

We had lost the taste for the pathological, if we had ever advanced far enough to acquire it. It was the uncrowned poet-laureate of England that first roused us to what we were missing in the real world of masculine men and masculine deeds. From him we caught a liking for the untamed, the crude, the savage. He taught us where alone we might find the unspoiled, the undegenerate. This prepared us for a clearer call of the wild, a return to the time when man was only a little lower than the animals. To-day, it would be a brute indeed that could outdo us in robustness of temper, in freedom from squeamishness, in absorption in the elemental. The primary virtues of truth and frankness are preached in every advertisement. The brotherhood of man is assiduously fostered by magazine-editors. The federation of the world for the conservation of the primitive graces is near.

But while Kipling and Jack London must be credited with a large share in the movement of humanity towards freshness and pungency, mere letters could not have brought the revolution full. It required a more direct method, a still less restrained style, a yet further remove from the softness and convention and hesitation that had followed in the wake of good-breeding, falsely so-called, to lift us to the plane where our hatreds should outweigh our loves, our denunciations exceed our approvals, our enthusiasms overpeer our appreciations, and our outspokenness blunt our discrimination. It was Thomas F. Lawson who, in the words of an admirer, was "cheerfully willing to let literature 'go hang' for braver things," and marked out the path to the purely elemental. He was the first of the present generation to do anything "man-fashion." Before his lurid advent, people in their benightedness did what they had to do in mere gentleman-fashion or woman-fashion or child-fashion—absurd cowardly temporizings, all of them. But red-blooded human beings and all animals conduct their relations "man-fashion," and we are on the right track at last.

We have mastered a new vocabulary, in which plain-speaking and hard-hitting, without cant and without adulteration, "strike vibrantly and aggressively the note of the new Americanism," which is intensely human and intensely

graphic. No person has anything to conceal from any other person. Nobody any longer lowers his voice, because tumult and shouting are provocative of larger apparent results, and, besides, low voices have "gone out." We have lifted the lid and smashed the glass that were keeping us from complete self-revelation to every passer-by.

We would not underrate the positive good in this stripping off of the clothes of civilization, but we do protest that civilization is more than a glove to be removed and turned wrong-side out at will. There is a time for gloves and a time to go without gloves, but with clothes it is vastly different. Outside of the halls of art and the hospitals, clothes have too long been considered a decent and necessary part, not simply of the body but of the whole man, to be left off now. It is a return to the elemental with a vengeance when personality can throw off the delicate draperies that its own sensitiveness has woven for it, and, with a bravery utterly beyond the reach of the physical person, count it a compliment to have it said of it that it is naked and that it is not ashamed.

WINSLOW HOMER.

The late Winslow Homer, one of the strongest marine painters of all time, was already a popular figure fifty years ago. As an illustrator of the civil war he was counted with the best, and he followed up that success with a series of admirable genre studies of negro life. A self-trained man, he was emphatically one of ourselves; his pictures needed no recondite eulogy or interpretation. He saw American themes with American eyes. That he was not contented with this easy and honorable path may be judged by the fact that in his forties he abandoned illustration, settled on a remote crag in Maine, and gave himself to the study of the life of fishermen and the moods of the northern sea.

After more than fifteen years of his seclusion, men began to suspect that a great painter had arisen. The hand of this veteran constantly gained power, his invention instinctively attained classic form. The last twenty years of his life were distinguished by a series of paintings in which was grasped, as never before in the history of art, the sheer energy of the ocean, its thunderous unforgetting onslaught against the raw

edges of a continent. He treated with force and sympathy many aspects of fisher life. The weather-beaten head of a sailor shouting through night and storm, "All's well!" is representative of this side of his genius. But he is most himself in those pictures which, without conventional human interest, catch the ravening waves gnawing at the rocks, dragging the seaweed into the crevices, or exploding in clamorous geysers. It was the awful energy of such a scene that attracted him. For him the spin-drift was not merely a filmy and decorative incident, but an acrid volley that cut the exposed face. Waves were not for him mere undulating forms, but active and potentially destructive masses of water, with formidable impetus and weight; and although his sense of bulk and texture was fine and accurate, he chose to emphasize in his latest work less the specific forms of rock and wave than the shock of their collision. It is this dynamic sense that gives him a peculiar eminence among the artists of his time, and this dæmonic quality in the work must condone some lack of the finest color sense and occasional crudity of execution. His subjects did not comport with that small preciousness of workmanship which was so highly prized by his contemporaries, and he willingly sacrificed epidermal charm to dynamic effect.

Yet charm and dexterity he possessed in a high degree. Only it is little in sight in his later and standard work. For many years, he made water-color studies of all conceivable subjects. There is an extraordinary series of fish leaping under the sting of the hook, there are sketches that contain the cerulean sea and sky of Bermuda and Nassau, and entrap the very sunlight of those blessed isles. Here, unlike his oil paintings, which are a bit labored, all is spontaneity and gusto. These minor sketches are miracles of execution. In them are balanced combinations of apparently incompatible colors. Work, in the sense of repeated effort, is absent; the effect depends upon some incredible simplification, both of the vision and of the creative act. Here such lightning executants as Besnard and Brangwyn are challenged in their old field. In fact, for real analogues to this joyous side of Winslow Homer's activity one must go to the wonder-working painters of Japan.

It is strange and perhaps regrettable that he never fully established a good understanding between the sketcher and the deliberate picture-maker. His larger paintings had much to gain from the slightest studies. It is possible that he suffered the inevitable penalty of devout nature worship in a certain specialization and narrowing of his gift. His theme was the eternal conflict of sea and land. May he not have feared to depict the tragedy in other than sombre colors? In any case, the suavity that accompanies the apparent brusqueness of his watercolor sketches is generally lacking in his larger marines, and his work presents a dual aspect. In an admirable simplicity, energy, and fidelity to dynamic truth, we find the unifying principle of a stalwart and purposeful manhood and an enduring lifework.

It was a resolute sense of ends that gave Winslow Homer his immense superiority over most of his contemporaries in painting. The hesitant, day-dreaming, essentially dilettante mood of many modern artists was alien to his spirit. Nobody tried harder than he, but nobody would have been more scornful of conventionally romantic notions about the unattainable and the tragedy of the artistic temperament. To the end, which came in his retreat by his dearly loved ocean, he was progressing. One life was too short for the complete unfolding of so great a gift.

For twenty years past, honors have been showered upon Winslow Homer. The other day, a sympathetic British critic, estimating the American exhibition at Berlin, rightly found in Winslow Homer's paintings the authentic and valuable American note. Yet we doubt if he is esteemed according to his merits, and when his portfolios are searched there may be surprises analogous to the sensation created by Ruskin when he explored the waste papers of the recluse Turner.

VICTORIAN LITERATURE. (The Philosophy of Change.)

I.

To write a history of English literature from 1837 to 1901, in all its manifold ramifications from political economy to fiction, is a task to make any but the stoutest heart quail, and, whatever else may be said of Professor Walker's volume, it bears evidence of industrious reading and pa-

tient understanding.* Like most works of its kind, it suffers somewhat from uncertainty of aim, being neither quite encyclopædic in completeness of detail nor sufficiently arbitrary in selection to deal effectively with ideas. But its arrangement by subjects and its inclusion of so much that is commonly rejected from literary history offer this great compensation that we are enabled to see the interworking of the various intellectual currents: Darwin and Ten-nyson, Malthus and Matthew Arnold, Spencer and Newman, thus appear as fellow-laborers, moulding and expressing that subtle, evasive thing we call the spirit of the age. Evasive in a way that spirit is, as the inner forces of life must always be, yet there is one date and one book so preëminent that no one can go astray in seeking the centre of Victorian thought. At the close of the reign—Professor Walker recalls the incident that every one will remember—a London daily paper asked its readers to send in lists of the ten books, English or foreign, which in their judgment were the greatest and most influential of the century past. The lists varied widely, save in one respect: in every list stood Darwin's publication of 1859, "The Origin of Species."

One is not inclined to take these plebiscites very seriously, yet this was really an extraordinary event. Probably not half the persons who named "The Origin of Species" had ever seriously read it, yet they all felt in some vague way that this book had struck the keynote of the century. In Darwin's hypothesis, though they may not have comprehended its full bearing, they thought the mind of man had found at last that for which it had long been seeking—the perfect scientific formula: it looked to them as if a new and everlasting basis for truth had been laid. Descartes had reduced the physical world to a mechanical system, and Newton had formulated its mathematical laws. But Descartes had, theoretically at least, separated the sphere of the human spirit from his system, and to bring the living world, exclusive of man, within its control he had denied to animals all reason and emotion and treated them as mere machines; while Newton in his laws merely ignored the whole organic creation. This extra-scientific field Darwin finally reclaimed, and, by the elimination of teleological and other foreign elements and by the authority of his vast patience, raised evolution to the side of gravitation. As an equivalent of the mechanical law of motion in the inanimate world he gave precise expression to the absolute law of change in the animate, thus uniting inorganic and organic (including all that is man) in one universal scheme

of science. The new law left no place for a power existing outside of nature and controlling the world as a lower order of existence, nor did it recognize a higher and a lower principle working within nature itself, but in the mere blind force of variation, in the very unruliness to design or government, found the source of order and development. Chance itself was thus rendered calculable, and science reigned supreme through "all this changing world of changeless law." No wonder that men were a little dazed by the marvellous simplicity and finality of this formula, and were ready to exclaim, with a new meaning to the words:

Let the great world spin for ever down the
ringing grooves of change.

II.

All this may seem rather remote from Victorian literature, but in fact it is, as the anecdote related by Professor Walker indicates, the very heart of the matter. Science has been, admittedly, the dominating intellectual force of the age, and the point of contact of science with literature is just this law of change. For it must not be forgotten that law, as it is understood in science, is a formulation of motion in the organic and of change in the inorganic realms as a power sufficient without any added principle of control to work out the ends of creation as we see them amplified in orderly recurrence and progress. Modern science and romanticism sprang up together, and have grown side by side. In one respect they have embraced diverse, even hostile, temperaments—on this side the man who deals with facts and tends to a hard materialism or a dry intellectualism, on the other the man of sentiment who dreams and loses himself in futile reverie. Yet it is a notorious, if paradoxical, fact that the effect of science on art and literature has been to reinforce a romantic impressionism, and that the man of scientific training when he turns to the humanities is almost always an impressionist. The reason is plain: he simply carries into art the law of change with which he has dealt in his proper sphere, and acknowledges no principle of taste superior to the shifting pleasure of the individual. In this he is typical of the age, for if the particular causo-mechanical theory of evolution promulgated by Darwin has proved untenable, evolution itself has remained as almost the universal creed of those who believe that some such hypothesis will ultimately be found adequate to explain all the processes of life.

And it is easy to trace the working of the same belief in other regions of contemporary thought, most easy, no doubt, in philosophy, which is nothing more than the effort of the reason to interpret in its own terms the common

*"The Literature of the Victorian Era." By Hugh Walker. Cambridge University Press. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.