

and the cabaret the garish, feverish hunting ground of Venus. But when I realize that the standard American marriage, so to speak, is made nowadays chiefly to the tune of the foxtrot I turn back to our campus strollers with lessened opprobrium.

These boys and girls see one another in classes (horrible as it may seem), as well as on dancing floors. At all hours of the day—eight o'clock classes (on "the morning after"), eleven o'clock classes, four o'clock classes,—rather than merely at all hours of the night. And day after day, instead of only on Saturday evenings. They see one another in sweaters and shirtwaists, even oftener than in tails and evening gowns; and hear one another in recitations on sober subjects as well as in the banter of flirtation. They have such splendid opportunities to learn, the boys about the girls and the girls about the boys, which is a fool and a shirker, and which is intelligent, sound, and dependable.

And, mixing so freely, they meet so many of the perilous opposite sex. They come to have standards of comparison. They become less liable to be blinded by the glamor of mere sex difference.

Ah, you say, they lose their illusions! You are right. That is the exact point. They do. Some illusions, at least. Not too many—Mother Nature looks after that. Not enough for entire safety, of course. But the utterly fatuous blindness of the lad who has scarcely seen a girl, and the girl who has scarcely seen a man, for four years, many of them—most of them, perhaps—do lose.

Of course, they make love together. They write notes to one another—and most excellent practice in English composition it is! They discuss together all subjects in heaven and earth. They are, to a greater or less extent, unconsciously hunting for their mates. But where else in the world have they a better chance—or even as good a chance—to find a suitable mate, or to test that suitability in advance?

And so when my middle-aged business takes me in the evening, under the full moon of May, down the avenue of elms that is known as Lovers' Lane, and I encounter this procession of chattering or silent couples, I have learned to smile tolerantly, even tenderly. Certain lines of Browning's come, almost too patly, into my head:

Making love, say,—  
The happier they!

Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,  
And let them pass, as they will too soon,  
With the beanflowers' boon,  
And the blackbird's tune,  
And May, and June!

MAX McCONN.

## The Condition of English Literature

UNDOUBTEDLY, English literature is suffering from a reaction after the war. Where it should be most alive, there is a general lassitude most sensible; this lassitude is manifest, in the work of our writers under forty years of age, in two distinct and complementary forms. On the one hand we have a deliberately exaggerated literature of what the French used to call *aquoibonisme*, a literature based not merely on the conscious diagnosis of a malady of perception and will—if it were, it would at least be symptomatic of constitutional strength—but on a sickly combination of timorous, half-hearted analysis, and of pleasure in the surrender to inhibition. It might be mistaken to lay too much stress upon the insistence of immaturity upon its own uniqueness, because that is perennial, and the discovery that true artistic individuality is achieved only after an arduous effort to discipline a merely personal otherness is often long delayed. But the tinge of complacency in the extravagant indulgence of immediate sensation at the present day is too apparent to be neglected.

On the other hand we have, most obviously in poetry, a curious phenomenon which we may call "right-mindedness." It, too, I imagine, is in the main the outcome of a war reaction, for the lassitude of which the former literary tendency is the direct expression has been the common lot of all sensitive minds, *l'ennui commun à toute personne bien née*. "Right-mindedness" is, in essence, a clumsy method of exorcising the devil that walketh at noonday, the attempt to combat an insidious disease by assuming the outward behavior of a healthy man. Now, if this literary habit, of which there are alarming evidences, for instance, in the current volume of *Georgian Poetry*, were a deliberate and conscious convention, it, too, would be a sign of strength. For two reasons. Not only is it essential that the poet should remain conscious up to the extreme point where complete consciousness is no longer possible, and the mechanism of an artistic convention aids him in this; but the careful practice of a deliberate convention would sooner or later involve the general recognition of the fact that it is an indispensable part of the highest artistic achievement. That is almost completely forgotten nowadays, and by the "right-minded" most of all. Since these affect a kind of *bergerie*, nothing would be better fitted to stiffen their backbone than a consideration of the pastoral convention from Theocritus to Milton. But that is impossible for them, and, as a matter of fact, the "right-minded" ten-

dency sways indeterminately and unconsciously between a reflection of the pastoral convention and a reflection of the romantic return to nature.

The real cause of its indeterminateness is that its impulse is negative. "Right-minded" literature is the expression of a turning away from something whose nature it has not paused to examine towards something it has not the capacity to conceive. It embraces nature without knowing what nature is; it upholds the banner of the tradition without looking to see what the tradition is, or whether a tradition can be said to exist at all. The result is, for the most part, a curious literature of unconscious pastiches, which is like and yet unlike the poetry which the public remembers. Hence its uncommon popularity and the disconcerting fact that the verse of three or four of these sincere but unimportant poets is more widely read than the work of Dr. Bridges or even of Thomas Hardy.

At ordinary times we might have a reasonable hope that a condition of things in which the literary work of the younger generation is divided into two equally false tendencies would be only a passing phase, for, if the times were ordinary, neither of them would have gained any real hold of the public, and the writer would have been left to fight the battle of his own literary development alone. But the conditions are not ordinary. Various disturbing factors enter in. To consider but two of them; there is a false sense of loyalty and a false sense of responsibility.

The young literary world is divided into two camps; the right-minded and the wrong-headed, the comprehensibles and the incomprehensibles, the top dogs and the under dogs. There are a few writers with a foot in both camps, and one or two in neither, but the general division holds, and a vigorous, though not always obvious, warfare is carried on. It is a disastrous contest; it has none of the invigorating quality of a struggle between the young and the old, or of the conflict between one deliberate literary theory and another. It is like the social struggle, an internecine feud between the haves and the have-nots.

Since neither side professes allegiance to any literary principle, the loyalty that unites its members is purely partisan and negative. Thus the free production and discussion of literature is impeded, and, by the accident of circumstance, what might have been venial errors of partisanship are exaggerated by a false sense of responsibility into serious offences against literature. Never have so many young literary men had greatness thrust upon them as during the war; never has the immaturity of genuine, but unformed talent been so popular. It was not their fault. They were young,

they were naive, they were credulous; they had had real experience of war, and they told what they could of the truth about it at a time when their elders were lying. They had every excuse for considering themselves creatures of genius, when their genius was so vehemently vouched for by people who ought to have known better. How should they know that they had barely begun the real work of literature? How should they know that most reviewers and most editors were as foolish and as ill-educated as themselves? But not even the knowledge that the process was inevitable can reconcile us to the humiliating spectacle of these young great men delivering themselves of preposterous opinions with a slightly uncertain air of omniscience; and the spectacle is humiliating, whether we regard it as an exhibition of how talent may be self-corrupted, or as an indication of the contempt into which criticism has fallen.

A great many of our young men of letters have become public figures at a stage of their development when they should have been employing all their energies in the repair of their interrupted education. I doubt whether there has ever been a generation of men of letters so startlingly uneducated as this, so little interested in the study of the great writers before them, so content to handle the English language as though it had been created *de novo* in the middle of the nineteenth century. The reason for this must be sought, no doubt, primarily in the war, which has inflicted upon so many the loss of five years in the most vital period of their intellectual development; but the tendency to jettison the burden of the past was discernible before the war. Impatience of structure and thought, contempt for technical method, the exaltation of sensational immediacy,—all these were apparent in English literature before the war began; the war, by snapping the thin threads of tradition that remained, by setting literary apprentices in the position of literary masters, has hastened the process of disintegration.

It is easier to believe that the process must be checked than to see where or how. The general atmosphere of hostility and suspicion is inimical to a revival of criticism. Yet a revival of criticism is the only way of salvation, the only means by which the fatal struggle between the haves and the have nots can be converted into that most salutary of all encounters, a conflict between reasoned literary principles. If a critical protagonist from each side could be induced to state a positive case for work of the kind which he affected to admire and emulate, if it could be tacitly agreed that, however mistakenly, both sides were in pursuit of the same end, the advancement of English litera-

ture, that insinuation and boycott are the weapons of a world morally inferior to that of literature, the atmosphere would be cleared of the miasma of bitterness which now obscures every critical issue of importance. As it is, we have chaos and anarchy and a lamentable waste of the best energies in capturing the popular suffrage. When a writer of the ability of Mr. J. C. Squire, from whom we have a right to expect services to literature commensurate to his talent, attempts to exploit mob prejudice against Mr. Bernard Shaw, when a novelist with the achievement and genuine literary sympathies of Mr. Arnold Bennett comes forward to defend the work of the late Mr. Charles Garvice, while admitting that it is artistically worthless, against a just criticism by the editor of the Nation, our suspicions that there is something rotten in the present state of English literature become conviction. I have endeavored to present an unbiased diagnosis of the case, as it presents itself to one observer.

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY.

## To All Those Who Govern Everywhere

**I** am old. And a woman. If the slow-moving states do not hurry, I may die without ever expressing myself effectively upon any public question.

But by dint of straight and humane living for many years, and of sympathetic observation of other people's lives, I have achieved some opinions, even about matters of state, which are, at least, not snap judgments. And I should like, O monarchs of the world, kings, prime ministers, presidents, cabinet officers, senators, governors, mayors, aldermen, judges, juries, policemen, investigators, editors, and individual voters, rulers all, to express one opinion in the comparatively safe form of a question. May I not ask—

See, now, what the civilized western world was before the Great War:

There was Germany, frequently described in fiction or descriptive essay as snobbish, and autocratic, but efficient. Almost all her males had votes, albeit not all votes were of equal weight. Her universities were so good that American young men flocked to them, and were proud to add Leipzig or Jena after their Ph. D.'s. Our college presidents treasured as precious the honorable baubles bestowed by the German Emperor. Our own universities were developed along German lines. And as for religion, Christianity was so systematically taught in all her common schools

that the churches of other lands envied their German brethren so well plowed a field in which to sow the Word.

There was England, the mother of Democracy, from whom we inherited our sturdy love of Liberty, and Justice. There was the Republic of France who through travail and convulsion had finally achieved an approximation of those ravishing ideals symbolized in *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.

And there was the United States, the liberties of her citizens bought twice over with the blood and tears of her heroes and martyrs, at Valley Forge, at Harper's Ferry, at Ford's Theatre—the home of millions of the Poor Voter on Election Day, the land of opportunity for the Rail-Splitter, the asylum of the Oppressed.

Truly, in spite of some imperfections which many of us were bustling about to improve on, by pleasant social gatherings, prayers, lectures, societies, resolutions, petitions, and eventually by laws and regulations, the good old world seemed to be ambling forward at a rather satisfactory pace.

Then came the War.

Now most of us realize some things unknown or unnoticed, before.

England and France had an understanding with Russia. When we associated ourselves in the war for Democracy, that gave some of us pause. We remembered reading over our morning coffee that when a few years ago a number of poor subjects of the Russian Tsar assembled unarmed to offer a petition, the troops of this same Tsar fired a volley into the crowd, slaughtering many.

The Turk reigned at Constantinople. England seated him there. Germany was his patron, or partner. Sometimes when we relaxed our efforts in behalf of Jewish pogrom victims, and turned our attention to relief of Armenians or other eastern Christians, these relations also made us uneasy.

Before the Great War, people read their newspapers—practically their sole source of information on the world's doings—cursorily. One who traveled on trains and trolleys could tell you, "Men turn first to the mimic warfare of sport and, second, to the bloodless warfare of stocks. Women, when they read at all, look for personal items,—anecdotes, and social events."

Now we all read, faithfully, and mostly with a pathetically simple faith.

And if half of what we read is half-true, then:

From the most renowned diplomat dealing with the boundaries and the equities of nations, to the pettiest court officer in the humblest village, our rulers have been either blind, ignorant, silly, or