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THOMAS BURKE

Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

THOMAS
BURKE



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE prevailing idea that there is a gulf fixed between literature and life finds no support in the person of Mr Thomas Burke. No man has exercised nicer discrimination in the matter of literary values; at the same time no man has a keener zest for life in all its phases. He can feel the pain of Spitalfields and can appreciate the quest for beauty in Bethnal Green with the same intensity as that with which he can unearth queer treasures from the nooks and corners of bookland. In it all he shows a wise tolerance. He refuses to laugh at people who crowd the parlour mantelshelf with cheap china monstrosities. He is catholic enough to recognize in this the instinctive feeling which, translated to another plane, expresses itself in the appreciation of a Ming vase.

Those readers who know Mr Burke only as the writer of powerful tales of Chinatown may be surprised at the delicate play of his humour. They will be prepared for his love of the bizarre, but they may not suspect his keen sense of beauty. Yet these qualities are abundantly exemplified in these essays, which now appear for the first time in book form, and the author stands revealed as a true man of letters, whose love of books is sound because it arises from his love of life.

Mr Burke was born in 1887, and has attained distinction as a short-story writer, poet, and essayist. As an interpreter of London in general and Chinatown in particular he is unsurpassed.

F. H. P.

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THE HUNGER FOR BEAUTY

IN the main streets of the poorer quarters of every city you will see a certain kind of shop; a shop that takes no money, but gives, in exchange for traders' tokens, certain ornamental articles that set one's teeth on edge.

Looking at the green-blue-red-yellow vases, the china clocks, the shocking landscapes, the gilded and flowered photograph frames, you may think: "Do people really want these things? Does anybody really save up in order to possess them?" The answer is: "They do." And if you ask why, and I answer "Because of the spirit of God," you will smile. But that is the truth.

In every man—black savage or white scholar—lives the hunger for what we call beauty. It is the essence of all noble religions; and it is this hunger which compels unlearned people to desire coloured vases and strident landscapes and pictures of impossibly angelic children feeding scarlet robins. They represent something one step higher, one degree cleaner, than the daily life of the slums, and they bring a more definite message than any organized religious ceremony. They are the beginner's ABC of the book of beauty. Why does the tenant of five square yards of back garden plant it with flowers that will never grow in slum air? It is for the instinct for beauty. Why is the front parlour kept holy for Sundays and Christmas Days, and the rest of the year spent in the discomfort of the back kitchen? For the same reason: the desire for something that is not of the squalid everyday.

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In the slums of all great cities this struggle is persisting. For those more comfortably placed something of beauty is within reach, and because it is within reach it is not often ardently desired. But the others must fight if they would have it, and as, by the daily ugliness of their lives, in sight and sound and smell, they know the need of it, they do fight, if only for coloured monstrosities. And every man who tries to make his backyard a garden; every woman who spends time and labour in arranging the crude *bric-à-brac* of her parlour; every girl who starves herself to buy a too-gorgeous hat; everybody who is moved by even the cheapest music—*The Lost Chord*, *The Rosary*, *In a Monastery Garden*—and people *are* moved by these things—is expressing the panting of the hart for the water-brook. For to them these things are beauty, and in them they find in some small measure what others find in greater measure in the sonatas of Mozart, the poems of Shelley, the symphonies of Beethoven, and the pictures of Leonardo.

It is a blind, undirected, subconscious instinct, but it is there; and, if tended, it will grow. But though a vast amount of work is done in the slums in the direction of social welfare, education, and study classes, there is, I believe, but one society—the Kyrle Society—which works for the stimulating of the sense of beauty.

Yet it is here, more than in knowledge, that the hope of the world lies. The world will never be remoulded by politicians or scholars or parading preachers. Whatever of fairness it holds to-day has been given to it by the artists, the creators of ideas, the dreamers of beauty; and the more their message spreads the cleaner

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will the world become. Scholarship and learning have little to do with this message, for many highly educated people are insensible to true beauty, while many of the uneducated—inarticulate artists—are keenly sensible to it. I remember hearing, at a social club in Shoreditch, a young railway-carriage cleaner telling us about his five visits to *The Immortal Hour*. He could not tell us what had happened to him, but it was clear from his face that something *had* happened to him; some magnificent moment of revelation. "Each time I came away," he told us, "I knew I'd been in contact with something wonderful. But I didn't know what. I felt—I felt as though—as though I'd swum the Channel!" It was a lame image, but there was the man whose soul was open to beauty; a man who, in its presence, had felt as the rough, unlearned disciples felt in the presence of Christ.

You will see young men of this type, from Bethnal Green and Stepney and Bermondsey and Walworth, in large numbers on the floor of the Queen's Hall at each promenade concert. I saw them recently at the concerts of the Lener Quartet. When I lived near Woolwich I knew many young workers at the Arsenal who gave their spare time, not to cheap papers or the movies—nor, on the other hand, to the study of Karl Marx and political principles and debate—but to the study of beauty. These young people saved for weeks that they might attend concerts and opera, and visit the two picture-galleries in London that are worth visiting, and buy an occasional cheap edition of the poets. They had found the spirit of beauty.

They are still finding it. The younger generation of the back streets, going a step beyond their parents'

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pleasure in the coloured vase, are moving toward full appreciation of the best in art. Cut off as they are from the education given to the children of prosperous people, they are not entirely devoted to dance-halls and picture palaces—that belongs more to the young people of the West End—nor to political agitation. In larger numbers than most people guess they are discovering the world of the poets and the artists; and poets and artists, as Shelley said, are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

The more of beauty that is perceived by the study of great literature, great music, and great pictures, the more will people desire that something of serenity and rhythm shall be translated from the works of art in which they dwell to the daily disordered life of this earth. It is the young people in the back streets, conscious of hunger for this beauty, and groping and blundering after it, who will be the future apostles for a world illumined by it; for youth alone has the sincerity (and exiled youth the zest) which can move mountains. This new world is coming; nothing can stop its coming; but it will not come by wars or by political debate. It will come through a common diffusion of the perception of beauty. Beauty is the one living thing. You can manacle bodies and slay them, but you cannot manacle or slay beauty and the ideas that it creates.

Genius in all the arts has sprung mainly from the masses; of late years it has sprung almost wholly from the masses. These articulate spirits, born in an ugly corner, perceived the necessity of beauty to this world: they realized that it is only by a common diffusion of the ideas of poets and musicians, and their penetration

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to men's hearts, that the world may be made cleaner and nobler.

In 1927 the whole of Europe was celebrating the centenary of the death of one of Europe's greatest men; *the* greatest man of the last century and a half; a man who expressed, through music, life as it might be: the soul of man in harmony with the spirit of God. He gave beauty its greatest expression, and it is toward him, and Milton and Shakespeare, that the common people are moving. When this blind instinct for beauty is taken in hand and directed, then we shall have the world that Beethoven dimly perceived: a world of gods and heroes.

Some years ago the workers died in millions and young students died in thousands for—a meeting of financial experts at Versailles. And they will do it again, for the same end, until all men obey the instinct for beauty that all possess, and pass on the message to others.

In the foulest street of the foulest slum you will find a painted window-box of flowers, or a painted doorway, or some other expression of the yearning for beauty. Let this yearning be encouraged and directed; for once it becomes conscious and active and understood there will be a new crusade, a peaceful crusade, that will not end in a meeting of old men over the corpses of the young, but will end, as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* ends, in the morning stars singing together and the sons of God shouting for joy.

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BY their accents we know them. Their work comes not from the path of the sun, but from behind the moon. In intent it is as serious as other designedly serious work, but always it carries some touch of prank or freak that marks it as out of step with the rest of literature. It tinkles with echoes from the *hollows* of the land of faery rather than the *peaks*. From this land comes all the magic of our music and our poetry; but it is a wide territory, and in it live not only elves and fays, but gnomes and goblins; and it is in accent and cadence that we hear the echo of this goblin world.

Sweet and potent is its spell. It holds nothing of the devilish. It is a quality or essence for which we have no pat name: something that is not of earth or heaven or hell. We do not know it, but we can feel it as we can feel the silence of trees. Our nearest word for it is demoniac. It does not belong to the deliberately whimsical or grotesque writers: the dealers in magics and spells: your Rabelais, Burton, Swift, Butler, Beckford, Monk Lewis, Peacock, Bierce; *theirs* is a quality of other distillation. But we find it in the apparently pure Mozart and in the apparently comic Cruikshank. Berlioz, Strauss, and Stravinsky may be as deliberately devilish as they please; but diabolism is never deliberate: it is of the spirit; and never do they achieve the demon shudder evoked by some of Mozart's clearest moments. Aubrey Beardsley at his most obscene and blasphemous was never so dreadful as Cruikshank

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at his usual, who drew a demon every time he thought he was drawing a man.

In literature this world of goblins is a large world. They are the unique writers, the flavouring of literature. They belong to no school, and they found no school. Each owes nothing to any of his fellows: all that they have in common is *obliquity*. They are not of the legitimate house of literature; they carry the bend sinister, and they wear the wrong clothes and use the wrong speech, but with an assurance that defies question. Volume upon volume of criticism cannot explain Sterne or Donne or Blake or De Quincey. We accept them as we accept our eccentric friends who enter our houses through the window with as natural address as though they had entered by the door, or breakfast at four o'clock in placid ignorance that that is other people's hour for tea. There is no book like *The Compleat Angler*; no book like the *Urn Burial*, or like *Lavengro* or the *Opium-Eater* or *Tristram Shandy*. The heart-beats that move the pulse of those books are not of this world nor of the great realm of the gods. Sir Thomas Browne, Donne, Walton, Blake, Sterne, Coleridge, De Quincey, Borrow, Fitzgerald, Hood, Poe, Herman Melville, Dickens—these are part of the family of nether faeryland. Their rhythm is widdershins, and their *tempo* fantastic. They give, not the grand poetic shudder of Magic Casements, but the tiny twilight shudder of Dark Towers. They do not present the unusual with an air of revelation, for they do not know it for the unusual. They are not returned travellers bringing news. They are speaking of their own land, which is right off any map we know; and they achieve their

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effect upon us by talking of marvels as though they were the commonplace. There is a song of Blake's called *A Dream*. A song of *innocence* he calls it, and every verse of it drips with strange experience, and moves to the sound of horns that are not in our key.

We feel of the great figures in literature that they were kissed by the angels; these others were surely kissed, not by angels or fallen angels, but by errant fairies. Think of *For Annie*, *The Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, *The Bridge of Sighs*, *Levana*, *Tiger, tiger*, "Time, which hath an art to make dust of all things," "The Accusing Spirit, which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath . . ." These were not grown on the plateaus that nourished Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Fielding, Goethe, Tolstoy, and the other giants; or in the great plains of literature. They are the produce of elfin undergrowths: an essence sipped from some flower that opens only to the moon. Is there not, in the very spin of their syllables, an oddity, as though they were going round the wrong way? Who, if strictly serious, would use the beat of galloping horses for a poem upon a suicide; or the beat of an engine for a poem upon a stricken sailing-ship; or the metre of a nursery-rhyme for the cry of a sick soul:

Thank heaven, the crisis, the danger is past,
And the fever called living is conquer'd at last;
With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall have music wherever she goes.

Hood's poem of *Miss Kilmansegg* is professedly a comic poem, but through it all we are aware of a twist that verges beyond the comic and halts on the edge of the unquiet realm of the bizarre. We perceive that

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twist in Dickens. Constantly the mind that was fascinated by the Moor Eeffoc of the Coffee Room crosses the brink of fun, trespasses into horror, and brings back Quilp and Jingle and other of his comic figures. They have the goblin accent: we are not wholly happy in their comedy. We find it, too, in W. H. Hudson. In *Green Mansions* and *The Purple Land* we are again aware of a strangeness that is beyond our literary experience. It lives, too, in every picture of Charles Chaplin, where we perceive the shadow of a world that is not the world of the comic or of any world that we know. The tones are lucid, but they issue from a penumbra.

Many serious and highly gifted people have brooded upon perfidy and the soul of the murderer, but not one of them could have written that mad, satanic essay *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. Only a very queer creature, born of the night, could have written it, and only a very queer creature did write it—the most wizardly creature in English literature, who, at the boundary of his seriousness, meets, at the boundary of *his* comicality, Thomas Hood.

We are all very sane to-day. Reason, not rapture, is our guide. The undergrowths of faery-land have been well beaten and cut down. Queerness is out of fashion, and the gods always people our earth with the creatures the earth demands. But three goblins are still with us, left over from the nineteenth century. One whose every newspaper paragraph holds something of his moonlit quiddity; another whose simplest verse for children is freighted with demoniac whispers; and a third whose little devil so darts about his page that one is never sure whether it is there or in one's

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own mind—Arthur Machen, Walter de la Mare, Norman Douglas.

Read them, to begin with; and you will see precisely what is that jack-o'-lantern quality that I am trying—and failing—to find words for. And having once perceived it you will recognize it again wherever it lives, and will be held within its silvery enchantments in those hours when the golden sun-rays of the giants are too blinding for travel in their territory.

NOCTURNE IN SPITALFIELDS

AT midnight, when the West is going vociferously to its night-clubs, its cabarets, and its supper dances, the streets of this corner of the East are silent. We are in London, but far from London, and in these dark-hued alleys, apt setting for the ironic, unfinished Comedy of the Jew, all is quiet. Here are the lodgings of the wanderers—wanderers from Russia, Bosnia, Lithuania, Estonia, and the Ukraine—whom their hosts hospitably call the scum of Eastern Europe, but they are not to be seen on the surface of the night. Wentworth Street, a coloured bazaar of silk remnants, is dark and dispirited. The stones of Brick Lane are grassed over by vegetable refuse. The old women who sit at street corners with baskets of cake have gone home, and the lodging-houses of Dorset Street are full. From the main road comes a faint splutter of traffic, the hoot of a belated car, the smell of many weeks' dirt. Those who linger by the coffee-stall under the parish church, waiting for the potato market to open, murmur their talk into intimate ears. Softly, now and then, a figure shuffles from nowhere, is caught by the glow of the stall, brought for a moment to life, then fades again into a slinking nothing.

And, again from nowhere, comes the sound of a cracked piano and a voice crooning the air of *The Red Sarafan*.

What is the secret of Spitalfields? I do not know. In the crowded life of other ignoble streets I am often conscious of a terror as strong as the terror of great

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deserts or of lonely hills; not the terror of solitude or the terror of the mob, but the terror of impalpable hosts. In the suburbs at night you may wander through street after street, alike in length, in width, in the number and in the style of their houses; and once you are inwardly aware that each street holds hundreds of immortal souls, each soul cherishing its own secrets of sorrow and hate, and misery and wrong, and that these streets multiply themselves around you for five miles, then you will know that terror.

But though Spitalfields moves me, it is not by terror, but by the shadow of an incommunicable pain. In every court and alley I can feel that pain. Around, above, and below people of alien race are resting or sleeping, and the air is laden with their hopes and dreams and despairs. It is not the pain of poverty, for though these streets are streets of hovels and mean dwellings there is much affluence here; it is a pain of the spirit, the pain of those for whom no spot of the world is home. They are not of their own country, nor of London. Here and there they are suffered to rest awhile, but always there is something that drives them on; and their pain goes with them, and a voice brings it to Spitalfields in the air of *The Red Sarafan*.

You cannot see them, but they are there, and lighted windows on ground floors of cottages and far up the walls of the tenements give veiled hints of their company. Every window is charged with a potent spell touched with that sadness that hovers on the verge of all beauty. It says nothing, yet one feels that it might at any moment say everything. It is the shining symbol of human life, a holder of all human secrets, to whose whisper we bend, though the words escape us.

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It gives only an evocative murmur, but from that murmur arise a thousand images. Behind it are common people doing common things; people like ourselves going about the casual occasions of every man within his own four walls. But we do not know. We are outside it. It offers a riddle that is unreadable, and we can only wonder.

Often wandering here and there I have peered through lighted windows where the blinds were not drawn, and have seen queer things and foolish things, and ordinary things; yet even the casual action, seen through a window, is transmuted from perceived metal into fairy gold. A woman pouring out tea for her husband is, in that moment, the eternal housewife; a man at a table mending a child's toy is the eternal father; and the insignificant postures of everyday assume a hue of the magic that is with us in all our doings, though we perceive it only when we are detached from it. I remember a front window in Stepney, and a man sitting at a table, dancing a baby on one arm, and with his free hand painting his face with long green stripes. I remember a front parlour in Haggerston, and a woman in her nightdress putting three children, also in night-clothes, through a sort of signal drill with small Union Jacks. I remember a by-street in Pimlico, and a man lying full length on a sofa practising blasts on a trombone. I remember a tea-party in a street near St Luke's on a March evening—four men and one woman each wearing a paper hat of the Christmas Day sort, and looking at each other with unspeakable misery. Those streets for me hold the secrets of life itself. There was nothing of romantic mystery there; the episodes I witnessed were merely the unreasonable

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doings of reasonable people; but they had forgotten to pull down the blinds, and they and their actions were arrested and fixed in a spiritual illumination, as the artist arrests and fixes some matter-of-fact moment whereby to express his vision of the human soul.

But the close-drawn windows of Spitalfields elude you. Through court and alley the misty singing calls to you, but what it has to tell of the life behind those windows you cannot know. Those wanderers from the Balkans and those dwellers in the Ghetto are not, you feel, people like ourselves. Of what is happening in their homes we can only guess. It may be the evening meal, or a cabinet-maker cabinet-making, or a girl singing *The Red Sarafan*; or it may be some dark religious rite; for among the mixed races of the quarter these matters are often celebrated in the home; or some sudden outreaching of a hand from a distant society upon one who thought himself safe. But all that you can discover is melancholy. Other streets, as I have said, are full of smells and refuse. Other streets are poor and mean and dimly lit. Every street, at midnight, where human creatures are asleep, is charged with awe; and every street in daytime can evoke pain or sorrow or dismay in those who can read their faces—the pain of Silverthorne Road on a summer morning, of Kingsland Road at noon, of Kennington Road at dusk.

But nowhere is the pain so ingrowing as here. Its people have their joys and festivals. They have smart clothes and good tables. Their restaurants are kept busy by customers or by loungers whose affairs are often matter for official curiosity. Their shops and stalls are centres of dark heads, eager eyes, and slow

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bargaining. There is colour, which so often goes with melancholy and reticent races, and there is gossip, and family joins family at the corners. There are poets and painters and philosophers and scholars unknown to Bloomsbury and Chelsea, but famous throughout the Jewish world. Yet over all is a sense of oppression, and at midnight this oppression holds the air unchallenged, and gives to a distant voice singing *The Red Sarafan* the unforgettable accents of the alien crying in a strange land.

DID BIERCE DIE, OR——?

FOURTEEN years have passed since Ambrose Bierce walked out of a Washington club into—what? We do not know. We know only that he was never seen again; and there can be no doubt that Ambrose Bierce is not now upon this earth. The sardonic Fury that pursues the artist in life, and marks his death with twisted laughter, did not let Bierce escape. Seeking a fitting end to this queer life, it presented him with the ending that he had himself devised and used for some of his own characters.

Bierce was born in 1841. Biographical facts are meagre. He fought in the American Civil War as a young man, and retired as major. As a writer, he had his first real chance in England on the *London Fun*, then edited by Tom Hood. To this he contributed, under the name of Dod Grile, those sketches and fables reprinted in *The Fiend's Delight* and *Cobwebs from an Empty Skull*. He returned to America, and for some time did newspaper work in San Francisco, conducting a long campaign against a railway combine. (Strange work for one of America's foremost artists.) Later, he returned to England to conduct a paper in defence of the ex-Empress Eugénie, and when that paper had silenced the opposition against her he went back, and thereafter wrote spasmodically. For fame or money he had little desire. Like many a genius, he would not take himself seriously. He left that to the inferior artists. He even belittled his own work; laughed at it, and would not understand what others found in it.

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But then, he was first and last a man of action; and his last plans, at the age of seventy-two, were for a mighty and hitherto unachieved journey.

Although England gave him his first opportunities as writer, he has not yet had his due appreciation in this country. The complexion of his genius is, perhaps, somewhat alien to us. His ghoulish joy in graves and epitaphs and worms disconcerts us. We take such matters seriously, and expect them to be treated in the grim and ghastly vein. He took them as a joke, and the marrow and mood of his stories are not found in our structure. Even those who do read him mostly read him in the wrong humour; they read him as they read Poe. But Bierce's stories were written in two senses for *fun*. His fun had many shapes—ironic fun, grotesque fun, sinister fun, and often disgusting fun. He might have used the macabre and sinister with a long face: he used it with a grin. He threw vitriol as other people throw paper pellets; and his ending was a Sunday School lesson in the penalty of being funny. Did he appreciate the moral? I wonder . . . I like to think that in the thought of his own fun turning upon him at the end he found a flavour that broadened and deepened his grin.

His style is entirely adequate to his stories. There is no flourish, no colour, no passage that one could extract as a sample of 'prose.' He had stories to tell, and he told them in language as stark as the stories. He told them in eight hundred words or four thousand words, just as they came; and, whatever the length, each story is a story, beginning and ending within its compass. There is no subtlety in them or in the telling of them, but much subtlety in his attitude to his themes.

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The man's work, as often happens, was related to the man's name. You have in his stories the deceitful softness of the 'Ambrose' and the sharp thrust of the 'Bierce.' And in the last paragraph of each story we hear a low, mocking laugh, whose humours we cannot isolate, for they are partly of this world and partly of another; partly of Ambrose and partly of Bierce.

The great journey that he planned he did not make. He made instead the most common journey, and went out without a trace. Friends, publishers, and all who were in any way connected with him have had no word from him since that autumn afternoon of 1913. Every search that could be made has been made. The American Press took up the mystery as they do take up mysteries. All the 'sleuths' were out. National and State newspapers carried 'strip' lines in large type—"Ambrose Bierce, where are you?" Large rewards were offered for the finding of him or his body. But there was no answer, and beyond a doubt he is gone.

The other morning, turning over a bundle of old letters, I lighted upon a note from an American friend, answering a note of mine about Bierce; and, by queer coincidence, on the evening of the same day I received from a publisher a copy of *Can Such Things Be?* the book in which, unknowingly, he may have foretold his own end. Here is the letter:

You ask about Bierce. I visited him in Washington in the summer of 1913. He disappeared that autumn, and has never been seen since. He has been reported as killed by the rebels in Mexico. As fighting in France or Flanders (1916). As in the South Seas. But he has not been found. I received a letter from him in the latter part of 1913, very shortly

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before his disappearance, telling me that he was going to South America to track the Amazon from mouth to source. He wished me success and health, and added that it was not likely that we should ever meet again. So I seem to be about the last person that heard from him. I took with me a copy of your book, as I knew it would appeal to him. A great writer and a strange man. Have you read *Can Such Things Be?* Read it and then tell me whether Such a Thing Could Be? Whether Such a Thing has happened to him?

Within a few hours of rediscovering this letter, as I say, I received a copy of *Can Such Things Be?* The Such a Thing to which my friend refers is this. Five of the stories in the volume deal with "mysterious disappearances." A man is crossing a field within full view of his family in the garden of his house. Suddenly, while they are watching his approach, the field is empty. He has gone. Again, two men are coming down a lane in opposite directions. As one calls out to greet the other the other isn't there. A man goes, in a heavy snowfall, from the farmhouse to a well. He does not return. His friends search for him, and track his footsteps in the snow to the middle of an open space, where they cease. In a note to these stories Bierce propounds his theory of mysterious disappearances. It is that the air about us is celled with 'pockets' or gaps in which the human organism becomes static. A man walking into one of these gaps walks into a new dimension. He is alive: that is all. He cannot see or be seen. He cannot hear or be heard.

The stories are good, but Bierce's own end has touched them with a new edge. Did his own theory turn upon him? Is the explanation that he made for

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his imagined mysteries the explanation of his own mystery? Did he walk from that Club into one of his own tales? There is nothing to be said; the fact remains that, whatever the explanation, his end must go upon the record of Mysterious Disappearances. Life treated this artist artistically, and rounded his story with the explosive question-mark that rounds all his work.

A WARNING TO THE FAMOUS

THIS story has a moral for all famous men.

Once upon a time there was a struggling young author who was living in one room of a small house kept by an old lady. All day he wrote and wrote, and though he sold nothing the old lady began to take an interest in her author. He confessed to her that he was a hopeful beginner, and she encouraged him. She told other people about her author, and prophesied his future greatness. She was sure that he was already a great writer, for all great writers slaved in garrets in their young days. So, when his rent fell due and he told her he had not the money, she said it didn't matter. He had hired the room only, and was feeding himself; or, rather, *not* feeding himself. When she discovered this she fed him. She gave him good meals, and told him not to bother, but to go on working, and he could pay her when he had succeeded, and she would be proud to know that she had helped an author on his way.

The author was much moved by this. One morning, going downstairs, he saw the old lady, a small, frail body, wrestling with the week's washing. Now among the many jobs that he had spasmodically followed he had once worked in a laundry, and knew the latest and most efficient ways of laundering. He saw that the old lady would take all day over a job that he could do in two hours. By way of return for her kindness and sympathy he urged her to sit down and let him take on the job. With amused indignation she refused.

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He insisted. He took off his coat, put her out of the way, went to the tubs, and did the business.

That was the end of everything. The meals stopped. The interest and pride in him stopped. And two days later the bill was presented, with request for payment, or the vacating of the room. An author who could descend to doing washing . . .

So take warning. If you have common instincts you must hide them. You must never be seen by your admirers, except, possibly, on a platform, and then only if you are the sort of fellow who can cut a figure on the platform. You must remain aloof. You must wear robes. The idea persists to-day in many quarters that an author cannot be much of an author if he is like ourselves. I had the idea myself when young. I conceived all authors as creatures after the pattern of the late Lord Curzon. I fancied them as living in splendid flats or sleek houses, with chauffeurs and butlers and secretaries.

I fancied them as thinking great thoughts beyond the range of the common man. I fancied them as brilliant conversationalists. And when I met some of my idols I was grievously hurt, until I learned from life that the greater the genius the more simple and common the man. I found that they lived in little suburban villas, and rode in buses and tramcars, and belonged to obscure clubs, and lunched at second-rate restaurants. I found that they talked commonplaces, and were interested in trivial matters like cricket and the Boat Race and the cinema. It took me some time, as I say, to learn that the author with pen in hand is one man, and that when the pen is dropped he is (usually) indistinguishable from the clerk; and the majority of readers never learn this.

A WARNING TO THE FAMOUS

That is why it is fatal for the author to meet his admirers on the level, or to let them see his commonplace home. He must live in West End or country-house style, with servants and motors, or he must be a hermit living in a lonely cottage in Woe-in-the-Marsh, and preparing his own meals. Either setting makes the traditional picture: nothing in between will be accepted, for it brings him near to the average man.

Often I have heard—we have all heard—people talking of famous authors they have met. They don't say, "What a very nice fellow Barnet Hadley, the novelist, is. So natural and kind and amusing. No side at all." They say, "Barnet Hadley? Oh, I've met *him*. He's nobody. Quite an ordinary chap. Talks rubbish most of the time. Nothing about him at all; you wouldn't look twice at him. No brains that I could see. I rather wonder whether he writes those books himself, or whether——"

And they lose all interest in the books of Barnet Hadley, and read him no more. He has killed himself by being himself; and as most authors are quiet, kind fellows, very much sharing the common weaknesses of mankind, they would do well to remain inaccessible, and preserve the public fancy that a man is like his work. West End actors know the rules of the game better. When they appear they 'make an appearance.' In hotels and restaurants, at receptions, even in their own homes, they never unbend. Always they are on the stage. But the author, serious though he may be in his work, seldom carries this seriousness into his daily life. There are a few who do, and they are the fellows who impress: the cold-blooded, the austere. But the majority are like the rest of us; and I am afraid that if

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ever they were in need of help, and you rendered it to them, they would not only thank you, but would forfeit their heritage and estate by doing common little services for you.

The public won't have it. Their attitude is the attitude of the landlady; and perhaps they won't understand this story, which I offer as a defence of those who are tired of living up to the public's fancy of them.

To a Brixton tavern, where music-hall performers met on Sunday mornings, came one Sunday Dan Leno, then at the height of his fame. He was wearing dungaree trousers, a Norfolk jacket hanging in rags, a blue jersey, and a hat about twenty years old. His boots were caked with garden mud. An elegant fellow, a singer of chorus ballads, and famous for his D'Orsay outfits, which he wore 'on' and 'off,' went to him. "Dan! Really, Dan, I say!" "What?" "Your clothes. Your clothes, my boy. Really! You can't do it, you know. You mustn't do it. You—the head of our profession—the—er—representative—going about like this. It's not right. You owe it to the profession, Dan, to be a bit more particular. Gives such a bad impression—coming out like this—like any street-corner organ-grinder. Sunday morning, too. Why d'you *do* it?"

Dan looked him up and down; then in his shrill, plaintive voice said, "Oh, just to show I got more than one suit." But Dan was wrong, and the other fellow was right. Never let the public view the variety of your wardrobe. Confront them always in the robes of ceremony.

THE COWARD'S MOTTO

ONE of the saddest sights in a city of many sad sights is London Bridge at nine o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the evening. The procession of the ants. By early experience and later observation I have come to see it with horror. It is a pageant of lost hopes, of creatures that once were men and now are clerks. It may be that once they had ambitions. Perhaps once they dreamed of breaking from the treadmill of their fathers, but the fear of going down and losing a place among their neighbours has restrained them, and so they have played the coward's game of Safety First. Well, they have their reward: London Bridge.

I use London Bridge as a symbol. Every city has its London Bridge and its morning and evening procession of the middle-aged who might have flown and have been content to plod. These are the men who have spent thirty years in the service of one firm; the men who might to-day be masters of their own business, but who preferred a dull certainty to a shining chance. They have spent their lives doing routine work that any boy or girl could do; they have closed ears and eyes to the invitation to break ranks; and now they are fixed in shop or office or the Civil Service as pieces of office furniture. Many of the crowd have never even dreamed of breaking away; they were born to serve a master, and are grossly content in their work. I am thinking rather of the others—the pathetic spirits who wanted to break away, but who waited upon

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Safety First until the time came when they were incapable of enterprise and could only realize by retrospect all that they had missed of fun and struggle and exaltation and distress.

Nothing now can move *them* ; but in that doleful pageant are many young men, and for them there is hope if they will grasp at it and take whatever it gives them, whether substance or shadow. From time to time I receive letters from young men of this sort. They tell me that they are in regular (and distasteful) employment, which assures them three or four pounds a week, and that they feel that their work lies in other directions. Do I advise them to throw up the certainty on the chance of succeeding in the work that they want to do? I suppose if I were sensible I should say, "No; stay where you are until you can see your way clear to making a success of the new project." But I am not sensible, and I don't say that. I say, "Yes, throw up your grindstone job, and get out into the street on your own feet. At present you find life empty, your days monotonous, your four pounds a week a mockery. Throw it up, and things will begin to happen. You will probably go a long way down before you begin to move up. You will probably be hungry. You may get shabby. You may not be able to find the rent for one room. But you'll be living, my son. You'll be dependent upon yourself for every event of the day. You'll be walking on the edge of a precipice, and that sort of exercise will keep you alert and keen. Throw yourself into the street or, if you wait until your prospects are good, you will be fit for nothing but walking with that London Bridge crowd and doing what you're told."

Some may call this dangerous teaching, but danger

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is youth's proper air. Life is not a matter of walking backward and forward over London Bridge. Life is risk ; life is a continual breaking away, snapping of chains, moving forward to that goal that always recedes. The man who never boards a moving bus, and always steps off with the left foot first, may be a good citizen : he is certain to develop into a useless slave. Life's buses do not stop to take up passengers. They give you no time to stand and examine their fare-list, so that you may discover if they are going your way. You must jump on and go with them, and jump off when you see an interesting corner.

The joy of life is not in achievement but in the struggle to achieve, and those are happiest whose lives are one long uncertainty. Compare the second-rate actor of about sixty with the City clerk of forty. The old actor is young, full of zest and hope, whatever his private distresses may be ; the City man's occasions are certain, and he is an old man, already half dead. He has got what they call " a job for life," which is more truthfully a job for death. The second-rate actor can see no farther than next week, and life for him is always April. Every day is a new day, different from all others. It may be a day of storms or of sunshine, but it will be an intense day. His life is an adventure. Adventurers never make money, and seldom look for safety ; they do not insure themselves for a sum of money at a ripe old age, because adventurers never reach it. But they do *live*. The little shop-assistant who takes a plunge and opens a shop of his own may be bankrupt in two years, but he will have had two years of fighting.

Go to the ants on London Bridge, thou hesitant youth, and take warning from what you see there.

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Imagine that in ten years' time you will be like them, and I think you will agree that it is better to be sorry than safe. If you do break away into the life that you want to live it is quite likely that you will fail; but it is better to be a happy failure, to have extracted the essence of life, even if you miss the substance, than to be one of those ants of London Bridge.

There are, I know, numbers of young men who are forbidden by every social and moral law to break away: young men who are the sole support of aged parents, and dare not take risks which may bring disaster upon others. I am not thinking of them, but of the thousands of young men who are free of responsibilities and have only themselves to consider.

But from the letters I receive I judge that the modern young man is fearful of facing life without a background. For a thousand young men who will join up for a war, or jump over the Bridge to rescue a drowning child, or plunge into a burning house, or tackle a mad dog, there is but one who will break his bondage and tackle life anew every day. 'Safety First,' 'security,' 'settling down'—these are immoral watchwords; they belong to the old. The young should wipe them out of their life, and take the long chance on whatever courses of life most attract them.

When a young man accepts "a job for life" he commits the sin of selling his birthright. The history of heroes is the history of rebels. Those only truly live whose hearts are young, and to keep young one must be always beginning again. So break away, young man, before it is too late, or, when the golden opportunity does come, you will find that it passes London Bridge without stopping.

THEODORE DREISER

A FEW months ago, when our little literary clubs were scouring Europe and the back streets of Chelsea for third-rate precious poets and dramatists to decorate their dinners, one of the greatest living novelists slipped into London and out again, and nobody but his publishers took notice of him.

Theodore Dreiser is not only the greatest living novelist of America, but, with the exception of Hardy, the greatest of America and England; and it is fitting that he should not have been a guest of honour at ridiculous banquets. Had he been invited, he would have refused, for the man is as great as his work, and has the simplicity that goes with true greatness. He would not have understood what the nonsense was all about.

For twenty-six years he has been writing novels, and only lately has the general English reader begun to ask, "Who is Theodore Dreiser?" This is, perhaps, not surprising, for, since the publication of his first novel, in 1900, his own country has either vilified or ignored him. This novel, *Sister Carrie*, was read in MS. by Frank Norris, who set himself to get it published. After some misadventures it was published, and immediately it was out it was prosecuted by some Anti-Vice League as an indecent work. Then the row began, and for many years Dreiser lived under a cloud. But, sober, earnest, sincere, he went on writing; and slowly, guided by Mencken, and urged onward by Arnold Bennett, who did much to make him known

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on his own territory, the American public came forward to recognize what a man they had.

Following *Sister Carrie* came *Jennie Gerhardt*; and then, at long intervals—for Dreiser works at his own pace—*The Titan*, *The Financier*, and, ten years ago, *The Genius*. The years between now and then have been given to the writing of his masterpiece, *An American Tragedy*, and on the publication of that work, at the beginning of last year, his position was unrivalled and unassailable. It has been a long, slow journey, like a Dreiser novel itself, but Dreiser, still full of strength, has accomplished it.

To-day there is nobody in America, and few in Europe, within measure of his stature. Before him all the much-advertised stars of the American novel splutter and fall like coloured rockets. After a study of his novels one is conscious, not of his faults, but of the slow emergence of the unmistakable quality of greatness: greatness of conception and, allowing for those faults, greatness of execution. There are fifty better *writers* in America to-day: there is no better novelist. Your pernickety critic, accustomed to the little, flawless productions of the cherrystone carvers of modern literature, can point out blemishes on every page of every novel of his. Every fault that the minor novelist so carefully guards against he commits. He writes carelessly; often, surprisingly badly; but always with such spiritual power as makes fault-finding more foolish than the faults. That is almost one of the signs of greatness: that a man should make all the mistakes he makes, and still succeed in his intention. He is so big that they don't matter.

As Beethoven sometimes took trivial themes for his

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great sonatas, so Dreiser can take the theme of a *Family Herald* novelette—as in *Jennie Gerhardt*—and lift it to epical intensity and proportion. He can blunder over his grammar and punctuation; he can write sentences that belong to the composing-room of a country newspaper; he can use words out of their meanings, and write paragraphs as dead as the waste-heap of a new London suburb; and still, at the end of a Dreiser book, nobody but a fool would deny that he had been in the presence of power and beauty. We do not look at public monuments under a microscope; the marks of the chisel may still be there for those who wish to see them, but sensible people look at the work as a work. Dreiser is not the little master of the precious few: he is the rugged, careless genius of the marketplace.

To turn from the thin trickles of our admired intellectuals to the great, deep, rich Dreiser books is like turning from a babbling brook to the vast, slow sweep of the Mississippi. The material of any one of his novels would serve your ordinary frugal novelist for half a dozen novels. The story of *Sister Carrie* makes 170,000 words; *Jennie Gerhardt* the same. *The Titan* makes nearly a quarter of a million words; *The Genius* 400,000 words; while *An American Tragedy* makes just upon nine hundred closely printed pages. Most modern novels can be read in any long evening after dinner, and forgotten. A Dreiser novel will hold you for a week of nights, and will afterward be a part of your life. Outside of Dostoievsky I know of nothing in fiction so haunting, so inevitable, so calmly and surely handled, as the gradual disintegration of the man Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie*. The long

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chapters (themselves a novel) in which this decline and downfall are unfolded are among the unforgettable things of literature; and they are merely a part of the story of Sister Carrie.

Dreiser's career, as I have said, has something in it of a Dreiser novel; and the patience and simplicity of his method is part of himself. He is never on show in literary parlours or social *salons*, and lives still in the modest apartment where he has always lived. Fame and applause are now his whenever he cares to claim them, but he is indifferent to these things. For ten years, the period given to the writing of *An American Tragedy*, he was forgotten by all save literary circles; and if he were forgotten again to-morrow he would not greatly care. He has now reached the highest point of fame that a man can reach: the point where he is no longer "Mr Dreiser" or "Theodore Dreiser," but just "Dreiser." Already he is an accepted Old Master. While still living, he has been given the remoteness of legend. Like Thomas Hardy, he has sought neither fame nor its prostitute sister, publicity. Fifteen years ago his books were either ignored or despised. To-day, at the age of fifty-five, his name is all over the Continent, and foolish film people are going to break their foolish necks upon these books in attempts to drag them down to the level of the screen. Through it all, the contempt and the applause, he has remained unmoved. He has given his life to his work, and he is indifferent whether the world gathers under his window to shout hurrahs or passes coldly by.

A great novelist and a great figure.

A FOOL AND HIS FOLLY

FOR five years I loved a girl with whom I never exchanged one word.

It began when I was eighteen, and when I say eighteen you will be prepared to learn that the girl was an actress. Had I been the usual eighteen, there would be no edge to the story. But I was not the usual eighteen. I did not fall in love with a statuesque woman old enough to be my mother. At the time I fell in love my actress was eleven years old.

On my way to and from the City establishment where I worked as junior clerk I passed twice daily a theatre, and often stopped to look at the photographs of the plays it presented. In 1905 this child had a small part in a play at that theatre, and a picture of her was displayed. I saw that picture, I suppose, half a dozen times without noticing it. Then I found myself recalling it during the day's work. The play had a long run, and the picture began to grow upon me. Why, I cannot say; but repeatedly, without deliberate recollection or reasonable occasion, it came up before my eyes. Merely to see her picture I began to make journeys to the theatre, additional to my twice-daily passings. Morning and evening were coloured with purpose—going to work or coming home I should be able to feed my soul with a photograph.

It became worse. At the office where I was employed I was allowed for lunch forty minutes only; at no other time, unless I were sent with a message, could I move from my desk. Will you believe that

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I cut into that forty minutes and made a long walk to the theatre? I did. And if there were messages to be delivered I would go by a roundabout route in order to pass the theatre.

That was its beginning, and for five foolish years that child, whom I did not know and who never knew me, was my secret lamp. She is in London to-day, married and retired from the stage; and, happily for my self-respect, she knows nothing of the absurdity of a young man who, up to the age of twenty-three, lived for her alone and built all his hopes and dreams around her. She does not know that most of his early poems—still, alas! in circulation—drew their inspiration from her, and I hope she never will know. I could meet her to-morrow if I wished, but I do not wish. I never have spoken to her, and do not wish to. What she may be like to-day I do not know; I choose to remember her as she was at seventeen, when I lost sight of her.

After many weeks of staring at her picture I took the next step. I had then barely enough money for living, and no money to spare even for a shilling seat in the gallery. I could not go to see her act, and I do not think I wanted to see her on the stage. It was not theatre-glamour that had drawn me to her; nor was it herself, since I knew nothing of her. It was the face alone that first caught and afterward held me. But I felt that I must see her in person.

So, then, night after night, when my office work was done, I would hang about the streets until half-past seven, and at that hour wait at the theatre. I remember clearly the first sight of her, and the great youthful jump of the heart, and the ensuing headache

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and misery when she had passed. I remember a little red-coated figure with green tam-o'-shanter skipping from a hansom cab and flitting up the long passage to the stage-door, and I remember how all in that quarter, save that narrow passage, was empty and cold; and how that narrow passage was beatified because her shadow had fallen there. But of the cause of that emotional leap I can remember nothing.

I wanted to wait until she came out, but as I had not seen the play I did not know at what time she finished. I could not wait there three hours, and I was afraid to ask the door-keeper at what time she was off. He might want to know why, and might ask all sorts of questions that would have abashed and bewildered me. I walked home in that despairing melancholy that is so sweet to the soul of youth, and thereafter twice a day—and more often when I could contrive it—I fed on her picture, and in the evenings stirred my silly heart with a glimpse of herself.

She began to be talked about. Her picture began to appear in the sixpenny weeklies, and if ever, in the Free Library, I saw her picture in one of these papers, I would somehow get hold of sixpence, buy the paper, and cut out the picture. I still have somewhere, I believe, some thirty or forty pictures of her, cut from the papers of that period. In her little way she was an artist and successful. I was a junior clerk, not worthy, I felt (as lovesick youth delights to feel), to touch her hand. If only I could do something, something beautiful—for her. At an age when most young men are giving their hearts, if at all, to grown girls of their own age, or to experienced married women, I was tormenting myself with love of a child-actress of eleven, and

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not the courage to send it. So—and this is the most ludicrous confession of all—I sent it to her at the theatre as a composition by “my young nephew.” To “my young nephew” came a letter of thanks written in a very childish hand. I then had her London address; and two or three nights a week I would travel from the City to the far West where she lived, and stand outside her house under the lit blinds until it was time for her to go to the theatre. “Outside her window . . .” All over the world that phrase carries the same emotional shiver; but I wonder how many young men of twenty have held vigil outside the window of a child of thirteen?

Sometimes she went to the theatre by cab, sometimes by the bus. When she chose the bus I suffered an extra delight. I would dodge ahead of that bus, and casually, very casually, board it some distance away. She rode inside, but I did not dare to ride inside. I dared not sit so near her or have her face before me. Such close neighbourhood, I felt, would have verged on sacrilege. I rode outside, and that bus became hallowed. I was as near her as, for my own peace, I wished to be. I wonder, was I ever noticed? Probably not; few people, other than novelists and detective officers, have observation for anything but their own immediate affairs. Yet one would think that she or the elderly person who always accompanied her must have noticed the furtive young man who was so often at or near stage-doors of theatres where she was working; who so often boarded the same bus in St John’s Wood or stood about in the quiet road where she lived.

It was fortunate, I think, that I was not seen. There would have been awkwardness, if not trouble.

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I could foresee the difficulty of getting an honest explanation accepted, as well as the shameful position in which such an explanation would place me. I could appreciate the interpretation that most people would put upon the case of a man of twenty following a girl of thirteen about the streets. They would say either that I was mentally deranged or—something much worse than mentally deranged. Who would have believed me if I had told the truth, assuming that I had the courage to tell the truth; if I had said, "That child is the one idolatry of my life. To see her is the greatest joy that I have yet known, and my attitude toward her is one of pure adoration"? The absurdity of it!

As those years went on her reputation grew. I found her name in a theatrical year-book, and from that entry I learned that she had a country address somewhere up the river. Whenever, at week-ends or Easter or on my annual holiday, I could find a few shillings I was up the river, and would spend the day mooning about the road where she lived, and sometimes passing her bright home and peering into the garden for a half-guilty sight of her. Of one book of my verses, of which in young conceit I printed privately twenty-five copies, three-quarters of the contents were conceived and written, verse by verse, in her shadow; either in the dusky avenues near her London home or on the shining banks by her river home; and in the booklet each poem is solemnly dated "Henley" or "St John's Wood." Three of the poems I sent to her at different times. I signed them, but I gave no address. I was afraid that I might be pounced upon and charged with 'annoyance.' Anybody reading those

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verses would accept them as indifferent love-verses from a man to a woman. Nobody, I think, would guess that they were written to a child of twelve or thirteen.

Often I wondered whether in this affair I was unique, or whether others had equally silly stories in their lives. Because of this I kept it a close secret, and until to-day, when it doesn't matter, only one other person has ever known it. Later I learned that older men than myself had had such affairs—Schubert with one of his child-pupils, Ruskin and his fourteen-year-old “Madonna,” Swift and Stella, who was a child when he first met her, Lewis Carroll and his child-friends.

How did it end? It didn't end. It softly faded out. At seventeen she disappeared from the stage, and I lost trace of her. Then other things came into my life I grew up, I suppose. And the thing and the memory of it passed slowly into stillness and shadow.

Was it absurd? I do not think it matters if it was. Foolish as the means were, they achieved something for me without disturbance to her. Any man who lives his life to the pattern of an ideal has done himself some good. Men find their ideals in strange places, and one man's ideal is to another inexplicable; but so long as it is an ideal it does not matter what shape it takes; and I do not regret or laugh at or apologize for my five years' worship of this child. Through every day of those years her presence was with me, making gracious the baldest spaces and raying its beauty about me. Through all the tedious occasions and hollow tasks of the day it was my solace and my strength; something apart; the secret lamp. It cleansed me

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and gave me courage when I most needed it. It was an April idyll, and for five years I was April's fool. It is good to have been at some time a fool, and especially good when the price of one's folly is nothing but a memory as clean and foolish as the memory of my worship of a child-actress. I have just unearthed from a mound of dusty papers an old photograph of her. It is a dangerous thing to look, after many years, at the photograph of an old love, but, looking with the eyes of sense and detachment at the photograph of this child, I feel that the young man who loved that face for five years was not such a fool, whatever the frigid world might think of him.

BOOKS OF THE CENTURY'S OPENING

SEARCHING the other day through a number of old periodicals for a reference that eluded me, I was, as usual on these occasions, led astray. You know how it is when you start this business of searching for a word or a fact—your eye is caught by something attractive that has nothing to do with your object, and away you go. The periodical that led me astray was the November number of a monthly literary journal for 1901. The rest of the morning I spent with the other eleven numbers of that journal for that year, considering the literary opening of the century, and meditating upon time's revenges against books—if twenty-six years may be dignified with the title of Time.

In meditating, it occurred to me that the younger people, who, in 1901, would be observing other matters than books, might like to know how the century opened in the book world; what were the books and who were the popular or distinguished authors of that year; and how fate has dealt with the "powerful" novels and "sheer works of genius" that then appeared.

Well, taking popularity before distinction, let us look at those novelists who were 'displayed' and 'starred' in their publishers' advertisements. Here we have an assortment of names, fair, bad, indifferent, against which we of 1927 could set, I think, many better names, even of the rank-and-file sort. The 'starred' authors were Joseph Hocking, Tom Gallon,

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Ralph Connor, Adeline Sergeant, Victoria Cross, Baring-Gould, Mary E. Mann, Fergus Hume, Lucas Cleeve ('starred' at the top of a column wherein is advertised, in small type, a new book by Stephen Crane!), and Maurus Jókai, the Hungarian novelist, who had three English publishers for translations of his books. Here's a little examination-paper for the *younger* readers: Give from memory the titles of three books by these authors.

Broadly, though, the first year of the century was a good year for novels; not a 'vintage' year, perhaps, but a good year. It produced no work that came with drums and trappings to mark the beginning of a new century; no new poet, no fresh accent, and only two men who compelled literature to turn and look at them. But it gave us much agreeable work by known writers, and a book by one of the new men, who, alas, was to pass away with but that one book: George Douglas Brown, whose *House with the Green Shutters*—that grim and frosty corrective to the molassine Scotch idylls of Crockett and Maclaren—was almost the book of that year. Almost; but it was overshadowed by one other. That year was a woman's year; it was the year of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet.

Do you know that book? Is it read to-day? From 1901 to 1902 it was talked about, written about, preached about, and everywhere made such a stir that families quarrelled about it. In America it made even wider stir. The stir was justified, for it *was* a big book; it had a big theme, and the theme was handled with almost masculine strength and restraint. I do not hear it spoken of to-day, and I have met no young people

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who have read it. But it was the novel of 1901, a year, remember, that gave us—— But let us look at the list.

Here is, first, the table of 'best-sellers' of 1901:

<i>Kim</i>	Rudyard Kipling
<i>The Eternal City</i>	Hall Caine
<i>Marietta</i>	Marion Crawford
<i>The Cardinal's Snuff-box</i>	Henry Harland
<i>Count Hannibal</i>	Stanley Weyman
<i>The Velvet Glove</i>	Seton Merriman
<i>In Spite of All</i>	Edna Lyall
<i>The Herb of Grace</i>	Rosa N. Carey
<i>Light Freights</i>	W. W. Jacobs
<i>The Right of Way</i>	Gilbert Parker
<i>Farewell, Nikola</i>	Guy Boothby
<i>Two Detective Stories</i>	Dick Donovan
<i>Tristram of Blent</i>	Anthony Hope
<i>Some Women</i>	Maarten Maartens
<i>Cinderella</i>	S. R. Crockett

Does anybody read Edna Lyall and Rosa Carey to-day? Would the Edgar Wallace generation find entertainment in Dick Donovan? Is the excellent work of Maarten Maartens known to the younger readers? I wonder. I wonder, too, how many children read the books of another 'best-seller' of that time—G. E. Farrow, whose work (I quote from a review) "deserves to rank with that of Lewis Carroll." Well, well . . . There have been many aspirants for a seat by the side of Lewis Carroll, but nobody has been allowed to sit there for long. And the Italian scenes of Marion Crawford and the gracious trifles of Henry Harland—do they still appeal? One does not hear of them, nor of Boothby's Dr Nikola series that once crowded every bookstall.

BOOKS OF THE CENTURY'S OPENING

Now for the books published during 1901, but not in the 'best-selling' lists. These, generally, as might be expected, are more interesting than those in the list above. They were *Anticipations* and *The First Men in the Moon*, by H. G. Wells; Stephen Crane's *Last Words*; G. K. Chesterton's *The Defendant*; W. J. Locke's *The Usurper*; Belloc's *Robespierre*; Henry James' *The Sacred Fount*; Arnold Bennett's *The Grand Babylon Hotel*; George Moore's *Sister Teresa*; Butler's *Erewhon Revisited*; a translation of Merejowski's *Death of the Gods*; Sir Richard Burton's *Wanderings in Five Continents*; W. S. Maugham's *The Hero*; W. E. Henley's *Hawthorn and Lavender*; a volume of short stories, announced as "Mr Bret Harte's new work"; Laurence Housman's *A Modern Antæus*, issued, without author's name, as the work of "the writer of *An Englishwoman's Love Letters*"; Hewlett's *New Canterbury Tales*; Galsworthy's *A Man of Devon*, announced, before publication, as by John Sinjohn; A. E. W. Mason's *Clementina*; and George Douglas Brown's *House with the Green Shutters*. There also slipped out, unnoticed, a great novel that has lately been reprinted here: Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

It was in face of those two lists that *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* became the book of the year; and, looking over the fiction list, I feel that the judgment that gave it that honour was not very far wrong. In the qualities that make the good, full, satisfying novel I can see only three competitors. Of the rest, some have survived on their merits, some on the incidental merit of telling a lively yarn, some have been kept alive by puffing friends, some have died natural

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deaths, and some have undeservedly been put to death. As the authors of many of them are still living I refrain from naming names.

The reviews that appeared during this year are interesting, as showing how dangerous a game is prophecy. Most of the prophecies are as wide of fulfilment as the predictions of certain popular almanacs. Again and again I find the phrases "It is a book that will live," "Will take a permanent place in our literature," "It is an event in literature," "A work of true genius." This of books whose titles and authors are wholly unknown to-day. Perhaps twenty-six years may be held not a fair test for the full effect of prophecy; for many a book, now established as part of English literature, has gone to sleep for a longer time than that. But with so many books labelled for worldly immortality, the process of selection must work; and one is justified in assuming that of most of the books of 1901—good as many of them were—the last word has been said. The temple of fame is not a sardine-tin. Already we have an overcrowded Poet's Corner in our Abbey, which would show us more credit if it were occasionally spring-cleaned and cleared of its lumber. Numbers of men sneaked into that Abbey by a side-door, but you cannot sneak into the temple of literature without a ticket.

Side by side with glowing prophecy one finds little paragraphs giving hasty 'notices' of books that by their own merit and their quiet deportment have survived these twenty-six years. The tone of these 'notices' is the tone of polite condescension to something that is really of no account. Only once in the reviewing columns did I find a prophecy that has justified itself.

BOOKS OF THE CENTURY'S OPENING

"Q" is reviewing a book by a Mr E. A. Bennett. He ends with this: "Mr Bennett is a pleasant writer to meet, and one whose career should be worth watching." Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch showed himself, as usual, a discerning critic, and, in the twenty-six years that have passed, Mr Arnold Bennett has proved that "Q" was right. He came in with this century, and always he has kept pace with it, right up to the minute.

A SÉANCE AT 2LO

AFTER a year of saying and thinking hard things of wireless as a form of entertainment I was lately moved to tear up my front garden at Folkestone and give an imitation of the *Laocoon*. Whereupon I said still harder things of the sardonic fellow who had named the thing *wireless*. But once it was fixed, and London and Paris were singing and talking to me as from across the road, I lost my prejudice in the wonder of it. I could sit in my chair, or on the veranda, and by the mere turn of a wheel I could amuse my ear with music two hundred miles away. I could not conceive those voices as the voices of mortals, or those strains as the strains of an earthly orchestra. They came to me as the music of the spheres, floating from nothing, through nothing; singers and musicians having their being somewhere east of the sun and west of the moon. There was something of Ariel about it. "Hertzian waves," said my informant; but he might as well have said "Spectres of the Brocken." The more he explained, the more incomprehensible the thing became. The more I learned about it, the more I shivered and wondered.

And then, one day, I learned too much about it, and the magic was materialized and shattered. The British Broadcasting Company invited me to visit Savoy Hill and see 2LO at work.

I went. I ought to have known better and refrained, for the bone of substance is a sorry exchange for the shadow of fancy. But I went, and now I listen no

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more to the music of the spheres, or to disembodied voices wandering through space. I have the feeling of the small boy who, after the first act of *The Sign of the Cross*, was taken behind and there saw Mr Wilson Barrett eating a steak and chips. I have seen the broadcasting studio and the 'simultaneous' room and the relaying room. I have seen Uncle Jeff and Uncle Arthur, and I have seen the bodily presence of that creature of the spaces who lives for you and me as a voice—the perfect voice whose only song is "London calling!"

The atmosphere of 2LO is an atmosphere of hush. One was sensible of being at the heart of a mighty mechanism. There was a feeling as of great things being done. There was tension in the air—something of the tension of a newspaper office at eleven o'clock at night—but with the difference that the atmosphere of the one is a live atmosphere, and this was suspended animation. The studio is a large, thick-carpeted room, furnished with the elegance of the lounge of a big hotel—a hotel where the manager is lying dead. The room is sound-proof, and the physical air is dry and warm. Printed notices enjoin "Silence," "No Smoking." The doors fit tightly, and there are no windows. Along the walls are panels of glass which look like French windows, letting in the sunlight; but the sunlight throws no beams and no shadows, and it comes impartially right and left. It is sunlight made by electricity behind orange curtains; the cold and dreadful light of a Robot sun.

In the middle of the room is a small pedestal. On this pedestal, in a bed of wadding, rests a small cylinder. That cylinder is 2LO, and when connection is made

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every whisper in that room, every cough, every sneeze, is heard in all parts of England. A terrifying thought!

Sitting there, I was conscious of the existence behind the cylinder of the impalpable audience: an audience of thousands, sitting in kitchens, in drawing-rooms, in bedrooms, in slum cottages, and in elegant villas; and all *en rapport* with that room. To stand on the platform of Albert Hall and face its crowded balconies is inspiring, but to stand in this room and face that metal cylinder gave me the feeling of assisting at a spiritualistic *séance*, with the microphone as medium. As at a *séance* there were silence, strained nerves, the awareness of invisible presences waiting upon our words and movements.

The Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's is said to affect some people with a sense of the sinister; but Charles Peace and Mrs Dyer are cast in wax, which is substantial, and therefore they are less terrible than the vision of thousands of shadows staring at a loud speaker. After half an hour of that room I knew that I must get out of it, or quiet homes all over England would be shocked by a scream or an oath, or some Rabelaisian flourish thrusting itself from the depths of my suppressed complexes.

The little cylinder itself seemed to be a presence: the presence of a dead thing which yet has the potentiality of life. Around it moved solemn people who talked with each other by signs and lip-work, and sometimes sat down before the microphone and talked aloud to it, or stood up and sang to it.

How the nightly programme is carried through I do not know, for I saw nobody in charge, nobody to receive the artistes and marshal them for their cues.

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There must, I suppose, have been some invisible prompter to summon them. The waiting-room for the artistes had none of the feeling of the wings of a theatre, but rather the feeling of the dentist's waiting-room—only more comfortably furnished. They sat around in deep chairs, staring moodily before them, as though waiting for news and expecting the worst. They might have been a living illustration of Wordsworth's "people in a parlour, all silent and all damned."

Yet these were the people who had nightly charged the ether with music and my ears with wonder; who had made our island full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs. These were the miracle-workers—the artistes, the announcers, and the casual young men upstairs who gave contact with Cardiff, Birmingham, Glasgow, Bournemouth, and Manchester by pushing little plugs into little holes. Before them my fancies faded, and I knew the folly of analysing miracles. I have seen the processes of their alchemy; and I wish now that I had not.

The fact of the wireless concert, heard simultaneously in a dozen widely separated towns of the world, is still marvellous; many facts are more marvellous than fancy; if the small boy had had keener sense he would have found equal wonder in Wilson Barrett's playing Marcus after a meal of steak and chips as he had found in the noble Roman of the first act. But all minds are not immediately capable of these fine adjustments; and whenever I now listen on the wireless I listen no more to voices of the air or to music drawn from the infinite. Between me and the floating song comes the vision of a lonely man shut up in a muffled room, singing or talking, not to you or to me, but to a metal cylinder.

TIME, PLACE, AND BOOK

FOR the true lover of books there is a time and a place for the reading of each of his loved ones, when they give of their best. There is a sort of book-worm who will read any book anywhere at any time. I caught a man the other day reading Smollett in the Tube; but that sort is no true lover. He does not taste his books; he wolfs them, and, of course, misses the *nuances* of flavour and the essential grace which are yielded only in the suitable surroundings. And the suitable surroundings must be in contrast to the spirit of the book. Smollett and the Tube are too near to each other.

We do not, for example, on the cedared lawns of the country extract the best from what are called open-air books. They should be read in back rooms in crowded cities. I know that, for myself, the lines:

Oh, it came o'er my ear like the sweet South
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour,

effused far more of beauty when read in a bed-sitting-room in Kennington than when remembered in Surrey lanes.

I would never read Richard Jefferies on a hill-top. The reality kills the illusion. Books cannot live with leaves and skies and sunlight. The proper place for a Corot is on the walls of a room; hanging from the bough of a tree it is an offence.

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So with books about the town; these best give their flavour in the quiet of a country cottage. Books of travel belong rightly to the fireside, not to the library of a liner. The authors most popular in the trenches were not the authors of books of physical adventure or exploration, or deeds that won the Empire. The author most in demand among the non-literary was Nat Gould; and, among the literary, poets and quiet essayists.

Certain heretics will tell you that the term 'bedside book' is a capricious classification, without basis in fact. I think they are wrong. I think there are decidedly books for the bedside, books for the library, books for the fireside, books for the tea-table, morning books, afternoon books, and evening books. A friend of mine even invented a magazine for the bathroom to be called the *H. and Cerial*.

Bed is assuredly the best place wherein to read tales of hairbreadth escapes and moving accidents. There you are cut off from the life presented to you, and even from the life of your own house or flat. If the telephone rings, let it ring. If the postman knocks, let him knock. You are undressed and in bed, three feet from the workaday floor, lifted above the world of planning and doing. You lie on clouds, god-like; and are in the right mood to hear the tales of the stress and struggle of these mortals. Bed is the place for *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. You can't get much out of Shackleton's *South* by reading it in a London bus on a foggy night; you are preoccupied with a personal adventure of your own, and are therefore the less sensitive to it. Take it to bed with you. But don't take Swift, he is a thorny bedfellow; and even Max

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Beerbohm and Anatole France are too shrewd to make good company.

For the winter fireside after dinner the boisterous picaresque novel is most agreeable—*Pickwick*, *Random*, *Gil Blas*, *Don Quixote*—or one of your gossips—Howell, of the *Familiar Letters*, Gramont, Pepys, Boswell, Evelyn, Captain Gronow.

Delicate or sophisticated writing suits the daytime. On the sunny morning or afternoon you may properly sit in the window with Jane Austen and Mrs Gaskell and Peacock, and *The Roadmender* and *The Compleat Angler*, and a good deal of Stevenson. Mrs Meynell's essays are for the afternoon; *Lavengro* or *The Bible in Spain* are for the evening. I once attempted *The Imitation of Christ* in the evening, and had to lay it aside for Paterson's *Roads*, as in the summer I have had to drop Herman Melville and turn to *A Sentimental Journey*.

I have seen people reading—or pretending to read—on seaside parades and beaches. What sort of books, and whether they really read them, I don't know. I marvel at the mere attempt. In open sunlight I cannot take the sense of even a newspaper paragraph, and a page of a novel becomes a maze of words. A few of the elegant poets—Lovelace, Herrick, Campion, Daniel, Drummond, Drayton, Cowley—permit themselves to be read in the dusk of the summerhouse or in a boat moored well under the trees; but no printed page is entirely happy in the full glare of the sun.

Apart from bed, the best place I know for reading heroic stuff is an organ loft. During my last year at school I was organ-blower in the school chapel. There, during the sermon, address, and prayer, I was safe behind my green baize curtain. I was surrounded by

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an atmosphere of mystery and stained glass, and through a hole in one of the windows I could see hills and white roads, and hear the sound of horses. Time and place were perfect for the purpose to which I put them—namely, the reading of Harrison Ainsworth.

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