

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

EDITED BY HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

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Fiction for a Living

RECENTLY reprinted from the London *Author*, in the American *Publishers' Weekly*, we find a discussion by John Galsworthy of "Authors and Their Public." In the course of his article Mr. Galsworthy says of young authors:

I think it's bad for both them and for literature that they should succumb to the demands of publishers, editors, or agents, for this or that kind of story. No one is bound to write fiction for a living. No one should write fiction for a living unless it's the very best fiction, light or serious—according to his grain—that he can turn out.

This, certainly, is the ideal condition. And fiction is an important thing, Mr. Galsworthy goes on to say. He believes, and we agree with him, that "most people experience at second-hand (through fiction) far more than humdrum life gives them at first-hand." Well then, it lies with the author what they shall experience. Shall they learn, through him, a scale of false values? Shall they, encouraged by him, come to resort to literature merely as a narcotic? Shall they learn to see life skewed out of all resemblance to reality, smothered in rosy mists, denatured by formula, constantly presented with appeals to infantilism, cupidity, the universal desire of "something for nothing," and the equally universal desire to pin easy, satisfying labels upon "types" of people?

And, on the other hand, shall they be at the mercy of the author's pet obsessions, pet propaganda, windy theorizings, personal spites and grudges, warped and abnormal, though perhaps powerful pessimisms?

If a sincere writer of fiction sat down to contemplate just what effect his writing might have on certain of his audience, the meditation might well engender panic in his breast. The audience is conglomerate, each human life of which it is vastly composed will be separately affected by his story as it bears upon his or her own personal problems. And who can possibly imagine all those combinations of circumstance. No, the author's "duty" to his readers can only be to speak the truth that is in him as he sees it. Except that he has one further duty, a duty well put in a phrase some years ago by a well-known poet and educator. There lies upon him "the moral obligation to be intelligent."

This obligation, it seems to us, does not weigh very heavily upon the minds of most of our recent writers of fiction for a living. The reason seems to be that they are writing fiction for a living, and hence, insidiously, the demands of publishers, editors, and agents, have taken the guidance of their creative writing out of their own hands. In preparing manuscripts acceptable in editorial offices and to publishing houses they have learned a series of tricks of technique and certain fundamentals, as they are considered, of "successful" fiction. They know that a primary "love interest" is absolutely necessary, that certain disagreeable truths are taboo, that the story must end with a satisfactory triumph on the part of the principals. They know that for nine magazines out of ten the story must be "motivated" with an obviousness and emphasis that could leave no possible doubt in the mind of a ten-year old, though to more mature minds (of which there are comparatively few among adults) the "damnable iteration" may well seem depressing. They learn to deal in primitive values, to feature perfectly gratuitous strokes of fate in order that their plots may "come out right." They trifle with serious situations, give the lie to their own actual experience of incident, touch up high lights, whip up a froth of "action," pervert to comparatively trivial

Archangels

By CHARD POWERS SMITH

SHE was not made to die alone, abroad,
In a small room where, all too small, we three
Could only stare at her Gethsemane,
Stricken within the agony of God.
Her little feet were made too light to plod
A journey to earth's hills, and there to end.
A flame was in her eyes that could not blend
With roots of daisies and with growing sod.
Hers was a spirit that was born to lead
Hosts without size, and ages without years,
A silent warrior among the spheres
Where there is neither space nor time nor speed;
And when she died there ranged behind our fears
Great silent wings, inclining to her need.

This



Week

"Barren Ground." Reviewed by *Archibald Henderson*.

"The Counterplot." Reviewed by *Mabel Holmes*.

"The Mistress of Husaby." Reviewed by *Allen W. Porterfield*.

"Original Letters from India." Reviewed by *Amy Loveman*.

"Swallowing the Anchor." Reviewed by *Hulbert Footner*.

"The Older Gentlemen." By *Christopher Ward*.

Next Week, or Later

The Deathless Classics. By *Paul Shorey*.

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ends the actual lessons of life. In many cases they completely kowtow to national delusions and hypocrisies, for the sake of a sale. Fiction for a living is a serious business, and it brings large emolument in this day and generation if prepared according to recipe, because to certain stock recipes the reading public is thoroughly used. They feel at home with them. Therefore they must be all right. And tabulated circulation figures say quite baldly that certain kinds of stories do "sell the magazine" while other kinds quite as certainly do not.

Now the exercise of the intelligence is not an easy thing. The vast majority of American writers of fiction have extraordinary facility. We are an ingenious and energetic people, and our writers' long suit is ingenuity, and their energy almost appalling. But ingenuity and energy are not intelligence. And so long as "fiction for a living" is the well-paid calling it is at present, just so long, it would seem, will the emphasis remain upon auctorial qualities far less important to the world than intelligence,—that intuitive imagination, that keen observation, that uncompromising use of experience which we recognize in the masters. Or will a new generation arise?

A New Estimate of Fielding

By WILBUR L. CROSS

NOTHING much more extraordinary has occurred in recent literary history than the new view of Fielding—the man and his books—taken by the present generation. Traditionally Fielding was a poor inebriate who bore down on his friends for a dinner or a guinea. He wrote a number of "theatrical pieces" which are "irretrievably immoral" and "not remarkable for wit," and three or four novels of which "Tom Jones" is a masterpiece, though it is almost as immoral as the plays. I am paraphrasing Thackeray. In France the potent voice was Taine, the brilliant historian of English literature, who set up the thesis that Fielding and his characters were not much more than animals actuated by physical passions only—all of them as thick-skinned as buffaloes. Premonitions of a different Fielding came with the critical studies of Dobson and the common sense of Lowell, who discovered the real man in his books. And there was Lounsbury, who remarked again and again that the publication of a complete list of Fielding's books would of itself prove that the Fielding of tradition was impossible. Fielding's minor writings, he used to say, which has been condemned by men who had never read them, would show what Fielding was doing when it was said that he was reeling from tavern to tavern over the pavements of Covent Garden.

Within the last decade or two a careful canvass has been made of Fielding's career as dramatist, journalist, novelist, and magistrate, with the result that the scurrilous tales about him, largely political in origin, have one by one fallen by the wayside. Fielding's personal life, it is seen, differed in no glaring way from that of other gentlemen of the period. Like all men of his class he drank freely of wine; but his abhorrence of distilled liquors, such as gin, would have satisfied the most ardent prohibitionist of the present day. And so on and so forth. From various critical studies there has emerged a rather heroic figure. In the just phrasing of M. Digeon, "the traditional picture of the *bohème* of letters, the coward in face of pleasure, gradually gives place to the live figure of an untiring fighter. The fact is that Fielding's was a life of implacable toil. As soon as he reached manhood, he had to work. He worked that his family might live. He worked to fulfil his duty as a magistrate; he worked to satisfy his literary ideals and to discipline his genius."

It probably ought not to be so; but there is a class of readers who are unable to separate an author from his productions. Good books cannot come from bad men is their conviction. They would not have a play by Oscar Wilde in the house. Though "Tom Jones" has always been regarded as a great novel, still many have hesitated to give it their full approval on the ground that it reflects the questionable morality of the man who wrote it. As the real character of Fielding has become better known, not only "Tom Jones" but all his other works have risen in estimation. What was once deplored is now praised. Girls in college now read "Tom Jones" in their courses in English literature. It is particularly illuminating to contrast Taine on Fielding with Louis Cazamian, who has recently collaborated with Emile Legouis on a "History of English Literature," not yet translated into English. M.

Cazamian's are the latest competent words on Fielding. Immature as are the plays that Fielding wrote in his youth, M. Cazamian sees in them "the hand of a master," and compares them with the early work of Molière. In those "theatrical pieces" so often condemned, it is contended, Fielding broke with the artificial comedy of Congreve and led the way to the comedy of manners such as we have in Goldsmith and Sheridan. Equally just and admirable is M. Cazamian's comment on Fielding's novels. And when he takes a final survey of Fielding's literary career, covering a scant quarter-century, he is astonished at the extent and wealth of the accomplishment. In the world's literature Fielding at length is given a place by the side of Lucian and Voltaire.

M. Digeon names Professor Cazamian along with Professor Legouis as his "masters." His book,* which was published in Paris two years ago, now appears in an anonymous translation, exact and excellent, without, however, the supplementary monograph of the text of Fielding's novels that forms a part of the book in the original French. M. Digeon limits his subject mainly to Fielding's novels, though he has something to say about the novelist's plays and essays, rather underrating them as a whole; and there is an introductory chapter on Fielding's career. In a "Foreword" he expresses regret that, owing to the great war, he was anticipated in the publication of a number of "little discoveries" by others who were exploring the same domain.

M. Digeon tells his English readers that Fielding is "one of the greatest writers ever produced by their race." Perhaps we also shall ultimately come to this conclusion. Certainly Fielding is one of the greatest of our novelists. The development of this genius M. Digeon would portray from several points of view. At one time it is Fielding's art; at another his psychology or his ethical code—or a quick interchange of all three. "It was at the theatre and by writing polemics and newspaper articles, that Fielding acquired the habit of a vigorous style." Then came "Shamela," a burlesque of Richardson's "Pamela"; and "Joseph Andrews," a burlesque of the same novel and much more than that; and "Jonathan Wild," a masterly piece of irony; and at last "Tom Jones" and "Amelia." In "Tom Jones" we have "the perfect equilibrium between the two extremes of Fielding's comedy," that is, between irony and sentimentalism; and in "Amelia" the novelist's art of life is set forth in its most elaborate form. Many other writers, beginning with Arthur Murphy, Fielding's first biographer, have drawn the literary portrait on a similar background. The interest in M. Digeon's portrait lies in the fact that it gives us Fielding as he appears to a French critic in the twentieth century.

As might be expected, M. Digeon draws freely upon French literature for comparisons, and for the literary influences that moulded Fielding. As a result, we have the novelist in a somewhat different setting than hitherto. I would not say that the perspective is truer or more comprehensive but that it is not the same. On Fielding's relation with Molière, M. Digeon is especially sound. Like M. Cazamian he points out the influence of Molière on several of Fielding's plays, but he carries the subject over into the novels as well. On the significance of "Joseph Andrews," he says: "Fielding altered the very texture of the novel. One is tempted to hail him, as an admirer hailed Molière: '*Courage, Fielding, voici le vrai roman.*'" The spirit which animates him is indeed the spirit which animates Molière. He has Molière's methods, he speaks of his characters and of his art in the same terms. How is it that no one has noticed this? It is the pure discipline of the great French classics, which he imposes upon himself. His is the genius which wills and dominates, which, when it has learnt its aim, marches straight towards it." It is well to say this; though it be an overstatement, for Fielding was versed in the ancient drama and knew and imitated the English comedy of the preceding age. Still, Molière runs all the way through Fielding's novels. It is a fact to which English critics have referred but they have never given it proper emphasis.

On its English side, M. Digeon's book is not so good. There are a few positive errors, as when in one place "Love in Several Masques" is mentioned

*The Novels by Fielding. By Aurélien Digeon. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1925. \$4.50.

as Fielding's first comedy and in another place the honor is given to "Don Quixote in England." Again, M. Digeon expresses surprise that none of the biographers seem to have discovered that Fielding, when only twenty years old, lost his fortune, as related in a letter of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to her sister, the Countess of Mar, sometime in the summer of 1727. The sentence quoted runs: "Our poor cousins, the Fieldings, are grown yet poorer by the loss of all the money they had, which, in their infinite wisdom, they put in the hands of a roguish broker, who has fairly walked off with it." On this sentence we have the comment: "It is, perhaps, to this reverse of fortune that we owe Fielding's decision to earn his living with his pen." And later on we are informed that Fielding probably had the "swindling broker" in mind when he described the despair of Heartfree after being robbed by Jonathan Wild. The fact is that the reference in Lady Mary's letter, as the context shows, is not to that branch of the Fielding family to which the novelist belonged. The reference is to the family of the Earl of Denbigh, whose daughter, Lady Frances Fielding, is described as "a fool" in the sentence immediately before the one quoted by M. Digeon; and in another letter her "relations" are also called fools. It was these silly women who, "in their infinite wisdom," were taken in by a sharper—not Henry Fielding along with his brother and sisters, whose estate consisted of land lying safe at East Stour.

As indicated by this instance, M. Digeon loves the hypothesis for its own sake. This is a characteristic of modern French criticism. An hypothesis may be as useful in literature as in science; but in either case the hypothesis should be thoroughly tested. To speculate on what may conceivably have happened, and then to draw conclusions as from established fact leads the intelligence astray. M. Digeon writes brilliantly; his style has behind it a fine psychology—not Freud, not psychoanalysis—but the real thing; it penetrates to the heart of Fielding's art and philosophy of life. It is only when he approaches semi-biographical details that lapses become apparent. Then the doubtful hypothesis shows its head. The question may concern, for example, the time when Fielding wrote "Jonathan Wild." Underlying this piece of social and political satire is an allegory, whereby the career of Sir Robert Walpole is depicted in the terms of the career of a thief and receiver of stolen goods. "Jonathan Wild," which was first published in 1743, contains several allusions to events that occurred in the spring and summer of 1742, immediately after Walpole went down to disastrous defeat. Naturally, one would conclude that Fielding wrote his novel at that time. But M. Digeon comes forward with the hypothesis that Fielding wrote out the first draft in 1737; and after the publication of "Joseph Andrews" re-worked this old sketch, interpolating the allusions to exactly contemporary incidents and adding as a relief to pure villainy the story of the Heartfreeds. There are no facts whatever to support the hypothesis that there was "a primitive *Jonathan Wild*." It is mere fancy. How, one might ask, could there be any parallel between the rise and fall of Jonathan Wild and the rise and fall of Sir Robert Walpole before the Prime Minister had fallen from power?

It is also difficult to follow M. Digeon in his account of the relations existing between Fielding and Richardson. He overemphasizes the polemic character of Fielding. In his view "Shamela" and "Joseph Andrews" are "polemics" levelled against Richardson. It is, I think, a mistake to see any animus in Fielding's attitude towards Richardson, whose "Pamela" he burlesqued. There is a French proverb which says: *On se moque de ce qu'on aime*. Fielding, I daresay, rather liked "Pamela," else he would not have read it through. He was clearly amused by its sentimentalities and saw and took the opportunity to lay bare the author's mental and artistic equipment. Of "Clarissa Harlowe" Fielding wrote in the highest admiration. Despite this fact, M. Digeon regards "Tom Jones" as a polemic, though milder than "Joseph Andrews," against Richardson. It so happened that Fielding was writing "Tom Jones" while Richardson was writing "Clarissa Harlowe." Fielding's sister Sarah, who was then living with her brother, was a friend of Richardson's also. M. Digeon thinks that Sarah kept Henry "in touch with the progress" of "Clarissa Harlowe," and that Fielding thus composed his "Tom Jones," as it were, with Richardson's

novel "in his mind." The conclusion is that "Tom Jones" is a direct reply or challenge to "Clarissa Harlowe." This close "interplay" between Richardson and Fielding, it is pointed out, has not been observed by "a single biographer." If Fielding did make any personal use of information privately given him by his sister concerning Richardson's novel, he was guilty of an act so dishonorable as to stigmatize his character forever. The impression one gets while reading "Tom Jones" is that its author went his own way with nothing in his mind but his own subject and his own art.

Apart from shaky hypotheses, M. Digeon is admirable on Richardson and Fielding as exponents of the age—the one of its sentimentalism and the other of its realities. A hundred years later they were to have their parallel in Dickens and Thackeray. They were rivals in that they divided the public into two opposing camps facing each other. They differed immensely in temperament. Richardson was jealous of Fielding and abused him in letters and conversation. Fielding was indifferent to Richardson the man, but smiled at his cumbersome art, his conventional moral code, and his lack of knowledge of the life he aimed to describe. To Fielding the world as we have it in Richardson's novels was artificial and unreal; whereas to Richardson Fielding's novels were "low," his women were "drabs," and his men "scoundrels." Richardson's art culminated in Sir Charles Grandison, the perfect gentleman, whose passions move, with the precision of a clock, under the supreme control of the will. Fielding's art culminated in Tom Jones, an imperfect young gentleman, whom Fielding depicted as he saw him, knew him, associated with him, and smiled over his follies, now and then casting a gentle rebuke toward him.

At the same time, we should not underestimate Richardson's technique (which has been praised by Hardy) or his influence upon the novel since his time. M. Digeon is inclined to under-estimate him in both of these aspects. Richardson's novels have obvious dramatic qualities. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end; and in "Clarissa Harlowe" his management of dramatic suspense is masterly. His leading characters are clearly conceived and as clearly delineated. After once making their acquaintance, we never forget them; whether we like them or not, there they stand in our imagination for ever. M. Digeon does not arrive at the whole truth when he asserts that Fielding's example has made the English novel "comic" or "humorous" and has "obliged it to continue as a comic novel." Our novelists have learned from Richardson as well as from Fielding. It would be more nearly correct to say that Fielding began the tradition of the humorous novel, and Richardson the tradition of the sober, sentimental analysis of character. Both kinds, with many alterations in technique, we have with us still.

Erratum

Through an unfortunate accident a part of the issue of *The Saturday Review* for last week was run without the signature of the author appearing above the essay on George Meredith. The article was written by Professor J. W. Cunliffe of Columbia University.

The following books have been sold for publication in the Tauchnitz Collection: "The Rector of Wyck" and "Arnold Waterlow," by May Sinclair; "The Constant Nymph" by Margaret Kennedy; "Love," by the author of "Elizabeth and Her German Garden"; "The Thundering Herd," by Zane Grey; "The Son of Tarzan," by Edgar Rice Burroughs; "Orphan Island," by Rose Macaulay; and "Balisand," by Joseph Hergesheimer.

Among recent privately issued publications is a booklet printed in Philadelphia, entitled "Francis Wilson to Eugene Field," a printing, with an introduction by James Shields, of a long letter—the only available letter—written to Field, then in London, by the best known of his many actor friends and sent by Wilson in answer to a characteristic letter by Field. In the introduction to this letter is incorporated much information about Field and Fieldiana now given to collectors for the first time, and based largely on memoranda made from a careful examination of Field family MS treasures.