memorable book, and that gives Mr. Mottram his peculiar fitness to write of war.

Twenty-Five: Being a Young Men's Candid Recollections of His Elders and Betters, by Beverley Nicholls. London: Jonathan Cape. 7s. 6d.

[*Daily Telegraph*]

'WHY not write about some of the exciting people one has seen while they still excite one?' asks Mr. Beverley Nicholls in justification of his claim that 'twenty-five seems to me the latest age at which anybody should write an autobiography.' Why not, indeed? It's a wonderful age, of fine enthusiasms and generous judgments, and, for a young man of Mr. Nicholls's brilliant talent (has he not given us three excellent books before reaching his first anecdote?), numberless opportunities for meeting people some of whom at least are exciting. And looking at the portrait that graces the frontispiece we realize that this is just the book that the youth there presented would write — a delicious mixture of happy impudence and hero-worship, a candor sometimes straying toward, but never into, the realm of indiscretion, a boundless capacity for friendship, and an often-displayed shrewdness of judgment of men — and women — and affairs.

In short, Mr. Nicholls has accomplished what so many of his 'elders and betters' (it is so easy to imagine the smile that accompanied the phrase) have attempted and failed — a book about himself which everybody will want to read. Kings and queens, presidents and playwrights, authors and actors, cabinet ministers and company-promoters, great ladies and great artists, jostle each other through his pages. He has a gift for making them talk. As they talk he studies them, and 'Twenty-Five' is in reality a series of studies of notable persons as they appeared to eager, friendly eyes. Here, for example, is his considered opinion of the Countess of Oxford and Asquith: —

'This lady has been very much maligned by the British public. A section of that public regard her as vulgar because she is enthusiastic, prejudiced because she is loyal, conceited because she is frank, and generally a very tiresome creature. They have not the wit to realize that she is, in reality, a woman almost unbearably sen-