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of LITERATURE

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"Lend Your Mind"

IT is strange what we lend of our minds. There is a phrase, "lend your mind to this." And people lend their minds to the consideration of business problems, of household detail, of plans of organization and of budgets. We lend our minds to the appreciation of amusing anecdotes and smart sayings, to the passing of conventionally courteous remarks. What we lend of our minds in common daily intercourse is another matter entirely.

Sometimes it seems as though most minds atrophied for the lack of lending. Ideas are exchanged,—yes. Points of view meet and clash. But two intelligences meeting and gradually beating a rising fire of imagination out of a chance spark of utterance constitute a rare enough spectacle. Most of us move through life in a half-vacant dream, so far as the imagination is concerned, rendering lip-service to a conventional litany. When some irritation at opinions sets us to rummaging our minds for an answer the chances are that we turn up mere dusty shibboleths or paw the scant heap of our ideas finding little to lend, little enough even to brandish in defiance.

Books do not seem to teach us to lend of our minds, truly to lend. We bandy pronouncements concerning the current volumes, but the man or woman who can clearly diagnose the exact ailment of a novel or saliently describe its true inwardness, relating it cogently to the life about us, is rare enough to command merely our silent respect. We have catch-words, we are stuffed with quotation marks,—but we ourselves have little to lend.

* * *

Folk are suspicious. It is not an easy matter, at that, to borrow of another person's mind. The real treasure is usually distrustfully guarded. All the surface remarks are but a shield. Conversation is a fencing with buttoned foils. The endeavor to appear completely intelligent in regard to every topic, the hurried cloaking of ignorance, the evasion of direct question, all this is merely fundamental in the school of fence of polite society. The chatter about literature and art is but so much passaging at arms. Hence the mere artist is often out of patience and feels all-elbows in such a fellowship, and his occasional remarks fall like brickbats or strike through sham congeniality like unwelcome steel.

What the artist really endeavors to do is to lend of his mind. In the past, and indeed sometimes in the present, this was and is regarded as an immodest disclosure. As if human beings were really modest! The most truly immodest disclosures one hears, as a matter of fact, are the smug mouthings of prejudice persuading itself that it is valiant opinion. We say "the artist endeavors" rather than "the writer" because many writers who believe that they are lending of their minds—for large sums—are merely debasing an excellent idea. They too pander to public prejudice, without truly giving of themselves.

True lending of the mind is no easy matter. It cannot, certainly, be achieved by constantly taking thought. It can only be cultivated through the growth in the temperament of what one might term generous curiosity. The more curious we become about the world the more we find in it; it can never grow dull. Censoriousness we may discard as an arid negative attitude. Healthy curiosity lends as freely as its listens. People about one emerge from shapes of flat pasteboard, labelled with easy labels, and are perceived in the round, rich in human virtues and vices. The reality of a very mixed world becomes exhilarating: not depressing. Lay

Salute

By ELINOR WYLIE

RIDING down the Avenue in the early morning I passed a man who was going home to bed; I was setting out and he was returning; I was alive and he was dead.

I rode in a chariot of bright green metal,
He in a chariot of dull black wood,
And each of us was too tired to settle
Whose luck was bad and whose luck good.

The street flowed molten—a white-hot level;
Smoothly we passed in our painted hells;
I bowed my head to the other poor devil;
His was bowed before Someone Else.

I the waker and he the sleeper
Passed where the pearly dust hung thick;
He rode down where the dust lay deeper:
My dime went into the slot with a click.

This Week



A New Elia. By Robert Cortes Holliday.

Sin Comes to Brattle Street. By Bernard De Voto.

Maugham's Latest. By Stanley Went.

Dramatist Turned Novelist. By Ben Ray Redman.

Wall-Papers. By William A. Drake.

Confident To-Morrows. By Ralph Barton Perry.

Every Tuesday. By Christopher Morley.

Next Week, or Later

Robert Frost. By Gorham Munson.
Unnoticed. By Robert Frost.

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figures of human society with their phonograph speech excite amused pity.

Certainly an earnest attempt on the part of many people attentively to lend of their minds would result in terrible things! As we say, it is a difficult art in itself. Nevertheless we commend its judicious cultivation. The brusque and wayward, rude and mannerless artist who occasionally breaks into a modern polite conversation has more of the right of it than his outraged listeners would by any means allow. If he lends suddenly, startlingly, and with both unwelcome hands, it might be remembered that his indecorum has doubtless been stimulated by listening to a deal of banality. And perhaps the atmosphere of gentility is cleared to a certain extent and certain lungs are grateful for a draught of fresher air.

Passing of a Literary Era

By ARTHUR H. QUINN

THE recent death of George W. Cable and James Lane Allen, following so closely upon that of Thomas Nelson Page in 1923, brings to an end one of the most significant chapters in our literary history. It is only ten years since Francis Hopkinson Smith closed his versatile career, and only seventeen since the first break was made in the ranks of the great writers of Southern romance by the death of Joel Chandler Harris. All of them were born before the Civil War—Cable indeed fighting through it—all lived and wrote in the twentieth century. Smith was born before Hawthorne had issued "Twice Told Tales" and Cable before Poe had published "The Raven," and they emphasize the continuity of our literary achievement, something constantly forgotten by those who insist that the Muse visited these shores first in 1915 and perched unhesitatingly west of the Alleghenies.

To the superficial observer, it may seem that this group simply painted pictures of Southern life, tinged with romance, where men were brave and women fair and charming. That they did, of course, but they did far more, and their choice of material, their methods of treatment, and, above all, their attitude toward American life in general may be distinguished with some profit to those who realize that after all, classification is of value mainly to call attention to variety. We who have the good fortune to live in the United States are becoming accustomed to having our blessings explained to us by foreign visitors and the list usually begins with Democracy. From the point of view of literary achievement, however, we do not know exactly what to do with it. For the artist in words or colors, who searches instinctively after contrasts, Democracy seems at first a leveling and a destroying creature. In time the more subtle distinctions grow under the hand of the great writer into quite as deep and profound contrasts as the aristocratic concept of life provided, but it takes, I believe, the greater artist to find them. Page illustrates clearly and delightfully the patrician striving to be the democrat. In a letter written to me some years ago in consequence of a printed appreciation of his work, he said:

"I have no doubt that your estimate of the comparative merits of my short stories and of my novels is absolutely correct and I have a secret fear that my earlier stories, those in dialect, are superior in their appeal to any that I have written since. If I find you selecting 'Marse Chan' and 'Meh Lady' in preference to 'Edinburg's Drowndin' and 'Polly,' I have no right to complain and it brings me a reflection which I have always had: as to what is the secret of the success of the story or novel. Is it the *theme* or the *art* with which any theme, reasonably broad is handled, or is it something growing out of the union of the two? Personally I have always estimated 'Edinburg's Drowndin' as possibly the broadest of my stories, at least as the one giving a reflection of the broadest current of the old Southern life, and so far as literary art is concerned, it seems to me at least on a par with the others. I think, therefore, it must be the unrelieved tragedy in 'Marse Chan' or the fact that 'Meh Lady' appealed to both sides, and was written to make this appeal, that has given them a prestige, if I may use so important a word, far beyond that of 'Edinburg's Drowndin' and 'Ole 'Stracted.' 'Little Darby,' 'Run to Seed' and

'Elsket,' which you have signalized with the stamp of your imprimatur, I also think among the very best stories I have written. The first two of these appeal to me almost as much as the dialect stories. The first of these was written on precisely the same theme with 'Marse Chan' and out of the consciousness that whereas the tragedy of 'Marse Chan' was laid in the highest social rank, the incident which had given rise to it was based on a letter written by a poor girl, of much lower rank, to her lover, who like 'Marse Chan' had found his death on the battlefield, and I felt somehow that it was due to that class that I should testify with whatever power I might possess, to their devotion to the South. If there is a difference it seems to me that it lies rather in the fact that readers estimate as more romantic a tragedy in the upper ranks of life than in the lower, whereas, we know that rank has nothing to do with it."

In the very denial of the last sentence, the consciousness of caste rings through. When Hopkinson Smith describes Colonel Carter of Cartersville, he puts the case even more clearly, for he had a broader vision:

"What a frank, generous, tender hearted fellow he is; happy as a boy; hospitable to the verge of beggary; enthusiastic as he is visionary; simple as he is genuine; a Virginian of good birth, fair education, and limited knowledge of the world and of men, proud of his ancestry, proud of his state; and proud of himself; believing in States' Rights, slavery, and the Confederacy, and away down in the bottom of his soul still clinging to the belief that poor white trash of the earth includes about everybody outside of Fairfax County."

One of the most embarrassing moments of my life presented itself through a question put to me by Hopkinson Smith. "You read a lot of these American writers, don't you?" he inquired. "Yes," I replied, "it is my business." "Well," he continued, "perhaps you can tell me something, then. How much of my stuff is going to last?" How I answered him, I cannot remember. I hope I was sincere. Just what is to remain among the work of these five writers as a permanent contribution to our literature in the placid days after "Main Street" and "The Triumph of the Egg" are forgotten? I am most sure of the early work of all of them. With Cable it is "Old Creole Days," "Madame Delphine" and "The Grandissimes." With Page it is "In Ole Virginia" and "The Old Gentleman of the Black Stock." With Smith, it is "Colonel Carter" and "The Romance of an Old Fashioned Gentleman." With Allen it is "The Kentucky Cardinal," "Aftermath," and "The Choir Invisible." With Harris it is, of course, the Uncle Remus stories and "Free Joe." To be sure, much of their later work has its own special merit, like "Red Rock," "Bonaventure," or "The Tides of Barnegat," but each had, like many another writer, his great moment and like many others he went on writing while the clock still ticked, but did not always strike the hour. It will be noticed that many of these early works are short stories and perhaps therein lies one reason for their superiority, for the art of all but Allen gained by the limitations of unity and compression. Smith learned these qualities, as he indicated more than once, from Bret Harte, and the rest may have studied from that model also. When we notice how the short story of "The Island of the Holy Cross," a powerful tale of the slave insurrection in the Danish West Indies, rises out of the confused mass of "The Flower of the Chapdelaines" we realize that Cable's art is best reflected in the shorter form.

But even when the less permanent elements of their work are cleared away, what a residue remains! Cable told me that when he was a clerk in a cotton warehouse, he was a member of a group of young men who wrote stories and criticized each others' work. One of them went to California and on his return told Cable that he should go there at once for that was the land of romance. But Cable replied that while his friend was away, he had discovered in New Orleans a vein of romance which lay at his hand but which all had neglected, the Creole race. In the group of stories that make up "Old Creole Days," he painted a picturesque people, proud of its descent from the earliest French and Spanish settlers, and inheriting their adventurous spirit, dreading the contamination of mixed blood, with life cheap but honor dear. Skilfully he drew a contrast between a few strong characters ruling a large unthrifty population, enjoying freedom from responsibility

as their greatest blessing,—a race living contentedly an unsanitary life—with a shadow of dread in the yellow fever always over them—a loyal, tender, revengeful, unreliable race, in short, a Latin race with its energy toned down by climate and years of irresponsible power over a subject people.

The very architecture of the place is romantic,—the houses with their shades of color, the irregular streets, narrow and winding, the balconies with their suggestions of mystery behind them, the courtyards, cool and quiet spots of retreat from the glare. Against this background of an old world civilization in a new world Cable drew some imperishable figures. For reserved tragic strength, for dramatic intensity, the scene in which Madame Delphine, the quadroon, denies her own flesh and blood in order that her daughter may marry the man she loves, is matched in our literature only by the later episode which brings her tortured soul to the confessional of Père Jerome, whence it passes from the comfort of revelation to her earthly friend and pastor to the peace of God. There is no argument against slavery, its terrible effects are drawn by a hand far above the sentimental ecstasies of Uncle Tom, but Cable used the motive as he used it later in the magnificent figure of the African King, Bras Coupé, in "The Grandissimes," simply for the establishment of character.

Page seems not to have realized that the appeal of his short stories lay chiefly in their artistic handling of the theme of loyalty. Whether it was the fidelity of a slave to his master, as in "Marse Chan," a fidelity against which the gates of death closed in vain, or the fortitude of "Little Darby," who saves the confederate army by apparently becoming a traitor, or the constancy of Elsket, the Norse woman, to her lover, it was the instinctive reaction of a reader to the old theme of human fidelity that carried the stories into their deserved success. In "Red Rock" Page painted the South in the days of reconstruction, when a brave people who asked only to be let alone with their great problem were driven to desperation by politicians like Jonadab Leech. In another portion of the letter quoted above, Page says, "After I had written a third or more of the novel I discovered that I had drifted into the production of a political tract and, discarding what I had written, and going back beyond the war, in order to secure a point of departure which would enable me to take a more serene path, I rewrote it entirely. I had discovered that the real facts in the reconstruction period were so terrible that I was unable to describe them fully without subjecting myself to the charge of gross exaggeration." His picture of reconstruction days is much more vivid than that which Cable gives us in "John Marsh, Southerner," or Harris in "Gabriel Tolliver."

Smith was the most uneven of the group. He worked on a broader canvas and in his pictures of life, here or abroad, he carried the enthusiastic description of the picturesque beyond that of any of his contemporaries. At times his plots are formless and his heroines are pretty much all alike. "Kennedy Square," which Smith thought to be his best novel, but which is not, is a charming study of a portion of a Southern city, laid in Baltimore but really drawn from a square which Smith had seen in Savannah. It is just because Smith the painter was so much interested in his background, that he sometimes neglected to construct a plot. But at times he is unrivalled in his creation of Southern characters—Colonel Carter, Aunt Nancy, Chad, Bud Tilden, remain vivid in the memory. And Smith limited himself less to Southern life than any of the rest. "The Tides of Barnegat," laid in New Jersey amid a civilization, prosperous seventy years ago but now fallen into decay, is the best constructed of his novels and the final scene in which father and son are thrown out of the sea, locked in the grip of death, rises to a high level of dramatic intensity. Tom Grogan, his story of an Irishwoman who takes her husband's place as a subcontractor, is as vivid as any character portrayal of the Southern types.

Harris, too, knew how to contrast Northern and Southern characters and he rivalled Page in the portrayal of the conflict between the sections in the Civil War. "On the Wings of Occasion," his volume of stories which deal with the Confederate Secret Service, is not read nearly as often as it should be, for it contains a picture of Lincoln from the Southern point of view which is original and striking. But Harris, because of his profound significance, is a writer who belongs not alone to

the South, but to the English speaking race, and the limits of this survey forbid any real analysis of his most important work.

In a sense, too, Allen is of and yet not of the group. His art, in some respects of a rarer quality, was guided in its development by a theory which would require for its interpretation a separate and very specific treatment. Like the others he selected his material at the beginning from the point of view of romance, but there he parted from them. Cable and Page and Smith one can compare and contrast for they belong to the same company. They, too, selected their material from the romantic point of view, but while Cable treated that material with a realism which holds the romance in check, Page and Smith proceeded, with the treatment of the idealist, to heighten and touch up characters and scenes until they become types rather than individuals. The latter is, of course, the usual method, but while the colors are more vivid, it results in less faithful drawing and in less enduring portraits. That is why Madame Delphine rises above even Colonel Carter and Meh Lady.

It was a brave world these men painted for us, shot through with loyalty and patriotism, with sacrifice for the sake of honor, with a pride of race that passed from memory to memory. When this life faded out of America it left a void that has not been filled, but the Providence that watches over a people's literature decreed that before it disappeared it should be interpreted by those who wrought with skill and with sincerity. Perhaps when we are no longer interested in prying into the purlieus of our national byways we shall return for comfort to this record of a noble dream.

A New Elia

CHARLES LAMB: A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS.

By ALICE BROWN. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1924.

Reviewed by ROBERT CORTES HOLLIDAY

ALICE BROWN, a creative artist of native and original talent long proved, rather surprises us by her recent inclination toward an essay into the field of purely literary playfulness. "Anyhow," the reader says, as he opens the little volume, "Charles Lamb: A Play," "Alice Brown wouldn't do anything that she didn't want to do, nor would she do anything that she didn't do well." The preface to this "colloquy" states, as one would expect, that "it is not meant to chronicle the weather that beat upon Charles Lamb and his beloved Mary, but the stoutness of heart with which they met it." So there can be no quarrel with the author's playing hob with fact and time and place. The reader is sympathetically all set to receive the imaginatively distilled "essence of Charles Lamb's life, ripe with hidden drama."

To make no bones about speaking bluntly, he gets an awful shock. First thing, his conception of the madness in the Lamb household had been of something shadowy and legendary and perhaps not unromantic. To be plumped into a scene of blithering idiots, John and Charles and Mary, is a thing decidedly rasping upon the nerves. Much startled, he begins to question the good taste of this performance. Insanity stalking upon the boards, it strikes him, is hardly delicate humor for a well-bred audience today. And when, in this matter, the note is changed to what purports to be drama, the reader's discomfort grows much worse. When Mary murders her mother staringly before one's eyes the reader's feeling is one of horror—at the length to which evidently it is possible for an author of high standing to be betrayed.

The writer of this review recently had occasion to do considerable reading in connection with a hospital for stammerers and stutterers; owing to this, perhaps, he is especially conscious that among enlightened people now the affliction which was Charles Lamb's is not regarded as a joke. In addition to the characters of the Lamb family, the figures of Coleridge, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, *et al.*, are very sad. The conclusion is the height of sentimentality.

In sum, the reader's general reaction to this little play is the awakening of a suspicion that maybe, in his habit as he lived, Lamb was not altogether the enchanting fellow of the legend. Those who love their Lamb, and who would continue to love him, would perhaps do just as well to keep away from it. And those who have a concern for American literature will hope that the author will promptly revert to continuing the cultivation of her natural gifts, which are considerable.