Books

A Letter to the Editor
and an Offer of a Prize

From " The Yellow Dwarf "

SIR: In London, if one is placed sufficiently low in the social hierarchy—or if, high placed, one is sufficiently fond of low life—to frequent houses in which Literature as a subject of conversation is not inhibited, one may occasionally hear it said of this or that recently published book that it has just been " reviewed " in the *Athenæum* or " noticed " in the *Academy*, " praised " by the *Spectator* or " slated " by the *Saturday Review*. I don't know whether you will agree with me in deeming it significant that one almost never hears of a book nowadays that it has been *criticised*. People who run as they talk are not commonly precisians in their choice of words, but the fact that the verb *to criticise*, as governing the accusative case of the substantive *book*, has virtually dropped out of use, seems to me a happy example of right instinct. Books (books in *belles lettres*, at any rate, novels, poems, essays, what you will, not to include scientific, historical, or technical works), books in *belles lettres* are almost never criticised in the professedly critical journals of our period in England. They are reviewed, noticed, praised, slated, but almost never criticised.

 I hasten

I hasten to exempt from my indictment those journals that are not professedly critical ; to exempt trade journals, for instance, medical journals, journals of sport and fashion, and the daily newspapers. The most one can fairly require of one's daily newspaper is that it should give one the news of the day. I'm not denying that a craving for the news of the day is a morbid craving, but it is to gratify it that the daily newspapers are daily born, daily to die. We can't with any sort of justice ask our penny daily for a considered criticism of books. That were to ask for more than our pennyworth ; and besides, the editor might reasonably retort upon us, "You have come to the wrong shop." We don't go to the ironmonger's for a leg of mutton, nor to the stationer's to get our hair cut. Wherefore I in no wise reproach the penny dailies (nor even the formidabler threepenny daily) for sedulously eschewing anything remotely in the nature of considered literary criticism.* Let me add, at once, that I don't reproach them, on the other hand, for their habits of printing long columns of idiomatic Journalese, and heading the same NEW BOOKS. They thereby give employment to the necessitous ; they encourage publishers (poor dears!) to publish—and to advertise; they deceive nobody within the four-mile radius ; they furnish the suburbs with an article the suburbs could probably not distinguish from the real thing if they saw the two together ; and (to crown all) it is the inalienable privilege of the British reader to skip. I buy my *Morning Post*, that I may follow, from my humble home in Mayfair, the doings of the Great in Bayswater ; my *Daily News*, that I may be informed of the fluctuations of Mr. Gladstone's health ; my *Telegraph*, that I may learn what is happening

* But surely, in the *Daily Chronicle*, we have at least one notable exception.—Ed. Y. B.

in Balham, watch the progress of the shilling testimonial to Dr. Grace, savour the English of Mr. Clement Scott, and keep up my Italian by studying the leaders of Mr. Sala; my *Pall Mall Gazette* . . . I really can't think why, unless it be to enjoy the prankful cubsomeness (not to mention the classical attainments) of Mr. W. E. Henley's truculent fifth form; but it is certain that I buy not one of these inexpensive sheets to the end of getting a considered criticism of books.

The case of the professedly critical periodicals, however, is a different and a graver case. They are professedly critical, and they do not criticise. They review, they notice, they extol, they scold; but criticise, but weigh, discriminate, analyse, perceive, appreciate—who will pretend that they do that? They wield the bludgeon and the butter-knife, they employ the copying-press and the garbling-press; but those fine instruments of precision which are the indispensable tools of the true critic's craft, they would appear never to have heard of. For the sake of a modern instance, examine for a moment the methods of the *Saturday Review*. There was a time, and that not so long ago, when the *Saturday Review*, though never critical, was at least diverting; it was supercilious, it was impertinent, it was crabbed and cross-grained, but it was witty, it was diverting. I am speaking, however, of the present *Saturday Review*, which is another matter. From week to week I take it in, and read (or make some sort of an endeavour to read) its "literary" columns. And what do I find? I find articles with such felicitous headings as "Mr. So-and-So—Minor Poet;" I find perennial allusions to the length of another poet's hair; but—criticism? I find that where once the *Saturday Review* was supercilious and diverting, it is now violent and provincial; but —criticism? I find that where once it spoke to me with the voice of a soured but well-bred and rather witty academic don, it

now

now bellows at me in the tones of a bull of Bashan ; but—criticism ? I find—I find anything you like but criticism. Yet, surely, the *Saturday Review* is amongst the most notorious of the professedly critical journals of Great Britain. The *Spectator*, the *Academy*, the *Athenæum*, are different, very different—with a likeness. The likeness, I would submit, consists in the rigorous exclusion of considered literary criticism from their columns.*

I am more concerned for the moment to mention and to deplore this state of things than to inquire into its causes. But certain of its causes invite no inquiry ; they are obvious, they "spring at our eyes." Foreigners, to be sure, pretend that our trouble is radical and ineradicable ; that the British mind is essentially and hopelessly uncritical ; that directly we attempt to criticise we begin to compare. ("They can only communicate their opinion of Oranges by translating it in terms of Onions," says Varjine ; and he adds, "The most critical Englishman I ever met was a clown in a circus at Marseilles.") That is a question I won't go into here. What is obvious and indisputable is this : that with the dissemination of ignorance through the length and breadth of our island, by means of the Board School, a mighty and terrible change has been wrought in the characters both of the majority of readers and of the majority of writers. The "gentleman and scholar" who still flourished when I was young, has sunken into unimportance both as a reader and as a writer. The bagman and the stockbroker's clerk (and their lady wives and daughters) 'ave usurped his plyce and his influence as readers ; and the pressman has picked up his fallen pen, —the pressman, sir, or the presswoman ! Well, what, by the operation of the law of cause and effect, what should we naturally expect ?

* THE YELLOW BOOK must note its dissent from the Yellow Dwarf's observations, in so far, at least, as they affect the *Spectator*.—ED.

expect? With an illiterate reading mob howling at our doors, and a tribe of pressmen scribbling at our tables, what, in the name of the universe, should we expect? What we get; not so? And the poor "gentleman and scholar," where he survives, is exposed to full many risks and full many sorrows. If he reads his penny daily in the morning, he is in danger of seeing his own critical vision obscured or distorted for the rest of the day, as his palate would be blunted should he breakfast off raw red herring. If he wants to write a book, he knows that there is no public to buy or read or understand it: and what's the use of casting pearls before animals that prefer acorns? If he wants to read a book, he knows that the entire output of decent literature in England during a year he might easily learn by heart in a fortnight. So he must read a foreign book or an old book, or else fall back, for fiction, upon our Stanley Weymans and our J. M. Barries; for poetry, upon our Sir Lewis Morrises or our Sir Edwin Arnolds; and for criticism . . . shall I say upon our Mr. Harry Quilters?

The critical periodicals of Great Britain make it a practice to review, notice, praise, or slate almost everything in the guise of a book or booklet which, by hook or crooklet, contrives to get itself put forth in print. They manage these affairs better in furrin' parts. In furrin' parts, your critical periodical silently ignores ninety-and-nine in every hundred of the books that are printed, and then—*criticises* the hundredth.

The fact is, Mr. Editor, that in order to criticise you must have certain endowments—you must have a certain equipment. You must have eyes and ears, you must have taste; you must have the analytic faculty and the knack of nice expression; you must have the habit of getting at close quarters with your thought and your emotion—you must be able to explain *why*, for what qualities, for what defects, you cherish Mr. Henry James (for instance),

instance), regard Mr. Marriott Watson with expectant pleasure, dread Mr. Anthony Hope, and flee from Miss Marie Corelli as from the German measles. You must have knowledge—a University education, indeed, would do you no harm, nor an acquaintance with the literatures of France and Russia. You must have a *tradition of culture*. And, above all, you must have leisure, —for any sort of considered writing you must have leisure.

Well, how many of these endowments, how much of this equipment is your Pressman, your Saturday Reviewer, likely to have? Taste? The analytic faculty? The instinct for the just word? Knowledge? A University education? An acquaintance with the writings of de la Clos and Frontin, of Poushkine and Karamanzine? A tradition of culture? And leisure? *Leisure*. He is paid at the rate of so many shillings a column. And he has his bread to earn; and bread, my dear, is costly. One does what one can. One glances hurriedly through the book that has been sent one "for review," and then (provided one is honest, and has no private spite to wreak upon the author, no private envy to assuage, no private log to roll) one dashes off one's "thousand words," more or less, of unconsidered praise or unconsidered abuse, as the case may be. One says the book is "good," the book is "bad." Good—bad: with the variations upon them to be found in his Dictionary of Synonyms: there are your Pressman-Critic's alternative criticisms. Good—with greater or smaller emphasis; bad—with greater or smaller virulence, and more or less frequent references to the length of the author's hair. There is your Pressman-Critic's "terminology." A novel by Mr. George Meredith is—good; a novel by Mr. Conan Doyle is—good. You would hardly call that manner of criticism searching, enlightening, exhaustive; you would hardly call it *nuancé*, I fancy, sir.

But you are wondering why I should take the matter so grievously

ously to heart. I will tell you. It is not, I confess, for patriotic reasons; not that I weep to see England the least among nations in this particular. It is for reasons purely personal and selfish. I love to read criticism. And to deprive me of the chance to do so is to deprive me of a pleasure. I love to discover my own thoughts and feelings about a book accurately expressed in elegant and original sentences by another fellow. When I happen upon such criticism I experience a glow of delight and a glow of pride, almost as great as if I had written it myself; and yet I have had no trouble. Monsieur Anatole France has kindly taken the trouble for me. Well, sir, we have no Monsieur Anatole France in these islands; or, if we have one, he doesn't write for our professedly critical journals. I ransack the serried columns of the *Saturday Review*, and its contemporaries and rivals, in vain, from week to week, to discover my own thoughts and feelings about books accurately expressed in elegant and original sentences. I discover pretty nearly everything except the thing I pine for. I discover plenty of pedantry and plenty of ignorance, plenty of feebleness and plenty of good stodgy "ability," plenty of glitter and plenty of dullness, plenty of fulsomeness and more than a plenty of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness; but the thing I seek is the one thing I never find.

When I went abroad for my holiday, in August, I took with me a bagful of comparatively recent books, all of which I read, or tried to read, while I was drinking the waters and being douched and swindled at Aix-les-Bains. I yearn, sir, to see my thoughts and feelings about these books set forth in elegant and original phrases by another fellow. And herewith I offer a prize. I will indicate very cursorily in a few rough paragraphs what my thoughts and feelings about the books in question are; and then I will offer a prize of—well, of fifty shillings—say, £2 10s. 0d.—to any one, man

man or woman, who will, on or before the 31st day of December in the present year, put into my hands a typewritten manuscript containing what I shall admit to be a polished, a considered—in one word, a satisfactory expression of my views. I make no reservation as to the length of the manuscript. It may run to as many thousand words as its writer wishes.

The first book I opened was not, after all, exactly a recent book. It was Mr. Hall Caine's *Manxman*. I confess I didn't open it with much hope of being able to read it, for past experience had taught me that to read a book by Mr. Hall Caine to the far-glimmering end was apt to be an enterprise beyond my powers of endurance. In early life I had begun his *Shadow of a Crime*, and had broken down at the eightieth page; when I was older, I had begun *The Deemster*, and had broken down at the eighth—the fearless energy of youth was mine no longer. However, I had been the owner of an uncut copy of the *Manxman* for well-nigh a twelvemonth; and I was in a Spartan temper; and I said—with some outward show of resolution, but with a secret presentiment of failure—I said, "We'll have a try."

Alas, at page 41, where the curtain falls—I beg Mr. Hall Caine's pardon—where the curtain descends upon the seventh scene, I saw myself beaten. "The moon had come up in her whiteness behind, and all was quiet and solemn around. Philip fell back and turned away his face." All was quiet and solemn *araound!* It was the final, the crushing, blow. I too fell back and turned away my face. I closed the *Manxman*, and gave it to my valet, who, it may please Mr. Hall Caine to learn, said, "Thenk you, sir;" and, a week afterwards, the honest fellow told me he had enjoyed it.

A talent for reading the works of Mr. Hall Caine is a talent that

that Heaven has denied me: one can't expect everything here below. Their artificial simplicity, their clumsiness, their heaviness, their dreary counterfeit of a kind of common humour, their laborious strivings for a kind of shoddy pathos, their ignorance, their vulgarity, their pretentiousness, and withal their unmitigated insipidity—these are the qualities, no doubt, that make them popular with the middle classes, that endear them to the Great Heart of the People, but they are too much for the likes o' me. I don't mind vulgarity when I can get it with a dash of spice, as in the writings of Mr. Ally Sloper, or with a swagger, as in the writings of Mr. Frank Harris. I don't mind insipidity when I can get it with a touch of cosmopolitan culture, as in the writings of Mr. Karl Bædeker. But vulgarity and insipidity mingled, as in the writings of Mr. Hall Caine, are more than my weak flesh can bear. On the title-page of *The Manxman* Mr. Caine prints this modest motto: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" On page 6 he observes: "In spite of everything he loved her. That was where the bitterness of the evil lay." On page 7, "A man cannot fight against himself for long. That deadly enemy is certain to slay." On page 11, "His first memory of Philip was of sleeping with him, snuggled up by his side in the dark, hushed and still in a narrow bed with iron ends to it, and of leaping up in the morning and laughing." And then, on page 41, "The moon had come up in her whiteness behind, and all was quiet and solemn around." Note the subtle perceptions, the profound insight, the dainty verbiage, the fresh images, the musical rhythm of these excerpts. "That was where the bitterness of the evil lay!" "A man cannot fight against himself!" "The moon had come up in her whiteness beyind!" . . . . Faugh, sir, the gentleman writes with his mouth full. Let us haste to an apothecary's, and buy an ounce

ounce of civet, to sweeten our imagination. And all was quiet and solemn *araound!* *

At the forty-first page I closed the *Manxman*, and gave it to my valet. It was as if for forty-one leaden minutes I had been listening to the speech of Emptiness incarnate; but a pompous Emptiness, a rhetorical Emptiness, an Emptiness with the manner of an Oracle and the accent of an Auctioneer: an Emptiness that would have lulled me to slumber if it hadn't sickened me. I wonder how Mr. Hall Caine keeps awake as he writes.

Nature abhors a vacuum, but the British Public, it would appear, loves an Emptiness. The Public, however, doesn't matter. The Great Heart of the People has warmed to bad literature in all ages and in all countries. The disgraceful thing is that in England bad literature is taken seriously by persons who profess to be Critics. The critics of France don't take Monsieur Georges Ohnet seriously; the critics of Russia don't take Alexis Gorloff seriously; but the critics of England do take Mr. Hall Caine seriously. Well, it only shows what a little pretentiousness in this ingenuous land will accomplish.

The value of pretentiousness can scarcely be too highly commended to young authors. If you are more desirous of impressing the ignorant than of doing good work, if you would rather make the multitude stare than make the remnant gaze—Be pretentious, and let who will be clever. A young author who appears to have

* A friend assures me that if I had pursued my wanderings a little further in Mr. Hall Caine's garden of prose, I might have culled still fairer blossoms; and gives as a specimen this, from page 141: "She met him on the hill slope with a cry of joy, and kissed him. It came into his mind to draw away, but he could not, and he kissed her back." How quaint Manx customs are. In London he would almost certainly have kissed her lips.

taken

taken this excellent maxim to heart is Mr. John Oliver Hobbes. His was the next book I directed an attack upon, after I had beaten my retreat from the impenetrable *Manxman*. But I found myself confronted with Pretentiousness at the very drawbridge. There fluttered a flag—I daresay, on my unsupported testimony, you could scarce believe it; but I can refer you to the book itself, or (it has been advertised like a patent medicine) to its publishers' advertisements, for corroboration—there fluttered a flag bearing this device—

THE GODS
SOME MORTALS
AND
LORD WICKENHAM
BY
JOHN OLIVER
HOBBES

This, in Christian England! And above it and below it were wonderful drawings, drawings of gods and goddesses and mortals; and, at one side of it, another wonderful drawing, a drawing of an Owl.

When I recovered my breath I turned to Chapter I., *An Aristocratic Household*, and before I had reached the bottom of that short first page, here is the sort of sentence I had to face and vanquish: "The young girl who came forward seemed to have been whipped up into a fragile existence from the very cream of tenderness, love, and folly." It is doubtless very pretty, but do you know what it means? Anyhow, it has the great merit of being Pretentious. I can see the Pressman-Critic, as his eye lights upon it. I can see him "sit up." I can hear him gasp, and

and murmur to himself, "Ah! *This* is a book to be treated with respect. This is *written*." Thus, by a discreet appreciation of the value of Pretentiousness, Mr. Hobbes breaks his Pressman-Critic's spirit with his title-page, and has him entirely subjugated about half-way down page 1.

But do you imagine that the author's pretentiousness begins and ends here, at the threshold? Far from it. His book is pretentious in every line; I might almost say in every dash and comma. It is linked pretentiousness long drawn out. It is packed with aphorisms, with reflections: it is diversified with little essays, little shrieks, and philosophic sighs: all pretentious. On page 135, for instance: "The weak mind is never weary of recounting its failures." *On dirait* the late Mr. Martin Tupper—not? On page 23: "O Science! art thou not also sometimes in error?" *On dirait* the late Mr. Thomas Carlyle. On page 13: "Men should be careful how they wish." *On dirait* Monsieur de la Palisse. . . . . And then, what shall we say of this? In Chapter IV. Dr. Simon Warre writes a letter; and the author heads the chapter: *In which Warre displays a forgotten talent!* Oddsfish, the letter one is justified in expecting, after that! What one gets is a quite ordinary, gossipy, rather vulgar, rather snobbish, very pretentious letter; and the only talent Warre displays is the talent of the Reporter, the Reporter for a Society paper; and that talent is unfortunately not forgotten.

Intending competitors for my prize will observe, furthermore, that the story, the plot, of *The Gods, Some Mortals, and Lord Wickenham*, is exactly the same dear old story that used to delight our nursery governesses when we were children. A good husband —oh, so good!—married to a horrid, wicked wife; a lord; a villain; an elopement. The same dear old conventional story, the

the same dear old conventional personages. I can't say *characters*, for there isn't a character, there isn't an individual, there isn't the ghost of a human creature, in the book. Simon Warre, his wife, his friend, his wife's lover, Allegra—not one is a man or a woman of flesh and blood, whom we can recognize, whom we can think of as of people we have known : each is a formula, a shadow, a conventional type. And then—Allegra ! Allegra carried me back an appalling number of years into the past, to the time when I was young and foolish. Everybody, when he was young and foolish (and generally in the flush of enthusiasm that follows his first visit to Italy—for a fortnight, at Easter, say), everybody has written a novel whereof the heroine was a pale mysterious Italian girl, the daughter of a nobleman ; and wasn't she almost always named Allegra ? And then everybody who was prudent has burned his manuscript. I burned mine, thank mercy ; but Mr. John Oliver Hobbes has published his. Ah, weel, bairn, ye maun just live and lurrun.

"Ah, but the style ! The style's the thing ! " cries the Pressman. Quite so ; the style. Mr. Hobbes seems to be perpetually straining in his style for the quality vaguely called distinction (which, I lately read, in the *Saturday Review*, of all places, is as easy as minor poetry), but, easy as it is, he never succeeds in achieving it. What he does achieve is—sometimes a feeble echo of Mr. George Meredith ; sometimes a flimsy imitation of Miss Austen ; sometimes a bit that is Carlylean or Tupperesque ; and, more often, gems of pure Journalese, so that one might wonder, "Is Mr. Hobbes, too, a Pressman ? " But *style* is personal, style is the man. Here there is no style ; there is only a mechanical mixture of the washings of many styles.

From the leaden pretentiousness of Mr. Hall Caine and the glassy pretentiousness of Mr. John Oliver Hobbes, it was restorative

storative to turn to the naturalness, the honesty, and the simplicity of Miss Ménie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia*, Miss Ella D'Arcy's *Monochromes*, and Mr. Kenneth Grahame's *Golden Age*.

Of Miss D'Arcy's book I will leave the would-be winners of my prize full liberty to say what they like ; only, they must say this : that the book gives its author at once a place among the three masters (indulge the gender), the three masters of the short-story form at present working in the English tongue ; and they must add that Miss D'Arcy is by no means the smallest of the three, and that she does not in the least resemble either of the other two.

Again, of Mr. Grahame's book, say what you will ; but be careful also to say that a more melodious or mellow book you have seldom read. Dwell upon the sweetness of the book's *voice*, the tenderness of its humour ; dwell upon its pathos, its sympathy, its imagination ; upon the rich golden glow it has, which is like a second justification of its title.

In *Gallia*, I own, I suffered one disappointment—nay, I suffered two. First, I was all along haunted by a suspicion that the book had a moral, that it had a purpose, that it was intended, in some measure, as a tract for the times, and not as a mere frank effort in the art of fiction. And secondly, I missed that brilliant personal note, that vibration of the author's living voice, which had delighted me in the *Girl in the Karpathians*, and (still more) in the marvellously clever and vivid little drama, *Wladislaw's Advent*, which you, sir, published some time back in the YELLOW BOOK. But, all the same, though I could have wished Miss Dowie to come nearer to the front in proper person, I enjoyed reading *Gallia* as I have rarely enjoyed reading a latter-day English novel. The style, if severely impersonal, is sincere, direct, effective ; the story is new and interesting, the central idea, the motive, being very

very daring and original indeed; and the characters are distinctly individualised. They are characters, they are human people, they are persons, they aren't mere personages, mere types. Had *Gallia* been a *roman-à-clef*, I think I could have named Dark Essex; I think I could have named Gurdon, too; I'm sure I could have named Miss Essex. As for Bobbie Leighton, little as we see of him, he is a creature of the warmest flesh and the reddest blood; and I, for my part, shall always remember him as a charming fellow whom I met once or twice, but all too infrequently, in Paris, in London, and whose present address I am very sorry not to possess. But Gallia herself I could not have named, though she is as real to me now as she could have been if I had actually known her half my life. If Miss Dowie had, in this book, accomplished nothing more than her full-length portrait of Gallia, she would have accomplished much, for a more difficult model than Gallia a portraitist could hardly have selected. Gallia—so terribly modern, so excessively unusual—a prophecy, rather than a present fact—a girl, an English girl, who *declares her love to a man*, and yet never ceases to be a fresh, innocent, modest, attractive girl, never for an instant becomes masculine, and never loses her hold upon the reader's sympathy!

A writer of fiction could scarcely propose to himself a riskier adventure than that which awaited Miss Dowie when she set out to write the chapter in which Gallia roundly informs Dark Essex that she loves him. Failure was almost a certainty; yet, so far from failing, Miss Dowie has succeeded with apparent ease. The chapter begins with a very fine and delicate observation in psychology. The blankness, the vague pain, rhythmically recurring, but for the specific cause of which Gallia has to pause a little and seek—that is very finely and delicately observed. "'I remember; there was something that has made me unhappy: what

what was it ?' Thus her mind would go to work ; then suddenly the sharpness of remembrance would lay hold of her nerves, and a little inarticulate cry would escape her ; her hands would go up to hide her face, and a shiver, not in her limbs, but in her body, would shake and sicken her." Presently Dark Essex is shown into the room, and presently Gallia tells him that she loves him. The chapter is restrained, the chapter is dignified, the chapter is convincing, the chapter is moving ;—or, rather, the chapters (for the scene is broken into two chapters, and so to break it was a prudent measure; little conventional breaks like this doing wonders to relieve the tension of the reader's emotion). It must have been difficult enough, in this crisis of the story, to make Gallia herself move and speak convincingly ; it must have been a hundred times more difficult to contrive the action and the speeches of the man,—the man who found himself in so unprecedented a situation !

Gallia is a remarkable book, and Gallia is a remarkable young lady. I have no prejudices in favour of the New Woman ; I proclaim myself quite brazenly an Old Male. But I respect Gallia, I admire her, I like her, and I am heartily sorry she made the mistake of marrying Gurdon. It was a mistake, I am persuaded, though an inevitable mistake. But I shall owe a grudge to Miss Ménie Muriel Dowie if she doesn't by-and-by write another volume about Gallia, and let me know exactly, in detail, how her mistaken, inevitable marriage turned out. I shall look for a volume entitled *Lady Gurdon*—for Mark will of course by this time have been created a baronet, at the lowest. And, meanwhile, I will ask competitors for my prize to be extremely careful and exhaustive in their criticisms of *Gallia*.

Two more books I will ask the same young gentlemen and ladies to consider, and then I will let them off. One is Mr. Hubert

Hubert Crackanthorpe's *Sentimental Studies*, the other Mr. George Moore's *Celibates*.

In dealing with Mr. Crackanthorpe's book, my prize-critics will kindly give attention to the actuality of his subjects, the clearness of his psychological insight, the intensity of his realisation, the convincingness of his presentation, and the sincerity and dignity of his manner. At the same time, they will point out that Mr. Crackanthorpe often says too much, that he is reluctant to leave anything to his reader's imagination, his reader's experience. He doesn't make enough allowance for his reader's native intelligence. He forgets that the golden rule in writing is simply a paraphrase of the other Golden Rule: *Write as you would be written to.* Mr. Crackanthorpe strains a little too hard, a little too visibly, for the *mot juste*. But the *mot juste* is sometimes not the best word to use. One must know what the *mot juste* is, but sometimes one should erase it and substitute the *demi-mot*. And then isn't Mr. Crackanthorpe handicapped as an artist by a trifle too much moral earnestness? Moral earnestness in life, I daresay, does more good than harm; but in Art, if present at all, it should be concealed like a vice. Mr. Crackanthorpe hardly takes pains enough to conceal his. If he won't abandon it—if he won't leave it to such writers as the author of *Trilby* and Miss Annie S. Swann—he should at least hide it under mountains of artistry.

And now for *Celibates*. *Celibates* is an important book; I'm not quite sure that *Celibates* isn't a great book, but *Celibates* is assuredly a most perplexing, a most exasperating book. How one and the same man can write as ill and as well, as execrably and as effectively, as Mr. George Moore writes, passes my comprehension. His style, for instance. His style is atrocious, and his style is almost classical. His style is like chopped straw, and his style is like architecture. In its material, in its words, phrases, sentences,

tences, his style is as bad as a Christian's style can be. It is harsh, it is slovenly, it is uncouth ; fluency, melody, distinction, charm it lacks utterly; it is sometimes downright ungrammatical; it is very often common, banale, pressmanish ; and yet . . . . Structurally, in its masses, it could scarcely be better. It has (as Mr. Moore would say) *line;* its drawing, its perspective, its values are the drawing, the perspective, the values of a master. It is a symmetrical temple built of soiled and broken bricks.

How could a writer who knows his Flaubert as Mr. Moore knows *his* Flaubert, speak of "sleep pressing upon Mildred's eyelids," as Mr. Moore does on page 8? What of *la phrase toute faite?* How could any one but a pressman say of his heroine that there was "a little pathetic won't-you-care-for-me expression" in her face? On page 33, Mildred Lawson looked at Ralph Hoskin "in glad surprise." On page 49 we have an epigram, a paradox: something or other "is as insignificant as life." On page 51 Ralph says, "I had to make my living ever since I was sixteen." On page 56 Mr. Moore says, "In the park they could talk without fear of being overheard, and they took interest in the changes that spring was effecting in this beautiful friendly nature." Shade of Stevenson, shade of Maupassant, what prose! On page 75: "The roadway was full of *fiacres* plying for hire, or were drawn up in lines three deep." Shade of Lindley Murray, what grammar! And on the same page: "Elsie wished that Walter would present her with a fan." It is almost enough to make one agree with the old fogey who remarked, anent *Esther Waters*, "Mr. Moore writes *about* servants, and should be read *by* them."

But no, the old fogey was wrong. Bad as Mr. Moore's style is in its materials, it is very nearly perfect in its structure; and, what's more, it's *personal.* You feel that it is a living voice, an individual's voice, that it is Mr. George Moore's voice, which is

addressing

addressing you. And surely a style ought to be personal, or else style's not the man.

The question of style apart, however, what makes *Celibates* an impressive book, very nearly a great book, is its insight, its sincerity, its vividness, its sympathy. If *Mildred Lawson* were only decently written—if only some kind soul would do us a decent rendering of it into English—*Mildred Lawson* would be a story that one could speak of in the same breath with *Madame Bovary*. Yes. The assertion is startling, but the assertion is an assertion my prize-critic must boldly hazard and proceed to justify. Mildred Lawson is one of the most interesting and one of the most complex women I have ever met in fiction. Her selfishness, her weakness, her strength, her vanity, her coldness, her hundred and one qualities, traits, moods, are analysed with a minuteness that is scientific, but synthesised with a vividness that is entirely artistic, and therefore convincing, moving, memorable. *John Norton*, structurally, is not quite so faultless as *Mildred Lawson*, but it is still a very notable achievement, a very important contribution to the English fiction of our day; and I don't know whether, on the whole, *Agnes Lahens* isn't the best piece of work in the volume.

However, these are questions for my prize-critics to discuss at length—Mr. Moore's execrable, excellent style; how, as it were, one would imagine he wrote with his boot, not with his pen; his subtle lack of grace, of humour; his deep, true, sympathetic insight; his sincerity, his impressiveness; and what his place is among the four or five considerable writers of fiction now living in England.—I, sir, have already too far trespassed upon your valuable space.

I have the honour to be,
Your obedient servant,
THE YELLOW DWARF.