

# A Letter from London

By MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD

A DISTINGUISHED critic complained the other day that "The Letters of Maurice Hewlett," which we are all reading, are disappointing and dull. Of course they are. He was the most loyal of friends, but his pen did not lend itself to the amiable platitudes or mild philosophies that usually decorate the correspondence of educated men and women. His brief notes were interspersed here and there with a striking sentence; but he seldom wasted his energy on more than this: and when he sat at his table it was to dream himself into the Middle Ages, into Italy, into romance and unusualness, as all his books testify. He was a good talker, a fascinating companion; quietly alert, yet dreamy and queer (I use the word affectionately), indifferent to most of the things that worldly men care for; but so tense about many they do not care for that it was no wonder his strength gave way. Even to look at him, in later years, was to feel that he had not enough strength, or physical material, left to do the work he asked of it: it had burnt out. Society bored him; and, though he loved beautiful things, picturesque shows, and good music, his leanings and dreamings all seemed to go to centuries long past. Or in the present, when he was actively awake, towards the betterment of the world and, especially, towards improved conditions for the poor. He had a keen sense of injustice, and gave a quick response to the needs and appeals of all sorts of people round him. It led him occasionally into unwise speech and imaginings, as when he opened a lecture to working men with "Gentlemen, today you are the masters of England." Naturally his hearers, instead of being stimulated by wise counsel to strive after a higher standard of work, or good citizenship, stood on their hind-legs and went away to strike, or to talk revolutionary nonsense among themselves. Yet a higher standard of work was what he most desired for them—for everybody; shoddy stuff of any kind shocked him; and of his own work he was always hyper-critical. For money or place he cared little; he resigned an easy and lucrative post to give himself wholly to literature. When fortune was good to him, he went to Italy and did the things he loved best; when the public tired of him, he gave up his good house in Wiltshire, took a workman's cottage, wrote poetry or essays on many aspects of nature, and for amusement did some gardening, though he was not strong enough to do much at it.

I should like to tell how I first came to know him; the story has been partly told before, but this is the first time I have written it down. Long ago they lived opposite our house—he and his little wife, who was as clever as she could stick, and as unconventional as himself. It was she who decorated their really beautiful rooms in Moorish fashion; there were few things of this sort she could not do; and years later, during the war, she had a government contract for aeroplanes with, I believe, some improvement of her own; employed hundreds of people and made a fortune—which, I feel certain, she gave away, just as he would have done.

We were strangers in those early days. One afternoon to my surprise Mrs. Hewlett appeared, and explained that they had read a book of mine; her husband wrote poetry, we were neighbors—and—and would we know them? We did, and much delight grew out of it. Several months later, charming and apologetic, he arrived with a brown paper parcel under his arm. He had written a novel, didn't know if it was any good, probably not; would I read it and, if necessary, be brutally truthful? Of course I would; and he left it. That brown paper parcel sat on a side table and worried me for days—in which he carefully avoided me, but went up and down the road on his bicycle, till it was like the flick of a whip. When I could bear it no longer, late one evening, I undid the string and found—"The Forest Lovers." I read it all night and could have danced for joy, probably did. I insisted on its going to the Macmillans, wrote to them, or went to them. They agreed to read it, but they had it a long time without making a sign; and again Maurice Hewlett went up and down on his bicycle, with his head turned my way this time. I pretended not to see him. One afternoon at a party I met Sir Frederick (then Mr.) Macmillan. He shook his head: "Our readers have tackled it," he said, "but I am afraid your friend's book won't do." I called his readers a bad name or two, and begged him to go home and read it himself. Evidently he did, for the book was published and made thousands. Maurice Hewlett sent me the very first copy. To

my surprise it was dedicated to me, and with it came a note which I keep, and shall always keep. Any others I have burnt; most of them consisted of a few words concerning his family or work, or a swift glance at the world as he was seeing it then. They were not meant for print. I have safeguarded them from it. It was good to know Maurice Hewlett, he was so stimulating, so quick to understand, and often suggestive of better things one might do than those one had in hand; but, even with a brilliant sentence or two thrown in, he was not a good letter-writer.

## Foreign Notes

IN his "Amerika und Sein Problem" (Munich: Meyer & Jessen), M. J. Bonn, the noted German democrat writer, presents an interesting survey of conditions on the American continent. The first portion of his work is given over to a survey of Canadian affairs, and the succeeding exposition of the standardization of civilization effected by the gigantic mail order businesses of the country. Herr Bonn examines at length into the racial elements of America, and takes up the problem of the effects which the limitation of immigration may be supposed to produce.

The second part of the monumental "Slovak Literary" (Prague: Rynak) in which Professor Jan Machal is presenting a detailed account of all that has been produced by Slavonic novelists, poets, and playwrights from the earliest times to the present has recently appeared. Its six hundred pages present with a liveliness that in no way interferes with their scholarly character a survey in the main of the Romantic period. Mr. Machal's method consists in grouping figures and tendencies, and providing what practically amounts to an essay for each group. The essays are followed by selective bibliographies.

The unusual happening is reported of an American novel finding acceptance here in London before it is taken in New York. Mr. Martin Secker, we learn, has decided to publish shortly a first novel entitled, "The Red Pavillion." It is by a young Chicago newspaper man, Mr. John Gunther, now on the staff of the Chicago Daily News in London. Apparently Mr. Secker was largely influenced in his decision by Miss Rebecca West, who had read the story in MS. and was exceptionally eloquent in her praise.

There has recently come to light through the opening of the archives of an Austrian family to a French man of letters a batch of letters from Madame de Stael to a young Austrian aristocrat by the name of Maurice O'Donnell. Apparently this young captain of Irish descent was but twenty-five when Madame de Stael, then thirty-nine, first met him in Venice. The correspondence which sprang up between them upon their separation after five days of fairly constant companionship appears at first to have had nothing of a sentimental nature about it. Madame de Stael, however, was apparently much attracted by O'Donnell, for three years later, when her repeated invitations that he come to visit her had borne no fruit, she set out for Vienna with the object of seeing him. There she made him her constant attendant, engaged him as secretary so as to assure herself a lien upon his time, and to judge from the notes which passed back and forth between them, fell passionately in love with him. O'Donnell apparently played the part of a passive lover for a time, but it is evident that at no time was he actually in love with her. After her departure from Vienna he summoned up courage to admit the nature of his feelings and to break off the incipient engagement that had been the work of Madame de Stael. The correspondence continued, however, Madame de Stael continuing for a time to address passionate letters to O'Donnell and later to write to him in the cooler terms of friendship. Only her letters are preserved in the collection that has just been discovered.

Philip Guedalla is at work on a Life of Palmerston. It is no doubt meet that he who ranks in some minds as the most impudent of biographers should deal with the minister who most frequently and openly was rude to Queen Victoria.

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Such are the queries which to-day stir forward-looking minds. What the outcome will be, no one knows. Yet we may safely predict that the outcome will be largely determined by what we, of this transition epoch, think and do. To offer some suggestions for sound thought and action, this book has been written.

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## Christopher Ward

READERS of *The Saturday Review of Literature* will be specially interested in the announcement of the publication of Christopher Ward's first novel—"One Little Man."

Mr. Ward's gay satire, his deft parodies and his sly humor have long delighted the discriminating. To his novel, however, he brings new and finer gifts. It has, to be sure, laughter and wit; but it is filled as well with pathos, tenderness and beauty.

This story of a timid and bewildered boy, of his growth to manhood, and of the poignant lessons life and love teach him is told with tenderness, dramatic power and a charm that is peculiarly the author's own.

F. P. A., in the first comment to appear on this book, said, "It is full of satiric humor and a vast amount of pity and heartbreak, too. A fine book and a great achievement."

With this judgment we are confident the great majority of critics and readers will agree.

# ONE LITTLE MAN

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## Points of View

### "Teetfallow"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
SIR:

I should like to touch upon certain misconceptions, apparent to a native of Tennessee, exhibited in the majority of reviews of Mr. T. S. Stribling's latest novel "Teetfallow." Exceptionally generous, and well deserved praise of this book has appeared in all quarters, and the book bears every evidence that it is bound for more than ephemeral consideration. Were it not for this, and the fact that "Teetfallow" has been regarded in many quarters as a sociological study of the South, rather than as an unusually fine novel, this comment would be superfluous.

Mr. Stribling has been accused of writing an allegory. He has been depicted as holding implacable hatred of the people he draws with such accurate perception. "Cold," "pitiless," "a pen dipped in acid," "no sympathy for the benighted folk of the Tennessee intellectual desert," are all typical recapitulations of certain aspects of most of the reviews. I doubt whether Mr. Stribling intended to do more than weave a dramatic tale of the people of a small section of Tennessee, more isolated physically, and as isolated mentally, as, say, the Pennsylvania Dutch, or the Mormons of Utah.

Of some importance in the consideration of a serious work is the correct identification of *locale*. In the fifteen or twenty reviews of the book I have read, all reviewers, probably with the Dayton evolution trial in mind, have spoken of Mr. Stribling's characters as East Tennessee mountaineers. Mr. Stribling, I imagine, does not take such lapses seriously, and probably smiles over them, but his own hill people would resent that implication as much as a San Franciscan would be irritated over being called an Angelino. There is just about the same difference, as the crow flies, between the mountaineers and the hill people as there is between the two California cities.

The author of "Teetfallow" was born in, and still regards as home, the little Tennessee river town of Clifton, in Wayne county on the border line of West Tennessee and Middle Tennessee. The county seat of Wayne county is Waynesboro, and a few miles distant from Waynesboro is Iron City on the L. and N. Railroad. A slight change in names giving Lane county, Lanesburg and Irontown in the novel, physical description of the country, and, most important of all, the superior sophistication of his characters, establish beyond question Mr. Stribling's own county as his theatre of operations in the present book.

Even now, as he tells, the Fords have descended on the county like a flight of Egyptian locusts. I suspect that the radio is to be found in the county seat and the more prosperous homes. Compulsory school laws have been in operation for several years. With all these things, and the no doubt well intentioned solicitude of the Yankee states over the South's non-conformity to current styles in thought and religion, Wayne county people of the next or following generation will come to be just like everybody else.

Mr. Stribling, I believe, would be the last man to say that he has written a study of normal activities in the hill country. What he has done, with his marvellous power of observation and memory, is to dramatize through a limited number of flesh and blood figures the intensely local translations, both in vernacular and action, of universal human characteristics, using material gathered from perhaps half the inhabitants of the county. I would go even further and assert that every action recorded by Mr. Stribling has had its counterpart at some time within the county, and, with local variations, all over the United States. Mr. Stribling with his deep insight into human nature has written a true "Comedie Humaine." But if it is allegory, I do not know the meaning of the word.

As for being a crusader, Mr. Stribling is too much alive to the beauty of things as they are to wish to lay a profaning hand on the life of an almost Arcadian people. Undoubtedly he derives rare fun from the human spectacle, and a particular sort of intimate amusement from his Wayne county friends. Although it does not intrude in "Teetfallow" to slow up the swift unfolding of his story, there is much philosophic material, direct, and implied, for it is a superb exposition of what any highly cultured man, privy to the Wayne county variant of human struggles, would reflect. Certainly there is shown in the book no hint of condemnation, nor an overwhelming desire to see these people changed.

As for hatred of his characters, and a vitriolic pen; what nonsense! Mr. Stribling shows neither approval nor disapproval. He has found a good story to tell, and then, I suspect, heartily enjoying the telling; has gone about its relation with a degree of competency reaching the absolute. If there is a question of sympathy or lack of sympathy the division is certainly upon the side of sympathy.

WILGAR COLEMAN.

New York City.

## Analyzing Literature

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
SIR:

It is pleasant to hear from Professor Norman Foerster ("American Literature," issue of April 3rd) that "we are now ready for free and fresh thought" in our studies of American literature. But it is distressing to find that his ideas of free and fresh thought simmer down eventually to those shop-worn tags—European influence, puritan tradition, romanticism, and realism. Can the professor be spoofing us when he refers to these classifications as "fresh, and scientific"?

Realism and romanticism are stale and unscientific distinctions. What can romanticism be, if Professor Foerster makes it include such diverse figures as Thoreau, Longfellow, Poe, Whittier, and Lowell? The futility of such classifications is shown when the professor himself first calls Whitman a romantic and later a realist. What sort of science or logic is that?

Equally unscientific is the idea that literature can be studied as a subdivision of history. In all our vast college curricula, no attempt is made to study any subject but literature (and history itself) by chopping it up into small historical periods. There are, of course, introductory survey courses: the history of music, the history of mathematics, the history of education. But after this child's play, nobody goes on with Victorian mathematics, the puritan tradition in mathematics, and the mathematics of the early seventeenth century. Nobody learns to paint pictures by walking through rooms of chronologically arranged paintings. Nobody learns to play the piano or to appreciate such music by listening to the world's masterpieces in chronological order.

Literature is not history, and history is not literature. The very items in which a book peculiarly reflects its own times are the hindrances to its universal appreciation as literature; the thorough contemporaneity of H. G. Wells, say the critics, is his literary doom. And when some book unites social influence with literary qualities, it is promptly ignored by the literary historians; look for Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" in the textbooks. The study of literature as history is a confession of failure to establish scientific methods of analysis and reasonable standards of value.

The division of all our writings under two heads (European culture and American environment) is a characteristic part of the current farce. Study geometry by dividing it into Egyptian and Greek. Study chemistry by classifying it into (a) German chemistry and (b) French chemistry. Study architecture and learn to build or to admire houses by writing a thesis on the sexual impotence of Phidias. Study painting and learn to sketch or to appreciate sketches by investigating whether Turner did or did not die in a tavern house brawl over a woman on the thirtieth day of May. Apply to the study of anything else the cock-eyed study of origins now so revered in literature, and you'll land in the same blind alley.

Professor Foerster is not more eager than I for a new dispensation, but it seems to me that he neglects the very axioms of literary study. You cannot analyze any art or science on a historical basis. Nor can you learn anything about the qualities of art by a study of its origins, any more than you can learn the qualities of water by studying those of hydrogen and oxygen. Values, in literature as elsewhere, depend never on causes, always on results.

W. L. WERNER.

State College, Pa.

## Erratum

Through an error of the composing room the name of William A. Deacon, a foreign correspondent of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, was substituted for that of Frederick M. Hopkins under the article on Rare Books in the issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature* of March 13. Mr. Hopkins is, of course, the writer of the Rare Book columns.

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