



### Exit of a Humorist

THE writer of this editorial never knew Oliver Herford very well, though he first met him years ago in the offices of the old *Century Magazine*, and at one time inhabited the same storied old apartment house in which Mr. Herford lived and died, 142 East 18th Street. That is a truly famous house. Among its tenants the drama is represented by Clayton Hamilton, the publishing business by Eugene F. Saxton, and the highest flights of poetry and fantasy were the property of one of its erstwhile lessees, Elinor Wylie. It is next to the Huyler factory and near to Gramercy Park and the Players Club. That made it a particularly advantageous spot for Oliver, who was the prime wit of the Players, and is sure now to haunt the purlieus of that fine old club as the most charming of ghosts; a ghost who will doubtless continue to make shrewd and amusing remarks about the other club members. One feels sad that Oliver is gone, and yet one is not at all sure that he is gone. There was ever something rather unreal about him, to the casual acquaintance; something a little too good to be true, as though he had stepped out of one of his own drawings. He was always a little dim as a human being, dim with a sparkle. As though it were yesterday, I can see him standing by my desk in the gloomy old *Century* office rummaging in his pockets for little bits of paper. He had a new packet of drawings for "Frank"—who was Frank Crowninshield—but he had temporarily mislaid the verses that usually accompanied his drawings. Oh yes! Here they were. "Here it is, here it is, see what you think of it," in a rather dormousy or Alice-in-Wonderlandish voice. Probably it turned out to be a limerick about how an ounce (the animal) was put into a pound (like a dog pound). The accompanying picture was, of course, inimitable. And how beautifully Oliver drew! His style was God-given. He lifted the Persian kitten into eternity, and was, without effort, one of the truest geniuses of our time. I say this advisedly; for a genius is a person who causes

something to exist whereat you wonder how it was ever possible that it had not existed before. Had Oliver Herford's fascinating young ladies not emerged from his pen it would have been necessary to create them.

I think he drew the most altogether charming young ladies, as I know that he drew the most beguiling animals, of any illustrator of our time. I only disagreed with him once, when in his "Pen and Inklings" column in *Harper's Weekly* he took a fall out of Vachel Lindsay for Vachel's own extraordinary drawings. A genius himself, of sharp individuality, it seemed strange to me that he could not recognize the different but authentic genius of Lindsay.

Mr. Gilbert of the *World-Telegram* has spoken of the Oliver Herford of recent years as "a superannuated Puck," a sterling phrase. And yet I refuse to believe that any drift of years could superannuate Oliver, just as I entirely refuse to believe that Oliver is now non-existent. He is merely, it may be, putting a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes. To those who loved him and knew him intimately this may seem too flippant a way to speak, and yet it seems to me the truest tribute to the man I was once privileged only to meet, to speak of him in Carrollian or Edward Learian terms—not to say Shakespearian, as above! He now knows whether or not the Snark is a Boojum.

Certainly no artist was ever more impressed by the unexpectedness of this world or saw it better in its proper perspective. And back of his whimsical flights was an enviable sense of the fitness of things. When Oliver wrote of an elf, a dormouse, and a toadstool he could do so without treacle, he could do it also with wholly admirable onomatopoeic effect: "Tugged till the toadstool toppled in two." When he encountered the shoddy buncombe and vulgar snobbery of the big-towners he could write "The Women of the Better Class," and simply wipe the purse-proud idiots off the face of the earth:

Ermined and minked and Persian-lambled,  
Be-puffed (be-painted, too, alas!)  
Be-decked, be-diamonded—be-damned!  
The Women of the Better Class.

That remains the most spirited and best defense of the real Bohemia, (aside from the fake one, which no one could detect more quickly than Mr. Herford) the land where values are real, where life is creative, and where no one is parasitic.

Oliver of the Artful Antics I loved from a child. Oliver the playwright I never knew. But if ever an artist richly deserved every reward that came his way it was this old-world gentleman beautiful and dim. He is one of two Englishmen who have brought honor to American illustration. The other is Reginald Birch. Both had perfect names and utterly characteristic styles.

This straying eulogium should, as it is

on the editorial page, make some telling point concerning the literary life. But Oliver lived a double one. He penned what he pictured and pictured what he penned. One cannot recall his best verses without seeing in the mind's eye the accompanying illustrations. One cannot divorce the pictures from the text. Therefore this particular artist was the favorite of fortune and the exception to most rules. The truest thing to say is that genius, of any kind, is always precisely that. That is why, sometimes, the dull wit of the world passes it by for the more accustomed thing. But Oliver was not passed by, because he was an entertainer.

What more natural than that he was akin to the folk of the stage. His wife, who had come from London with Cissie Loftus, first met him at the home of E. H. Soth-ern. It is a noble profession, that of entertainer, in any one of its various manifestations. Oliver was properly of the Club founded by Edwin Booth.

And so what editorial moral may be drawn? Well, perhaps this—that though Herford belongs, for his table-talk, among the best wits of all the ages, there was no real malice in him. There was simply and always delight. It was an intensely funny world with intensely funny people in it. And for the most part it was nonsensically innocent. And every now and again the Ithuriel spear of the world's beauty transfixed the poetic breast. There are plenty today to show us the sewers, the gutters, the refuse-heaps. There are few like Herford to lighten the heart and charm the brain. Ah, my masters—how ancient and honorable a profession it is to be a droll!

W. R. B.

### Ten Years Ago

In the corresponding issue of 1925, *The Saturday Review* recommended "Barren Ground," by Ellen Glasgow. Archibald Henderson wrote: "When I encounter reviews of 'Barren Ground' entitled 'Realism Crosses the Potomac' or some such nonsense, I am staggered anew with the fortuity of fame . . . Realism crossed the Potomac twenty-five years ago, when Miss Glasgow wrote 'The Voice of the People.'" Mr. Henderson found "Barren Ground" a "superb study of the evolution of an individual, the growth of character under the grinding stress of individual folly and economic pressure . . . a great novel" . . . Ellen Glasgow's latest novel, "Vein of Iron," will be published in August.

### Today

The *Saturday Review* Recommends these new books:

THE JURY. By Gerald Bullett. See review on page 5.

THE LAND OF SVAMBRANIA. By Leo Kassil. See review on page 7.

Letters to the Editor: *At Home with the Hollenbecks*

Rural Book News

SIR:—It has been with interest that I have read Mr. Alan Devoe's letter on the lack of knowledge of current literature in the rural communities.

I have lived half of my life in a small country village in Vermont and have spent the last ten years as a member of the state library extension agency of one of our largest agricultural states. So I have long been aware of this situation and have wondered what can be done about it.

In spite of all a state library extension agency can afford to do to advertise its wares, it seems to be impossible to reach people like "Grandpa Hollenbeck." I have sometimes thought that one of the news syndicating companies ought to be able to sell mats containing literary news and gossip, book reviews, and the like to country newspapers as they sell those for household hints, fashions, etc. Especially, if these notes and reviews were written by someone familiar with the psychology of rural people and aware of their much more conventional attitude toward certain moralities.

The library book truck in many states is doing a great deal to bring books to the doors of these people. The county library system, with its depository station in the village stores and school houses, is helping also.

Librarians have long been aware of this situation but limited funds have prevented them from doing what they know should be done. We hope that the publishers will realize the possibility of this field and in some way stimulate the people in rural communities to demand library service, and thus force state dispensing agencies to help finance it.

GILBERT H. DOANE,  
*Librarian.*

University of Nebraska,  
Lincoln, Neb.

Reading in Ruralia

SIR:—As an ex-librarian who now lives on a farm in Ruralia, I was much interested in Mr. Alan Devoe's letter in the June 15th issue of the SRL. . . . I make my home with the "Hollenbecks," to adopt Mr. Devoe's type-name, and every winter evening I sit by a kerosene lamp in our kitchen and read aloud to this family; and the books we read are the worth while products of our own contemporaries. Last year we had "I, Claudius," "Drums," Wells's "Experiment in Autobiography," half a dozen others which I cannot now recall, several volumes of short stories, and the articles and stories in *Harpers* and the *SRL*. And my Hollenbecks are less educated than Mr. Devoe's for, though one of them is a Normal School graduate, the other two were not even lucky enough to finish grammar school. Novels by the ultra-moderns would not be a success in Ruralia. The Hollenbecks enjoy and appreciate Boyd's "Roll River" but damn Wolfe's "Of Time and the River" (and I agree with them!); but they savor with pleasure the sophistication that comes in smaller doses in short stories.



"SHE DATES FROM THE SCOTT FITZGERALD ERA."

What has become of the pestiferous book agent? Why does he not bury his Bibles and "Pilgrim's Progresses" and, putting the solid worth of the moderns in his rumble seat, drive forth into the mountains and valleys of the farming country? . . . The farmer's dog may bark at night but he rarely bites. Don't be cowards, for to the brave goes the battle of life.

DAWES MARKWELL.  
New Albany, Pa.

It, Racket, Flapper

SIR:—Mr. Morley cites Mark Twain's use of *take it*, and Mr. Fitzroy's letter adduces Pepys's *not so hot*. In the same connection, I venture to remind you of the following:

"Tisn't beauty, so to speak, nor good talk necessarily. It's just It. Some women'll stay in a man's memory if they walk down a street."—"Mrs. Bathurst," Rudyard Kipling.

"I tell you, this racket of Mr. Atwater's takes the cake."—"The Ebb-Tide," R. L. Stevenson.

"You know by experience that I grudge no expense in your education, but I will positively not keep you a Flapper."—"Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son," XLIII.

J. BRYAN, III.  
New York City.

All But Him

SIR:—I happened upon Mr. Morley's reference to *Casabianca* today while looking through the recent issues of the *Saturday Review*, and am a little perturbed at the intimation that I have been rewriting Mrs. Hemans.

If you will look up the history of the poem, you will find that in its first ap-

pearance in book form ("The League of the Alps . . . and Other Poems." Boston, 1826), the second line read:

*Whence all but him had fled.*

She presented a copy of this book to the Bishop of St. Asaph's in which, with her own hand, she changed "him" to "he," and she seems to have had many painful hesitations thereafter between the two words, but since "him" is not only the first reading, but also the grammatical one, I followed it both in "The Home Book of Verse" and "The Home Book of Quotations."

I assure you that I have never knowingly altered any author's words—though sometimes sorely tempted!

BURTON E. STEVENSON.  
Chillicothe, Ohio.

Mademoiselle from Armentières

SIR:—Can any of your readers help me in my search for authentic war-time verses of a song known variously as "Mademoiselle from Armentières" and "Hinky Dinky Parlez-Vous"? This was sung by both British and American forces.

I have been engaged for over five years in collecting its stanzas, which were in serious danger of being lost, because apparently no one else has felt that they were worthy of preservation. These are being incorporated in a privately issued book for the edification of ex-service men only. Any authentic contributions will be most gratefully received.

If you could find space to print the above appeal, it would be very much appreciated.

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