

The Literary World

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POETRY.

The Breath of Avon.

TO THE PILGRIMS OF GREATER BRITAIN.

I.

Whate'er of woe the Dark may hide in womb
For England, mother of kings of battle and song—
Be it rapine, racial hate's mysterious wrong,
Blizzard of Chance, or fiery dart of Doom—
Let breath of Avon, rich of meadow-bloom,
Bind her to that great daughter severed long—
To near and far-off children young and strong—
With fetters woven of Avon's flower-perfume.
Welcome, ye English-speaking pilgrims, ye
Whose hands around the world are joined by him,
Who make his speech the language of the sea,
Till winds of Ocean waft from rim to rim
The breath of Avon: let this great day be
A Feast of Race no power shall ever dim.

II.

From where the steeds of Earth's twin oceans toss
Their manes around Columbia's chariot way—
From where Australia's long blue billows play—
From where the morn, quenching the Southern Cross,
Startling the frigate-bird and albatross
Asleep in air, breaks over Table Bay—
Come hither, Pilgrims, where these rushes sway—
'Tween grassy banks of Avon soft as moss!
And, if ye found the breath of Ocean sweet,
Sweeter is Avon's earthy, flowery smell,
Distilled from roots that feel the coming spell
Of May, when all the flowers that loved him meet
In meadows that, remembering Shakespeare's feet,
Hold still a dream of music where they fell.

—Theodore Watts.

Stratford-on-Avon, April 23.

LONDON LETTER.

THE literary excitement of the moment rages around the question of the boycotting, by Messrs. W. H. Smith & Son, of Mr. George Moore's *Esther Waters*. A great many literary men and women have flung themselves into the discussion now going on in the *Daily Chronicle*, and it is notable that so far all the letters have been on Mr. Moore's side. Among those who are taking an active part are Mr. William Archer, Dr. Conan Doyle, Madame Sarah Grand, and Mr. L. F. Austin. I notice that this morning one of the letters defending the book is from the Rev. W. J. Dawson, the distinguished nonconformist clergyman who, in conjunction with Mr. Frederick Atkins, edits those extraordinarily successful publications, the *Young Man* and the *Young Woman*. Mr. Dawson is the author of a notably refined and musical volume of poems which Messrs. Macmillan published some little time ago. Mr. Faux, Messrs. Smiths' manager, who is acknowledged to be the responsible censor in the case, has had so far the charge of his own defense. According to Mr. Faux he is Mr. Moore's friend, and excludes his books most unwillingly because of incidental blemishes. According to Mr. Moore Mr. Faux has excluded all his books save one, *A Modern Lover*. The exclusions included *Vain Fortune*, which ran in the *Lady's Pictorial*, and which, according to my memory of it, was absolutely innocent. So far as I can see there is something to be said for both sides of the quarrel. Mr. Moore has got a bad name

for himself, and it is not surprising that some of the mud of his former novels sticks to a serious and vital book, such as *Esther Waters* undoubtedly is. Then he has the compensation of knowing that his book is receiving the most magnificent of gratuitous advertisements. Meanwhile the British non-Philistine, who, as a rule, bears most amiably the burden of his Philistine fellow countryman, is up in arms against him with true British hysteria. As it stands, it is rather a pretty quarrel.

As to the merits of *Esther Waters* itself, there is no doubt that Mr. Moore has succeeded in producing in his servant-girl heroine a study of extraordinary patience, gravity, and sweetness. So far as the home goes *Esther* had better join the far less convincing *Tess* in the locked cupboard; but for the grown man or woman the book is of the gravest interest and value. A masterpiece of its kind, there hangs over much of it an atmosphere dreary and sordid, but that comes from its extraordinary fidelity in painting a life steeped in dreariness. The one star shining in the mirk is *Esther's* maternal passion and the strenuous honesty, even purity, which is the most convincing thing in this unmarried mother. In a way I wish *Esther Waters* had been written by a man with a cleaner literary record than Mr. George Moore. If that were so, one would accept what Mr. Faux calls the blemishes as more surely inevitable in an inevitable tragedy. One thing that strikes me as curious is that Mr. Moore has made Queen Charlotte's Hospital, the famous London maternity hospital, the scene of one powerful and somewhat brutal chapter. Yet no one so far seems to have objected. Perhaps novels take a long time to reach the authorities of Queen Charlotte's; but I should say, judging from the point of view of a mere lay person, that there is ground for even a prettier quarrel over *Esther Waters* than that at present in the public eye.

It is a long cry from these things to *Santa Teresa*, Mrs. Cunninghame Graham's big life, in two handsome volumes, of the great woman-saint of Spain. Mrs. Graham, the wife of the chivalrous and erratic member of Parliament, is herself a Spaniard. A thousand pities for the book's sake that, going a step further, she was not a Catholic as well! She has followed *Santa Teresa's* footsteps in Spain with the ardor of a devout lover. Every spot hallowed by the saint's presence or her foundations Mrs. Graham has learned by heart and prints in her book with a singularly free and picturesque pen. She seems to have gathered in the compass of her work everything that is to be known about *Santa Teresa* and *Mount Carmel*. She brought to her task passionate sympathy, unwearying industry, and an excellent literary faculty. This ought to have been the life of *Santa Teresa* for all time, yet Mrs. Graham spoils her work by not knowing how to let well enough alone. Every miracle, every vision of the saint, she explains after a mundane fashion, intolerably exasperating. She explains away her ecstasies and apologizes for her fervors. It is the last position one would expect *Gabriela Cunningham Graham* to take up. It is *Santa Teresa* viewed from the standpoint of *Little Bethelcum-Bradlaugh*, if one could imagine that conjoined with a rare enthusiasm and fervor. I fear *Santa Teresa* will not please either of the classes to whom it should appeal most strongly—the Catholics or the High Church people. One is

very sorry for it, because one cannot help feeling admiration for the love and labor expended on it. I wish Mrs. Cunninghame Graham would revise it for us, leaving out all those objectionable comments. Even as it is, apart from the irritation caused by her explanations, her work is of much historical value. It is most handsomely produced by Messrs. A. & C. Black, and it ought to be the standard work which a little revision on the lines I have indicated would make it. No one will wish Mrs. Graham's pen-pictures of Spanish scenery and the old life of monasteries absent.

Mr. Van Der Poorten Schwartz, better known under his pen-name of Maarten Maartens, is again among us. He is the guest of his publisher, Mr. Bentley, at Slough. Those of us who were fortunate enough to meet him last year will be anxious to repeat the experience. It would not be easy to do justice to the charm of his personality; it is one in which good looks, generous stature, a beautiful voice and accent, and exquisitely cordial and well-bred manners all play their part. Maarten Maartens is veritably a fascinating person. Another distinguished visitor is the great Rudyard, who has not been seen, however, at any of the literary gatherings. Perhaps he will come into the open when leafy June brings the season into full swing. At present the weather might exercise a positive blight on all manner of movements. After a delusive early spring, which forced flowers and greenery alike, we are swept this May by a biting northeaster, which pinches Flora and her train sadly and sets the birds to wondering whether they had not better be migrating than building. I dare say Rudyard has his quiet smile over the *Esther Waters* controversy, inasmuch as a couple of years ago Mr. Faux interdicted the *Christmas Detroit Free Press* from the bookstalls, because of Mr. Kipling's free-spoken heroine, "Badalia Herodsfoot." I fear Mr. Faux' standard of morality must be one of outward decorum merely, seeing the stuff the lady novelists are at present stocking the libraries with. Mr. Kipling's *Jungle-Book*, many of the stories of which have appeared in *St. Nicholas* and in *To-Day* on this side of the water, will be published this month.

Mr. Fisher Unwin has just issued, at a shilling, Mr. W. B. Yeats' fairy play, "The Land of Heart's Desire," which, having acted during a short calamitous run as *lever de rideau* to Dr. Todhunter's unlucky play at the Avenue, is now performing the same office for Mr. Bernard Shaw's amusing and inconsequent "Arms and the Man." Mr. Yeats' little fantasy shared to some extent the damnation of Dr. Todhunter's play, though it yet holds the bill as the subordinate item. One wonders, indeed, how such a little poem could be supposed for a moment to attract a London audience. It is all millions of worlds away from modern Babylon, which appreciated little the fairy child, the mortal bride rapt away to fairyland, Father Hart, and the peasant's cottage, with its crucifix above the fireplace. Painful enough it must have seemed to see these things exposed to the stupid wit of 'Arry in Easter week. Mr. Yeats gets farther and farther away from a true dramatic ideal. "The Countess Kathleen" would have been a far better acting play than "The Land of Heart's Desire;" but "Mosada," an early dramatic fragment of his, would have been incomparably better than either. That was a dramatic conception in

