

possess the secret of social evolution; but one cannot help feeling that this book is in a measure prophetic. To consider the present as part of a series of changes that stretches back into the remote past is, inevitably, to shake off some prepossessions. This Mr. Hyndman helps one to do.

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MR. DIMOCK: A Story of To-Day. By Mrs. Denis O'Sullivan. New York: John Lane Company.

If Mrs. O'Sullivan has not quite succeeded in writing an absorbing story, she has produced something much rarer and better—a genuine reflection of life and character, a narrative that may be called, without further abuse of a much-abused term, a novel.

And a very winsome novel it is, too. It is easy to find fault with it just in proportion as the critic chooses to take high or technical ground. There is, one might say, far too much dispersion of interest throughout the story; one is attracted by everything, held by nothing. Where is the unity of the narrative? We do not find here anything that looks like an inevitable sequence of events; the people of the story are in fact a little arbitrary, a little unaccountable in their reactions, and the currents of thought and feeling that come into individual lives from the great world do not appear to flow in any particular direction. There is no strong central figure. Mr. Dimock himself may be intended for one; but Mr. Dimock is an obvious egoist, a mild profiteer, an elderly Don Juan; it must be confessed that before one is half-way through the story one loses interest in his psychosis and ceases to care what becomes of him—the tolerant Lady Freke may marry him if she chooses, or he may go back to America and legitimize his relations with his stenographer. As a picture, the story possesses unity, but it is the unity of the author's own temperament and social experience.

The novel has, indeed, a very special characteristic which, while it increases its charm, contributes to the effect of dispersion just noted. It has its setting in a little world of its own, a group, a family; and yet it is by no means a study of, or even a story *about*, such a world, group, or circle. This characteristic is, if one may be permitted the impertinence, distinctly Irish—as it is intensely human. Old friends, a good deal related, much interlinked in their affections and in their love affairs, the people of the story are all desperately individual and yet almost clannish in their sympathies. New friends also are drawn into the circle, treated with sympathy, loved, idolized, and lost. Lady Freke is passionately maternal toward two handsome, high-minded Serbian officers. One can never be sure whether or not they are as dear to her as her own sons, or whether or not their country is as dear to her as Ireland itself. She invents, and believes in, the myth that Serbia and Ireland are alike. She sees in the two Serbians the highest type of manhood, and yet she never admits that her two American sons are not the highest type of manhood. With a kind of

imaginative and unthinking passion, yet with dry reserves, with flashes of disillusionment, she loves all—Serbia, Ireland, her sons, the Serbian officers,—with a devotion that cannot be measured. Mr. Dimock, the unspeakable Mr. Dimock, profits by the spirit of loyalty—loyalty to what, exactly?—that pervades the whole circle.

Loyalty to love, loyalty to one's own dreams, loyalty to *any* fine or disinterested quality in another—above all loyalty to oneself! For these people are as individual as they are clannish. Their devotion to each other is a spontaneous giving, and they insist that the gift must be appreciated. They are as capable of hating as of loving, of suffering intense personal humiliation as of bearing patiently with the faults of their friends.

But whereas we have set out to show why it is that Mrs. O'Sullivan's novel is not exactly a novel of power, we have really been demonstrating its human value. This value lies, of course, in its emotional versatility and in its complete genuineness. There is nothing good or bad in life but feeling makes it so; and thus when one finds in a novel these two rare things, utter genuineness and the most wonderful flexibility and liveliness of feeling (both qualities controlled by fine taste and by a discriminating knowledge of the world), it is difficult to deny to that novel even the final praise of power.

Genuineness linked to sophistication (as it is in this paradoxical book) is far harder to find than what is called sincerity. Any good craftsman is sincere; no one who is not a master can, for the most part, afford to let himself go, or even to appear to do so. But Mrs. O'Sullivan never seems to be constrained; she has a faculty for putting her own feeling for life into the story which is the next thing to genius. To express the matter a little more definitely, there is in the tale nothing whatever of that more or less self-conscious impersonation, that studying of effects, which half spoils, for example, so good a story as *The Book of Susan*. It has been said of Stevenson, that often his characters seem to wear masks, and that you can sometimes see the smiling eyes of Stevenson himself looking through the eye-holes. The people in Mrs. O'Sullivan's story, on the contrary, do not wear masks; you can see the texture of their complexions, and you can see their souls—not profoundly, indeed, but sufficiently. And with all this, there is adequate artistic restraint.

Besides this genuineness, there is a wonderful versatility of feeling. (By *feeling*, of course, one does not necessarily imply strong emotion: every affection of the mind that drives away boredom, that sodden lack of interest in life, is represented here.) Love for Ireland, love for Serbia, and pain for both; a delicate appreciation of Irish, American, Serbian traits; a cosmopolitanism that appreciates, loves, and makes fun of all national traits, while it feels an intelligent interest in the fate of Europe; a love for the truly rustic people of Oxfordshire and a sense of rural beauty and contentment such as every writer who moves his characters from stiff London drawing-rooms to cosy cottages struggles to assume, but rarely with success—these prevent the book from having a dull page. Even the wit is genuine wit, and Lady Freke, the epigrammatist of

the story, is a good epigrammatist. The children, whom Mrs. O'Sullivan cannot keep out of the tale, though they have uncommonly little to do with it, are lovable and entertaining children—not little bores, nor mere vehicles for emotion. On the whole we are glad that Mrs. O'Sullivan has not kept them out.

The story is really built up about the characters of three women: Lady Freke; her sister, Crystal McClinton; and Daphne O'Brien. They are a trio that impress. Between the more mature, original, and worldly-wise "Katty Freke," and the young, ingenuous, potentially wilful Daphne, stands Katty's sister, Crystal, as the truest representative of the type to which all three belong. It is a type of pure, sensitive, intellectually keen and very modern femininity. Despite the distinctively Irish-American traits and some individual peculiarities, one feels that here is a type of feminine soul and mind that the world has not as yet fully realized, at least, in fiction—modern womanhood depicted without suppressions, without conventionalities, without libellous distortions in the interest of either romance or realism. Here is something spiritually vital—yet not too good for human nature's daily food—which seems really to belong to the life, the civilization, the war has left us. It is well enough that Lady Freke remains a little sphinx-like throughout the story; that Daphne does not have much to reveal in the way of "psychology," and that Crystal McClinton is the only one of the three whose thoughts and feelings are fully known. What we get from them all is a wonderful portraiture of womanhood under the post-war conditions. It matters little that the basic situation is slight. Horace Dimock, after many amatory and some marital adventures, falls in love with and secretly marries Crystal McClinton. Then he becomes infatuated with his ward, Daphne, the daughter of an old flame, and tries to win her from her resolution to become a nun. But she has only contempt for the amorous Horace. Horace—who is, by the way, very skilfully portrayed as a pretentious nonentity with many of the likable traits that usually pass for virtues—writes Crystal the bitter truth. Under these circumstances the feelings and the mutual relations of the three women afford material for a fine and subtle study, while the eventual "exit" of Mr. Dimock becomes a matter of slight significance.

The three women dominate the story. The vision one gets through their eyes—not of "life," perhaps, but of what life may mean—and the insight one obtains into their own ways of thinking, are ennobling. Mrs. O'Sullivan has written a lively, colorful, witty story, which it is something of an emotional education to read.

POETIC ORIGINS AND THE BALLAD. By Louise Pound, Professor of English in the University of Nebraska. New York: the Macmillan Company.

Scholarship has its "idols," now as in the days of Bacon, and if there is one branch of scholarship, more than another, which is prone to a kind of intellectual idol-worship, it is that which concerns itself with the more abstruse problems of literature. It is perhaps not too harsh a thing to say that a good deal of what is termed literary scholarship has been not so much scholarship or literature as pseudo-science. The fashion of thinking which sought to explain almost every ancient belief as a "sun-myth" has its parallel in the modern desire to find the origin of almost all intellectual forms in some ancient communal impulse, rite, or practice. Of such is the theory that the ballad originated as an improvisation among the "festive throng"—the throng being credited with some sort of inspirational quality not exactly specified. Back of this theory was the ultimate need of explaining in some way the superiority which critics of a romantic way of thinking ascribed to rude ballads, the product, it was assumed, of the popular mind, as compared with the more sophisticated "literary" compositions—a phenomenon which (perhaps) does not need explaining because (just possibly) it does not exist.

While it is inadmissible to prejudge a question, the solution of which rests with peculiarly difficult research and with an exceptionally painstaking analysis, yet it does seem that Professor Pound has greatly weakened the pious assumption that she has criticized in her recent book; and it seems, moreover, that her conclusions are rather strengthening to common sense and to a vital, non-mystical interest in literature as opposed to scholarly lore. Literature, it may be said, has never been much benefited by association with *a priori* assumptions. Efforts to ennoble it by connecting it with some other impulse, religious, social, ethic, or aesthetic, seem seldom to produce the desired result. In origin and function, literature seems not much more amenable to doctrinaire theories than are health, beauty, or thought.

Professor Pound begins by exposing the double or triple sense in which the word *ballad* is used by scholars, to the confusion of earnest students. Etymologically the word means "dance song"; but the fact is that whereas many other forms of verse have been used in connection with dancing, the narrative ballad has been thus used only, as it were, *per accidens*, and shows in its structure no signs of having been originally designed for such use. The author next examines the supposition that the ballad, or any form of poetry to which the name ballad might properly be applied, originated in "the festive throng." In the first place, it is absurd, she argues, to suppose that communal composition could have preceded individual composition. If a tribesman could not compose by himself, how could he become suddenly endowed with this faculty amid a crowd of his fellows? But there is much evidence in favor of individual composition. Among the American Indians, for example, many songs not only have individual authorship, but are the private property of those who compose them. Furthermore, cases of ballad forms used in connection