

some of the cases described are such as to make one wonder whether Mr. Carrington's former critical conscience has not been drugged by too much soaking in Sir Conan Doyle's grand truth. A few of the cases presented, however, are very hard to explain away, *provided* all the relevant facts are given us. If they are, the spiritistic explanation would seem to be almost forced upon us unless we take refuge in some sort of universal telepathy, or in that last hope of the bankrupt skeptic—perhaps somebody lied.

"The Letters from Harry and Helen" differ from the other books here reviewed in the tone which pervades them—a tone that is neither professional, scientific, nor pseudo-scientific. Harry and Helen are on the other side, and their letters were taken down by their (living) sister, who is no professional medium, but who suddenly learned that she had the gift of automatic writing; and the messages brought so much comfort to the bereaved mother and to various friends that it was decided to share them with the public. Whatever one's attitude towards their content may be, no one can fail to note their sincerity and simple directness, as well as the plausibility of much that they have to say. The letters contain no tests of identity or other efforts at demonstration; but give incidentally many details as to the nature of the new life.

The descriptions of the new life which one finds not only in the books here under review, but in nearly all the books of this sort that have appeared during the last five years, are often improbable enough; but there are two facts about them which must appeal as mildly interesting to any one who has had the task of wading (or skimming) through several thousand pages of this sort of thing. In the first place, their general agreement as to detail is rather surprising; and secondly, the almost universal omission of various things which one would naturally expect is somewhat notable. Since all or almost all of these books are written down by mediums who must have absorbed in early childhood all sorts of Christian views as to the next life, one would expect that in the trance state these ingrained views would dominate the descriptions of the other world given out in the automatic script. As a fact, none of them, so far as the present reviewer is aware, has anything to say of the "beatific vision," none of them puts the next world in "heaven" or "hell," and only one or two of them have anything to say about seeing Jesus. Instead of this, we find a pretty general agreement that the departed spend much of their time on earth, among their living friends; that there is no division of the good and bad in "heaven" and "hell" or elsewhere, but instead a division based upon present ability rather than upon past deeds, into less or more advanced "planes," with increasingly rapid "vibrations"; that the dwellers in the higher planes help in the instruction of those below them; that those on the lower planes spend much of their time coming to the aid of the dying; that their life on these lower planes is in many ways like ours here, some retaining their theological prejudices, and all being in need of further education; that while there is no money and no business on the other side, the pursuit of science and of art continues there as here, etc., etc. The list of agreements might be continued indefinitely, and coming as they do from such varied and independent sources, they seem to suggest some kind of theosophic tradition, handed on, as Professor James once proposed, through the subconscious processes of successive generations of me-

diums. But whatever one's explanation of the phenomenon, and whatever significance, or insignificance, one attributes to the content of the communications, the influence which this rising tide of *soi-disant* spirit messages is going to exert and is already exerting upon the religious faith of those on this side of the great divide should be a matter of considerable interest to every intelligent observer of the drama of human life.

Humor Alive and Dead

My Uncle Benjamin. By Claude Tillier. Translated by Adele Szold Seltzer. New York: Boni & Liveright.

The Three-Cornered Hat. By Pedro A. de Alarçon. Translated from the Spanish by Jacob S. Fassett, Jr. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Tarr. By Wyndham Lewis. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

AMERICAN publishers have been doing a pretty service to the cause of international understanding by giving us not only the war-books of Europe—friendly Europe at least—but her peace-books of the human-kindly order—not only chronicles of "Potterat and the War," but jolly and graceful little masterpieces of humor like Claude Tillier's "My Uncle Benjamin," and, but now, "The Three-Cornered Hat" of Pedro de Alarçon. Somehow we slapstick Northerners and Westerners have contrived to cling to the impression that the Gauls and the Latins are solemn folk—as if Rabelais and Cervantes had been mere "sports," without parallel and probably without appreciation in their own countries. Yet here are two worthy descendants whose sly and pleasant humor has survived half a century at home before venturing abroad among the barbarians.

If we wished to try to appropriate Claude Tillier, we might call him a Sterne without the leer. "My Uncle Benjamin," like "Tristram Shandy," is a man's book, with its reckless boyish high spirits and its boyish sentiment as well. Uncle Benjamin is a figure of delight, ". . . the gayest, funniest, wittiest man in all the country round, and he would have been the most—how shall I say it without failing in respect to my uncle's memory?—he would have been the least sober, if the town drummer, named Cicero, had not shared his glory. . . . Nevertheless my Uncle Benjamin was not what you lightly term a drunkard, make no mistake about that. He was an epicurean who pushed intoxication to the point of philosophy—that was all. He had a supremely elevated and noble stomach. He loved wine, not for itself, but for the short-lived madness which it brings, a madness which makes a man of wit talk nonsense in so naïve, piquant, and original a way that one would like to talk that way always. If he could have intoxicated himself by reading the mass, he would have read the mass every day. My Uncle Benjamin had principles. He maintained that a fasting man was still asleep; that intoxication would have been one of the greatest blessings of the Creator, if it did not cause headache, and that the only thing that made man superior to the brute was the faculty of getting drunk." The scene is a sleepy French village at the end of the eighteenth century, and the text is decorated with charming silhouettes which add much to the quaint attraction of the little volume.

Pedro de Alarçon was a brilliant politician, journalist, and novelist of the mid-nineteenth century. In the original preface a Spanish critic, Luis Alphonso, estimated "El sombrero

de tres picos" with an enthusiasm which the continued fame of the tale has justified: "For a long time we have been accustomed to recognize in the novels of Alarçon his faculty of invention, his wit, and a subtle and enchanting spirit, French in origin and tradition, which he expressed with rare dexterity and ease. Now he has seen fit to reveal himself to us as a skilful painter of splendid quality, a most faithful and capable exponent of the best traditions of the Spanish school, as one accustomed to dip the pen of Quevedo into the palette of Goya. And it is the canvases of Goya, more than anything else, that this little picture of manners, this *genre* picture, as it is called nowadays, entitled 'El sombrero de tres picos,' most resembles. One sees in it the freshness and vigor of coloring of the creator of *Les caprichos*, his mischievous and easy-going types, his strong accentuations of light and shade, and his admirable lightness of touch." A mischievous little tale it is, founded on a folk-story which the author had heard repeatedly from peasant lips, and to which he succeeded in giving a delicate perfection.

Over against these two little jewels of humor we may set, for self-disciplinary purposes, an example of the very modern product of our current British school. Perhaps one ought not to take "Tarr" as a work of humor; but if not, how shall we take it? The author, Wyndham Lewis, is a painter and critic who has connected himself with the very newest movements in art and morals. He has been recently cited by that eager modernist, Ezra Pound, as a distinguished comrade in vorticism and other new preoccupations of "the serious artist." Somebody, according to the publisher, has pronounced "Tarr" "the most vigorous and volcanic English novel of our time." Perhaps it is—in terms of vorticism. To the layman it would seem singularly remote from anything recognizable as an English novel but for the accident that the English tongue has been more or less used in writing it. Its surface is that of a story of Paris by an Englishman in the Russian manner. Its persons, members of an artist-bohemian set, out-Slav the Slav. Without exception, they are flighty, garrulous, emotional, full of words and empty of character. Perhaps it is well for us to be permitted a glimpse of an artist Paris other than the conventionally piquant *quartier* exploited by the late F. Hopkinson Smith and conspiring sentimentalists to-date. But we do not believe that Mr. Wyndham's Paris exists in this world or any other—if it does, it is not worth exploring. In short, we find this modern chronicle a rather dull rigmarole, glittering, here and there, with a bit of "realism," a nasty word, or what not. Tarr is a mouthing theorist, who cannot help lecturing even his mistresses. Much of it is brilliant, taken by itself. Behold Tarr, for example, the moment before his conquest of Anastasya (who is half-Russian), in full discourse:

"... Anything living, quick, changing, is bad art, always; naked men and women are the worst art of all, because there are fewer semi-dead things about them. The shell of the tortoise, the plumage of the bird, makes these animals approach nearer to art. Soft, quivering, and quick flesh is as far from art as an object can be."

"Art is merely *the dead*, then?"

"No, but *deadness* is the first condition of art. . . . The second is absence of *soul*, in the sentimental human sense. The lines and masses of the statue are its soul. . . ." And so on. One may find this kind of thing in Mr. Pound's recent collection of essays, and we see no just cause for Mr. Wyndham's using a Tarr for his mouthpiece un-

less—dare we suspect?—in order to steal an audience wider than his professed criticism is able to command. Tarr is a dummy, as dead as Wyndham pleases; and we confess that, with a touch more of eccentricity and egotism, the Kreisler of whom he is proud as a portrait of the insufferable Teuton is as like him as a twin brother. If we are to share the author's ideal of a world of cosmopolites, we may at least reserve the hope that it may be peopled by human beings and not by gibbering monotonous bogeys and bores such as inhabit these pages. . . . If (and we are conscious of misgivings) the book is to be taken as vorticistically humorous, we must sadly maintain that its appeal as humor (in default of sane characterization and action) would have to rely upon something remarkably like a running "He-he!" from a slapstick showman.

Mediaeval Freedom of Speech

The Spirit of Protest in Old French Literature. By Mary Morton Wood. New York: Columbia University Press.

AN unusual interest for the general reader attaches to this Columbia University dissertation of Mary Morton Wood. Its title gives welcome evidence that students are seeking to examine and formulate the spirit of mediæval literature in the vulgar tongues. Of theses dealing with the form of mediæval poetry and with the complicated relations of this or that version of the same "motif," there has been no lack. But occasionally there appears a study such as this, wherein the remains of mediæval literature are treated as human documents, written by men who really had something to say out of their very hearts, instead of strumming upon the frayed strings of conventional heroism, adventure, chivalry, or indecency.

The didactic and satiric writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries furnish the bulk of the evidence set forth in this volume. These writings are in large measure the work of churchmen of an advanced or independent type; men who refused to admit that the organized system of social injustice and of the restraint of nature was part of the divine plan. We are taken here into the company of the distant forerunners of the Reformation and the Renaissance, those ground-breakers, some timid and apologetic, others bold and bitter, who performed for human society the valuable functions of an irreducible minority.

At a time when all humanity is tending to bay at command with the leaders of the pack, there is something very stimulating in reading the courageous protests of these old French thinkers. They are the mediæval representatives of that irrepressible and fearless intellectual activity which has marked the literature of France from Jean de Meung through Rabelais, Descartes, Molière, Rousseau, and Voltaire to George Sand and Romain Rolland. These writers speak not for France alone and for her aspirations towards social and intellectual freedom, but for all the commonwealth of yearning humanity. A righteous discontent, the first step towards enfranchisement, pervades their criticism, as voiced in the passages quoted in the original and accompanied by an adequate prose translation. The criticism is directed at five general abuses: absolutism in government, privilege in economics, superstition in religion, authority in thought, sex discrimination in opportunities. Much progress has been made in six centuries, but all these topics are still upon the carpet in 1918, and we may take many a