

artist-philosopher. Artist-reformer would be nearer the truth, and the distinction between him and the mere artist would remain. The mere artist, whom you may call either a convictionless or a disinterested artist, just as you please, is known by his eagerness to look again and again at the world with fresh eyes. He values life more for its variety and its capability of surprising him than for its conformity with his previous reports upon it. The artist is known by what he omits, the artist-philosopher by what he omits to observe. His subconscious tells him either that his philosophy would be different if he observed more, or else that he would have no end of trouble trying to squeeze his new material into his old system. In this his subconscious does the artist-philosopher a good turn. We forgive Mr. Shaw the hardness and fastness of his conclusions because we know he has observed nothing, literally nothing, that is inconsistent with them. We should never forgive him if he saw all life, and saw it merely as all raw premise for his finished conclusion-product.

It is by never forgetting Mr. Shaw is an artist-philosopher that we escape from his bondage. An artist-philosopher is a system-maker, and no system can be true. But even when we are equipped with this knowledge escape from him is not easy. His hold upon us is tenacious. He relaxes our will to get away. As a mere artist his power is not easy to resist. One of the greatest masters of clear statement that have ever lived, a humorist of the first rank, one of the great wits of the world, he knows how to use his wit and humor and clearness to serve his own will, the will to make us disbelieve. A while ago I spoke of his mots d'auteur, but really all his plays are mots d'auteur, spoken with a practical object. Will the next century read and see his plays? I have not the slightest idea. No words of mine, gentle reader, and a fortiori no words of yours, can tell how little we know about the tastes of our successors. But I am willing to bet, if they do read him, that they will find singularly little to skip.

Mr. Shaw's destiny is an odd one. All his articulate life he has been telling what he took to be subversive and unpleasant truths. His reward has been money, a reputation for brilliancy, few converts. Then the war came. He did as he had always done, said what he had always said, and with the same fresh wit and energy. This time, at last, he roused thousands and thousands to fury. So his chance has come for showing, now that he is about sixty years old, the courage he would have shown all along, if he had had the chance.

PHILIP LITTELL.

Behind the Blockade

Short Rations, An American Woman in Germany, 1915-1916, by Madeline Z. Doty. New York: The Century Co. \$1.50.

MISS DOTY went to Germany looking for wretchedness and revolt—and she found them. A certain fringe of unstable emotionalism surrounds her somewhat meagre sum of cold facts. There is considerable conjecture and surmise, considerable yielding to the impulse to magnify the feeling of an individual into a sort of mystic wave of national emotion. Even her own reaction to the visible hunger and gloom of the people is not consistent. In one word she seems to say that if the starvation and isolation process goes on much more the anger of the people will mount to a

frenzy of blind destruction of their now so many enemies. She reports strong feeling against submarine "ruthlessness"; well, the "ruthlessness" has come—so far, that theory is justified. Germany does not now appear to care whom she hurts or who are her enemies. Yet in another mood, Miss Doty seems to justify the "iron ring" policy on the ground that the growing misery of the people will issue in revolt not against those who are directly responsible for it, but against those who are indirectly responsible—namely, their own government, or, more accurately, Prussia. This is the crucial decision for Germany. Certainly the balm of victory will be denied their wounds. Their protest will be either towards international anarchy or towards national self rehabilitation. Miss Doty's book would have gained had she kept one or the other point of view consistently before her, had she steadily made one or the other question her preliminary "sense of the problem." And her book would have had more consequent weight on the side of sanity and generosity toward Germany.

But in spite of the false vividness and foreshortening of reality that is at a premium in American newspaper offices, in spite of occasional "worked up" sentimentalism and a rather cheap-jewelry style, in spite of trivialities fused with basic interpretations in a common amalgam, *Short Rations* is a moving book. Miss Doty has a real passion for life, the woman's horror at wasted flesh and broken bodies. War means not so much unromantic and grim suffering to her as it means waste—blind and futile waste. Criminals are embittered by whips and so are nations. Individuals cannot permanently adjust their human relations through physical strife and neither can nations. She has not surrendered her intelligence to the stupid level of believing war an effective instrument of statesmanship. She refuses to be mobilized. And that passion for the living reality beneath the sonorous phrases of unimaginative diplomats gives, for all its cheapness of handle, a fine and sure and thrilling edge to the knife of her narrative.

William Dean Howells

William Dean Howells, a Study of the Achievement of a Literary Artist, by Alexander Harvey. Soon to be published by B. W. Huebsch, New York. \$1.50.

A CRITICAL study of William Dean Howells is needed in America. Mr. Harvey thinks that the lack of it is due to British literary superstition. Mr. Howells, he believes, has not been highly, or highly enough, esteemed in London, and the English underestimation has been slavishly adopted here. Whether this is the true cause or not, the fact is indisputable. The most eminent man of letters in the United States is not half so well established in the literary consciousness of our present generation as any one of a dozen Englishmen. American criticism, such as it is, has done very little for our leading novelist. There are Continental writers, indeed, thanks partly to Mr. Howells himself, whose work and whose personality arouse a desire that is incommensurably greater than the desire which he arouses. For all the exciting literary recommendation that is so common in America the tone about Mr. Howells, with a few thrilling exceptions, is exceedingly mild. He is installed in good repute. He is circulated. He is eulogized. He is honored. But he is not treated as a positive living force. The reasons for this, considering his eminence, are worth inquiry, since American criticism has long owed it to his genius to do something toward breaking up its ceremonial attitude.

Clever and admiring as Mr. Harvey's book is, it does not satisfactorily avail of the opportunity that William Dean Howells afforded. Mr. Harvey selects important aspects of Mr. Howells's work for lively and assertive advocacy, but it is abundantly clear from the start that Mr. Howells is his point of departure rather than his goal. Like a caged canary that catches a sound only to burst into his own song, Mr. Harvey listens to Howells only to break forth about the Philistinism of Boston, the frustration of Charles Francis Adams, the erotic symbolism of Edgar Allan Poe. It makes a suggestive book, but it neglects the case in point. An arduous task confronted Mr. Harvey. There were not only the thirty-odd novels to consider, but farces and comedies and books of travel and criticism and reminiscence making a total of nearly a hundred volumes, all coming from a man whose recollection spans half the life of the Republic. There was a critical study to be made not only of the production that Mr. Howells has achieved, but of the national substance from which it came. It must be said that in being loosely oracular and discursive, instead of attentive, Mr. Harvey has missed his hour.

The special nature of woman seems to be a subject of compelling interest to Mr. Harvey, for example, and he insists on looking to Mr. Howells's novels for a satisfaction of this proclivity. But Mr. Howells is the wrong person for a man with such an objective. It is like going to Chicago for the lotos. There is something to be said for the contention that, "from the standpoint of literature regarded as a fine art, I consider *The Rise of Silas Lapham* the greatest novel ever written. . . . In the matter of form, structure, style, whatever we choose to call that part of the novelist's equipment which reveals him as an artist, this tale of the Laphams is more finished than the masterpieces of Flaubert." But there is very little to be said for the violent contention that "it is a tale of the love of Irene for Tom and of Tom for Penelope, every development of the plot being critical to us because it bears, in a manner near or remote, upon that intense affair. I have been unable to call to mind a novel in which the sentiment, indeed the passion of love has been steeped in so unsparing a realism with such an intimate knowledge of the subject matter. . . . The most remarkable feature of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is that it has two heroines."

Is Mr. Harvey entirely sincere in proffering this novel as another *Romeo and Juliet*? It has the intense interest of Tom and Irene and Penelope. The unmerited misery of Irene and of Penelope, the fire underneath such a simple phrase as, "Penelope Lapham, have you been such a ninny as to send that man away on my account?"—these things do make it a passionately human love story. But "the mystery of pain and loss" is in nowise confined to the girls. Mrs. Lapham "had never heard of the fate that was once supposed to appoint the sorrows of men irrespective of their blamelessness or blame, before the time when it came to be believed that sorrows were penalties; but in her simple way she recognized something like that mythic power when she rose from her struggle with the problem, and said aloud to herself, 'Well, the witch is in it.'" That fate afflicts Silas as well as Irene, and in the rise and fall of Silas Lapham, in his promotion to prosperity, in his collision with a different order of civilities, there is an epic which is subsidiary to nothing else. So accurate is the delineation of Back Bay that impatient Bostonians say: "But we know all that." It is the main achievement of this novel that it drives us to

realize the inexorable necessity and the equally inexorable cruelty of exclusiveness, social and sexual, in direct proportion as we have imagination. If we suppose that the statement of these cruel necessities is a matter of no moment to Mr. Howells and comes from a juxtaposition caught by the accident of the camera, we naturally conclude that *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is merely a bit of skilful representation and we have no emotions about it except for its virtuosity. But such a supposition of detachment is too naïve. Silas Lapham is alpine with the inflictions its author has given it.

It is a great novel especially, as Mr. Harvey says, because of the relevancy of its material, the aesthetic consequence of its arrangement. Take any little passage like this: "Penelope began hastily to amend the disarray of her hair, which she tumbled into a mass on the top of her little head, setting off the pale dark of her complexion with a flash of crimson ribbon at her throat. She moved across the carpet once or twice with the quaint grace that belonged to her small figure, made a dissatisfied grimace at it in the glass, caught a handkerchief out of drawer and slid it into her pocket, and then descended to Corey." Has this the remorseless inclusion, the jejune literalness, of a photograph? It is faithful to fact in the sense that it conveys Penelope to us by letting us see her in movement, but it is a picture suffused with feeling, feeling for her charm, her characteristic gesture, her humorous self-consciousness, her daintiness. Contrast this "realism" with a conventional verbal portrait: "So, in the blinding glare of cloudless morning, under the dark, overarching orange trees, on a street, narrow, dirty, and anything but straight, they met. The tall, well-knit young man in quiet, close-fitting brown, was small-faced, with clear, grey-blue eyes, a hooked nose, and pink, boyish cheeks. The man, rubicund all over an ample countenance, his eyes watery gray, his surface suety, his outline pear-shaped, wore a loose, flapping suit of soiled, spotty, snuff-streaked black." It is only persons that have no particular feeling for literary art who can go astray about the deceptive simplicity and artlessness of Mr. Howells—an "artlessness" which this real artlessness reveals.

And yet on this very point Mr. Harvey goes hopelessly astray. In his chapter on the limitations of Mr. Howells he says, "His novels, his novelettes, his experiments with the short story, his farces, his criticisms never take us to the depths of anything. There are, he seems to say again and again, no depths. Life is a surface. . . . He is like those older psychologists who kept us so carefully within the limits of consciousness that they never suspected the existence of the subconscious. The matter might be put in a different fashion by noting that the genius of Howells is objective and not in the least subjective. He can tell us with subtle observation what Grace Breen said when she confessed her love, how she looked, the way she raised her arms and what she wore. He never dares to say what went on within her soul. How could he ever know the subconscious? In avoiding all that he avoids likewise the symptoms or the depths of passion, its essence, as the poet might say." And again, "To tell the truth it is impossible to read the literature of the psycho-analytic school of Freudian psychology without marvelling at the completeness with which the whole fabric of the Howells criticism collapses and disintegrates. It is all surface and no depth. . . . These people [the native Americans of Anglo-Saxon origin] have never explored life subjectively. The American subconsciousness is to all intents