

LITERARY CHAT

THE BROWNING LETTERS.

Regathered petals of a vanished rose,
They crowd back each on each, and bloom
again:
Borne tenderly in clasped hands, now as
then,
Our "spirit small" one, finely strong, it glows
In royal challenge to the easy sneers
That genius fails of true heart blossoming.
The Poet Two yield then this precious thing,
This record of their few, sweet, merging
years,
In noble bounty, winging laggard faith,
Leading the dust blind vision to the light,
Teaching that selfless lives are reverent
prayers,
That passionate, pure devotion is no wraith—
That loyal human hearts may reach the
might
And deathless wonder of a love like
theirs!

"RAGGED LADY."

Has the creator of *Ragged Lady* found the golden key to the baffling secret of personal charm? Or is *Clementina's* power merely a happy accident? She does not say a clever or even an interesting thing throughout the book. She shows neither imagination nor humor, and her conscientiousness is distinctly tiresome. Yet from five to eight men, besides a woman or two, fall in love with her in the brief interval between the covers, and, far from suspecting Mr. Howells of exaggerating, we are quite sure that if any more men could have been worked in upon the crowded scene, they too would have succumbed.

Perhaps the attraction springs from the first description of her, where she appears at the door, "smiling sunnily," with her face "as glad as a flower's." Perhaps it is her innocence, her freedom from all the ugly traits that one might dread in a country girl picked up by a wealthy woman. Perhaps more than anything it is the reserve of her child nature.

We never get very close to *Ragged Lady*. Mr. Howells tells us what she says and does, but he never presumes on his right as author to look frankly into the thoughts and feelings behind. Most historians lift the lids of their characters, and bid you come and look in whenever it pleases them; but this little country girl has been treated with fastidious delicacy, and we can know her only as the people around her did—not very well, for, with all her simplicity, she was not expan-

sive, and moreover we have grown lazy about making our own deductions, accustomed as we are to being warned the instant the heroine's pulse varies. We see her only as we see other human beings who do not confide in us, and out of this faint mist of uncertainty rises her inexplicable charm.

"THE HAUNTS OF MEN."

Mr. Robert W. Chambers is unquestionably a writer of rare versatility. He has drawn pictures of Paris under the Commune, and Paris as it is today; he has sung the songs of our army posts, and written certain weird, imaginative stories that remind us vaguely of Poe or Hoffman. In his latest book, "The Outsiders," he has laid his scenes in the city of New York, and among the people who constitute what are usually termed the "Bohemian circles of society." His true forte, however, lies in stories of the woods, and a superb example of his skill in this line may be found in his volume of sketches called "The Haunts of Men," in which is printed a stirring, sympathetic story of a guide who, having killed an Indian pursuer, betakes himself to the great forest that lies about the headwaters of the Little Misery River, and is there hunted down and slain.

It is doubtful if any other American writer could have invested this sketch of the hunted outlaw with the dramatic force and atmospheric charm that Mr. Chambers has given to it. As it stands on the pages of "The Haunts of Men" it suggests a drama of American life which would be interesting, original, and absolutely native to the soil. There are plays and novels to be written of life in the Maine woods, and the field is open to a writer possessed, like this one, of dramatic ideas and a keen sympathy with the inanimate as well as the animate things of forest life.

"A DUET."

Take a pound of guide book, a sprig of melodrama, a gallon of sentiment well softened, and a dozen stale maxims, and you have the last work of fiction perpetrated by A. Conan Doyle. "A Duet" is a frank treatise on the inexhaustible subject of how to be happy though married, varied by such novel features as a trip through Westminster Abbey, with a description of the monuments; a Buried Past, who, of course, goes to see the young wife, and, equally of course, is moved

to tears by her sweet imbecility and departs with her secret still unsprung; a Browning club incident that would have rejoiced the "Feminine Chatterings" editor of a Sunday supplement; a wholly unnecessary and improbable financial struggle, and love making enough to satiate any adult over five years of age.

It is what one is tempted to call a chump book. When a certain type of writer sets out to draw a winsome woman, a sunny, guileless, pouting, arch, adorable little sprite, that particular expression is all a limited language gives us with which to convey our opinion. The artless lectures on the subject of Samuel Pepys and Jane Welsh Carlyle suggest the same term. In a guide book or a Third Reader they might have proved interesting, if not entirely new to the average reader, but in fiction they are out of place, and work irritation.

As to the "Maxims for the Married" that the story professes to work out, we fear they will add little to the vast amount of disregarded knowledge already existing for the benefit of persons in that state of life. They are very sensible, very true; but the sins of the married lie beyond the reach of eloquence, rooted in unregenerate human nature, which remembers the laws of wisdom only when it is good and does not need them.

It is a mild, innocent little book. No doubt ninety nine out of every hundred will glow at the love making and weep at the birth scene and rejoice at every danger escaped by the little two oared boat. Even the critical hundredth will have his sympathies stirred, as they must be by the primitive elements of life, honestly handled—and Dr. Doyle's handling is always honest; but his teeth will be on edge from beginning to end.

HAROLD FREDERIC'S LAST NOVEL.

When Sardou writes—or rather constructs—a play, he builds his crucial scene first, and then so arranges the preceding acts that everything leads up to it. Inferior dramatists frequently exhaust their resources in a strong first act, which contains everything that they have to say; and the consequence is that the interest in the later portions of the play grows smaller and smaller until, at the end, the drama may be said to "run emptyings."

The late Harold Frederic was always an interesting story teller. If he had studied the art of play writing under such an accomplished master as Victorien Sardou he might have taken the very highest rank as an American novelist. In his last book, "The Market Place," his lack of constructive skill is painfully apparent. The story opens with a few powerful sentences which give us a picture of a great London speculator seated

in his office at the close of a day of triumph, his enemies routed, the spoils of battle within reach of his hands. It would be difficult to conceive of a better beginning for a story of modern London life than this; and at the same time the seasoned novel reader cannot help feeling what an excellent ending it would make for such a tale. As Mr. Frederic's book stands, interesting as the story is for the most part, and strong as is some of its character drawing, it simply does not get anywhere at the end, and the reader lays aside the volume with his interest sated, his curiosity unsatisfied.

The triumphant operator whom the author introduces to us in the very first line achieves nothing afterwards, except marriage—a humdrum affair in his case—and a fine country estate, with which he does nothing in particular. He has a sister who continues to keep the book store she inherited from her father, and a nephew and niece who study art, which in their case, as in most others, is another mode of doing nothing. With the exception of a poor old vagabond who dies at an opportune moment, the characters all end in nothingness. The syndicate of Jews who were vanquished and plundered in the first and most interesting part of the book do not take their revenge, though we are led to expect something of the kind from a remark let fall by one of them on the occasion of his last meeting with his conqueror. The young nobleman, who was such a powerful help to the hero in his manipulations of the stock market, disappoints us by doing nothing at all thereafter, except a vain attempt to best the man with whom he had formerly worked in unison. A clever American girl, from whom much might be expected, also does nothing of any consequence.

"The Market Place" is well worth reading, however, if for nothing more than the light which it throws on the London stock exchange and the methods in vogue there. Its last quarter is a failure; but if three quarters of its pages are interesting ones, it possesses an advantage of which few novels of today can boast.

THE LITERARY SHOP.

The game of bowls with solemn editors all in a row for ten pins and Mr. James L. Ford for the thrower of the balls, is one that we all watched with glee five years ago when first "The Literary Shop" appeared. The new edition, issued by the Chelsea Company, of that delicious diatribe which is half a jest, shows that Mr. Ford's arm has lost none of its dexterity and the game none of its fascination for the onlookers.

Even those who had never had a manuscript declined by a magazine which, their

friends and their vanity assured them, printed far less valuable matter every month, felt grateful to Mr. Ford for causing the dignified potentates of current literature to topple over so humorously for their amusement. As for those who had become unwilling collectors of rejection blanks, what balm it was to their wounds to learn on authority that the mission of some of the most successful writers was "to put gas fitters to asleep" or "to keep dish washers awake."

The chief value of "The Literary Shop," however, was not in providing balm for the victims of editorial indifference or brutality, though it incidentally did that. Neither was it in furnishing clever quotation, though it accomplished that too. For months after its appearance no reminiscent article failed to call forth "Recollections of R. B. Hayes by His Ox and His Ass" or "Why My Father Loved Muffins by Mamie Dickens," and no mention of the social successes of rising young authors failed to remind some one of "Mr. E. F. Benson, author of Dodo, who has been so overwhelmed with attentions from women of rank and position that his evenings are now fully occupied with social functions and he is unable to attend night school."

These, however, did not constitute the chief value of "The Literary Shop." That consisted in showing, humorously and convincingly, that all that is bound between boards is not literature, and that the imprint of a most respectable publishing house does not absolve readers from the use of such critical faculties as Heaven may have bestowed upon them.

The later papers embodied in the new edition show the same spirit and the same skill. "The Village of Syndicate," where literature is produced in an orderly fashion at work benches and in foundries by sober and industrious laborers, is the scene of most of the sketches, though one is laid in Sing Sing prison where the idle convicts are engaged in the manufacture of prose and verse. It is there that the warden is represented as asking one of his visitors, a grave and reverend poet editor:

"Do you think that the idea and the verses should appear on the same page?"

Whereupon Mr. Ford sends the ball rolling merrily down the alley and overturns the grave and reverend poet editor, who replies:

"It has not been my practice to print them in that fashion, and in my own poems I am always careful to avoid such a combination, believing it to be thoroughly inharmonious."

LITERARY MATERIAL FROM LIFE.

Just how far is an author justified in taking his material from life? This is a question that is frequently asked in these days when

accurate character drawing and local color are considered such important qualities in fiction, and it is a question that vexes a great many conscientious writers.

Nearly all writers agree that to do their best work they are obliged to get their suggestions straight from observation—that is, from conditions and people that they know. But to use this material without violating considerations of delicacy or kindness is a most difficult matter. Many authors have found themselves in hot water from the skill with which they have reproduced certain types of character. In some instances, they have unwittingly drawn people they have known; in others, they have made the portraits intentionally, trusting for protection to a thin disguise which is only too easily penetrated by sensitive originals.

Then, too, there are cases when people have imagined that they were introduced into novels, though the authors could not possibly have had them in mind. A New York magazine editor used to say that in "A Hazard of New Fortunes," the experiences which he had had during his first year of literary work in New York had been described in detail, and, if he had known Mr. Howells, nothing would have persuaded him that the novelist had not taken him for a model. This, of course, is not as astonishing as it at first seems; it merely shows that, in the same walks of life, men are likely to have more or less similar experiences.

In that very novel, by the way, two well known New York publishers are supposed to have furnished material for the character of *Fulkerson*. As a matter of fact, one of these had not met Mr. Howells before the book was written, and it is equally improbable that the other suggested any part of the story.

It is interesting to note that the late Robert Louis Stevenson made a capital portrait of a New York publisher in "The Wreckers"; very few writers of the city could have read the book without recognizing in *Pinkerton* a familiar figure. Indeed, Mr. Stevenson was so open about the matter that, before the book went to press, he wrote to the publisher and acknowledged his indebtedness for "copy," leaving a means of escape for himself, however, by saying that he had been obliged to make certain changes in the character for purposes of disguise. At first, the publisher did not altogether like it, for reasons apparent enough to readers of the book; but now he frequently speaks of it with some pride.

In the same book, a prominent American painter, for many years a close friend of Stevenson's, appears as the fastidious *Dodd*, a far more flattering picture.

In spite of these apparent violations of privacy, however, Mr. Stevenson was very

chary about taking his material straight from life. He deliberately refrained from using some very valuable matter that had come within his experience, fearing that it would make certain people unhappy. While in the South Sea Islands a superb plot for a novel presented itself in the shape of a tragedy in the life of one of his young friends among the natives, and he used to express his regret at being unable to use it.

A popular English authoress has even outdone Mr. Stevenson in a feat of literary self denial. A number of years ago she published a novel in a prominent magazine; while it was appearing, readers began to declare that the chief figure, a man in political life, was undoubtedly the eccentric member of a family long socially conspicuous. The author was so distressed by these reports that, though the story was sure to have a success in book form, she never allowed it to appear between covers. Those of her admirers who wish to read it are obliged to seek it out in the back numbers of the periodical where it appeared.

Mr. F. Marion Crawford is one of the few living authors who frankly declare that they draw their characters from life; and yet he has never been reproached with any violation of good taste in doing so. He explains this immunity by the care he takes to place his characters in circumstances wholly different from those by which they are surrounded in life, so that the unfamiliarity of the environment makes them seem like different people. Indeed, this is probably the method employed by all good writers with consciences.

CONCERNING "SLUM" FICTION.

Not so very long ago it was next to impossible to sell a story dealing with what is known technically among literary craftsmen as "low life." This was because the reading public was supposed to be a polite one, and therefore interested only in those grades of society in which good clothes, cleanly habits, and high moral standards prevail. Ingenious literary toilers of that day who tried to run the blockade with low life stories, and found themselves with the rejected manuscript on their hands, were wont to advance all their characters a few pegs in the social scale, surround them with more costly appurtenances, and then offer the resulting story to the same discriminating editor who had rejected it in its original form.

In the course of time, however, the public became satiated with a national fiction which dealt almost wholly with commonplace respectability—than which nothing on earth is more tiresome. Some editor, more enterprising than his fellows, opened the gates of the lock so as to permit just one low life story to drift in, and very soon the word

went forth that the embargo had been raised at last. Since then we have been deluged with all sorts of stories dealing with what used to be known under the general term of "low life," but is now variously classified, in New York, as "the slums," "the Ghetto," the "congested district," and the "great East Side." The West Side, which includes within its limits Hell's Kitchen, the Tenderloin precinct, the negro quarters, and other more or less unsavory regions, seems to have been almost entirely ignored by the keen witted students of metropolitan life and character who have taken possession of this new literary field. I should qualify this last statement by explaining that they have only taken possession of it in the way in which our government has taken possession of the Philippine Islands. They occupy the field, and do not intend to let go of it; but they really know very little of the newly acquired territory, and the ominous rumble of discontent among the natives has already been heard, voiced by one of their chiefs in the following terse phrase:

"Say, what t'ell do dey let them fellers write dem things fer?"

He did not ask why the "fellers" wrote the stories that treated of his own corner of the town. He wished to find out why they were allowed to write them.

Since the lifting of the embargo a great many writers of undisputed ability have turned their attention to the "low life" of New York. In "Maggie" and "George's Mother" Stephen Crane has given us somber charcoal sketches of a life that is gruesome enough to satisfy the most morbid taste; Jacob Riis has portrayed the very poor from a thoughtful and statistical, rather than a picturesque standpoint; Julian Ralph has given us some remarkably faithful and interesting pictures of tenement house life and character; and Morris Cahn has made the inhabitants of the Jewish quarter a subject of special study. Other portrayals of similar phases of life and character there have been also, but these are selected because there can be no sort of doubt as to their sincerity.

Mr. Riis has been for years a police court reporter, and knows what he is writing about, and yet one cannot help feeling he is too close to the life that he describes—has his nose a little too deep in the mire, so to speak—to obtain a proper perspective. Mr. Crane views the field with the eyes of a realist who is always looking for the sad and terrible, and misses entirely that which makes Mr. Ralph's "People We Pass" the very best of the whole modern crop of low life literature. For Mr. Ralph alone has discovered, through personal observation, probably, that the dominant note of life among New York's decent poor is one of cheerfulness rather than

of gloom. And it is this very quality of merriment and contentment, which scarcely any other writer seems to have detected in his investigations of slum life, that affords an excuse for these observations.

The average writer of low life fiction, enjoying, let us say, an income of five thousand dollars a year—we do not wish to name a figure that will bring the profession into disrepute—takes it for granted that a family of four, living in a tenement house on an income of eight hundred dollars a year, must of necessity lead absolutely joyless lives. The complete absurdity of this theory may be realized by supposing Lord Rothschild to be writing a story dealing with the low life writer himself. And it should be remembered that the difference in rank, importance, and financial standing between the Israelitish banker and the creator of New York fiction is infinitely greater than that between the writer and the bricklayer's family whom he paints in the somber hues of misery and discontent. The following is respectfully submitted as an example of what we might expect to find in a story by Lord Rothschild, if he acted upon the theory that seems to be the favorite one with our own authors. The extract which I have chosen is from his great work, "The Toilers of the Pen":

The sun was high in the heavens when Reginald Centaword arose from the couch in his squalid bachelor apartment of two rooms and a bath, and looked out through his bedroom window upon the roofs and chimneys of the great town. He had slept late that morning—as the very poor often do—because he had no bank to go to, no bags of shining gold to count. With Reginald, to awake was but to begin another day of toil. A bitter groan of despair passed his lips as he seated himself on the edge of his ordinary porcelain bath tub, and waited for the water to run from the cheap nickel plated faucets.

"Nothing but water to bathe in," he said bitterly as he watched the slowly rising tide. "Ah! how grateful would a champagne bath be to the wearied limbs of the poor literary toiler!"

Half an hour later, the poor young writer entered a restaurant much frequented by the needy dwellers of the neighborhood, and ordered a frugal meal. He did not call for terrapin or an underdone canvasback duck. No, dear reader, even those simple dishes with which you are wont to regale yourself when they are in season, are not for the bitterly poor. Reginald simply ordered poached eggs on toast, a small pot of coffee, and some English muffins toasted and buttered. The times were hard, and this was the best that he could afford. Breakfast over, he returned to his squalid abode, threw himself into a cheap cane bottomed chair, and wearily took up his pen.

His desk was not inlaid with mother of pearl, nor was his pen of solid gold, tipped with a ruby or emerald. He could boast of nothing better than a plain oaken table and a common fountain pen, from which the ink exuded on his fingers in a tiny flood that could not be stayed, any more than the blood

could be cleansed from Bluebeard's key. The paper on which he penned his thoughts was plain and unruled, and bore neither heraldic crest nor gilded edges. And yet, despite all these disadvantages, Reginald Centaword toiled on, in the dull, diligent way in which the poor of our great cities set about their tasks.

Not until the sun was two hours past the meridian did he put aside his work and rise from his chair with a sigh of relief. Then he put on his overcoat, which was already in its second winter, thrust several pieces of manuscript into an inner pocket, and set forth to dispose of his wares.

There were cabs aplenty on the thoroughfare down which he walked with rapid tread, and several of the drivers hailed him eagerly, but he made no sign of recognition, for the toiling poor cannot afford to be robbed so early in the day. Half an hour's brisk walk brought him to the door of a tall building on Fifth Avenue. For some minutes Reginald Centaword stood irresolutely on the pavement, nervously fingering the pieces of manuscript in his coat pocket. Then, with a look of desperation on his face, he pulled his hat down over his eyes, turned his collar up around his ears, and passed with quick determined step through the door and into the elevator.

I insist upon it that there is no more reason for believing that the people who live in tenement houses are miserable and unhappy than there is for the assumption on the part of Lord Rothschild that a man who cannot afford to entertain royalty in a great Piccadilly mansion is of necessity a despondent misanthrope, incapable of enjoying such of the good things of this world as may happen to drift his way. To reach the truth of the matter, it is only necessary to walk through Central Park and note the comparative degrees of happiness that are reflected in the faces of the people in carriages and those on foot.

If we are to have a "slum" fiction, let it bear some resemblance to the truth; and let every writer who ventures into those once forbidden fields, remember that the complacent assumption that cheerfulness can be estimated on a basis of dollars and cents is a treacherous quicksand of ignorance on which no honest, sincere work can be built.

A new record in literary sectionalism is scored by an English company which, it is announced, is to acquire Mr. Quiller Couch's *Cornish Magazine*, and to issue similar periodicals devoted to other British counties. We may shortly hear of a *Gumbleton Magazine* and a *Muddleton Illustrated Monthly*.

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In one of Conan Doyle's short stories the hero, after fighting at Gettysburg, is incapacitated for further service by a severe wound received at Antietam. Dr. Doyle, who is rather fond of introducing Americans into his stories, would do well to study a textbook of United States history.

ETCHINGS

"WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY."

THE papers now are telling—and claim they tell not half—

About a new device they call the "Wireless Telegraph";

Of the "waves" it makes through ether very learnedly they write,

But I know of a "wireless" one that puts theirs out of sight.

When Madeline is near me, and tender thoughts arise,

A flash of soft heat lightning lights up her bright blue eyes;

And what I say or think about, she notes with nod or laugh,

And I am the "receiver" of this charming telegraph.

Its "Hertz waves" are just heart waves, and they never fail to beat,

When we meet within the parlor or pass upon the street;

We both know how to make it make plain our keen desires,

And we do it in an instant without the aid of wires.

I'm willing all the world should shout, and very happy be,

When reading of the wonders of that new telegraphy;

I do not doubt its strangeness, or its high commercial worth,

But mine has been coeval with the long age of the earth.

It will not go out of fashion, with eyes of black or blue,

The things it says are lovely, ineffable, and true;

It offers more delight than one can hope for or can guess,

And its most ecstatic message is its sweetly whispered "Yes."

Joel Benton.

GOLFING SONG.

WHEN from his bed the sun doth rise

And flecks the links with gold,

And blossoms rub their drowsy eyes,

And to the day unfold,

Oh, then away with sluggard sleep!

The caddie waits below;

And far afield, the clubs to wield,

A golfing we will go,

Heigho!

A golfing we will go.

The turf is firm beneath the tread,

The course is fair to see;

The hazards challenge far ahead;

So quickly to the tee.

Aye, out with ball, and to the tee,

And drive for all you know.

So, heart and soul, from hole to hole,

A golfing we will go,

Heigho!

A golfing we will go.

Around the course, and on the card

A score of eighty nine!

With blood aleap and muscles hard,

And appetite to dine.

Come, lads and lassies, to the links,

And get your cheeks aglow;

And life shall smile upon you while

A golfing we will go,

Heigho!

A golfing we will go.

Frank Roe Batchelder.

PRESUMPTION.

I AM not worthy e'en to press my lips

Upon the dainty imprint of her feet,

As in the springtime glad my lady trips

Her maiden way across the meadows sweet.

Yet once I raised my eyes unto her eyes,

I seized her trembling little hand—the wine

Of one kiss, stolen, made me bold—and wise—

I clasped her to my heart—and she was mine!

Brand Whitlock.

TO THE POSTMAN.

GRAY coated messenger, I vow

In all your weary round

None waits your coming with such hope

As makes *my* pulses bound;

No maiden, filled with eagerness

For lover's billet doux,

Can list and peer as daily I

Do peer and list for you.

Most times, my rights ignoring quite,

You calmly thrust on me

Some certain manuscripts that I

Had thought no more to see.

In fact, so quickly oft you act

'Tis very evident

You simply kept them in your pouch,

And they were never sent.