

Contemporary Journalism

Writing of Today

Selected and discussed by J. W. Cunliffe, D.Lit., and G. R. Lomer, Ph.D. New York: The Century Company. \$2.

This is the third, and extensively revised, edition of a book that has proved its value in both the school of higher education and the private library; it contains a body of well-selected and intelligently grouped material that is meant to serve as a model for journalistic prose. The sections are divided into descriptive and narrative articles, interviews and personal sketches, expository and editorial articles, humorous and occasional pieces, controversial writings and, finally, criticism of literature, drama, music and art. The eight divisions are preceded by brief introductory paragraphs—commendable for their amount of sound, undogmatic advice and their unwillingness to sprawl into that futile professorial verbiage which mars so many collections of matter intended to serve a similar purpose.

In that characteristic tissue of paradoxes which Oscar Wilde has called "The Critic As Artist," Ernest asks: "What is the difference between literature and journalism?" To which Gilbert facetiously replies: "Oh, journalism is unreadable and literature is not read. That is all." The explanation seems to follow Wilde's notion that an artistic untruth is preferable to an uninteresting verity, but it omits the consideration that literature and journalism sometimes become interchangeable terms. Indeed, another witty Irishman, the blatant Bernard himself, has written in his "Sanity of Art" that: "I also am a journalist, proud of it, deliberately cutting out of my works all that is not journalism, convinced that nothing that is not journalism will live long as literature, or be of any use whilst it does live. I deal with all periods; but I never study any period but the present. . . . And so, let others cultivate what they call literature; journalism for me!"

Shaw Defines Journalism

Shaw, of course, says nothing new in this gay paragraph. He has merely taken what most of us always called good literature and labeled it Journalism, in order to emphasize the proposition that posterity can be interested only in those traits of man's writings which are always contemporary, because always human. And this is what the successful editors of "Writing of Today" have done. In-

deed, they might have recommended to their prospective students the reading of the passages from Wilde and Shaw that have just been quoted.

This is, then, not the average textbook, although both in arrangement and double-column width of pages it serves the external needs of that purpose admirably. It amounts, in fact, to a carefully chosen series of essays, and three-quarters of the material answers, in greater or less degree, to the Shavian definition. Picking at random, there are James Huneker on "Coney Island at Night"; Dorothy Canfield on "The Day of Glory"; H. G. Wells on "My First Flight"; Robert Minor on "Lenine"; George Santayana on "Materialism and Idealism in America"; Shaw versus Steffens on "The Case for Equality"; Dr. H. S. Canby on "The Sins of Book Reviewers"; Gosse on "Plays in Verse"; Galsworthy's important article on "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama"; Yeats on "The Irish Drama." Truly a lofty standard to set before aspiring journalists.

A Pound of Example

To every ounce of precept there is a pound of example; that is the better way of our latter-day education which Mr. Cunliffe and Mr. Lomer have followed. One can only hope that the student, passing from the book to the columns of the average newspaper, will not suffer a disillusionment that is almost inevitable. Yet the fact remains that these articles have all been culled from—and properly credited to—well-known organs on both sides of the Atlantic; they show what journalism can be at its more exacting level, and the students should be content with nothing less. In the preface to their first edition, the authors, answering their own question as to why the teaching of English composition yielded such unsatisfactory results in modern American schools and colleges, attributed the state of affairs to a lack of contact with reality. "The pupil sees in his appointed tasks no connection with his life as it is or as it is likely to be." Here that contact is established, and with no sacrifice to mere surface interest. And that contact is established in the very title of the book, which might have been "Contemporary Journalism," but is not. At least one person, unashamed to be called journalist, has gone through it with the pleasure that inevitably comes from a well-grouped succession of essays.—*Christian Science Monitor*, July 15, 1922.