

# The Book Table

## Among the Story-Tellers

By R. D. TOWNSEND

THE main theme of Mary Johnston's "The Slave Ship"<sup>1</sup> is Stevensonian (as in "Markheim" and "The Master of Ballantrae") in that it depicts a moral battle in the grim nature of a Scotchman between the horror and wrong of the slave trade and his own security and freedom from servitude. He was on the wrong side at Culloden in the '45, was sent to Virginia as a plantation serf, had good treatment and bad treatment, and escaped. So far this is "old stuff;" one feels that one has read it before a dozen times. But when David Scott finds that what he has escaped to is a slave ship bound to the African coast, the true interest begins. His captain, a kinsman, is a gentleman and a Christian! His fellow-officers argue speciously that the slaves are worse off in Africa than in Virginia, and that this ship at least is humane. But David Scott sees the horrors of the Middle Passage; he sees the tragedies and deviltries and wild carouses in Africa. His heart is sick and his conscience distraught. What shall he do? What can he do? What does he do? The answer is the crux of the situation and the climax of the story. As straight, forceful narrative, albeit with a little of the visionary, semi-supernatural element to which the writer inclines, "The Slave Ship" is a fine piece of writing—and of feeling, too.

Mr. Masfield's "Sard Harker"<sup>2</sup> is intensely masculine in its appeal. Harker is first mate on an English bark—a quiet, manly, competent sailor man. Strange events thrust him into a long series of struggles for life against rum-runners, kidnappers, brutes, and villains. He keeps his head, never gives up, and pulls through. We hardly think of Harker as a hero—he certainly is not of the Richard Harding Davis type; but when the reader lays the book down Harker remains in mind as a big figure of a man who conquers by persistence and courage. The incidents of the book are well invented; but the plot, with its visions and mysterious messages at the beginning, and at the end its devil worship and the all but completed sacrifice to the devil of Harker and the girl he seeks, is painfully manufactured rather than truly imagined.

James Stephens's Irish tales and fantasies are always a delight because of their quaint whimsicality, their delicate fancy and their charm of style. Sometimes they grow a little too subtle and mystical as they go on; even in the "Crock of Gold" this is so; but it is not so in "The Demi-Gods," which for sheer pleasure and humor is unapproachable. Mr. Stephens's new story "In the Land of Youth"<sup>3</sup> is clear as a bell, imaginative in conception, a true fairy story for grown-up readers. It begins with startling happenings on an All Hallows' Eve in the ancient days of Ireland, and follows a strange course through the deeds and longings and "wishing true" of men, women, magic-workers, and people of the Land of Faery.

"Human nature is awfully human," Will Rogers or somebody says. In books sometimes it is; other times it isn't. Mr. Anthony's "Golden Village"<sup>4</sup> leaves a pleasant memory just because the people are simple, true, and therefore human. Here is an old grandfather from Hungary. He is in America to find a band of his countrymen who long ago came here to found a village, to carry on an ideal farm life, to be free, happy, and helpful. With his Americanized grandson he searches the country around New York. Many and queer are their adventures. At last they find some of the old man's associates, who honor and welcome him. But as to the "Golden

<sup>1</sup>In the Land of Youth. By James Stephens. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.50.

<sup>2</sup>The Golden Village. By Joseph Anthony. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis. \$2.

Village"—well, it was neither romantic nor ideal. The poor Hungarians toiled and lived in slums; the rich were bankers, bakers, mill-owners. But they were all pretty cheerful and reasonably comfortable. The old man—irate, willful, and independent—goes back to Hungary and to the land, but tells his grandson to continue to be a good American and marry his Hungarian-American sweetheart.

Just how much of "The Wind and the Pain"<sup>5</sup> is autobiography and how much is imaginative it is hard to say, but Mr. Burke in a full sense has put himself in it—his boyish wonder at the queer sights in Limehouse and Greenwich, his queer Chinese friend, the scenes and smells of the East End, his induction into music, reading, and art, his success as the depicter of out-of-the-way London. Those who remember Mr. Burke's remarkable article on Charlie Chaplin in The Outlook know he can write. This book is Burke at his best.

Books of short stories should be bought, not borrowed from library or friend. People who say they "don't care for" collected short stories will find they do care if they will keep at hand a volume like this and read one now and then. To sit down and read such a book through is cloying and tiresome. The present collection<sup>6</sup> is chiefly British in authorship; Edith Wharton's is the only really famous American name. The editors confess a leaning toward thrills and a taste for the supernatural, but humor and character sketching are not lacking.

<sup>5</sup>The Wind and the Rain. By Thomas Burke. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$2.

<sup>6</sup>23 Stories. By Twenty and Three Authors. Edited by C. A. Dawson Scott and Ernest Rhys. D. Appleton & Co., New York. \$2.50.

## The New Books

### BIOGRAPHY

**COLONIAL WOMEN OF AFFAIRS.** By Elisabeth Anthony Dexter. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$5.

Our foremothers in colonial days entertained no suspicion, more than did our forefathers, that the proper and normal sphere for woman could be other than the home; perhaps that is why, when necessity, convenience, or opportunity induced a woman to step outside it, nobody became excited. There was no fear of the example being dangerous, and in a new country there was so much to be done that every efficient hand or head was welcomed to its task. It was after the Revolution, when the laws of the young

Republic were codified and tightened, that women lost by definite legal restrictions many privileges which they had earlier been allowed to take for granted. It was then, too, with altered social and industrial conditions that the lady of leisure made her appearance—there had been ladies, even great ladies, before, but not of leisure—and the working woman began to lose caste.

Such are the conclusions of Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, expressed in her interesting study, "Colonial Women of Affairs." Mrs. Dexter feels to the full the fascination as well as the importance of her theme, and her work, careful and

<sup>1</sup>The Slave Ship. By Mary Johnston. Little, Brown & Co., Boston. \$2.

<sup>2</sup>Sard Harker. By John Masfield. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.50.

painstaking as it is, is never dry; the many quotations, especially those from old newspapers, are as quaint and colorful as they are illuminating. The most full and frequent feminine advertisers were the "she-merchants," who seem to have dealt in a wide range of goods, from "India chints, taffety, Alamode, Strip'd Lutestring, fine Brussels lace, Silver, Paduasoy and other Plain Ribbons" to "Good Madeira, Lisbon, and Teneriffe Wines, Cherry and Whortleberry Brandy, Aniseed, Orange and Clove Cordials, Geneva and Brandy. All by the Barrel or Single Gallon." Others specialized in articles of their own making, ranging from "Black Bags and Roses for gentlemen's hair or wigs" to teakettles and fishing-nets, soap, sieves, and sausages.

Women appear occasionally in such unexpected occupations as those of tanner, miller, blacksmith, dealer in oil, and owner of whaling boats. Women were landed proprietors and administrators of great estates; they were printers, publishers, and authors. There were, of course, numerous schoolmistresses and midwives. And there were innkeepers; so many that Mrs. Dexter inclines to think they outnumbered the men. A glance at her list inclines one to long for the days of old—to think distastefully of our towering million-dollar hotels, and sigh for a glimpse of Mrs. Ann Jones, buxom, tuckered, and curtsying on the threshold of The Plume of Feathers, or to be served sedately and tranquilly in her cozy inn parlor at Bristol by Dame Yetmercy Howland, whose name Hawthorne himself might have invented.

**PIERRE LOTI: NOTES OF MY YOUTH.** Double-day, Page & Co., New York. \$2.

Fragments of a diary, edited by the author's son. The date of the diary is 1870-8, beginning at the age of nineteen, and relating early experiences in the French navy.

#### MUSIC, PAINTING, AND OTHER ARTS

**GASTON LACHAISE.** Sixteen Reproductions in Collotype of the Sculptor's Work. Edited with an Introduction by A. E. Gallatin. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$10.

An appreciation, literary and pictorial, of the modernistic work of a sculptor who "found the atmosphere of France uncongenial for creative work, but that of America most sympathetic."

**THE NATURE, PRACTICE, AND HISTORY OF ART.** By H. Van Buren Magonigle. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$2.50.

That a busy practitioner of the arts can write a successful treatise upon them is proved by this book. Beginning in its author's plan as a text-book for students, its purpose widened till it has become a history of Western art and a medium for the expression both of the author's philosophy of art and of his personal im-

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