

COMMENT ON CURRENT BOOKS

NOVELS AND TALES

A tense, exciting, soul-stirring tale of sea-fighting and land-plotting in the days of Nelson is to be found in Mr. Ollivant's "The Gentleman."¹ The bulldog courage of the British sailor, the spirit which made brutal, coarse men die fighting with cheers on their lips, the devotion to England and Nelson—all are thrown into vivid relief. The book is marred a little by hints of torture and by some passages which may try the nerves of haters of bloodshed and cruelty, and sometimes the author's style, purposely made sharp and concise, becomes a little too Victor Hugoish in abruptness. We wish, too, that he had omitted the quite unnecessary "I will answer no questions about this story," which stands in place of the usual "The End." But, criticism aside, the romance is one of the best of its class; it holds the imagination with intentness; it stirs the blood as does the best of Stevenson's adventure-romance. No one could possibly have written it who had not a large conception of English history and of literary art.

A greater contrast to Mr. Ollivant's story could not be imagined than Mr. Jacobs's "Salthaven."² This novel is precisely after the fashion of his inimitable short stories, but, unlike many "extended tales," does not become in the least tedious. The sly turns, the badinage and chaff, the oddly conceived situations, are all Jacobs at his best—the Jacobs of "Many Cargoes" and "Captains All."

A good story of what may be called the H. S. Merriman type is Mr. Albert Kinross's "Joan of Garioch."³ The author was a newspaper correspondent, whose work gave him an intimate view of the recent terrible uprising against Germans and Russians in the Lettish provinces. A graphic description of those outbreaks and their suppression is included in the story—and this alone would give it positive value. But the story is also vigorous in its handling of plot, and the personal adventures of its supposed narrator are told with real power. The reader is led from one incident to another with skill, and the element of suspense is well maintained. A singular feature is that, while the love of a woman is the controlling motive and while "Joan's" personality is made clear and strong, she never once actually appears upon the scene.

The line between nervous prostration and

actual mental disorder is so vague and variable that it is difficult to determine. Physicians are puzzled, and the patient is, of course, quite beyond settling the matter. Something of the same perplexity haunts the reader of several of the new novels. Three, now under consideration, offer difficulties, if one is courageous enough to attempt to "define and divide," which Emerson has said is a godlike thing to do. The well-chosen title of Beatrice Harraden's novel, "Interplay,"⁴ attracts attention to her work, in many respects unusually clever. The central situation is not a new one. A woman, unhappily married, runs away with a lover, whose sudden death gives her husband the chance to divorce her, which he had refused to do when it might have been a merciful act. Years after, she determines, from the impulse of a new and nobler love, to put away her past, as men do, and give herself to happiness. The theme of the author is equal morality for men and women. But why should the emphasis be put upon equality in immorality? The somber stuff that is the substance of the story is elaborately embroidered with dainty and skillful stitches, making a rich and original bit of work. Harriet Rivers's friend, Margaret Tressider, a rebel from childhood and a merry and courageous soul; the half-witted violin-mender, a legacy from the law-breaking period in Harriet's life; the robust Arctic explorer, who forgives as he is forgiven; the inimitable Ermytrude, worshiper of culture and convention; with a group of minor characters, each one definite and wittily conceived—all these, touched by modern English influences and reflecting modern English life, are admirable in their way. But the question—the defining of the line—still remains unsettled, upon more than a single moral point in this story.

A second story⁵ involving a moral problem is from the skilled hand of Anne Douglas Sedgwick. Amabel Channice, to state the fact baldly—an offense never committed by this analytic author—also leaves her husband for a lover. But we are so subtly handled that before we know it we sympathize with the deluded girl shocked by realities, and are entirely convinced of her purity and moved by her genuine repentance. Her husband's acceptance of her deed is indicated in a masterly manner. His wife, grateful to him during many years for what she believes is his unexampled generosity in

¹The Gentleman. By Alfred Ollivant. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$1.50.

²Salthaven. By W. W. Jacobs. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$1.50.

³Joan of Garioch. By Albert Kinross. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$1.50.

⁴Interplay. By Beatrice Harraden. The Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York. \$1.50.

⁵Amabel Channice. By Anne Douglas Sedgwick. The Century Company, New York. \$1.50.

shielding her good name, has her eyes opened to his unscrupulous character. She shrinks from the knowledge with exquisite pain. The complications of the plot are perfectly fitted into each other, and the result, apart from the great interest excited by the human situation, is a distinct intellectual pleasure. Here again the inequality of moral standards between men and women is the theme. But between Amabel Channice and Harriet Rivers is as great a difference as there is between the style of Miss Harraden and Miss Sedgwick. "Amabel Channice" impresses the reader with a profound sadness, only lightened by the wonderful skill of the author's style. Has the defining line altogether vanished?

Of Eden Phillpotts's work it is hard to speak without enthusiasm. The simple force of his wonderful descriptions of Dartmoor and his straightforward dealing with human nature, as seen in his loved countryside, carry one away, swept along by the strong current of his style. "The Virgin in Judgment"¹ differs somewhat from his other novels in the point of view chosen by the author. Yet in many respects it bears all the well-known characteristics—perhaps even mannerisms—of Mr. Phillpotts. The irresistibly humorous discourses among the men who gather at "The Corner House," presided over by the big ex-prize-fighter Mr. Shellabeer, are as fresh and full of meat as ever. The light-minded, the slow-witted, and the sturdily practical men discuss religion, philosophy, and neighborhood gossip unendingly, yet never become tiresome. One of the best scenes in the book is the advent of Shillabeer's old professional friend "Frosty-face," of prize-ring fame, and his shrewd management of a village prize-fight. But these are mere asides; the depth of the story lies in the character of Rhoda Bowden and her unwittingly evil influence upon the lives of her adored brother David and his wife Margaret. She was the virgin in judgment, and in her Phillpotts emphasizes his constant contention for the sanctity and nobility of the natural instincts of humanity. Offenses against the moral code necessary for human social life are not made prominent though they appear in the story, but the evil, blighting influence of harsh judgment, wrong suspicion, and imputing sin to others is grimly portrayed to a tragical conclusion. It is doubtful whether Phillpotts has surpassed "The Virgin in Judgment" in any of his previous novels. He lies full length upon Mother Earth, but he gazes up into the depths of the sky.

¹The Virgin in Judgment. By Eden Phillpotts. Moffat, Yard & Co., New York. \$1.50.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is true that one escapes from the wide sky of the moors and enters the narrow city streets of Harold Begbie's study of a man's soul, "The Vigil,"¹ with a distinct refreshment of the spirit. The book is a rare one in its quiet atmosphere, in its serene gaze into eternity. Not that its records of life are those of the cloister or of sequestered men and women. There are constant activity, continual work, and many plans. But the abiding effect emanates from Beatrice Haly, who keeps vigil, helping here and there, waiting for the awakening of her dearest friend. That friend, Richard Rodwell, is so perfectly analyzed and so completely portrayed for us that it seems a useless task to do more than direct the reader to the book itself. He was an educated man, regarded as a quixotic *intellectual* by all who knew him except Beatrice, who had loved him from their common childhood, and who believed in his possibilities. After trying a London parish among the poor, Richard decided to go to a coast town noted for its materialism and lack of anything beyond the most sordid living. There he worked hard, trying, as he said, to make people a little better and a little happier. His faith was in the Church, its magnificent history and organization. But, brought face to face with actual sin, he found himself helpless to aid desperate men. Again he was filled with questionings and wearily dissatisfied with himself. Being of an almost tragically honest mind, he searched himself to the depths. Coming in contact with an old Dissenting preacher, a saint who had yet failed to save his own household, he inquired of him the secret of the power he certainly had to lead men out of their sin and unbelief. The chapters devoted to the conversations between these two men and between Richard and the sweet old wife of the preacher are marvels of clear statement—illuminations of spiritual truth—and yet expressed with limpid simplicity. A terrible accident in the works which employed many of the men of the town brought Richard to the point of realizing that "the mercy of God was, in comparison with the sins of these poor men, as the whole ocean is to a speck of rain." At the same time he learned the actuality of sin. As old Simon Eyre said sadly, "There's no Saviour, Mr. Rodwell, unless there's a hell." Into his life there came for the first time deep feeling and tremendous passion. His heart was touched, his nature was opened to the tenderness of human love, and he turned to Beatrice to be his helpmate in his new comprehension of life's purpose. By the

¹The Vigil. By H. Begbie. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$1.50.

chicanery of her man of affairs, her fortune was lost—all the money she had freely given to further Richard's schemes for benefiting others. She was glad to go out into the world with him, and he, "dragged away from the benign atmosphere of refinement and culture in which he had yearned for a closer and more mystical communion with the Saviour, was forced by Circumstance to go out into the world naked of everything but the invective of Christ." While the heart of the story is deeply serious, there are many touches of true wit and most attractive humor. The characters are varied, original, and really lifelike. The old sexton, the big Mrs. Biddecombe who bought and sold eggs and garden produce, the different women of the town who aspired to social heights, above all Mr. Shorder, the erratic owner of the works, the delicate Christabel, companion and former governess of Beatrice, and Mr. Jevvers, her lawyer, all stand out distinctly as persons who demand attention. In every respect, in subject, treatment, literary style, and exalted purpose, "The Vigil" stands in a prominent place among the books of the year.

A very pretty story by John Luther Long takes its title from the little girl named Felice,¹ who mothers her smaller brothers and sisters upon the death of their mother and the arrest of their father for stealing bread. A glorious and eloquent barber, Martinos by name, who has a "pu-ull" in the Tenth Ward, is the moving power in Little Italy on the East Side. His Italian-English eloquence brings swift punishment upon the starving thief, and then his own soft heart and generous acts overturn the processes of law and restore the poor man to his little helpless family. The bare outline of the story does not convey in the least an idea of its moving pathos or its entertaining humor. The fiery impulses and warm hearts of Italy bursting into the midst of ward politics and the police courts of New York start a tremendous dramatic combustion. One must read the story to understand its charm.

The author of that delightful idyl "The Loves of Pelleas and Ettarre" has woven another graceful tale² having for its background Friendship Village and for its center a sweet-natured maiden lady named Marsh, as she said, "baptized Calliope because a circus with one come through the town the day 't I was born." Her comments on the people and customs of her native village are pungent and kindly, tempting to quote. The recorder of these happenings and events is a

stranger who takes an old house in the town, and from her interest and the friendliness of the people soon becomes one of them. One of the cleverest chapters describes a tea party she gives to her new friends. "What is that in thine hand?" is a searching question answered with mingled humor and pathos in another chapter. Several scenes have been made familiar to lovers of good writing by their publication in periodicals. It is hard to choose among so many good things, but for tender sentiment the "Grandma Ladies" and "Nobody Sick, Nobody Poor" are particularly effective. There are genuine every-day Christian faith and hearty fellowship in these pretty, homely, and decidedly clever sketches.

"The Leaven of Love"³ is the title of an over-sweet story by Clara Louise Burnham, and it carries with it a frank plea for Christian Science. Sensible Christian people would not have such strong reasons for disbelief and distrust of this especial cult if it did not declare itself, as the writer of this story asserts, "not an invention but a discovery." A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Many years ago, amid real trials and suffering Madame Guyon understood the secret of serenity and true happiness. When she wrote, in captivity,

"My Lord, how full of sweet content
I pass my years of banishment!"

she claimed to have made no discovery, but relied simply upon faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing in this rather amusing story, as far as happiness under adverse circumstances goes, that is not a daily experience of Christians everywhere, except, perhaps, the disappearance of a "weeping sinew" in an organist's wrist as the result of his giving up an "obstinate thought."

Every one has noticed the serious absorption of children at play, their complete oblivion to their actual surroundings. There are but very few writers who retain the absolute simplicity and earnestness of a child's point of view. Mr. E. V. Lucas stands alone, for the time at least, in this position. He keeps this freshness and perfect understanding, and writes stories as though they were told under the open gaze of a child, who listens "with all his ears." We know of nothing comparable to the collection of his tales, led by that bewitching one called "Anne's Terrible Good Nature,"² which has already won many hearts through The Outlook. This, with four of the others, has been printed here, but there is double the number in the book. Whimsical enough to

¹ Felice. By John Luther Long. Moffat, Yard & Co., New York. \$1.50.

² Friendship Village. By Zona Gale. The Macmillan Company New York. \$1.50

³ The Leaven of Love. By Clara Louise Burnham Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$1.50.

² Anne's Terrible Good Nature and Other Stories for Children. By E. V. Lucas. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$1.75, net.

amuse a child, and yet never baffling him by a subtle wit intended for an older audience, these stories are inimitable. The impression left upon the mind after reading them—and all the grown-ups will read them—is a picture of a father looking straight into the face of his child, seated on his knee, and quietly spinning off these delicious fancies, sometimes smiling “behind his mouth,” as the children say, when an especially apt phrase or telling situation pops into his head. Think of the old man named Thomson who always sat in a certain seat in Kensington Gardens, with his back to the Albert Memorial—not that he was one of those persons who always click their tongues when the Albert Memorial is mentioned, “for he really did not mind the gold on it at all”—but the seat was set that way! Each story is permeated by a spirit of fair play and innate refinement, and there is not a single precocious child in the book. Each one lives in his own childish world, and none suffer from the modern responsibility of putting away childish things entirely too early. Roderick, the small boy cricketer; Christina, who disobeyed and spoiled her doll; Mary Stavely, who became one of a pair of Anti-Burglars, and kept a most entrancing account of her proceedings; the Little Mother who kept a Christmas shop for a day—every one of these children, led by the “terrible” Anne, is absolutely convincing. Though their adventures may be rather unusual, as children they always keep their own place—and that is in our hearts.

An attractive collection of new and old tales made under the supervision of Kate Douglas Wiggin and her sister Nora Archibald Smith, entitled “Tales of Laughter,”¹ offers admirable material with which to interest children. No better editors could be chosen, and they lay tribute upon many lands and languages. It is noticeable that most of the stories are very short, securing the undivided attention of a child, and never overtaxing his memory. Some of them are for the tiny folks, others for their big brothers and sisters. There must be from three to four hundred in the pretty volume, which, although without illustrations, has the beauty of good binding, paper, and print.

Mrs. Hugh Fraser makes use of an example of Japanese loyalty and Japanese morality in a little story called “The Heart of a Geisha.”² Shinayé San is a beautiful, virtuous girl, devoted to the profession of entertainment. Her lover is of the old régime, a follower of the impoverished sov-

ereign whose glories had been stolen away to Yedo. In order to shield her lover, who was in hiding and intended to escape from Japan to study in Western lands, contrary to the law, the girl sacrificed herself and beguiled the officer of government who was deputed to arrest the young rebel. Such loyalty was accepted and honored in old Japan, and occasions for it arose, we are told, during the recent war. It is radically opposed to our ideas of honor, yet it is not to be condemned, as depicted in this pretty little tale of a by-gone time. The story is not embellished by the drawings and marginal decorations done by Ludwig Holberg. They are far too elaborate and occasionally clumsy for a representation of Japanese daintiness and restraint.

“The House of Prayer,”³ by Florence Converse, is a curious specimen of compounding rather technical information with a child's story. It is a question as to which of the widely separated objects possessed the author's mind most completely. A tiny boy, left by his mother in the care of his grandfather, is told to be sure to say his prayers. He rebels, from loneliness and longing for his mother, who always helped him. His grandfather is writing a book about prayer, and asks little Timothy to help him on the typewriter. By means of an angel whose acquaintance Timothy makes in a little chapel he dreams about (in New England), he is led out all over the world to study the varied forms of prayer among men. He goes deeply into Oriental petitions, and studies the sources of the English Prayer-Book, learning Latin prayers and copying long ancient forms on his typewriter. The gap between the erudition necessary to the subject and the little boy who masters it all is too wide for the credulity of the ordinary reader. The book is prettily illustrated with semi-ecclesiastical drawings by Margaret Ely Webb.

The bright author of a popular novel, “Concerning Isabel Carnaby,” which amused the public a few years ago, writes with similar but less effective cleverness of “Miss Fallowfield's Fortune.”² If any one group of people, a small English circle, ever expressed so many absolutely foolish sentiments and displayed such grotesque conceit of ignorant opinion, it should certainly be shunned. Miss Fallowfield prayed at the shrine of Saint Winifred for riches. She had them, but with them came sorrow and care, as she was warned by an old clergyman

¹Tales of Laughter: A Third Fairy Book. Edited by Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Archibald Smith. The McClure Company, New York. \$1.50.
²The Heart of a Geisha. By Mrs. Hugh Fraser. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. \$2.

³The House of Prayer. By Florence Converse. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$1.50, net.
²Miss Fallowfield's Fortune. By Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler (the Hon. Mrs. Alfred Felkin). Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$1.50.

would be the case. Left alone except for a pretty niece, who certainly was the most inconsequent and light-minded young piece, she lived in lonely grandeur, until a late love affair with her rector promised happiness. But a shipwreck destroyed all hope, and she was lost, leaving her fortune to harass her heirs. The difference between the tremendous disasters which the author finds are necessary to move her plot along, and the absurdly matter-of-fact way in which all the startling news is received by the survivors, is positively comic. The new novel will not add to the reputation of the author. It is an ill-assorted jumble of religious precept, misplaced melodrama, and many amusing conversations between rather stupid persons.

**ART IN
HOME DECORATION**

"Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful," wrote William Morris. Almost any one can decide what is useful, and numberless books and articles are being written now to help us decide what is beautiful. The ordinary home-maker may find sensible and helpful counsel in a little book upon Art and Economy in Home Decoration¹ by Mabel Tuke Priestman, for several years a practical worker in interior decoration. The clear classification of subjects in this manual will be appreciated by those who use it. Suggestions are given how to treat our walls, what curtain material is best, what to choose as floor-covering, and how much ornament is admissible on our furniture, besides many other points of vital importance to the young housekeeper, or the older one whose eyes are being opened to possible beauty. The illustrations in the book are excellent as aids to the text.

**THE SHADOW
WORLD**

It is fortunate for the reading public that such works as Mr. Hereward Carrington's "The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism" and Mr. David P. Abbott's "Behind the Scenes with the Mediums" are available to correct the bizarre and sensational presentation of the phenomena of modern spiritism which Mr. Hamlin Garland has made in his "The Shadow World."² This book, although cast in the form of fiction, purports to give "a faithful record of the most marvelous phe-

nomena" that have come under its author's observation during many years of inquiry into things spiritistic. It also contains accounts of the mediumship of D. D. Home, Eusapia Paladino, and other celebrated wonder-workers, whose specialty has been the production of the so-called physical phenomena of spiritism, materializations, levitations, etc. Whatever may be said of Mr. Garland's highly colored narrative of the mediumistic performances which he personally has witnessed, there can be no doubt that he shows himself amazingly uncritical in his treatment of the more celebrated "psychics" of whom he writes. He declares his belief in the "perfect honesty" of Eusapia Paladino, when the fact is that she has been repeatedly detected in fraudulent practices, and on at least one occasion—in England, where, Mr. Garland naïvely says, she "made a partial failure"—was openly denounced as an impostor by the Society for Psychical Research. For the benefit of those inclined to take his book at all seriously it may be added that the "phase" of mediumship with which it is almost wholly concerned is precisely that which has been most conclusively demonstrated to be permeated through and through with fraud.

"DE LIBRIS" Mr. Dobson belongs among the most charming poets and the most agreeable prose writers of our time. He always brings with him the aroma of the best literary society, for the writers with whom he deals have almost always had some relation to the social life of their time. They have not only had the charm of genius, but the charm of manners. This volume of essays¹ is in Mr. Dobson's accustomed vein. One expects to see, and one finds on the title-page, the names of Samuel Rogers, Pepys, the Johnson Club, Fielding, and other old friends and old subjects. Mr. Johnson has long furnished a kind of running commentary on eighteenth-century manners, learning, and books. He knows all the minor writers of a period which was essentially a minor period, but one full of human variety and charm. When he comes to recent times, it seems very appropriate that Kate Greenaway should catch his eye, and that he should have something to say about Hugh Thomson. Verses are interjected here and there without violence to the text, and show that Mr. Dobson has lost none of his old grace and skill.

¹ Art and Economy in Home Decoration. By Mabel Tuke Priestman. The John Lane Company, New York. \$1.50, net.
² The Shadow World. By Hamlin Garland. Harper & Brothers, New York. \$1.35.

¹ De Libris, Prose and Verse. By Austin Dobson. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$1.50.