

who are less than six feet are something less than men. Consequently, he is able to say of Poe: "As literature his writings are essentially valueless"—though he regards Poe as the "one absolute artist of our elder literature." However wholesome as an antidote for the excesses of the Poe idolaters, this is establishing standards with a vengeance.

His point of view is studiously impersonal. It may be suggested by his own subtly phrased comment on French social intercourse in "French Traits": "The speech and action of each communicant encounter those of the other without in any degree involving either individuality behind them." The withdrawal of the critic behind his standards is in the case of Mr. Brownell almost complete. He scorns the reader who judges with his nerves. He himself is unwilling to judge even with his character. He is all but successful—far more successful than his admired Arnold—in producing the illusion that he is representing "things as they really are." Like many writers of fiction who have aimed at a philosophically impossible "objectivity," he has sacrificed something of force and vitality.

Furthermore, the unmistakable man—New Yorker, cosmopolitan, rationalist, Horatian—peers here and there over the edge of his entrenchments. He is visible behind the sharp thrust at New England as the "incubus of our civilization," and at the self-complacency of her literary historians, particularly Professor Wendell, who "tucks" American literature "into the confines of Harvard College." He is visible again in the reminder to Professor Lounsbury, apropos of Cooper's heroines, that "in the quiet scholastic closes of New Haven no doubt they like a little more ginger, 'in fiction at least,' than palates more accustomed to it demand." Though these vivacities are exceptional and incidental, they are significant, breaking as they do the suave decorum generally maintained. They help us to understand the unaccustomed warmth of Mr. Brownell's appreciation of Cooper, who was not bred by the frog pond of Boston Common. They throw some light upon his resolute depreciation of Hawthorne, who, he says, is lacking in substance, and is seldom re-read.

His style is an effective instrument for what he regards as the business of the critic—characterization. Disciplined, pondered, slightly hesitant, its virtues are not those of Thackeray, whose prose he extremely admires, but rather those of Henry James, whose complexities he deprecates. It aims not at fluency and directness, but at the last degree of expressiveness. It is both ample and precise, but it is somewhat deficient in color and tang. Its movement is checked by a fastidious concern for shading. Its vocabulary is select, psy-

chological, Latinate—the style of a man who picks his way gingerly through the dictionary, abhorring carnal odors and the touch of the agricultural implement. Henry James, for example, he says, has clearly preliminarily mastered his complicated theme in its centrality. His work, he seems to say, is done when he has constructed his labyrinth in emulating correspondence with the complexity of his model, life, and at the same time furnished a potentially discoverable clue to it.

If we dwell at some length upon Mr. Brownell's procedure, it is because he himself keeps us constantly reminded that criticism is a fine art. Irritating as his air of premeditation may become, it is the comment of a consciously exigent and accomplished connoisseur upon a genial improviser that makes his study of Lowell not merely entertaining, but finely instructive, and, in its way, definitive. Though he dissents with refreshing spirit from the recent depreciation of Lowell's scholarship as "not up to current standards"—praying that *belles-lettres*, at least, may "hold out a little longer before it is transformed into scientific feudalism or declines in Byzantine decadence"—he does find the man essentially of the dilettante temperament. His definition of this variable term and his application of it are worth recording:

He was a dilettante of an original type in being so thoroughly American. He had the disinterested delight in the delectable that characterizes the dilettante as distinguished from the artist, to whom the delectable is material. His singularity—as a dilettante, not as an American—consists in his being attracted by the elementary quite as much as by the differentiated.

This clearly defined central conception Mr. Brownell—who is much attracted by the differentiated and scarcely at all by the elementary—elaborates through sixty pages. The quality of Lowell's temperament appears in his culture; though he reads with the industry of a Chinese scholar, he always follows his natural bent, and so fails of an adequate discipline. It appears in his criticism; for example, he immensely admires Dante and knows everything about him, "but he does not communicate because he does not express his general conception of Dante, and he does not because he has not himself, one feels sure, thought it out into definition." It appears in his style; it is praised for its brilliant and felicitous detail, but "its defect is that it is detail, and so accentuated as to nullify the *ensemble*, on which style inexorably depends." Preferring rather to read than to think, to color than to design, to decorate than to construct, he falls short through temperamental indulgence of the great architects of prose—of the great critics. The key to criticism is as simple as the key to suc-

cess: "Criticism is not the product of reading, but of thought. To produce vital and useful criticism it is necessary to think, think, think, and then, when tired of thinking, to think more." Thus Mr. Brownell, conspicuously exemplifying his own principles, maintains a masterly unity in variety; he attacks truth from every point of the compass, but his arrows all fly to the same mark; his own detail, frequently polished to brilliance, is not idly ornamental but organic, like links in chain armor. The workmanship in general is so admirable, the principles so explicit, so sound, so classical, that the essay might well serve both as a model of criticism and as a brief manual of critical theory.

What we miss in the equipment of this "impeccable Aristides" of criticism—to adapt one of his own phrases—is perhaps a power that is, after all, extra-critical. It is the power to convey along with his acute judgments of men and things the ardor of the scholar of whom Giuseppe Caponsacchi speaks—the scholar lost in his books, who yet knows that life is greater than all the books ever written, and who, while he reads, dreams, "Thus should I fight, save, or rule the world." Mr. Brownell probably has no desire either to fight or to rule the world. We doubt even whether he would care to save it, if it had to be preserved *en masse*. Yet in the refinable remnant he feels a temperate interest, and points out, though with marked freedom from demonstrativeness, the way of salvation, through culture. One feels tempted to apply to him his penetrating remark on Emerson in the most deeply sympathetic of these studies:

His feelings really glowed, one may say, within extraordinarily narrow limits. When he could exercise his *Vernunft* in complete neglect of his *Verstand*, he reached the acme of his exaltation.

But the application would be unjust. Indeed, he is bent on showing how Emerson himself became an apostle of culture in spite of his disdain for culture, and a kind of divine democrat in spite of—or rather because of—his hatred of the mob and his shrinking from the vulgar.

If his emotional nature lacked warmth, what eminently it possessed was an exquisite refinement, and a constituent of his refinement was an instinctive antipathy to ideas of dominance, dictation, patronage, caste, and material superiority whose essential grossness repelled him and whose ultimate origin in contemptuousness—probably the one moral state except cravenness that chiefly he deemed contemptible—was plain enough to his penetration.

This is paradox put to some purpose. From it is deduced one of Emerson's greatest services both to America and to the rest of the world, a service, as Mr. Brownell says, subtly rendered, "be-

ing, in fact, rather an implication of his writings than anywhere explicit in them—the rationalization of democracy through the ideal development of the individual." It would be impossible to put in more concise form the integrating principle of Mr. Brownell's own thinking: it is the democratic justification of Brahminism. What distinguishes his Brahminism is its intensely intellectual and rational quality; it outcasts all emotions situated lower than the head. But in the "positive perfume of sensitive intellectual refinement" it becomes almost—not quite—intoxicated. If in its survey of literature, British as well as American, it undervalues the elemental, the spontaneous, the old-fashioned "spiritual," these virtues have already had their enthusiastic appraisers, and perhaps may generally be trusted to look out for themselves, anyway. If it sets a very high price on pure intelligence, self-conscious refinement, and the new-fangled "reality," there is an idea affixed to every estimate, which compels the reader either to defend or to abandon his prejudices. If it frequently points to an unattainable excellence, we can—as Carlyle reluctantly admitted to Emerson after expressing some regret that the Concord sage was not doing precisely what he himself was doing—we can "spare a man for that, too."

#### CURRENT FICTION.

*The Ball and the Cross.* By G. K. Chesterton. New York: John Lane Co.

It has long filled Mr. Chesterton with fiery indignation that the devil should have all the good music, art, and literature. If a mediæval juggler could stand on his head in honor of the Virgin, if Luther could smoke tobacco to the glory of God, he can see no reason why a twentieth-century journalist with a command of epigram and paradox should not write a rollicking allegorical romance in defence of the Cross. And that is why the crash of glass in the office-window of the atheistical Turnbull is the challenge to a series of duels—with long swords out of a curiosity shop—between him and the Roman Catholic Highlander MacIan—a series of duels which carries the participants hotfoot all over England, and the reader, not quite so rapidly, through a book of four hundred pages. In the course of their fighting flight, the duellists fall in with a number of more or less realistic symbolical personages—a Nietzschean, a Tolstoyan, a French rationalist, etc.—who, according to their several dispositions, further or hinder the combats for the vindication of the honor of God. In the end the atheist, the Catholic, and most of their abettors are rounded up in the mad-house; the mad-house is fired, and the devil, its superintendent, escapes in an airship; and the swords

of Turnbull and MacIan form a cross in the ashes.

The burden with which this romance is freighted is that unbelief is madness. Turnbull and MacIan are the only sane men in England. Turnbull is sane, because he believes that God does not exist; he is eager to fight for his faith—therefore his author respects him. MacIan is sane, because he believes that God does exist; he is eager to fight for his faith—therefore his author loves him. It is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this book that a Roman Catholic is its hero. In Evan MacIan, Chesterton is manifestly drawing his own idealized portrait, and he does it in his happiest manner:

Evan lived like a man walking on a borderland, the borderland between this world and another. Like so many men and nations who grow up with nature and the common things, he understood the supernatural before he understood the natural. He had looked at dim angels standing knee-deep in the grass before he had looked at the grass. He knew that Our Lady's robes were blue before he knew the wild roses round her feet were red. The deeper his memory plunged into the dark house of childhood the nearer and nearer he came to the things that cannot be named. All through his life he thought of the daylight world as a sort of divine debris, the broken remainder of his first vision.

That is effective writing. Yet Mr. Chesterton had said the thing quite as finely in "Orthodoxy"—"according to Christianity, we were indeed the survivors of a wreck, the crew of a golden ship that had gone down before the beginning of the world." And not merely this, but most of the best things in the later were anticipated to some extent in the earlier book. It is not necessary to explain the sometimes obscure symbolism of the "Ball and the Cross," for the reason that "Orthodoxy" explains it. Mr. Chesterton wrote his annotations before he composed his text. He made a key and then constructed a lock to fit the key. For example, "The spike of dogma fitted exactly into the hole in the world" ("Orthodoxy") is the only thing that makes intelligible to us the exclamation of the idiot monk in his cell ("Ball and the Cross"), "Spike is the best—it sticks out." This reversal of the customary process suggests the limits of the author's success in this field of fiction. Fine phrases, paradoxes, happy metaphors, even long chains of argument burst into his mind spontaneously in a flood of light. But he sustains his narrative and his allegory by sheer force of will and intelligence. His logical processes are inspired; his romance is excogitated. It is necessary only to compare the exquisitely veiled malice of Anatole France's little masterpiece, "Putois," with Chesterton's brutal English reformation of it to feel how unequally the men are matched with this kind of weapon. And yet can all French

literature supply a sentence quite so satisfactory in its way to the Anglo-Saxon spirit as this?—it is, if we may be permitted the figure, the Sancho Panza half of Chesterton in a nutshell: "Everything his eye fell on it feasted on, not æsthetically," (there is a thunderbolt between the commas), "but with a plain, jolly appetite as of a boy eating buns"!

*The Beggar in the Heart.* By Edith Rickert. New York: Moffat, Yard & Co.

The Heart belongs to Miss Tyrriena Sidonia Pickersgill, daughter of an American parson. She goes abroad to study art, and in Paris acquires the nickname "Petty-Zou." There and in London she spends a good many more years than there is any reason for, making little statuettes for an uncertain pittance, and dodging the altogether proper and desirable advances of the naturally-to-be-expected lord-in-the-case. She is, in short, one of those sprightly, youngish heroines in whom the modern feminine audience so much rejoices. Her little audacities and rebellions, her pouts and subterfuges, will have their appeal for those who admire the "bachelor maid." In fiction, at least, the charm of that young person depends on the ultimate triumph of her femininity over her theory of independence and equality. "Petty-Zou" is, perhaps, too consciously bedizened with prettinesses greatly to please any other than her own doll-loving sex. Of course, in the end the beggar in her heart gets what it wants in the person of the lord in question; and matters are made altogether comfortable by the discovery that "Petty-Zou" is a near descendant of the Earl of Uxminster, a perfectly eligible old rascal. The marrying lord is better than the average woman's hero: at all events, he is no pale shade of Rochester. But it is to be doubted if many men are able to read the book without irritation at the aimless sprightliness with which many of its pages are filled.

*The Sinking Ship.* By Eva Lathbury. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

The writer has endeavored in this story to accomplish a very difficult feat—endeavored with an intensity of effort that results in occasional crudity and bathos, but that achieves its result to a praiseworthy degree. The theme of the regeneration of a worldly group by the introduction among them of a being of higher fibre has been treated with varying degrees of beauty and success by the obvious methods of the Morality. In the present instance, this theme has been approached more subtly, the intention being to present it, not in a symbolic masque, but by means of a cross-section of the actual world of every-day. It is a more exacting business to deal