

are concerned, he knows Jack, who is not much of a metaphysical puzzle inside and out, and he has brought him home to us as no sea-writer ever tried to do before. Years ago it seemed natural to fancy that he might write himself out, but he goes on with a freshness which looks inexhaustible. If I cannot read him with the old enjoyment it is my misfortune and not his fault. If his latest book had been his first I should have found in it the charm which caught me years ago. But it is in the nature of things that an individual writer like Clark Russell should be his own most dangerous rival.

Clark Russell is captain on his own deck, whether he sail a coffin or a princely Indiaman of the old time. Sir Walter Besant is lord of his own East End, and of that innocent seraglio of delightful and eccentric young ladies to which he has been adding for years past. Sir Walter Besant is chiefly remarkable as an example of what may be done by a steadfast cheerfulness in style. His creed has always been that fiction is a recreative art, and we have no better sample of a manly and stout-hearted optimist than he. He is optimistic of set purpose, and sometimes his cheerfulness costs him a struggle, for he is tender-hearted and clear-sighted, and he is the Columbus of "the great joyless city" of the East. He has had a double aim—to keep his work recreative and to make it useful. In one respect he has been curiously happy, for he once dreamt aloud a beautiful dream, and has lived to find it a reality. It was his own bright hope which built the People's Palace, and a man might rest on that with ample satisfaction.

He has given us many well-studied types of character, but he excels in the portraiture of the manly young man

and the lovable young woman. In this regard I find him at his apogee with Phyllis Fleming and Jack Dunquerque, who are both frankly alive and charming. He is good, too, at the portraiture of a humbug, and finds a humorous delight in him, very much as Dickens did. There is more than a touch of Dickens in his method, and in this way of seeing people, and, most of all, in the warm-hearted cheer he keeps.

It is outside the purpose of this series to dwell on anything but the literary value of the works of the people dealt with; but little apology, after all, is needed for a side-glance at the work which Sir Walter Besant has done for men of letters. He has worked hard at the vexed and difficult question of copyright; he has founded an Authors' Club and an authors' newspaper; and he has devoted with marked unselfishness much valuable time and effort to the general well-being of the craft. He has stood out stoutly for the State recognition of authorship, and in his own person he has received it. *Esprit de corps* is a capital thing in its way. Whether it is well to have too much of it in a body of men who hold the power of the press largely in their own hands, whilst at the same time publicity is the breath of their nostrils, is perhaps an open question. But of Sir Walter Besant's single-mindedness in this voluntary work there is no shadow of doubt. Remembering his popularity with the public, and the price he can command for his work, it is evident that he has expended in the pursuit of his ideal time which would have been worth some thousands of pounds to him. He has striven in all ways to do honour to letters, and the esteem in which he is held is a just payment for high purpose and unselfish labour.

(To be continued.)

