

## Once-a-Month Selection of a Few Top-Liners. Current Literary Topics Tersely Treated

By THE EDITOR

*Britling didn't See it Through—(English)*

*Gerald Stanley Lee Supplies Wells' Missing Link—(American)*

*Letters of a Sunny Subaltern—(Canadian)*

*Paperknife's Views on Canadian Story-Writers Arouse a Chorus of  
Protests*

HAVE YOU READ  
Britling Sees It Through?  
By H. G. Wells.

**A**S a novel—an ambitious failure.  
As a story—as loose as a load of hay.  
As philosophy—a moonlight walk in the woods.

As character drawing—mainly mediocre.

As an expression of the war psychology of England seen through the spectacles of one Britling—Immense!

Having expressed these opinions about a book which almost every other person you meet nowadays has read or is going to borrow from somebody, let us get down to what there is about the book that makes it worth devoting a page and a half to in the Canadian Courier's Literary Quarter Section.

First of all—Who and What is Britling? The artist who made the picture on the cover this week has given us his impression of what Britling looked and felt like at midnight writing his long, humanizing letter to old Herr Heinrich, father of his sons' tutor, killed in the Carpathians. He found it a puzzling job. Wells delineated the anatomical outlines and mental peculiarities of Britling, but didn't make Britling express himself. This is the first picture of Britling ever made. Some while ago an American weekly published the story—with no attempt to give its readers a picture of this blustering John Bull of a journalizing philosopher. Since then the book has come out. It is now somewhere round the First Hundred Thousand in the United States. Just invading Canada. Without Britling the book would be a sucked egg. And this Britling is a strange man; in spite of the cumbersome yarn out of which he splutters and peers at us for all the world like a good family hen laying an egg in a strawstack.

Some say Britling is—Wells. So he may be. Wells has always been a semi-subjective writer who never could cut himself loose enough from his own experiences to create a male character that can't be traced somehow in part or in whole to the author. Most of his sociological and scientific and pseudo-political stuff gets back to—Wells. Trace back your own acquaintance with this boundless Belloc of modern quasi-fiction, and see if—

Britling is pretty much the average middle-class Englishman in a high key; John Bull cut away from Punch and mid-Victorianism into war time.

Well, then, has England any real Britlings? Or was Wells overdoing the character just to make a big seller? When he says that Britling saw it through—did he really stop several mileposts before he got to the end? In the light of recent German and American phenomena, shall we need a sequel to Britling? If so Wells will need to revise his own opinions of the Germans and the war. That compassionate letter to old Heinrich does not fit in very well with recent German symptoms. Does Wells, after all, know Germany any better than he knows the United States? And if Britling was going to see

it through why didn't he swap his fountain pen for a rifle?

Very likely Wells shared Britling's hope that the war would be over before anything else had a chance to happen that would change his outlook.

But things are happening.

At the same time, any one who would truly understand the kind of country that expects to finish this war as the biggest of all her world jobs, had better read Britling as far as he has gone. Because it will throw a deal of light on what now is and what is to become.

Wells must have begun to collect material for this book just as soon as the war began. He must have fyled away a bushel of clippings. Tabloiding them. Diligently co-ordinating England.

Let us tell you a little story to illustrate how Wells works. Those who have read the "New Machiavelli" will recall the story of the political dinner which was interrupted by the announcement that the upper stories of the house were on fire. The diners did not



Gilbert Cannan, author of *Mendel* and *Three Pretty Men*, is also a conscientious objector.

stir, but finished their dinner and their speeches with the water from the fire-hose dribbling through the ceiling into their plates.

This episode, it appears, really took place. Wells and Bennett both heard of it, and both recorded it in their note-books. Bennett was telling a friend how he meant to make use of the story in a new book he was writing—when another friend drifted in with a copy of the "New Machiavelli" in his hands and told them that the episode was already immortalized in Wells' book.

To quote Mr. Direck, in Britling, Wells "beat him to it."

First it is important, in the light of what has happened since Wells wrote the last chapter of his book, to get a picture of Britling. Here it is—as Mr. Direck saw him first.

His moustache, his hair, his eyebrows bristled; his flaming freckled face seemed about to bristle too. His little hazel eyes came out with a "ping" and looked at Mr. Direck. Mr. Britling was one of a large but still remarkable class of people who seem at the mere approach of photography to change their hair, their clothes, their moral natures. No photographer had ever caught a hint of his essential Britlingness and bristlingness. Only the camera could ever induce Mr. Britling to brush his hair.

Since 100,000 copies of Britling are being sold in America, we must conclude that the book has something in it to interest Americans. And it has. Quite apart from the war—Mr. Britling's affairs with other women—and Direck.

And who is Direck?

The lamest shadowgraph of an American character ever set down in black and white. Direck is nothing but a wooden man labelled American. What Wells does know about Britling is equalled only by what he does not know about Direck.

"My word," says Mr. Direck, somewhere, "this is some war."

### A FEW BRITLINGISMS.

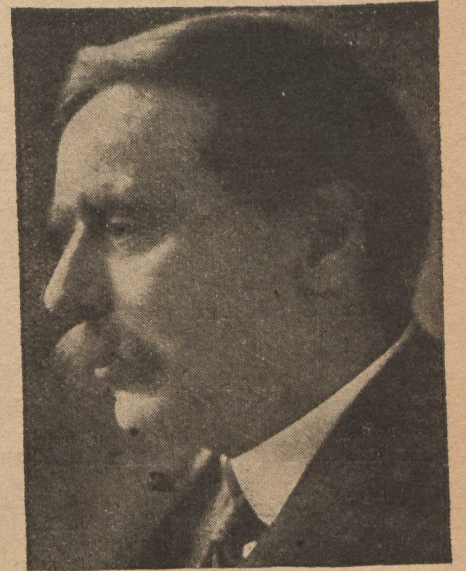
No longer did he ask why am I such a fool, but why are we all such fools? He became Man on the automobile of civilization, crushing his thousands daily in his headlong and yet aimless career. . . .

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That was a trick of Mr. Britling's mind. It had this tendency to spread outward from himself to generalized issues. Many minds are like that nowadays. He was not so completely individualized as people are supposed to be individualized—in our law, in our stories, in our moral judgments. He had a vicarious factor. He could slip from concentrated reproaches to the liveliest remorse for himself as The Automobilist in General, or for himself as England, or for himself as Man.

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Because things had gone easily and rapidly with him he had developed indolence into a philosophy. Here he was just over forty, and explaining to the world, explaining all through the week-end to this American—until even God could endure it no longer and the smash stopped him—how excellent was the



The Author of *Britling Sees It Through*.