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American Style

HERE has been a space waiting on the shelf, beside the "Oxford Book of English Verse," for the "Oxford Book of English Prose,"* if indeed that excellent anthology of poetry has ever been long on a shelf, its place being more often in the pocket or open upon the library table. But can an anthology be made of prose, which is so much less concentrated than poetry and requires so much more context for its appreciation, the units of which are not small but large? Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has perhaps followed the only possible method. He has read widely and taken what he liked, not attempting to present authors where he finds no brief wholes that please him, not letting space assigned be a criterion of greatness. And he has striven to make his book as English in spirit as possible, for it is the prose that voices the English heart and relieves the English soul which arouses the faculty of choice in this Cornishman.

It is a readable book, but the principles of selection result in some interesting reflections upon the tastes of a Professor of English Literature in Cambridge. He does not like the kind of prose that women write. Among three hundred odd names in the panoply of English prose, where Rupert Brooke and Compton Mackenzie and James Hopwood Jeans and H. G. Wells and John Murnet and A. B. Walkley have their place among our contemporaries, only seventeen in six centuries are those of women writers. True, there were few women writers before the Eighteenth Century, and yet seventeen is small pickings for the sex! More instructive is his attitude toward the Americans.

"Q" likes Americans when they write most like Englishmen; he likes them best when they write of England. This is consistent with his desire that this new Oxford Book should be a shrine of Englishness, but it scarcely comports with the idea of a catholic monument of English prose. He chooses from Santayana an article on English traits, he selects from Irving a glorification of London and English country life, Whitman is represented by his paragraph on the death of Carlyle, Parkman when he describes the taking of Quebec, Lowell from "A Certain Condescension in Foreigners," Thoreau (this becomes amusing) by a passage which begins with a reference to a British brig. Apparently American prose warms for Q only when the subject is close to the heart of England. American prose that sounds like English prose and has for its theme England, may go into a standard anthology.

De gustibus, etc.—We shall not quarrel with Sir Arthur, for his omissions, as well as his choices, reveal an extraordinarily interesting fact. He could find nothing that pleased him in Mark Twain, nothing in Poe, nothing in Stephen Crane, in Bret Harte (though Kipling, so amply represented, reveals his borrowings from the Californian), nothing in Cooper, in Daniel Webster, in Louisa Alcott, in Roosevelt, in Wilson, in Miss Cather, in Hergesheimer, in Cabell, in Lewis, and in Lincoln only the Gettysburg paragraph. Well, it is easy to explain some of these omissions, impossible to explain others in the presence of so many minor Englishmen except by a principle fairly obvious. The Cambridge ear does not regard as literary the prose which reflects the unfamiliar rhythm of American speech and adumbrates the American temperament. Mark Twain is not literary—Joseph Conrad is. Stephen Crane is not in the tradition—Rupert Brooke is.

* The Oxford Book of English Prose. Chosen and Edited by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. New York: Oxford University Press. 1926. \$3.75.

The Black Flute

By HERBERT S. GORMAN

THE music of the black flute dances
With jiggling negro feet. It chances
The labyrinth of violin
And thrusts its polished figure in.

Meanwhile the drum oracular
Keeps philosophic thud and jar,
An elephantine tread that nears
The piccolo's hysterical jeers.

The saxophone with sullen moans
Will wring its hands and shake its bones
Observing that sadistic brute,
The bass horn, chase the little flute.

But round and round and in and out
The dodging flute will shrilly shout,
Until, tired out, it seeks a nap
In the astonished 'cello's lap.

This Week



- "Lolly Willowes." Reviewed by Christopher Morley.
- "In Our Time." Reviewed by Louis Kronenberger.
- "Black Valley." Reviewed by Ernest Sutherland Bates.
- "The Autobiography of an Attitude." Reviewed by L. M. Hussey.
- "Color." Reviewed by Walter White.
- "Madame Récamier." A Review.
- The Private Life of Paris. By Elmer Davis.
- Books by Lenin and Trotzky. Reviewed by Wilbur Cortez Abbott.
- "Animal Heroes of the Great War." Reviewed by Albert Payson Terhune.

Next Week, or Later

- Factors in American Literature. By Norman Foerster.
- "The Hounds of Spring." Reviewed by Anne Parrish.

Critically considered, this is, of course, nonsense. Mark Twain at his nervous best, in "Huckleberry Finn" for example, is to be measured for vigor of rhythm and purity of English only with the greatest. Stephen Crane, whose imagery was so deceptively close to the language of American journalism, is as much a master of the impressionistic style which has proved such an excellent medium for Americans, as Pater of his elusive rhythms—and in this new century Clemens and Crane are masters in a sense that Arnold, Ruskin, Thackeray will never be. Q is right in not taking into account popularity or "influence," but that he has no ear for a style in American English that is not—like Lowell's and Irving's—borrowed, is nevertheless clear. This is, if you please, provincialism; yet it is unfortunate because so many English critics of repute and so many

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Frank Harris

By TEMPLE SCOTT

THE history of literature presents no more intriguing man of letters than the author of "Elder Conklin," "The Man Shakespeare," the "Life of Oscar Wilde," "Contemporary Portraits," and the autobiography just published with the title, "My Life and Loves." *

It is a strange composite of human nature that projected these different writings under the compulsion of a belief that it was thereby fulfilling itself, as Frank Harris would have us understand. And the strangeness is even more markedly thrust upon us by the reading of this last work. No one who is at all acquainted with the adventurous career of Harris could doubt that this record of his life would, in its matter, make deeply interesting reading; and no one who has read his books would question his power to make that reading a fascinating entertainment. The record might not be all *vero*, but it was certain that it would be *ben trovato*. But neither his most intimate friends nor his most admiring readers could possibly have conceived that the story of his life would deal with incidents he has here deliberately chosen, and to narrate them in such wise as he has here, as deliberately, invoked his genius to fulfil itself.

* * *

The nature of the facts and the manner of their narration are of a kind to suggest a comparison between this "Life" and two other autobiographies, by two other adventurers in life. I refer to the "Confessions" of Rousseau and the "Memoirs" of Casanova. All three works are self-revelations of dynamic natures, of reckless gamblers with fate, and all three men were afflicted with the megalomaniac vision. Each of the three, however, was differently urged in the undertaking of his adventures. In his "Confessions," Rousseau was a sentimentalist indulging his sexual appetites as he would border his garden walk with a row of mignonettes. In his "Memoirs," Casanova was a realist, frankly and even heartlessly capturing his lights o' love for his own enjoyment, as the Red Indian might decorate his wigwam with the scalps of his enemies. In this "Life," Frank Harris is both sentimental and realist. In his sentimentalism he is exalted almost to the verge of the visionary—which Rousseau was realist enough to save himself from—and in his realism, he wallows in orgies of his Priapian exercitations—which Casanova was sentimental enough to leave to the imagination. Rousseau never mixed his sentimentalism with his realism, and Casanova never obtruded his realism into his sentimentalism. Frank Harris, however, would have us accept his realistic pornographic chronicle of his *noctes deliciae*, as a sentimental gospel of culture, as his contribution to the formulation of a new Pagan-Christian religion, in which the body and the soul are alike dedicated to Love and her worship. This Adamitism hath an ancient and fishy smell; but Harris tones its Litany with an almost apostolic resonance. "It is the first book," he claims with pride, "ever written to glorify the body and its passionate desires, and the soul as well and its sacred, climbing sympathies."

That a man of Frank Harris's astute worldly wisdom and keen sense of humor should have indited this sentence in the belief that it would be accepted on its face value, offers a curious problem in psychology. For to identify "the soul and its sacred, climbing sympathies" with the intellectualized

*My Life and Loves. By Frank Harris. 1925.

amorous bouts described in this "Life," if it is not the babbling of senility, is certainly the mouthing of debility. "It will be six or seven years," he spouts solemnly, "before I shall know whether the book is good and life-worthy or not, and yet need drives me to publish it at once." That must be the reason why the book was written, and it must have been a desperate need, indeed, that drove him to such a pass as this.

Yet there must be some other reason for undertaking so rarely curious and so strangely bizarre an exposure of himself as this book presents. It is the last derisive fling of scorn at a world that has exiled him from its pleasant places. To those who knew Harris personally, two qualities were arrestingly manifest in him—his inordinate vanity, and his anger at the world's treatment of him. One was the expression of the other, and both were unbounded and rampant. The anger, which amounted to a rage, sprang out of a vanity that had been deeply wounded. The man knew himself to be gifted, as indeed he was, beyond most men, and the world recognized him not at all commensurate with his self-esteem. He had filled positions of responsibility and trust, as editor of the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Saturday Review*, and had acquitted himself with marked ability. He had met and measured himself with the best minds of his day, and had found himself to be their peer. He had mingled in the political and financial circles of London and had demonstrated his powers to envisage and resolve their problems with rare insight and a rarer intuition. He had gained reputation as the writer of one of the best short stories in the language, and had made a really original contribution to the elucidation of the life and works of Shakespeare. And yet, despite all these high and even splendid achievements, he found himself in the end almost the despised and rejected of men. Why?

* * *

The answer to this question may be read between the lines of this autobiography. It does not ring true. There is a flaw in the metal. It is shot through and through with an egotism that is nothing short of the monstrous. Always it is his vanity which is the deciding influence on the man's conduct of life, and under the lash of its scourge every particle of the genuine metal is beaten thin until it cracks.

He has employed his unusual abilities, not so much in response to the impulses of a high ambition, as from the urge in him to demonstrate the superiority of Frank Harris over other men. He sought the favors of women, not to meet Love's call, for that would mean self-surrender, but to enjoy their worship of himself as the physical superman. He wrote his "Life of Oscar Wilde" not, as he would claim, to reinstate a lordly spirit, but to exhibit himself as the magnanimous and beneficent friend. The world, at one time, accepted Frank Harris even at his own valuation, and it rewarded him both in homage and goods; for where there was so much promise there would be fulfilment. But the fulfilment never came; for that comes from a soul, and Frank Harris had sold his soul for a mess of pottage, and it was no longer in his keeping. It is the nature of every living thing to fructify only by self-surrender, and not by self-possession; Frank Harris never forgot himself, never really gave himself utterly to any ideal. As a consequence, he has remained sterile. He may think he is giving himself now in this autobiography, but he is mistaken. It is barren; it is devoid of soul. Instead of permitting the soul in him the freedom to grow its wings, he confined and debauched it, and it is now impotent and bereft of its seminal virtues. It is powerless to give birth to its genius. The world came instinctively to feel this in him, and it made him feel that it felt this; and it was then that his vanity was wounded beyond healing.

I write of Frank Harris in the past tense, as if he were no longer living, for there is a sense in which any man who has reached the stage of writing his autobiography, may be considered as "out of the game," as being no longer in circulation, so to speak. But the man who could write and print this particular autobiography, and also include in it the story here narrated of Carlyle, compels the world to wish to forget him. Yet so virile is the man's brain, despite his pitiful complaint that he is "half drowned in the brackish flood of old age," and so monstrously impudent is this exhibition of himself, that we are driven to confess that he is still very much alive. He is still storming at the gates of the

world's holy places demanding admittance to the sanctuaries within, and to be accorded their shelter and refuge. But, alas, it cannot be now that he will ever be permitted to enjoy their hallowed precincts. "The pity of it, Iago, the pity of it." I can never forget this man's supreme splendor of intellect, nor the magic of his golden speech. A great writer has been lost to the world, drowned in "the brackish flood" of his vanity, and a rare spirit has flickered out in this his latest pathetic effort to feed its flame with the dross of the market-place.

* * *

Two years have passed, and now comes the second volume of this autobiography—not openly, as would befit the Gospel of the "Synthetic Religion of the Future," which Harris now claims it to be, but surreptitiously introduced. The title has been altered from "My Life and Loves" to "My Life" simply. The change is significant, though the contents scarcely warrant it. The voice may be the voice of Jacob, but the smell is the smell of Esau.

The significance of the change in the title may, however, be more justly understood from the "Foreword," in which Frank Harris offers his "Apology" for writing the first volume in the fashion he did. He found himself constrained to do this, because of the anathemas which had been hurled against him by English and American critics. Of the two hundred millions of English-speaking people, he says, only two—Bernard Shaw and Mencken—were found to be righteous; the rest displayed, what he characterizes as a "childish unreason of the world which fills me with fear for the future of humanity." Harris may comfort himself with the knowledge that he is not the only one who has suffered. It seems to be the fate of reformers to get all the kicks and no ha'pence. For what can one man do, even though bucklered by Bernard Shaw and Henry Mencken, against one hundred and ninety-nine millions nine hundred and ninety-seven? The late unlamented Mr. Bryan was in a more parlous plight, for he was one against the whole world, and yet he was fearless to the end.

But, surely, this language of hyperbole is somewhat disingenuous coming from the pen of a man who, as he tells us, took Jesus and Shakespeare for his "guides in life's labyrinth." Neither of these guides ever expressed his fears for the future of humanity because of what humanity said or did against him. They were made of sterner stuff, and were possessed of a more gracious spirit.

I thought (Harris explains) that if I described the intense perpetual sex-urge of my youth simply, and at the same time showed how passionately eager I have always been to learn and grow at all costs that at any rate the porch of the temple would be significant and appealing . . . if all the ways of love are beautiful to me why should I not say so? . . . The soul of living to me has always been love of women and admiration of great men.

Indeed, the porch of this temple, which, by the way, is still in the process of being built in this second volume, is both significant and appealing; but its significance lies in the gargoyles that disfigure it, and the appeal is to the impure demons to enter by their open mouths and remain within. If love of women and admiration of great men sends a man in his impotent old age, licking his chops over his recollections of his youth's lecheries, then Harris may be justified in his confessions—to himself; but it will be childish unreason in him to resent in others the questioning attitude as to the quality of his love and the worth of his admiration. Even the great men whom he admired, the masters who were his guides in life, would repudiate him, and tell him—as Oscar Wilde once told him of another but a like high challenge—that he could never understand—that he had never truly worshipped at the high altars of either their idealism or their realism.

* * *

"Non pudeat dicere quod non pudeat sentire," he quotes, to justify himself as Montaigne did. Well, all that need be said by way of comment on this plea is, that what Montaigne was not ashamed to say of what he was not ashamed to feel, has for centuries expanded our hearts and captivated our wits; but what Harris here shamelessly says of what he shamelessly felt—and did, is sneaked into the country through some backwaters of the publishing under-world, by colporteurs who furnish literary aphrodisiacs to debilitated gallants, and supply the text-books to our modern Paphian sanctuaries of Artemis. Here lies the difference between Michael Montaigne and Frank Harris; and it is a difference

which must ever separate the creative artist from the imitative one.

Yet there are chapters in this second volume—alas, too few—which for excellence in narrative and for ability to present personalities, may well rank with the best writing in modern fiction. The stories of Guy de Maupassant and Lord Randolph Churchill, despite their shocking conclusions, are vivid pictures of scenes in which these highly gifted men are made to reveal themselves in their last days of direst affliction. The telling realism of the description of English gluttony is overpowering as a fetid stench in the nostrils, yet truly dramatic in its revivification of the materials of memory. Even the recital of Ruskin's intercourse with Harris, pieced together and patched as it evidently is of fact and fiction, is breathing with vitality. Yet in all these higher reaches of his literary efforts, it is not the artist but the accomplished raconteur who holds us by the wizardry of his tongue—and holds us, I must confess, by the lesser side of our nature. Harris is the actor determined to divert us at all costs; he is never the poet singing to enhance us. At best, his reminiscences are recreative and not in the least creative. That explains why they are so self-asserting and also, so self-revealing. They are colored by a temperament eager for applause, by prejudices born of his disappointments, by chagrin the outcome of his injured vanity, by an enjoyment in the scandalous, by an almost Mephistophelian delight to belittle the great men of his time to the level of common men—perhaps to his own level. This, surely, is not the manner of Shakespeare and Montaigne.

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"It is difficult to tell the truth about one's self," he pleads. True; but why take the trouble? Yet he does not see that he has unconsciously told all the truth there is to tell of himself, in what he thinks he has told us of the truth about others. It may be that this is not the truth he intended to tell. Well, in that case, he should have early apprenticed himself after his Shakespeare's advice contained in what, he will recall he once told me, is the finest line in English literature—"to take upon's the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies." But that kind of truth demands the "precious seeing" of the poet-lover even to suggest, far less to tell. In every *Warheit* there must of necessity be *Dichtung*; and as Harris is neither a poet nor a true lover, he cannot act as one of God's spies, and the mystery of things must ever escape him. There was the making in him of both lover and poet, but, unfortunately, he early went about the world, as he tells us, seeking for knowledge of facts, and became so absorbed in that pursuit, that he neglected to cultivate an acquaintance with his soul, so that now, he is not even on speaking terms with it. Hence the tears.

How pathetically evident this is may be seen in the last chapter of this volume. "Age is not to be denied," he confesses.

The worst part of it is that it robs you of hope: you find yourself sighing instead of laughing; the sight of your tomb there just before you on the road is always with you, and since the great adventure of love no longer tempts, one tires of the monotony of work and duties devoid of seduction. Without hope, life becomes stale, flat, and unprofitable.

* * *

This from a pupil of Jesus and Shakespeare? What a confession of the futility of the Synthetic Religion of the Future, from the mouth of its very evangelist! Is it to this favor that we must come at last? Had Harris entered on the "great adventure of love" as his master Shakespeare, in his riper wisdom, admonished him to do, the world, and not he, would have contemplated his tomb with poignant regret. Yet there is hope for him also. The reception accorded his first volume has taught him wisdom. "A year or two ago," he says plaintively,

I was honored on all hands; wherever I came I felt that men and women spoke of me with interest, curiosity at least; since the first volume of "My Life" appeared, everywhere I feel the unspoken condemnation and see the sneer or the foul sidelong grin. I have paid dearly for my boldness.

It may, therefore, be that in the writing of the further volumes of his "Life," he will, as he half promises to try, fulfil his better self; for I know there is that in his autumnal ripeness which can yield nourishing juices for the heart's comfort and the friend's gladness. Surely, these are worth hoping for and living for to distil from one's life!