

## "A YELLOW MELANCHOLY": THE NEW QUARTERLY

Of the new English quarterly, *The Yellow Book*, the original literary departure from the conventional magazine, and whose appearance is the literary sensation of the month, the *London Speaker* gives this review:

In an advertisement affixed to *The Yellow Book* we learn that Messrs. Elkin Mathews and John Lane, of the Bodley Head, Vigo Street, London, W., "produce books so delightfully that it must give an added pleasure to the hoarding of first editions." At the present moment the hoarder of first editions is being forced to draw and defend himself. Hitherto the poor man has imagined that his pursuit was as innocuous to others as it was agreeable to himself, and now, lo and behold! he is attacked, his little idols are being shattered by impious hands, and he himself is asked to give a reason for the faith that is in him. Let the lover of first editions take comfort. Foolish he may be—we ask him to admit it for the sake of argument—and vain he may be; but no collector that we ever heard of is foolish or vain enough to hoard, even if he should be mad enough to purchase, the first or any other edition of *The Yellow Book*. And on the day of literary judgment it shall be counted to him for righteousness if he can say to those who would sentence him, "Behold my shelves: no quarterly block of yellow ochre cumbers them with its farrago of aspiring affectation and preposterous incompetence."

Thus might the hoarder of first editions speak. His words would be strong, but we fancy that most of those who have dipped into *The Yellow Book* would hold that they were not without some justification. For what, after all, is this boomed and trumpeted quarterly publication; what cause is it intended to serve, what taste can it be supposed to gratify? We can picture Messrs. Mathews and Lane calling round them the band of Bodley Head disciples, and saying to one, "Write us something that shall have neither beginning, nor end, nor meaning;" and to another, "Saddle your Pegasus and cause him to strike rhymes from his clattering hoofs;" and to yet another, "Draw for us caricatures of nightmare visions;" and to all of them, "Be mystic, be weird, be precious, be advanced, be without value:" and we can picture, too, the yearning, emotional joy of this curious company of pilgrims on receiving their various commissions. But what we fail to understand is why Mr. Henry James, and Dr. Richard Garnett, and Mr. John Davidson, and Sir Frederick Leighton should have joined these strolling players and donned the yellow suit! Nor is it at all comprehensible why the bound result of all these efforts should have been flung in the face of the public.

We open *The Yellow Book* at random, and find ourselves brought face to face with *Tree Worship*, a poem in eighteen verses by Mr. Richard Le Gallienne. Here at last, we murmur to ourselves, we have discovered the religion of a literary man. Not the outworn dogmas of obsolete systems, not humanity, not work, not pleasure, but—trees. It appears that somewhere or other Mr. Le Gallienne has seen a tree "knotted and warted, slabbed and armored like the hide of tropic elephant." We have all met such trees, arboreal elephants, branched and leafy rhinoceroses, gnarled hippopotami, amidst a forest of minor zoological specimens. This tree, moreover, had a haughty crest, with which it called the morning friend—a polite salutation which we hope the morning duly

returned. "Huge as a minster," says the poet, "half in heaven men saw thee stand, Thy rugged girth the waists of fifty Eastern girls." Now here we hint an omission. We have never seen an Eastern girl out of a pantomime, and we have not the slightest conception of what her waist may measure. This ought to have been clearly stated. But suppose we take it at twenty inches. An easy effort of arithmetic brings us to the knowledge that the tree which Mr. Le Gallienne worships measures 83 ft. 4 in. round! This tree existed before there was yet of Mr. Le Gallienne "so much as men may poise upon a needle's end." It will be confessed that few poets have taken more words to say "nothing."

Next enter Messrs. Aubrey Beardsley and Walter Sickert, disguised as artists. Mr. Beardsley stabs Mrs. Patrick Campbell basely in the back with a travesty, and Mr. Sickert, having hidden *The Old Oxford Music Hall* in a fog, cuts off the legs of *A Lady Reading*, and seats her like an adult female cherub on nothing. Still pursuing his career of villainy, the former produces *A Night Piece*, the principal character being a lady who has, naturally enough, mistaken her hat for an omnibus, and is about to drive in it past the Chelsea Barracks. The cleverness of Mr. Beardsley is monstrous—an epithet which also fits his artistic impudence and his affectation. Mr. Rothenstein and Mr. C. W. Furse have each contributed *A Portrait of a Lady*—inoffensive and not unmeritorious little bits of slap-dash. We would fain speak of the ferocious Crackanthorpe and the more than masculine George Egerton. Both these masters of modernity are represented by prose pieces which resemble Mr. Sickert's *Lady Reading* in having absolutely no foundation to rest on. If to signify nothing in a flat-footed and disjointed fashion be a qualification for praise, let the critics prepare their largest honey-pots for Messrs. Crackanthorpe and Egerton. To these two Mr. Henry Harland must be added. The three of them seem, if the metaphor may be permitted, like men who should carve at a feather-pillow with knives in order to make of it a statue. We challenge any dispassionate critic to read the stories they have written and tell us what they are all about, where the interest comes in—gentle decadents, forgive the expression—and why in the world any one of them should have been written at all.

Nor must we leave out of this Chamber of Horrors the figure of Mr. Arthur Symons, the "high-toned" Don Juan of the pavement, who sings his *Piccadilly amours* with a zest that would be ludicrous if it were not loathsome. He has a suitable coadjutor in a Mr. Max Beerbohm, who writes on cosmetics, like a sentimental hairdresser's assistant, in a language which may be Dutch but certainly is not English. Worthy are they all of the artistic aid of Mr. Beardsley and the gentleman who contributes an obscene abomination—a picture-puzzle called *The Reflected Faun*.

Here we pause, overwhelmed by the feeling that, ere three months have come and gone, a second and possibly more terrible *Yellow Book* may be flaunted before our eyes and jaundice our amiable dispositions. But no: we cannot believe it. Messrs. Mathews and Lane have come it strong. Let them now be merciful.