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of LITERATURE

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Exit the Villain

WHAT has become of Mr. Slope with his greasy hands? Where is the cold-hearted Scrooge? Are there no more Uriah Heeps? Why do Roger Chillingworth and Sir Pitt Crawley and Carver Doone and Miladi and even Mr. Collins seem to have few successors except in melodrama and sentimental romance? Where are the Victorian villains?

To depict a villain like Iago or Lovelace with new varieties of cold-blooded rascality was once a test of the art of fiction, like the playing of Lady Macbeth or Hamlet in the art of the stage. New methods of cloaking a crocodile heart were rewarded like new methods of concealing the culprit in a detective story. Or the villain was made to dominate the whole story in a crescendo like a winter storm which broke with his death and left the hero and heroine exhausted but safe. The tigerish women, the sorrowful Satans, the blighted, desperate Red Rovers, the vicious children, the ruthless wills, the snakes in the grass, the black panthers of notable fiction are gone. Look for them in the movies or not at all, and even in the movies they begin to be villains only by accident.



Science, which alters moral thinking with the slow impassivity of a machine tool, has reduced the old villain to scrap, from which art will have to laboriously build him up again into a new mould of villainy. For in spite of new conceptions of responsibility, common sense has not given up its belief in essential villainy. It has relinquished original sin and accepted glands or infant training in place of the devil, yet it knows very well that the honest man will be despoiled unless he watches his neighbor, and sees that the widow and the orphan have a safety curve that rises little higher than in the past.

Fiction, of course, has responded with lightning rapidity to the change. The novelist's simple response to the alteration in values has been to make the villain the hero. Of nine fairly recent novels the protagonists were (1) a predatory sharper willing to sacrifice anything to his vanity; (2) a congenital alcoholic prostitute whose social position kept her out of jail; (3) a monstrous egoist who could not decide between two women, and so ruined both; (4) a mean-spirited woman who spent twenty odd years in nagging, or being nagged by, two old women whom she was paid to care for; (5) a man who deserted his wife because she loved him too much; (6) a woman who preferred bossing men to loving them, or indeed to life itself; (7) a noisy drunkard who uses the power of great wealth with about the spiritual insight of a ten-year-old boy; (8) a young girl who marries an old man for his money, freezes him, gives him dyspepsia, and runs away from him to live on his money with someone else; (9) an artist so brutally selfish and so irrational outside of his art that he mars every life he touches, including his own.



The protagonists of these novels are not heroes or heroines in exactly the old sense for they are not always praised, or even defended; yet they are sympathetically presented, although each could have been depicted as a deep-dyed villain, each story could be a tale of an evil personality preying upon the good, every one of these books fifty years ago would undoubtedly have been a study in villainy. And in the lot there is not one leading character that the novelists are willing to condemn. Everyone has his or her excuse. One suffers from a complex,

There Lives a Lady...

By ROBERTA HOLLOWAY

THERE lives a lady whose pale body,
Cream, and white, and shell-pink pearl,
Folded to slimness in scintillant textiles,
Fondled in tinsels that float and curl,

Lilting and careless, glides over the thresholds
Of silken tomorrows, and twines time in a mesh
As though the whole world were a cool bed of satin
For the lissome, arrogant ritual of flesh.

Her smooth feet move in amber-hued sandals;
A dew-colored jewel glimmers like a candle
At her throat; and the faint, voluptuous fragrance
Of her hair enwraps her in a misty mantle.

Her white limbs drowse in their tissue shell,
And over them passes a frail, frosty chain
Of moments; but sleeping, she may not tell
What fair links grow dark ere she awakens again.

She is secure in the arms of her lovers
As a wingless moth in a brown cocoon,
Untroubled by the snowy, wild circling of days,
And the nights, black eagles that plunge to the moon.

H. M. Tomlinson

By J. B. PRIESTLEY

MOST of his readers, perhaps all but the most astute, would be surprised if they met him. There is nothing of the traveler about H. M. Tomlinson. He is not bronzed, hearty, hail-fellow-well-met, nor does he carry with him any suggestion of great distances and strange suns. Yet his appearance, I think, is significant, revealing not a little of his secret. At a first superficial glance, he looks like a rather hard-bitten city clerk. At a second glance, he looks like a gnome, who has come up from some elfin solitude to observe the stir of things on the bright surface of the world, to see men hurry down long streets, swing up to their navigating bridges, or dive below to their engine rooms, and harry their little ships across the globe to some fantastic heart of darkness. These two contradictory appearances bring us close to the secret of his unique power as an essayist of travel. His work would not have the force it has unless he were at once the city clerk, that is, the man who knows the life of the dark streets, and knows what it is to escape, and the elfin recorder, with such a wealth of exact yet luminous imagery, who travels here, there, and everywhere in search of strangely significant facts. He is not to be confused with those writers—and there are not a few of them—who deal largely in the same wares, the docks and the old clippers, and little ports on the edge of the jungle, for the purpose of achieving cheap romantic effects. Theirs is the way of easy escape. Although, to the casual observer, he may seem to travel the same path, actually his way is very different, for it is that of hard escape.



He does not turn his back on hard facts, and lose himself and his reader in romantic glamour. He has a lightning eye for a fact, and a grim, ironical appreciation of the hardest of them. This does not mean that poetical glamour does not exist for him. On the contrary, he continually recognizes its presence with all the gusto of the true romantic, and it is for him the beginning of things. Time and again, he admits it:

You probably know there are place-names, which, when whispered privately, have the unreasonable power of translating the spirit east of the sun and west of the moon. They cannot be seen in print without a thrill. The names in the atlas which do that for me are a motley lot, and you, who see no magic in them, but have your lunacy in another phase, would laugh at mine. Celebes, Acapulco, Para, Port Royal, Cartagena, the Marquesas, Panama, the Mackenzie River, Tripoli, or Barbary—they are some of mine.

That essay—perhaps the finest of all his shorter papers—called *A Shipping Parish*, from "London River," in which he laments the vanished glories of Poplar, is made up of exact detail observed against a vague, glamorous background of dim horizons and lovely lost ships. He hugs with delight his knowledge that the sea creeps almost into the heart of London, that you have only to go a little way past the offices of Fenchurch Street to arrive at the foreshore, where there are saloons full of men whose talk may be pieced together to form an epic. He tells us how, when a boy, he had to take some documents to a vessel loading in the London dock:

She was sailing that tide. It was a hot July noon. It is unlucky to send a boy, who is marked by all the omens for a city prisoner, to that dock, for it is one of the best of its kind. He had not been there before. There was an

This Week



"Julia Marlowe." Reviewed by
Francis Rufus Bellamy.

"The Limitations of Victory." Reviewed by *T. H. Thomas.*

"Selected Poems of Edith Thomas." Reviewed by *Robert Underwood Johnson.*

"Selection of the Letters of Horace Walpole." Reviewed by *Percival Merrick.*

"My Own Story." Reviewed by *Wallace Irwin.*

"Palimpsest." Reviewed by *John Gould Fletcher.*

Quertyuiop.

"The Giant of Oldborne." Reviewed by *Margaret Wilson.*

Priestess. By *Christopher Morley.*

Next Week, or Later

A Note on the Modern Novel Pattern. By *Mary Austin.*

Neil Munro. By *Cameron Rogers.*

another breaks away to escape the iron of convention, a third is a pathetic example of the needs of youth denied, a fourth is the inevitable reaction of the clever human animal to the predatory habits of the animals that surround him, a fifth is a study in pathology which shows how charm persists in woman even when desire becomes a mere disease, a sixth is the apparent result of modern marriage.

Thus science, which is essentially a study of causes, has led us to analyze the villain into heredity, environment, personality; after which we tell the story of why he did it rather than what he did.

This is a vital change, and it is definitive. We
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astounding vista, once inside the gates, of sherry butts and port casks. On the flagstones were pools of wine lees. There was an unforgettable smell. It was of wine, spices, oakum, wool, and hides. The sun made it worse, but the boy, I think, preferred it strong. After wandering along many old quays, and through the openings of dark sheds that, on so sunny a day, were stored with cool night and cubes and planks of gold, he found his ship, the *Mulatto Girl*. She was for the Brazils.

The Master, the very figure for a boy's eye, told him that there was a berth for him if he would go along. But the boy did not go, and "never heard again of the *Mulatto Girl*." You might say that he has spent the rest of his life looking for her.

Here then, obviously, is the desire to escape. We could not deny it even if we would. Escape is the secret of the magnificent gusto that we discover in his first book, "The Sea and the Jungle," a book that has no single passages equal to some of the finest things in his later volumes but is, nevertheless, his most sustained and perhaps his best performance. At the beginning of that book, we meet again that "City prisoner," now grown up. On a certain grimy morning, he catches the inevitable 8.35 for the City and finds himself once more caught in the dreary routine, a squirrel turning in a cage. A few bitter paragraphs dismiss the whole foolish business. But then the Skipper arrives; the Skipper, bound for the very heart of the Amazonian forest. "I saw an open door," he tells us. "I go out. It was as though the world had been suddenly lighted, and I could see a great distance." Once more he is asked to go, and this time he goes. The adventure begins with Swansea in the black rain, but he can chant: "Now do I come at last, O Liberty, my loved and secret divinity! Your passionate pilgrim is here, late, though still young and eager-eyed." The rest, that long journey through the grey tumult of the Atlantic to the steaming reaches of the Amazon, we know or should know if we have any love of travel and good writing. It is related in some of the best descriptive prose of our time.



But to honest minds (and here is a burningly honest mind), there is no such thing as absolute peace. We only move from one set of responsibilities to another. Liberty only confers upon us the power of making our own and possibly sterner choice. The sea demands a routine more exacting and inflexible than that imposed by bank managers or editors, and a man without a romantic imagination, a Dr. Johnson, has good warrant for preferring a gaol to a ship. Given that glamour we have already noted, the case is altered, but an honest mind cannot escape into the very blue of idle hours and pretty adjectives. What Tomlinson did was to escape from a dreary routine to an heroic routine, and it is this that binds him, as it did Conrad, to the men of the sea, who, in an age when so many of our activities are petty and muddled and cynical, are still able to do their duty, simply and stoutly. Theirs is one of the eternal and symbolical callings. Conrad saw this, and thus was able to turn a quarter-deck into an arena of tragic circumstance, to express through an account of some schooner in heavy seas an heroic vision of this life. There is a similar attitude of mind to be found in many of Tomlinson's grim and vivid records, and it has brought him some of his finest passages. Consider the moving significance, for example, of his description of the derelict. He watches the seas pouring over it, watches it all from the deck of an enormous New York liner, and then concludes with this:

There was something ironic in the indifference of her defenceless body to these unending attacks. It mocked this white and raging post-mortem brutality, and gave her a dignity that was cold and superior to all the eternal powers could now do. She pitched helplessly head first into a hollow, and a door flew open under the break of her poop; it surprised and shocked us, for the dead might have signed to us then. She went astern of us fast, and a great comber ran at her, as if it had just spied her, and thought she was escaping. There was a high white flash, and a concussion we heard. She had gone. But she appeared again far away, forlorn on a summit of desolation, black against the sunset. The stump of her bowsprit, the accusatory finger of the dead, pointed at the sky.

There is the ring of genuine tragic feeling in this clean and strong prose, all the more moving because of its reticence.

There is a difference, however, between our author and Conrad, and it is a difference as important as their likeness. Conrad was himself a seaman, and shadowed forth his views of things in-

directly, by way of romantic narrative. Tomlinson, on the other hand, is, as we have seen, an escaped "City prisoner," now a traveler, a recorder of his impressions; indeed, perhaps the shortest description of him is that he is a reporter of genius. He has been endowed with an amazingly sharp eye and a prose style that is at once unusually vivid and exact. If newspapers were still produced for intelligent people, and were not afraid of detached yet eager minds, their editors would want to send him out every hour of the day and night and would not stop short of kidnapping to secure his services. There is nothing he cannot make as memorable to a reader as one of that reader's own unusual experiences. He can drain a scene, a figure, an event, of all its color and bloom and salt and tang. It is only just to Fleet Street to add that this fact was realized and that for some years he was one of its special descriptive writers. He was sent to the scenes of various catastrophes, and finally arrived on the scene of the greatest catastrophe of all, being for some time a war correspondent. In this capacity he was not a success: he saw too much and felt too much. The ideal reporter sees this life as something of a show; the less he feels the more able he will be to reproduce the official emotions expected of him; at heart he should regard a European war merely as a glorified circus, content to sharpen a few more pencils when faced with the enlarging vistas of death and international ruin. At the front, Tomlinson found again that heroic routine, but now it was robbed of all the glamour of great distances, the poetry of fantastic names, and his experiences there left him a legacy of not ignoble bitterness. Hence the difference between the author of "The Sea and the Jungle," written before the war, and "Waiting for Daylight," whose grim title tells its own story.

A glance at his situation reveals its irony and probably explains the ironical twist that has been given to his thought. He is a reporter of genius because he brings so much mind and heart to the task, but, as we have just seen, it is perhaps better that a reporter should not have too much mind and heart. His task is to be an onlooker, an eager spectator, an epicure of curious scenes, a creator of vivid pages, and nothing more. There are numbers of men with great talent who do not ask to be anything more, and some of them made reputations during the war. But such a one as H. M. Tomlinson naturally revolts against being a mere spectator, against his task of finding new adjectives with which to conjure up the vision of death and disaster. Continually he finds himself where terrible things are happening, but neither one of the victims nor one of the rescue party, simply a man with a notebook and pencil. Send such a man, with his needle-sharp eyes and ears, his taut nerves, his blazing, honest, sensitive mind, to the front, not to take part in the ghastly business, to march and dig and shoot until he has blunted his tragic sense of what is happening, but to go here, there, and everywhere, describing what he sees and hears, missing nothing—and you have condemned him to Hell. Small wonder that he should emerge far more embittered by his experience than those of us who were actual soldiers, for we were in it, and, therefore, could afford to forget about it, whereas he was looking on, watching, watching, while a hundred thousand lads went tramping past to die. And even where the War was not in question, the position of such a writer as Tomlinson would still not be easy. If he goes to sea, it is not as a seaman, who can lie back and think no more about things once his watch is done, nor yet as a mere passenger, who knows nothing, who is all innocence, merely so much superior freight. Thus he is condemned never to take things easily, and has more responsibility, in the honest depths of his mind, than the skipper himself, for the skipper has only the ship and the crew and the freight on his back, but this brooding spectator of heroic routine has skipper, ship, crew, freight, the wide sea itself, on his back. Naturally despising the rôle of mere idle spectator, delicate and heartless collector of sensations, he has no alternative but to feel passionately about the life he has escaped into, to share—as it were—every watch, climb to every mast-head, to go down with every doomed ship.

This is what I meant by "hard escape." It is this (and a greater mastery of prose style) that distinguishes H. M. Tomlinson from those other writers who talk of clippers and jungles. Romance

is there—the strange distant light has never gone out—but it is something seen between bouts of wrestling with hard facts. Remove him from these scenes of heroic routine, touched with fantastic beauty, and you have an ironist of a sardonic and uncompromising temper. His reading is significant, for when he has reluctantly set aside the great simple voyagers, his men are Swift and Heine and Butler and Anatole France. Criticism is not really his business at all, though for some years he was engaged in it. He could probably write about a few books and authors better than any man living, but for the rest, he is no critic. His demands are too narrow and personal, and he would rather explore the world than other men's minds. He would seem to pass by the light graces of life and literature with a shrug. Sentimentalism makes him angry. Hearing the seas forever roar behind him, seeing once more the image of young men going to die, he is inclined to make the mistake, common to such masculine tempers, of thinking that the things spiced with terror and danger have a superior reality and significance. But though he may be unduly embittered at times, he is anything but soured, and is far removed from certain contemporary authors who assail the universe and their fellow creatures because vanity is eating out their hearts. He might be excused if he were sometimes bitter about his own affairs and not about all the noble doomed things in this world. I for one would forgive him (though I doubt if the occasion will ever arise) because I think he has been badly treated. It would not be easy to give the author of "The Sea and the Jungle," "Waiting for Daylight," "Old Junk," "London River," "Tidemarks," and this last and characteristic book on travel, "Gifts of Fortune,"* his full due, for the hour is not ripe, but at the present time, their author, who is undoubtedly the master in his own kind of work and one of the best prose writers we have, is still suffering from what seems to me shameful neglect, both on the part of the critics and the English public. Fortunately, there is still time for this to be remedied, but meanwhile—and I am reluctant to make the admission—it looks as though yet another name will have to be added to the list of notable English authors who have been given an earlier and more generous welcome in America.

One Among Many

JULIA MARLOWE: Her Life and Art. By CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1926. \$5.

Reviewed by FRANCIS RUFUS BELLAMY

MACAULAY in his Essay on Boswell's "Life of Samuel Johnson" says that it is a remarkable thing to consider that perhaps the greatest fool of all time has written the greatest biography. Because Boswell had no sense whatever of the fitness of things, he could tell, without self-consciousness, details about himself and about Samuel Johnson concerning which other men, more prudent, would have remained silent.

In inverse ratio, Mr. Russell must be one of the wisest of men since he has written one of the dullest of biographies. He reveals his point of view in a conversation which he had with Julia Marlowe concerning Henley's comments on Balfour's "Life of Robert Louis Stevenson." In that conversation Mr. Russell regretted "that Henley chose to tell so many things that put Stevenson in an unpleasant light, little things and lesions in his character that it seemed to me spoiled the image of him that existed in the minds of his admirers."

In this particular volume, Mr. Russell has done his best, precisely, not to "spoil the image" of Julia Marlowe that exists already in the minds of her admirers. He gives us the list of her plays, and tours, and successes, and does it from the point of view of a man who is interested in the theatrical business, and who understands it. In addition, he draws a very good picture of Miss Marlowe's remarkable devotion to her ideal, and of the infinite details which for her made up the art of acting. But of Julia Marlowe herself he reveals almost nothing.

Julia Marlowe has stood for a very definite thing in the American theatre. She believes in beauty and truth in the drama, and has never appeared in any play which she felt actively sinned against them.

*Gifts of Fortune. By H. M. Tomlinson. New York: Harper & Bros. 1926. \$4.