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The East Aurora Orator

MR. ELBERT HUBBARD, of East Aurora, New York, U.S.A., recently visited Toronto and delivered a talk in the Conservatory of Music Hall. It was not the first time that Mr. Hubbard has visited the capital of Ontario, which knows him fairly well and buys his *Philistine* and other wares in moderate quantity. Several visitors to the *Courier* office in the following week said pityingly: "Oh, you missed such a treat in not hearing Hubbard."

The admirers of this lecturer from East Aurora are inclined to be urgent and occasionally hysterical. When I calmly told a certain persistent woman that I do not admire the style and subject of Mr. Hubbard's discourses, she retorted: "I don't believe you've ever read anything he has written."

Now it does not matter in the least to Mr. Hubbard whether one lone Canadian woman likes or dislikes his writings. However, I informed the indignant champion that I had read quite enough of Mr. Hubbard's productions to find them utterly repellent but that I have no quarrel with those women—or men—who find them choice food.

In the issue of *Toronto Saturday Night* of May 2, "Lady Gay," in her interesting column, wrote a criticism of Mr. Hubbard's lecture which, like the famous *Christopher North* article, "mingled praise with blame," but which was in kindlier tone than *Christopher's* remarks. In the *Toronto Sunday World* of this week there appeared a communication signed Margaret I. MacDonald which attacked "Lady Gay's" few unfavourable comments. "Lady Gay" is quite equal to defending her own point of view in this matter. She is a brilliant, graphic journalist, with good Irish blood in her veins and is independent enough to write what she thinks, while she will hardly descend to the personal tone which marks the communication to which I have referred.

To anyone who tries to read even a little of the best that is written nowadays, the latter's characterisation of Mr. Hubbard as "one of the finest intellects of the day" is deliciously amusing. Mr. Hubbard is clever and smart and many of his admirers justly apply to him the odious word, "brainy." But his acquaintance with the best side of literature, music or art is merely showy and shallow. One may mention, by way of contrast, a member of the present British Cabinet who is hardly one of the finest intellects of the day—Mr. Augustine Birrell. There is more substance in *Obiter Dicta* than in all that the prophet of East Aurora has written. Mr. Hubbard's essays are lacking in scholarship and good taste and he probably rejoices in the lack.

"You'd better read some more of Elbert Hubbard's stuff," persisted the adviser; "it does one so much good." Several days after this advice was given, I discovered a copy of *The Philistine* among a pile of papers in the *Courier* office and settled down to read the first article. It consisted of an attack on Charles Dickens, because, forsooth, the English novelist had resented the action of a United States landlord who presented himself with a band of admirers for Dickens' delectation. No doubt Mr. Hubbard finds it entirely incomprehensible that Charles Dickens or any other writer should be irritated by the incursion of unknown admirers; but the average Englishman has a reserve and fondness for decent privacy which are, perhaps, serious flaws in the eyes of essayists to whom the big drum is the sweetest music. Some of the opening sentences in Mr. Hubbard's paragraph displayed a vulgarity so offensive that I carefully laid *The*

Philistine away with the wonder how those who care for the finer things in literary expression can enjoy such material. Charles Dickens was not without faults, either as man or writer, but he was a great creative genius whose works will be loved and cherished when the productions of "Fra Elbertus" have gone the way of last year's snow.

The writer in the *Toronto Sunday World* emphasises the high esteem in which Mr. Hubbard holds woman. Really! This is news to some readers of *The Philistine*, who have found the flamboyant editor singularly lacking in appreciation of the truer, nobler qualities in woman's nature. Mr. Hubbard wrote an article some years ago in which he decried Mr. Kipling's work, because, sad to say, the critic considered that Mr. Kipling has a contemptuous opinion of woman. Yet it never entered into the heart of Mr. Hubbard to depict such an honest type of wholesome womanhood as *William the Conqueror*, to say nothing of *Miriam Lacy* and *Georgie's* mother, while the wistful beauty of *They* is as far removed from the *Philistine* as the heavens are from East Aurora. Mary Wollstonecraft is hardly a type of womanhood to be held up for admiration and honour.

There is one feature of the *Sunday World* letter which may well arouse protest. The heading, "And They Spat Upon Him," is used in quotation marks. Surely, this is in deplorable taste. No one "spat" upon Mr. Hubbard. An able woman journalist who appreciates the brilliant aspect of his work merely made reference in well-bred fashion to features of his oration which she did not admire. The criticism was quite legitimate and independent. The time should be forever past for a difference of literary taste to be accompanied by personal unpleasantness. However, there is a more offensive aspect to this heading. The words were originally used in reference to the sufferings and persecution of the Founder of Christendom and their employment in the present connection is not short of blasphemy. Even the most ardent admirer of Mr. Hubbard's virtues will be capable of seeing the worse-than-impropriety of such an allusion.

This article is intended neither by way of attack nor defence—merely as a frank expression of opinion.

JEAN GRAHAM.

The New Learning

They taught him how to hemstitch,
and they taught him how to sing,
And how to make a basket out of
variegated string,
And how to fold a paper so he
wouldn't hurt his thumb—
They taught a lot to Bertie, but he
couldn't
do a
sum.

They taught him how to mold the
head of Hercules in clay,
And how to tell the difference 'twixt
the bluebird and the jay,
And how to sketch a horsie in a little
picture-frame—
But strangely, they forgot to teach him
how to
spell his
name.

Now, Bertie's pa was crabbed, and he
went, one day to find
What 'twas they did to make his son
so backward in the mind,
"I don't want Bertie wrecked," he
cried, in temper far from cool,
"I want him educated!" So he
took him
out of
school.

—From *Jersey Jingles*, by Leonard H. Robins.