

The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND PEARSON

Heap Big Chiefs

THE autumn camp-fires are lighted and the braves are gathered round for the telling of stories. Young warriors are expected to be brief and modest. If they do not live up to this expectation, there are influences which keep them from too great loquacity. At intervals there comes striding into the circle the blanketed and impressive form of some grand sachem, who seats himself in his place of importance and begins his story. He is apt to be very long about it, since no one has the right to tell him to come to an end.

A few years ago we heard from a Heap Big Chief—no less than Bernard Shaw himself. Once he was a young fighter, and forced to be brief and witty. Now he is the venerable sachem who delivered himself of the tale called "Back to Methuselah," which lasted for night after night, and made his warmest admirers groan at its tedious length. We learned then how dangerous it is for one of these story-tellers to be able to talk as long as he likes.

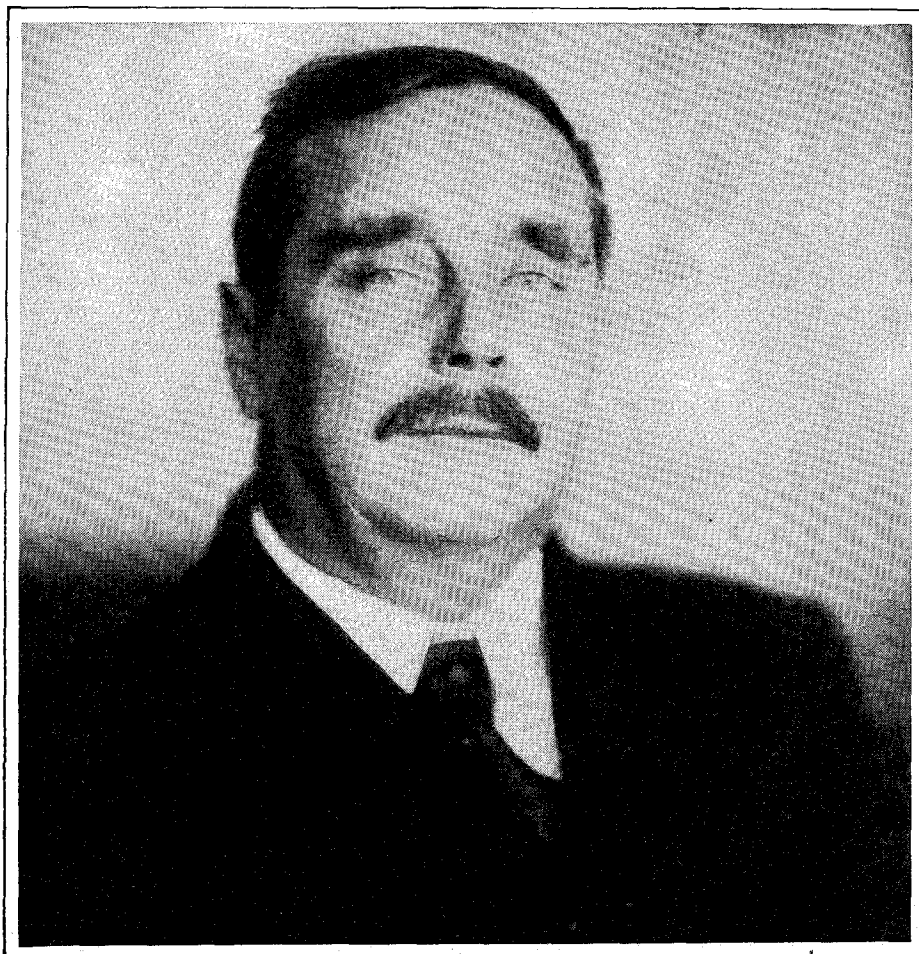
Into the circle this autumn there have already come two great chiefs, H. G. Wells and Rudyard Kipling. Once, in the days of his youth, Mr. Wells told wonder-stories which have never been surpassed. But now he has set up as prophet-priest and lawgiver to all the tribes, although he still insists that he is to be received as a spinner of yarns as of old.

"The World of William Clissold"¹ is a substantial piece of so-called fiction in two volumes and nearly eight hundred pages. (What was that old ballad, by Mr. Kipling, about the passing of the three-volume novel?) It is divided into books and sections like a doctoral thesis, but it is much more interesting than ninety-nine per cent of the theses. Mr. Wells begins with a preface, before the title-page, in which he asserts that the work is a novel, and not a treatise nor a sermon, and that the hero, Clissold, is

¹The World of William Clissold. A Novel at a New Angle. By H. G. Wells. 2 vols. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$5.

his own self and not his author's self. The author says that Clissold's views run close to the views of Mr. H. G. Wells, but that they are to be taken as the views of the imaginary character. Indeed, the Clissold opinions and the words in which they are expressed run so close to Mr. Wells's own writings—take the passage about Karl Marx, for instance—that if any one else had written this novel there could be a suit for infringement of copyright. I might add, by the way, that the views expressed about that old humbug, Marx, are sound and refreshing.

By diligent search a story may be extracted from all these pages. No plot is to be found, nor was one desired. William Clissold, an Englishman, who was killed in the sixtieth year of his age in an automobile accident in France this very year, 1926, sets out to tell the story of his life. He is a wealthy business man, a manufacturing chemist. He has much to say about his brother, a financier and public servant. Their interests in politics, and their own private experiences, together with their marriages and love affairs, fill perhaps two hundred pages. The other five hundred pages are devoted to their reflections upon English, French, and American politics, international affairs, education, business, love, sex and morality, warfare, the royal family, the future, country life in England and France, scenery, automobiling, tennis, swimming, literature and the stage, and some thirty-five or thirty-six other topics. It may give a clue to the nature of this remarkable book if I say that one or the other of the brothers Clissold meets or discusses these personages: Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Conan Doyle, Einstein, Philip Henry Gosse, Dean Inge, Hilaire Belloc, Mr. Wells himself, Dr. Jung (the psycho-analyst), Queen Victoria, King Edward, King George and Queen Mary, the Prince of Wales, Karl Marx, Lenine, President Masaryk, President Wilson, President Coolidge, Mrs. Asquith (now Countess), Christopher Morley, Vishnu, Siva, Sidney Webb, Harry Furniss, Van Houten (the cocoa man), Filene (the department-store man of Boston), Lloyd George, Bottomley, Lord Rhondda, Clynes (the Labor leader), Lytton Strachey, Prime Minister Baldwin, practically all English Cabinet Ministers of the past fifteen years, Lord Northcliffe, William Randolph Hearst, the sons of Joseph Pulitzer, Maynard Keynes, Bernard Shaw, Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan,



(C) Nickolas Muray

H. G. Wells

Henry Ford, James Branch Cabell, H. L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson, Douglas Fairbanks, Rudolph Valentino, and a large number of others.

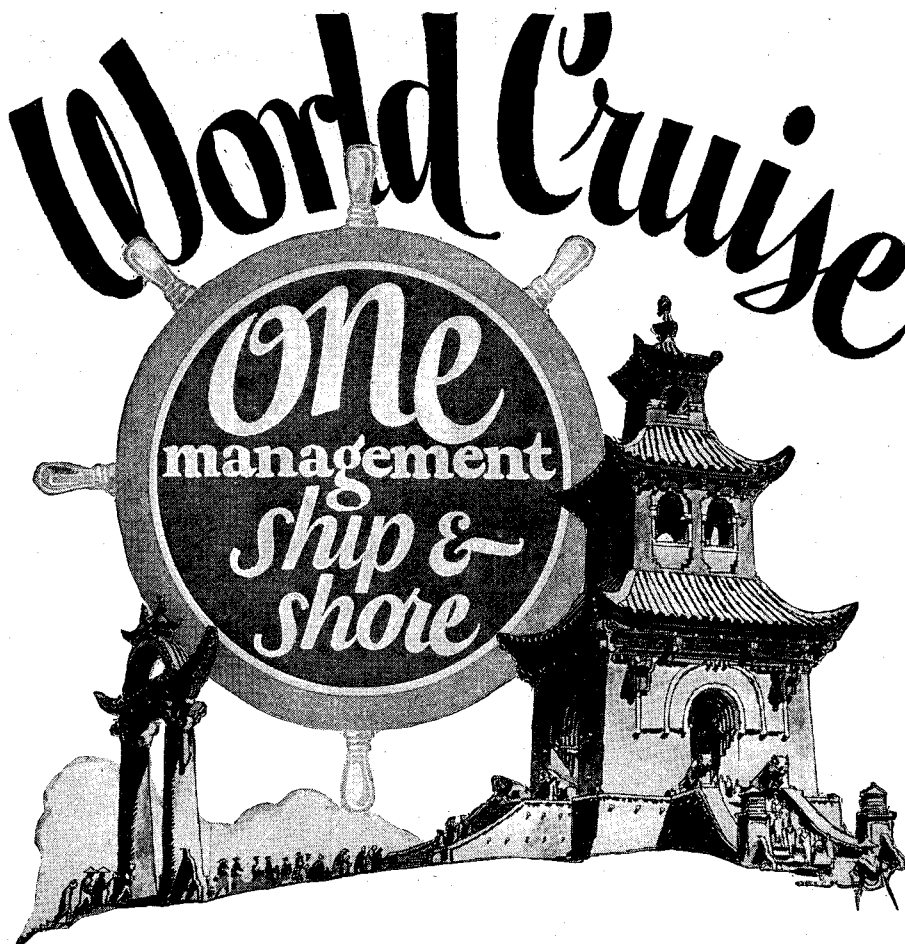
Throughout this encyclopædia there are many interesting pages; many, very many, wise observations; and, with all its long-windedness, so much escape from dullness that I have turned all its pages, neglected other work this week, and done no great amount of good to my eyes in reading it. Take, for instance, the summing up of Karl Marx and the whirlwind that he sowed in creating Soviet Russia:

"An imperfectly aerated old gentleman sits in the British Museum, suffering from a surfeit of notes, becomes impatient to set a generalization in control of his facts, and presently we have this harvest of tares."

Take also (it is too long to quote here) his observations on the net result of the outspoken qualities of modern fiction and conversation (Volume II, pages 374, 375). Take this amusing line: "I find the nightingales too abundant and very tiresome with their vain repetitions, but Clementina does not agree; her mind has been poisoned by literature, and she does not really hear the tedious noises they make, she hears Keats." And consider his amusing comments on English society hurrying home from France for the London season and for Henley and Ascot. The grave men in gray top-hats, the King and Queen, and "wherever there is a foreground there also will be the Countess of Oxford and Asquith." All of these folk gravely assembled, dressed with extraordinary attention, "and doing nothing, nothing whatever except being precisely and carefully there. . . . They have no God, and Michael Arlen is their prophet."

The great chief Wells has taken up my time and encroached upon my sleep and left me with small opportunity to do justice to the elder and greater chief, Kipling. I can only give an imperfect report upon his "Debits and Credits."² He, too, likes to reprove and admonish the sinful outside of the British Empire, but he is not first and foremost a preacher. He is still a story-teller; not the wizard of the days of Mulvaney, but still a teller of tales, a great medicine-man and magician. He sings at times, and sometimes sings badly. Senility, however, has not overcome him. He is vigorous, and never long-winded. Here are crisp conversations of men in the war, as in "Sea Constables;" war stories

²Debits and Credits. By Rudyard Kipling. Doubleday, Page & Co., New York. \$2.



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with a supernatural flavor, combined with genuine realism, as in "A Madonna of the Trenches;" two Stalky stories—"The United Idolaters" and "The Propagation of Knowledge;" and others, with intervening poems. The Stalky stories are amusing for those who like them; to my taste, Mr. Kipling's schoolboys are what themselves would call a lot of filthy little swine, whom I would gladly see weighted and thrown into the ocean off the Hobby Drive. They always seem to be straining themselves to bring

in every last word of correct English schoolboy slang.

This book contains the poem "The Vineyard" and one short story which have provoked too much comment in the newspapers because of their reflections on America. Mr. Kipling considers himself half an American, and believes that we are men enough to stand caustic comment without becoming angry. "The Vineyard" is an expression of natural resentment, with only two lines which are false and in-

dicative of bad sportsmanship. Mr. Kipling, like Sir Owen Seaman, seems to meet a good many disagreeable Americans, and to like to talk about them.

Admirers of Jane Austen should read this book if only to read the story called "The Janeites." Readers who enjoy a fine story for its own sake must not miss "The Bull that Thought." E. P.

Fiction

THE ENTERTAINING ANGEL. By Samuel Merwin. The J. H. Sears Company, New York. \$1.50.

There is excellent story material here in the adventures of a theater company traveling by caravan from one little California town to another. There is romance also in the finding of one gifted actress in the caravan by a shy, nervous, and Septimus-like dramatic author, who buys the caravan in order to be near the girl.

SINISTER HOUSE. By Charles G. Booth. William Morrow & Co., New York. \$2.

You may guess part of the answer to this murder and mystery tale of southern California, but we doubt if you can tell in advance all that happened when the emerald intaglios worth \$300,000 disappeared, much less what became of them. The bootlegging and road-house scenes are startling enough; but fear not, the heroine escapes.

CANDAULES' WIFE, AND OTHER OLD STORIES. By Emily James Putnam. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. \$2.

"Candaules' Wife" takes its title from the first of the five short stories in the book. They are gleaned from the histories of Herodotus, and credit is given him before each story by the insertion of a translation from the original. The contrast is interesting. The art of Emily James Putnam is far more amusing than Herodotus, and probably nearly as accurate. The author proceeds to take liberties, and her liberties are in the manner of a little delicate chuckling under the chin of history.

The tragedy of King Candaules is the oldest tragedy, with variations. It is the triangle of the rich old man with a beautiful young wife and the lover. "King Candaules was a lover of the beautiful." His classic death moves his Queen to say, "At last he has done something really beautiful." "He who could not escape" is the spectacle familiar to law courts of the pardoned murderer repeating his crime. According to the Egyptians, Helen never reached Troy, and "Helen in Egypt" is an ironical story of how she wearied of a seasick Paris during the long voyage to Egypt, and decided to remain there at the king's right hand. In all the stories are characters who have their representatives to-day. Gyges, the lover of Candaules's wife, might have been a disciple of Freud; Hippocleides, who danced himself out of a wife, was probably one of the first Marathon dancers, while the soothsayers were no more foolish in the olden times than they are to-day.

A MANIFEST DESTINY. By Arthur D. Howden Smith. Brentano's, New York. \$2.50.

The action of Mr. Howden Smith's latest novel is spirited but not rapid, and the personal fortunes of his fictional hero seem to have interested the author less—or perhaps they interest one reader less—than those of the actual characters whom he did not invent but has tried with distinctly creditable success to interpret and vivify. Walker of Nicaragua, the once famous filibuster, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, the old Commodore, are the two outstanding figures, the clash of whose schemes and

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