

# THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. XXIII.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, MARCH 2, 1904.

No. 19

## BEGINNING A LITERARY CAREER IN ENGLAND

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AS the editor has been so kind as to ask me to write something for THE VARSITY, it has occurred to me that perhaps a short account of some of the difficulties that are likely to be encountered in pursuing a literary career in England might not be unacceptable to your readers. And as my space is limited, I may at once say that there are two main points that have to be borne in mind by a Colonial or American coming to England if he would avoid disappointment.

The first is that the English people, owing to their historical antecedents and the feudal constitution of their society, have no admiration for intellect as such, nor are they disposed to yield any special deference or consideration to its possessors. The question they inwardly ask of every man they meet are, first, Is he a "gentleman" in the technical sense of the term, by birth, profession or breeding? secondly, is he a man of personal honor and integrity? If he be both he may pass anywhere, and will be treated with respect in any society; but if he have the latter qualifications without the former, if he be a workman, for example, or retail shopkeeper, or engaged in any occupation forbidden to the class of "gentleman," neither intellect nor character will avail. He will not count, he will have no personal influence, and no one will be interested either in himself or his opinions.

The aristocracy scarcely read at all, much less read solid work, and have in consequence little interest in the writers of books, and the other classes have accepted their estimate. Intellect is regarded by the people rather as a commodity than a personal attribute, a thing to be bought in the market as it is required, like a pair of shoes, without more ado, and having little more differential interest in itself than the corn or wine or cloth with which a merchant deals and out of which he makes his money.

In all the other great nations of the world a large amount of admiration, personal deference and consideration are accorded to men of intellect as such. It is not so in England, and hence it is that of all men a cultivated Englishman is least understood by the cultivated men of other nations, and until his sterling qualities of character have had time to disclose themselves, perhaps the least liked. I shall never forget my amazement when I first came to England, on being asked by a cultivated

and charming lady with whom I was dining as to what interesting sights or persons I had seen. On my answering that I had been to hear Spurgeon and Morley, Punshon and Dr. Parker, she coldly replied: "Oh! we don't think much of them," the *we* meaning the class of ladies and gentlemen to which she belonged, and who alone count either personally or in matters of opinion. And what she said I found to be true, and the reason was that, in spite of the world-wide reputation of those men and the vast congregations to whom they ministered, there were not perhaps in any of these congregations, especially in that of Spurgeon, more than half a dozen families belonging to the recognized class of "ladies and gentlemen." It was as if in America a man should imagine he could get personal admiration or consideration by having the reputation of being the preacher who could draw the largest congregation of negroes!

The second point to be borne in mind seems a paradox after what I have just said, but it is nevertheless true. It is that, in spite of this want of interest in intellectual things, nowhere else perhaps in the world will be found a greater number of competent and accomplished critics of every side of life or thought; and this is owing to the immense complexity and variety of the intellectual material of all kinds that proceeds from London as from a workshop to supply the rest of the English-speaking world, the quality of the demand everywhere calling forth the appropriate talent to meet it.

How then is all this to affect the decision of the young Colonial ambitious of making a literary reputation in the mother country? In answer, I would say that if his aim is to be a novelist, a poet, a dramatist, or a humorist, he may come over at once, for he will be in no way handicapped by the land of his birth. The critics know their business thoroughly, and will be sure to do him full justice. And even if they did not, as all classes read novels, the number of cultured and competent readers and of experienced playgoers is so large that his merits will be at once recognized. Gilbert Parker had no difficulty in getting a hearing as a novelist, or Haddon Chambers, the Australian, as a dramatist. But if he is a writer on serious subjects, on the other hand, he must be prepared for a considerable amount of preliminary disappointment. The way it operates is somewhat in this wise: When the great monthly magazines took to signed articles, editors