

AGNES REPLIER.

A MOST FASCINATING ESSAY.

No Ordinary Female Writer—A Well-Armed and Powerful Critic—Sly Humor—Pungent Sarcasm—Little Lord Fauntleroy Unmasked—The Children of To-day—Our Nursery Tales.

A friend of mine, a dweller in the city, a lover of red bricks, one to whom the sound of the dray-cart merrily grinding on the pavement is sweeter music than a burst of woodland song, has tardily conceded that the Adirondacks, on a summer day, is pleasant. I value his testimony and record it with pleasure. Let us be thankful for small favors when cynics are the donors. For me these woods, lakes and crystal streams hold an indescribable charm. They are the true abode of man. Here is liberty, while the city is but a cage, with its thousands uttering the plaintive cry of Sterne's prisoned starling. I cannot get out. For the hum of wheels we have the songs of birds, the music of water-falls, the purr of mountain brooks, and the harmonies of the winds playing through the thousand different species of trees, each one differing in melody, but combining in one grand symphony. Orchestras are muffled music when compared to nature's lute. The Pipes of Pan is but a poet's struggle to embody in speech such a symphony. For the city's smell, that not even a Ruskin could paint, albeit they are far from elusive we have the mountain air that has dallied with the streams and stolen the fragrance of a thousand clover fields. Every man to his taste. There is no disputing of this. Lamb loved bricks and Wordsworth such scenes as ours; yet, Lamb would be as sadly missed from our libraries as Wordsworth. Swing my hammock in the shade of yonder pines good Palsy. A robin is piping his sweetest notes to his brooding spouse, the salmon river runs at my feet, biting the sandy shore, laughing loud when a saucy stone falls in its current. From over the hills comes the scent of new mown hay; bless me, this is pleasant. To add to this enjoyment you have brought a book—something bright, you tell me. I'll soon see. And gliding into my hammock, I said my first good morning to Agnes Repplier. It was a breezy good morning, one of those where the hat unconsciously goes out as much as to say: old fellow, you don't know how glad I am to see you. There was no friend with a white cravat standing on the first page to introduce us, and tell us that the authoress bore in her look a fecund message to struggling humanity, and that the major part of that same humanity could not see it; hence it was his duty to stand at the portal and solve the riddle. There was no begging for recognition on the score of ancestors, fads or fims. I am Agnes Repplier, said the book; how do you like me? A few pages perused, and my own voice amusingly fell on my ears, saying: first class. Here was a woman who thought—not the trivial thought that nauseates in the books of so many literary women—but virile aggressive thought, that provokes, contradicts, and, like Hamlet's ghost, will not be downed. This thought is not folded in a garment, whose many hues quicken the curiosity and make her pages a continual feast of wit, droll irony and illuminative criticism all curiously and harmoniously blended. Her pages are rich in suggestion, apt in quotation. You are constantly aroused, put on your guard, laughingly disarmed, and that in a way that Lamb would have loved. She has no awe in the presence of literary gods. Lightly she trips up to them with her polgaard, shows by a pass that they are made of mud, and that the aureole that encircles them is but the work of your crude imagination. Clearing away your shreds and patches she puts the author in a plain suit before you, and, how you wonder, that with all your boasted knowledge you have called for years a jackdaw a peacock.

How delightful to watch this critic armed cap-a-pie, demolishing some fad, that has masqueraded for years as genuine literature. Is it little Lord Fauntleroy, a character sloppy, ineane, impossible to real life, yet hugged to the heart by the commonplace. Miss Repplier keenly surveys her ground, as an artist would the statue of his rival, notes the foibles, cant, false poses, and crazy-quilt jargon used to deck pet characters. Experience has taught her that you cannot combat seriously the commonplace. "The statesman or the poet," says Dudley Warner, "who launches out unthinkingly of this will be likely to come to grief in his generation." Sly humor, pungent sarcasm, are the weapons effectively used. The little Lord is unrobed, and the life that seemed so full of charity and virtue, becomes but a mixture of hypocrisy and snobbery. Yet, if some of our critics could, "all the dear old nursery favorites must be banished from our midst, and the rising generation of prigs must be nourished exclusively on Little Lord Fauntleroy, and other carefully selected specimens of milk and water diet." The dear land of romance, in its most charming phase, that phase represented by Red Riding Hood, Alla Baba, Blue Beard and the other heroes of our nursery hood must be eliminated, for children are no longer children, in the old sense of believing "in such stuff" without questioning. American children, at any rate, are too sensitively organized to endure the unredeemed ferocity of the old fairy stories we are told, and it is added, "no mother nowadays tells them in their unmitigated brutality." These are the empty sayings of the realists, who would have every child break its dolls to analyze the sawdust. The most casual observer of American homes knows that our children will not be fed on such stuff as Realists are able to give, but will turn wistfully back to those brave old tales, which are their inheritance from a splendid past, and of which no hand shall rob them. As Miss Repplier so well puts it, "We could not banish Blue Beard if we would. He is as immortal as Hamlet, and when hundreds of years shall have passed over this uncomfortably enlightened world, the children of the future—who, thank Heaven, can never with all our efforts, be born grown up—will still tremble at the blood-stained key, and rejoice when the big brave brothers come galloping up the road." Ferocity, brutality, if you will, may couch on every page, but this is much better than the sugared nothingness of Sunday-school tales, and beats all hollow, as the expression goes, the many tricks perpetrated on children by the school of analytical fiction. Children will read Blue Beard, and thank Heaven, as grown-up men, for such a childish pleasure, adding a prayer for her who wrote the "Battle of the Babies." Bunner and others have accused Miss Repplier of ignoring contemporary works, of rudely closing in their face her library door and saying he who enters here must have outgrown his swaddling clothes, must have rounded out his good half-

century. This may be one of Bunner's skits. Even if it were not, there is more than one precedent to follow. Hazlitt, in his delightful chat on the "Reading of Old Books," begins his essay, "I hate to read new books." This author has the courage of his convictions, you do not grope in the dark to know why. Here is the reason, and it is easier to assent to it, than to deny it. "Contemporary writers may generally be divided into two classes—one's friends or one's foes. Of the first we are compelled to think too well, and of the last we are disposed to think too ill, to receive much genuine pleasure from the perusal, or to judge fairly of the merits of either. One candidate for literary fame, who happens to be of our acquaintance writes finely, and like a man of genius; but unfortunately has a foolish fad, which spoils a delicate passage;—another inspires us with the highest respect for his personal talents and character, but does not come quite up to our expectation in print. All these contradictions and petty details interrupt the calm current of our reflections. These are sound reasons, as if to clinch them he adds, "But the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature have nothing in common with the pure, silent air of immortality." Miss Repplier, an admirer of Hazlitt, and if one may hazard a guess, her master in style, would not go so far. She believes in keeping up with a decent portion of current literature, and "this means perpetual labor and speed," whereas idleness and leisure are requisite for the true enjoyment of books. To read all the frothings of the press for the sake of being called a contemporary critic were madness.

She concurs with another critic that reading is not a duty, and that no man is under any obligation to read what another man wrote. When Miss Repplier stumbles across an unknown volume, picking it up dubiously, and finds in it an hour of placid but genuine enjoyment, although it is a modern book, wanting in sanctifying dust, she will use all her art to make it other hearts a loving welcome for the little stranger. A By-Way in Fiction, tells in her own way, of a recent book born of Italian soil and sunshine. The Chevalier of Pensieri Vani. It is the essayists right to read those books ancient or modern that are to her taste, and it is a bit of impertinence in any writer to particularly recommend to Miss Repplier a list of books, which she is naturally indisposed to consider with much kinds, thrust upon her as they are, like peregories or porous plaster. "If there be people who can take their pleasures medicinally, let them read by prescription and grow fat." Our authoress can do her own quarrying. One of the darts thrown at this charming writer is, that she would have children pore through books at their own sweet will, will unoppressed by that modern infliction—foot-notes. That, when a child would meet the word dog an asterisk would not hold him to a footnote occupying a page and giving all that science knows about that interesting animal. This is precisely the privilege that your modern critic will not allow. He will have his explanations, his margins, "build up a bridge over a rain-drop, put ladders up a pebble, and encompass you on every side with ingenious alpen-stocks and climbing irons yet when perchance you stumble and hold out a hand for help behold, he is never there to grasp it." What does a boy, plunging into Scott or Byron want with these atrocities? The imagery that peoples his mind, the music that sweeps through his soul, these, and not your stilled erudition are the milk and honey of boyhood. "I once knew a boy, says Miss Repplier, in that sparkling defense 'Oppression of Notes' who so delighted in Byron's description of the dying gladiator that he made me read it to him over and over again. He did not know—and I never told him—what a gladiator was. He did not know that it was a statue, and not a real man described. He had not the faintest notion of what was meant by the Danube, or the Dacian mother or a Roman holiday, historically and geographically, the boy's mind was a happy blank. There was nothing intelligent, only a blissful stirring of the heartstrings by reason of strong words, and swinging verse, and his own tangle of groping thoughts." Had the reader stopped the course of the swinging verse to explain these unknown words, boyish happiness would have flown, oppression become complete and let us hope sleep would have rescued the bored boy from such an ordeal.

Cowley full of good sense is on the side of our essayist. In his essay "On Myself" he relates the charm of verse, falling on his boyish ear, without comprehending fully its purport. "I believe I can tell the particular little chance that filled my head first with such chimes of verse as have never since left ringing there. For I remember when I began to read, and to take some pleasure in it, there was wont to lie in my mother's parlour (I know not by what accident, for she herself never in her life read a book but of devotion) but there was wont to lie Spenser's works; this I happened to fall upon, and was infinitely delighted with the stories of the knights, giants, and monsters, and brave houses, which I found everywhere there (though my understanding had little to do with all this), and by degrees with the linking of the rhyme and dance of the numbers, so that I think I had read him all over, before I was twelve years old, and was thus made a poet as immediately as a child is made an enchanter." The charm of Miss Repplier's pages lie in their good sense. She is a lover of the good and beautiful, a hater of shams and shoddies. Everything she touches becomes more interesting, whether it be Gastronomy, Old Maids, Cats, Babies or the New York Custom House. Like Lamb and Hazlitt a lover of old books, finding in them the pure silent air of immortality, she will welcome graciously any new book whose worth is its passport. Agnes Repplier was born in the city of brotherly love more than thirty years ago. Her father was John Repplier, a well known coal merchant. Her earliest play-mates were books. Her mother a brilliant and lovable woman, fond of books, and, as a friend of her's informed me, a writer of ability, watched over and directed the education of her more brilliant daughter. Under such a mother, amid scenes of culture, Agnes grew up, finding in books a solace for ill-health that still continues to harry her. When she entered the arena of authorship, by training and study, she was well equipped. At once she was reckoned as a sovereign princess of "That proud and humble . . . Gipsy Land," one of the very elect of Bohemia. She came, as Steadman says, "with gentle satire or sparkling epigram to brush aside the fads and fallacies of this literary *fin de siècle*, calling upon us to return to the simple ways of the masters. Her charming volumes should be in the hands of every student of literature as a corrective against the debasing theories and tendencies of modern book-making. The student will find that if she does not know all things in heaven and on earth, she may plead in the language of Little Breeches:

"I never ain't had no show;
But I've got a middlin' tight grip, sir."
On the handfull o' things I know."

WALTER LECKY.

CATHOLICS IN BOOKS.

A Most Interesting and Able Essay.

One of the first things that strikes the Catholic reader of contemporaneous literature is the peculiar treatment his fellow-believers receive in its pages. They are spoken of as though they were beings of a distinct race, and if an author finds it useful or necessary to introduce a Catholic to his readers he hastens to apologize for it by assuring them that that particular specimen is of a liberal turn of mind and not at all to be confounded with the superstitious element who believe in the Pope and are deficient of admiration for Voltaire. The picturesque in Catholic belief is left to the character, but most of its fundamental doctrines are eliminated, and the result is funny. We have a Catholic who goes to Mass, is regular at Vespers, says pretty little prayers to the Saints and does not forget to pray for the dead; but who "smiles superior" at the dogma of the Infallibility of the Pope, and who considers his or her interpretation of right and wrong more correct than the Church's. Needless to say, such Catholics are purely creatures of the imagination. But why is this apologizing and cutting down necessary? Is there a peculiar atmosphere about Catholics which prevents their assimilation with other people unless faith is mutilated in some way? It would seem so.

But perhaps it is only some sort of blind instinct which warns those writers that a Catholic character needs a great deal of paring down before it can be acceptable to that great wide world which has little sympathy for anything that is not like itself.

The feeling that dictates this apologetic tone probably has its origin in the old fallacy which placed Catholics on a less respectable level than their fellow creatures; and it is the same feeling which urges writers, the exigencies of whose stories demand a gentle, innocent, convent-bred heroine, to assure us with all haste that the "good nuns" never attempted to interfere with the faith of their pupil. What an irreparable calamity it would have been had the maiden become a Catholic!

Besides this class of writers, who, to do them justice, are rarely offensive; there is another, of whom Edna Lyall is a fair sample. This class can do nothing with their Catholic characters until they convert them body and soul to some other form of belief. This accomplished, usually by means of the hitherto unread Scriptures, the converts become models of nobility and virtue, and are remarkable for their religious fervor which no doubt they would not have been had they not providentially been converted.

But why is this necessary? Have Edna Lyall and her fellow authors never met good and noble Catholics who were capable of all the self-sacrifice and other heroisms which the most exacting public could demand? What about the Father Damens in the leper settlements of the world; and the Sisters of charity who nurse the cholera patients in Europe and the yellow fever patients in America when even their own relatives run away from them?

Nor are all heroic Catholics priests and nuns. There are many among the laity who would make as admirable heroes and heroines as Miss Lyall and her contemporaries could desire. The insinuation that a soul cannot be noble or great while it cherishes the Catholic faith is unworthy of a talented mind like Miss Lyall's and is a sign that she has yet to free herself from a prejudice which the greatest minds of the age have consigned to oblivion long ago.

But if these two classes of whom I have spoken have much to learn, what shall we say of that third class of whom Emma Jane Warboise is a specimen brick? Anyone who has ever read either "Overdale" or "Father Fabian," will know what I mean. This lady is haunted by a spook in a black gown which she calls a Jesuit. A cunning, mischievous goblin, who creeps into unsuspecting households in the guise of an Anglican minister and converts them to Romanism before they know what they are about. Miss or Mrs. Warboise is a Methodist, and her books are directed against Anglicanism in general and high-churchism in particular, as being the great highways to Rome. According to her, Protestants who cherish religious purity and freedom must cast themselves into the arms of Dissent or consent to go into the bondage of Rome via the Anglican establishment; and she barricades her position by asserting that no dissenter ever went straight into the jaws of Romanism, but always took a circuitous road through Orthodoxy. Wherein Miss Warboise displays lamentable ignorance of current events. Unfortunately, her want of knowledge is not confined to one point; her books are full of the most absurd mistakes which might be forgiven in a school girl, but are inexcusable in one who sets herself up as a teacher and guide in the most momentous question that ever disturbed the human soul. For instance, in "Overdale" she makes her hero, who had been an Anglican clergyman, separate himself from his wife, because, forsooth, he had become a Catholic, and the Catholic Church does not approve of married priests. Is Miss Warboise not aware that Anglican Orders are not recognized by the Roman Church, as she politely and grammatically calls it; and that a Protestant clergyman becomes simply a layman upon entering its fold; therefore, need not leave his wife. Surely one who shows herself so conversant with Catholic prayers and ceremonies cannot be ignorant upon the important point just mentioned. Yet if not, what are we to think of her good faith? Perhaps the lady, in her visits to the numerous monasteries and convents she describes, has unconsciously imbibed the doctrine that the end justifies the means, hitherto supposed to be peculiarly the perquisite of the Jesuits. The error, willful or accidental, might be excused did she not solemnly inform her readers at the end of the story that it was founded upon facts of which she had personal knowledge. This is a little too much.

A reader of "Overdale" or "Father Fabian" cannot help coming to the conclusion that their author has never been beyond the precincts of some English village where Orthodoxy and Dissent are locked in a death struggle, and her knowledge of the Catholic Church has been gathered from some stray book of devotion of which she had not the key. Had she even the faintest idea of the world wide work of the Jesuits and the importance of the subjects they occupy themselves with, she would never represent their General as devoting his days and nights to the perusal of midnight despatches relating to the spiritual condition of obscure Anglican clergymen in England or anywhere else. Neither is she a good reader of the signs

of the times or she would be aware that instead of leading to Rome, Ritualism is at the present moment keeping many souls out of her fold by supplying them with the outward form of the nutriment they crave; and those who have come to her by that path would have got there much more quickly had they not been delayed on the way by the shadow of the substance they were seeking. A heart that craves to express its devotion both interiorly and exteriorly would never content itself with the formalism of Methodism or the bareness of Presbyterianism. It is not Rome that makes souls discontented with these religions, it is their discontent with them that sends souls Romeward. The world moves, and before the coming generation has passed away it is safe to say that the class of people who are frightened by the bogies evoked by Emma Jane Warboise and others of that ilk, will have ceased to exist, and it is even possible that a writer may by that time dare to introduce a Catholic to his readers without feeling obliged to apologize for it.

EMMA C. STREET.

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