
THE AMATEUR JOURNALIST

VOLUME FIVE
THE LOVECRAFT COLLECTORS LIBRARY
EDITED BY GEORGE WETZEL

The Amateur Journalist

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HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT

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EDITED BY GEORGE WETZEL

SSR
1955

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

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THE SIMPLE SPELLING MANIA

With the possible exception of slang and vers libre, the most pernicious literary crime of this unsettled age is the attempted destruction of standard English spelling by fanatical so-called reformers. In the younger days of our language, every man was his own orthographical authority. Not only were the works of the different authors marked by dissimilar spelling, but one writer would frequently vary his usage within the compass of a single sentence, even signing his own name as the fancy of the moment dictated. The ill effects of such a system are obvious, and we need but glance at the early Colonial documents of New England to perceive how confusing it was.

But increasing civilization, acting as a check to the vagaries of individuals, gradually evolved an approximately uniform orthography, which was well established by the works of the exact and polished Augustan writers, and settled with fair definiteness by Dr. Johnson's epoch-making dictionary. This process of adjustment was by no means abrupt, radical, or artificial; being a mere selection and perpetuation of the best models, with the almost imperceptible abandonment of the less desirable forms. Of the benefit of this crystallisation it is scarce necessary to speak. The use of correct English, now become uniform, spread with marvellous facility throughout all classes of society, reaching every home in our northern American colonies by means of the famous old New-England Primer. The spelling-bee arose as a recognized Yankee institution, and the isolated farmer attained an orthographical level equal to that of his more cultivated urban brother.

Another and less rational side of the situation, however, had existed since the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Sir Thomas Smith, Secretary of State to that splendid monarch, brought forward a radical and artificial scheme of phonetic spelling which defied every law of conservatism and natural growth. Part of his system required new alphabetical characters which cannot be exhibited here, but as specimens the following may be given: priesthood, "prestud;" name, "nam;" glory, "glori;" shame, "zam."

After England had ceased laughing at the eccentric precepts of Sir Thomas, there arose a celebrated teacher, one Dr. Gill, who became even more ridiculous in his departure from good taste. Some of his few innovations which can be spelled with ordinary letters are: gracious, "grasius;" seem, "sym;" love, "luv;" cannot, "kanot!"

In 1634 Mr. Charles Butler published a treatise on bees wherein he displayed a freakish mode of spelling which he had invented, and which approached, though scarcely equalled, the follies of Smith and Gill.

From the "United Co-Operative;" Number 1, Volume 1, December, 1918.

During the reign of Charles I there was a phonetic tendency which broke out in such forms as "erth" for earth, "dais" for days, and the like. Soon after this, Bishop Wilkins put forward an "ideal" orthography; which, however, he had the sense to know the public would never adopt.

There is in the author's library an edition of Erasmus Darwin's poems, printed in New York in 1805, and containing a novel system of representing the elision of vowels in verse. Unmark'd is here spelled unmarkt; parch't, parcht; touch'd, toucht; lock'd, lockt; and so on. However, despite all these attempts at disturbing the normal development of our spelling, no radical change has yet been seriously accepted or considered.

But the present age is eminently one of folly and radicalism. The metrical sins of the contemporary "poets" are grave and manifold; the colloquial atrocities of the prose writers are, if anything, more numerous and abominable still. For the first time in history our orthography is in danger of a deliberate destruction which will, if successful, obliterate all natural uniformity of spelling and plunge us backward three centuries into a state where no two men can spell alike. Each particular "reforming" fanatic has his own favourite degrees of change, and unless conventional forms be guarded with the greatest assiduity, we shall see the artificial tearing down of our language attain a chaos equal to that of Chaucer's time. Etymology, that invaluable aid to precise expression, would be extirpated, should the modern vagaries come into use.

As yet only America seems tainted by the insidious propaganda of the "spelling reformers," but Old England itself has some very ridiculous examples, and is in ultimate danger. Most offensively does the evil appear in certain of the amateur press associations, whose personnel, mainly youthful, fall an easy prey to new fallacies. While some venture no further into the vice than to write "thru," "tho," and "thoro" for through, though, and thorough, others display more serious symptoms, and are liable to commit the worst excesses of perverted orthography. Are there not enough sound critics in amateurdom to conduct a systematic campaign, both by example and precept, against "simplified" spelling? Most of the scholarly element are known to be opposed to the pernicious practice, and most writers in the United States refrain commendably from it; but in other associations it runs rampant and unchecked. It is here respectfully suggested that those publishers who, though using normal spelling themselves, yet print "simplified" contributions without amendment, take a definite stand for the purity of their mother-tongue, and revise all matter received to the authoritative forms of Webster, Worcester, or Stormonth.

The radicalism of today will soon become but a memory, and the present generation of free poets, peace advocates, socialistic cranks, and users of slang, simplified spelling and the like will look back with blushes on their former folly. Is it not best, then, to assist in the extinction of the spark which if unchecked may seriously disturb our etymological and orthographical precision and uniformity? Individual influence is slight among us, but a concerted effort to save amateurdom from corrupt usages may be felt even outside the boundaries of our little world.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

.... On considering local clubs, it strikes one as singular that only two—the Hub and Blue Pencil—would pay the newer societies to study their secrets and follow in their footsteps rather than join the silent majority in the Valley of His.

Especial care should be taken in the quest for new members; care that the acquisitions be not mere social friends of indeterminate tastes, but always actual literary enthusiasts whose love of aesthetics is sincere, intense and unmingled with mediocre professional ambitions. The best pattern for a local club is the sort of circle of aesthetics found around the major shops of our more alert cities—groups to whom beauty and ideas are the greatest interest in life.

There is ground for considerable satisfaction in the progress of this year, specially as regards the private revision of manuscripts. Messrs. Loveman and Cole command our deepest gratitude for upholding a sound artistic standard leaning neither toward Victorian dullness and insipidity nor toward modernistic chaos and extravagance. This matter of critical standards is so liable to become an acute official issue in the near future, that we believe it ought to be thrashed out while still in the unofficial stage, as it is likely to be in the course of the controversy started by Mr. White's Oracle Critique. The important thing is to ensure a critical bureau so impartial that no writer may find himself condemned or ridiculed merely for following a tradition at variance with that of his reviewer. Individual differences of opinion are inevitable and desirable, but we must, if possible, discourage the dogmatic arrogance which impels a critic of one particular school to judge by his own narrow values the authors who follow other schools, and to deal out supercilious censure or condescending shreds of faint praise on the puerile and grandiloquent assumption that these other schools have no background, standing or

From "The National Amateur" XLV - 6 July 1923; the first portion of this prose piece has been deleted from this reprint, as being matter of the "business" of the National Amateur Press Association and of no interest to the Lovecraft collector.

authentic existence. Ultra-conservatives and ultra-radicals are equally in the respect; indeed, we hardly know which is the more provokingly pitiful, the unimaginative fossil who scarcely realizes that William Blake, Nietzsche, Huysmans, Remv de Gourmont, and George Santayana have been born, or the feverish Freudian who speaks patronisingly of Homer and Milton, and knows Dryden only by name. Both of these extreme types must curb their personal prejudice, acknowledging on the one hand that the continuous stream of traditional art can never be despised, and on the other hand that the growth of sophistication and psychological knowledge has added to the general body of art many new and unaccustomed forms and points of view which are none the less genuine because they involve shifting values and apparently enigmatic subtleties of thought.

What we must seek to destroy is the clownish snickering which, if not checked will end by discouraging all sincere artistic effort of any kind.

Secretary of Publicity Dowdell is to be congratulated on what he has done in the brief time at his disposal. His successor next term should receive equal support, for a campaign once commenced possesses a momentum which should not go to waste. Recruiting should be increasingly discriminating, and credentials should be more than nominal formalities. We cannot hope for internal harmony unless we confine admissions to persons in sympathy with our aims—persons truly enamoured of beauty and eager for self-expression for its own sake. In the writer's opinion, assimilation is even more valuable than acquisition; so that our very first and strongest efforts should be spent in interesting persons already on the membership list, and in introducing them to all the various phases of our work and associated life. There is really very little reason why amateurism should consist of an active inner circle surrounded by a penumbra of transient members who never learn our inmost counsels or share our essential spirit. Another important matter is the inclusion in the National Association of many local club members who at present either fail to belong to the country-wide body or else remain as inactive "fillers" on its list. The inactivity of these persons in the National constitutes in many cases a reprehensible waste of fine material, and we would urge that the local clubs encourage their members not only to join the National but to participate to the fullest extent in its general correspondence, discussion, and publishing activities. It is unfortunate that there should be so many half-amateurs.

.... With such activities and prospects, the members are urged with sincerest fervour not to let the coming year witness a pottering out or relapse to trivial and unliterary conditions. For the socially and commercially inclined there are plenty of congenial organizations—Elks, Rotarians, Y.M.C.A., Boy Scouts, Mutual Welfare League, and what not. Let the Babbits seek their level. But let us keep amateur journalism attuned to that unique minority who need it most—the

lonely "Lucian Taylors" of the world, who possess personalities and individual minds, live rather than vegetate, thrill at beauty and shrink from tawdriness, and demand a selected fellowship because they must express themselves, yet cannot among the commonplace, self-satisfied uncomprehending bulk of mankind. There are the real amateur journalists—sensitive and artistic minds that see in the universe more than the atoms and molecules, food and clothing, dollars and cents, and patterns and platitudes of the throng. They deserve consideration because there are so few of them, and because the mediocre monotones of the diurnal treadmill have so little to offer them. Grant them at least one haven from the maddening greyness, sameness, tameness, hypocrisy, and emptiness of the crude and futile puppet-show called life; one haven on earth "ubi salva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare requit!"

It is not learning or proficiency which determines the amateur; these indeed are often the remote goals he seeks. What does determine him is the possession of a real individuality, be it cultivated or uncultivated, and this moves us to realize that the supreme banes of our circle are the obvious and the commonplace. There are the facile and insidious foes that creep unawares into our most pretentious counsels—these elusive atmospheric drugs which subtly stifle our aspirations and debase our efforts. Sometimes they masquerade as wit, sometimes as great wisdom or erudition; but always they retain the same stultifying qualities—supine acceptance of conventional externals and illustrious, sottish absorption in repetitious details, and meaningless practicalities, stupid and ephemeral mock-values, and a gleeful infantile exultation in the stereotyped, glamourless, and painfully predicable routine of the common, cowed, inhibition-ridden habit-ruled multitude. In such drab Philistinism is a negation of every sincere and genuine value in life; a repudiation of every faculty which distinguishes men from one another and from the presumably lower animals. It is a servile and cowardly resignation of real humanity; a sale of each soul's individual birthright of beauty and intellect for a waterly collective anaesthesia and sheep-like system of wholesale try and rote action. What depths of mental poverty and aesthetic paralysis yawn in the simple fact that hordes of people each supposedly endowed with individual perceptive faculties and a responsive imagination, vary not a whit in their stolid, incurious reactions to the world's wonders, and glimpse not a vision beyond the bare, material geometrical outlines of the scene before them. One patient herd; one conglomerate mind; one universal coma! This every-day, beauty-void point of view, or absence of a point of view, is a kind of death to the individual personality. It is a darkness of mediaevalism—a repression and a resignation. Life is an escape from it; and only the real thinker or the real artist lives. Art and Thought form a sort of resurrection—a sort of glorious pagan Renaissance of some half-fabulous golden antiquity of freedom, beauty, intensity, and individuality. From one grey world the artist escapes to a colourful cosmos of hundreds of brilliant worlds—for does not an awakened imagination shatter all barriers and empower the mind to shape the impressions it receives? Nor must any two artists see exactly

the same kaleidoscope of worlds; for do not the sensitive fancies of men differ as much a hideous common sepulture in shadow as their faces? Truly, artists exchange through spheres irradiate and iridescent. To give such liberty and adventures to aspiring spirits capable of receiving them, modern amateur journalism exists. Can even the stoutest defender of unimaginative mediocrity tell us why institution should be held back to accommodate bovine Philistines who do not crave these peculiar benefits! Let the National rise above the surly, dog-in-the-manger psychology whereby so many of its contemporaries have suffered wreckage at the hands of their unprogressive substrata!

As the writer lays down the insignia of office after seven months tenure, he is conscious of a vast surge of relief. The burdens have been many, but will not be regretted if they prove instrumental in redeeming and preserving amateur journalism as a genuinely artistic force. Of the gratitude owed to the many officers and members whose cooperation has been so indispensable, words cannot tell. It is possible only to hope that one's own efforts have been worthy of such valiant and generous support

AMATEUR CRITICISM

The somewhat remarkable attack of an amateur editor upon the United's critical bureau, made just a year ago, has apparently inaugurated a long period of debate regarding this phase of our literary activity. Exponents of mildness and severity, vagueness and frankness, personality and generality, archaism and modernism, each have had their say; without arriving at any perfect community of ideas or consensus of opinion.

"The Conservative" in this issue publishes a brief contribution to the fray, from the pen of Prof. Philip B. McDonald, Chairman of the Department of Private Criticism. Prof. McDonald is a modernist and liberalist; and while his remarks are undeniably the fruit of much erudition, mature reflection, and sincere conviction, it is hard to let them pass unchallenged. As former Public Critic, "The Conservative" feels impelled to defend the policy whereby he was always a strict upholder of classical standards and impeccable technic.

Prof. McDonald affirms, "that it is more important to be interesting than to be correct," and in enunciating this dictum he is indeed speaking truly. All things, however, have their limits; and there are certain standards of technique below which no author may fall without impairing his literary strength, and distracting the attention of his readers by the grossness and numerousness of his faults. Style should be imperceptible; the crystal medium through which the theme is viewed. Laxity of technique is the least excusable of literary deficiencies, since it depends not on a want of natural parts, but on pure haste or indolence. We may pardon a dull writer, since his Boeotian offences arise from the incurable mediocrity of his genius; but can we thus excuse the careless scribbler whose worst blunders could be corrected by an extra hour of attention or research? The contemporary tendency to condone carelessness for the sake of brilliancy, is as illogical as it is pernicious. No man ever wrote the duller for being correct, whilst many have transformed commonplaceness to pleasing urbanity by means of a graceful mode of expression.

Among amateur journalists, technique is the most neglected branch of literary art. We have scores of brilliant writers whose productions lose a considerable percentage of their possible force through lack of polish. Concretely, it may be pointed out that of our well-known poets only

From "The Conservative" vol 4-1, July, 1918.

Messrs. Kleiner, Lowrey, and Loveman have an absolutely comprehensive and unfailing mastery of their medium, whilst the writers of elegant and musical prose are scarcely greater in number. Not to strive in every way to remedy this condition would be both unwise and reprehensible. It is in no spirit of cavilling or assumed superiority that "The Conservative" and other official critics have consistently laboured on the side of correctness. Any other course would have seemed, in their eyes, a flagrant dereliction of duty.

Regarding the element of individual taste and personal preferences in official criticism, it would be foolish to insist that the reviewer suppress all honest convictions of his own; foolish because such suppression is an impossibility. It is, however, to be expected that such a one will differentiate between personal and general dicta, nor fail to state all sides of any matter involving more than one point of view. This course "The Conservative" sought to follow during his tenure of the critical chairmanship, with the matter of vers libre as a single possible exception. That abominable species of artistic Bolshevism, condemned with equal vigour by every person who has ever been connected with the United's critical bureau, has no more right to a defence than political Bolshevism or any other sort of anarchy. Fortunately but few specimens have been inflicted upon our Association.

Within the last few weeks one of amateurdom's most prominent critics, a man who has served for more than a decade on either the public or private board, expressed in a personal letter the belief that all amateur public criticism is futile; that if honest it offends too deeply to instruct, and that if "sugar-coated" it has no power to inculcate ideas. "The Conservative" does not entirely coincide with this view, but experience and observation have done much to remove from his mind the opposite opinion.

THE SYMPHONIC IDEAL

Just a year ago "The Conservative" had occasion to refer to his contemporary, "The Symphony," whose discontinuance last July is a matter of such keen regret amongst United members. Though never formally affiliated with the Association, it was widely known in amateur journalism as an exponent of the acquisition of happiness through conscientious service to humanity. That so benignant a journal should lack the support necessary for continuance, is a circumstance reflecting unfavourably upon the mental temper of our age. We live in the midst of a new and outspoken cynicism; the result of declining orthodoxy on the part of the religious, and of aimless iconoclasm on the part of the philosophical. The happiness once acknowledged in our minor joys and moments of respite from the burden of life, is now laughed at and despised as a mere narcotic to the intelligence; and we are bidden to dismiss as unreal those simple and honest delights which alone make human existence endurable. If aught but the severe satisfaction of perfect intellectual, artistic, aesthetic, and moral beauty chance to please us, we are straightaway damned as superficial, and censured for our childish triviality of taste.

There recently appeared before the public a rather unsophisticated volume entitled "Pollyanna," which preached a sweetly artificial doctrine of converting ills into blessings by the contemplation of possible calamities still more direful. After a period of enthusiastic laudation from the "jeune fille" type of admirer, poor "Pollyanna" became the target of every penny-a-line hack reviewer and little-wit in Grub Street. They loftily demonstrated that the easing of melancholy by force of imagination is a vastly unscientific thing. Impossible, they vowed! Or, even if possible, it ought not to be; since 'tis a frightfully callow sort of mental regimen, quite unworthy of the mature mind! They all swore 'tis an affront to the eternal verities to be able to stop thinking of the world's evil and to gather a little joy from that idyllic goodness and virtue of which the world undoubtedly possesses, or seems to possess, a little. The "New York Tribune," in fact, deemed the inoffensive "Pollyanna" sufficiently culpable to merit a sneering editorial

(* From "The Conservative" vol 2-3; Oct., 1916.)

THE PROFESSIONAL INCUBUS

It has often been remarked that fiction is the weakest point in amateur literature, and I do not think the belief is a mistaken one. None can deny that we have nothing in the field of the story which may be compared with the poetry of Samuel Loveman, the essays of Edward H. Cole, or the phantasies of Frank Belknap Long, Jr. True, Mrs. Edith Minter produces work of the highest quality—but unfortunately only the most infinitesimal fraction of this appears in the amateur press. Our loss is the outside world's gain.

The generally assigned cause for our fictional debility is lack of space, and this factor is certainly a potent one. For the adequate development of a story idea, ample room is an absolute essential; and this we are unable to provide for under present financial conditions. But of late I have come to believe that there is another cause; a cause extending very deeply into the composition of the American scene, and affecting us because of our slowness in making a certain distinction. This cause is the hopeless inferiority and inartistry of the entire standard of American bourgeois fiction, and the neglected distinction is that between successful professional fiction and honestly artistic attempts at self-expression in the narrative.

If the object of amateur journalism were to train likely young plodders in the skilled manual labour of professional fiction carpentry, no one might justly protest at the existing condition. But the idea has been held by some that amateurism is synonymous with aesthetic sincerity, and with the loving craftsmanship for its own sake which is art. If this is so, we are on the wrong track; for there is nothing of art or true merit in the "salable short story" which too often forms the model of our efforts. I do not think any meritorious short story could be sold to an average professional magazine of the popular class except by accident. He who strives to produce salable fiction is lost as an artist, for the conditions of American life have made art impossible in the popular professional field.

Editors and publishers are not to blame. They cater to their public, and would suffer shipwreck if they did not. And even when one transfers the blame to the larger unit, one cannot justly be very savage in his blaming; for analysis shows that most of the trouble is ab-

* From the "National Amateur," XLVI - 4 March, 1924.

solutely inevitable—as incapable of human remedy as the fate of any protagonist in the Greek drama. Here in America we have a very conventional and half-educated public—a public trained under one phase or another of the puritan tradition, and also dulled to aesthetic sensitiveness because of the monotonous and omnipresent over stressing of the ethical element. We have millions who lack intellectual independence, courage and flexibility to get an artistic thrill out of an original and realistic situation, or to enter sympathetically into a story unless it ignores the colour and vividness of actual human emotions and conventionally presents a simple plot based on artificial, ethically sugar-coated values and leading to a flat denouement which vindicates every current platitude and leaves no mystery unexplained by the shallow comprehension of the most mediocre reader.

That is why our professional fiction is unworthy of the emulation of any literary artist. Editors, however, cannot logically be blamed. If any magazine sought and used artistically original types of fiction, it would lose its readers almost to a man. Half the people wouldn't understand what the tales were about, and the other half would find the characters unsympathetic—because these characters would think and act like real persons instead of like the dummies which the American middle classes have been taught and persuaded to consider and accept as human beings. Such is the inevitable condition regarding the enormous bulk of fiction which sets the national standard and determines the type of technical training given all fictional students even in our best universities.

But even this is not all. Added to this, as if by the perversity of a malign fate, is the demand of an overspeeding public for excessive quantity production. Simply put, the American people demand more stories per year than the really artistic author of America could possibly write. A real artist never works fast except by mood, and never turns out large quantities except by rare chance. He cannot contract to deliver so many words in such and such a time, but must work naturally, gradually, sometimes very slowly, and always as his psychological state determines; utilizing favourable states of mind and refraining from putting down the stuff his brain turns out when it is tired or disciplined to such effort. Now this, of course, will not do when there are hundreds of magazines to fill at regular intervals. So many pages per month or week must be filled; and if the artistic writers lag behind, the publishers must find the next-best thing—persons of mere talent, who can learn certain mechanical rules and technical twists, and put forth stuff of external smoothness, whose sole merit is in conforming to patterns and rehashing the situations and reactions which have been found interesting to the people by previous experience. In many cases these writers achieve popularity—because the public recognizes the elements that pleased it before, and is satisfied to receive them again in dexterously transposed form. Actually, the typical reader has very little true taste, and judges by absurd freaks, sentimentalities, and analogies. So it has come to be an accepted tradition that

American fiction is not an art but a trade—a thing to be learnt by rule by almost anybody, and demanding above all else a complete submergence of one's own personality and thought in the general stream of conventional patterns which correspond to the bleakly uniform view of life forced on us by mediocre leadership. Success therefore comes not to the man of genius, but to the clever fellow who knows how to catch the public point of view and play up to it. Glittering tinsel reputations are built up, and dumb driven hundreds of otherwise honest and respectable plumbers take correspondence courses to crush their individuality and try to be like these scintillant "great ones" whose achievements are really no more than mere charlatanry.

Such is our fictional situation—indiscriminate hordes of writers, mostly without genius, striving by erroneous methods toward a goal which is erroneous to start with! One sees the thing at its zenith in periodicals like "The Saturday Evening Post," where men of more or less real talent are weighted down with the freely flung gold which forms the price of their originality and artistic conscience. A fearful incubus—which only a few adroit or daring souls ever shake off. But here in amateurdom there is no gold to weigh us down or buy our conscience.... Here, if anywhere, we ought to be able to write for the love of writing and the thrill of aesthetic conquest. Shall we not at least strive to do this, in order that our institution may be a thing of real dignity and value instead of a rather ridiculous caricature of the tawdry professional sphere?

A REPLY TO THE LINGERER

Editor Tryout: It was with little interest that I perused the recent attack on the United Amateur Press Association made by the Rev. Greame Davis in his excellent publication "The Lingerer." Since the culture and intellectual quality of Mr. Davis forbid one to charge him with the trivial and illiberal prejudices of association politics it is an inevitable deduction that his anti-United attitude arises from lack of recent information concerning the two major societies and their places in the amateur world today.

It is entirely true that much puerility and much immaturity does exist within the United. The discovery of this condition requires no considerable acumen, nor does its mention in a United paper constitute either a treasonable revelation or a naive admission. The Conservative editorial from which Mr. Davis derives such unholy glee was a frank criticism of a remediable fault; and was directed against a small clique, also active in the National, whose maleficent energy seems now quite spent. For evidence of a puerility that is permanent or an immaturity that is immutable, our critic should look elsewhere; nor should he close his eyes to his own association whilst sifting out the flaws of another.

To speak brutally and impartially, all amateurdom is more or less homogeneously tinged with a certain delicious callowness. To confound this callowness with downright density would be most unjust, for it is merely a healthy adolescence which results from the continual infusion of young blood. But why exclude the United from this charitable interpretation? Is the ancient and honorable lineage of the National a fetish so potent that what passes for budding genius within its own fold, must in the United be branded with alliterative ingenuity as "permanent puerility and immutable immaturity?" I would admonish Mr. Davis that it ill becomes the pot to call the kettle black.

When Mr. Davis essays a direct comparison between the United and National, he exhibits most clearly the effects of his long absence from amateurdom. Proud of the justly famous personages in the old association, he is entirely ignorant of the new and commanding figures in the literary life of the United; men and women of ideals and scholarship, who have appeared above the horizon during his seven years of retirement.

*From "Tryout" vol 3 No. 7, June 1917.

Perhaps it is the dormant state of the amateur press which has kept many of these gifted recruits from his notice, but he at least owes it to the United to withhold invidious comparisons before acquainting himself with our present personnel.

To refute Mr. Davis' none too generous suggestion that my own loyalty to the United is caused by a conceited desire to stand out against a background even more mediocre than myself, I need only mention the names of a score of fellow members, to each of whom I can justly and gladly concede the palm of vastly superior genius, scholarship, and expression. Were I desirous of shining at the expense of youth and crudity, I am sure that my search for suitable "foils" would lead me through pastures much closer to Mr. Davis than the United.

If in the preceding paragraphs I have seemed to bear criticism with less than Christian meekness and acquiescence, it is because of the peculiarly unprovoked and uncalled for nature of Mr. Davis' attack on the United. It would perhaps have been more seemly and logical to explain to the Lingerer some of the ceaseless and laborious enterprises undertaken by the United in the ill-rewarded cause of serious educational service; enterprises whose very spirit and essence are unknown to the basically dilettante mind of the typical Nationalite; but I feel that he should have known of these before seizing upon an exceptional case of criticism as grounds for a polite sneer. The standards of a decade ago are no longer to be applied to amateurdom, for the United has left the beaten path and is pioneering in fields to which the National does not aspire. Each association has now its separate niche; and the need for mutual rivalry, jealousy and hostility is past.

Rev. Graeme Davis is deservedly classed as one of the elect in our miniature world. His Lingerer is one of the few papers of which no one recipient will ever throw away a copy. Must he not, considering the intellectual height from which he views the panorama of amateurdom, soon grasp the scene as a whole, without the prejudices common to less disciplined mentalities?

CONCERNING "PERSIA—IN EUROPE"

"Indiguor quaudoque bonus dormitat Howerus: Verum operi lovgio fas est obrepere somnum."

—Horace, Ars Poetica.

Editor Tryout:- Since Mr. James F. Morton, Jr., so conclusively demonstrated his scholastic infallibility over a year ago, in his lofty essay on "Conservative Run Mad," the undersigned would like to inquire about a remarkable geographical statement contained in his clever article in your September number.

In suggesting the birthplace of an historical character whom he later shows to be a PERSIAN, the Great Radical describes the land as "one of the most backward countries of modern EUROPE. The undersigned, when seeking to guess who the unnamed individual might be, exhausted the previous recognized area of the European continent without avail; never dreaming that Persia had moved out of Asia into the more western grand division of the earth's surface. Is it a result of the war, or merely an incident in the progress of that Radicalism which heeds no boundary lines, either of reason or of territory?

Amateurism would doubtless appreciate a more detailed knowledge of this unexpected change of continental allegiance on the part of an ancient state whose history is symbolical of the Orient and its spirit. Lacking this knowledge our members are scarcely to be blamed for their failure to identify the heroine of Mr. Morton's sketch; in fact, it would be impossible for anyone to select the proper personage, with the search so plainly confined to Europe as we have hitherto known it.

It is only fair to add that the undersigned would have failed in any case; being unfamiliar with the minor theological vagaries of the modern Orientals, or with the fugitive freaks and fallacies of Eastern superstition which occasionally flitter into this country to prey upon the minds and purses of the credulous.

* From "Tryout," vol. 3 No. 2, January, 1917.

LES MOUCHES FANTASTIQUES

Extreme literary radicalism is always a rather amusing thing, involving as it does a grotesque display of egotism and affectation. Added to this quality, however, there is a distinct pathos which arises from reflection on the amount of real suffering which the radical must, if serious, endure through his alienation from the majority.

Both of these aspects lately impressed "The Conservative" with much force, as he glanced over a now and most extraordinary amateur publication entitled Les Mouches Fantastiques published by Miss Elsie Alice Gidlow and Mr. Roswell George Mills of Montreal. Miss Gidlow and Mr. Mills are sincere and solemn super-aesthetes, fired with the worthy ambition of elevating dense and callous mankind to their own exalted spiritual plane, and as such present vast possibilities to the humorist; but it is also possible to view their efforts in another light, and to lament the imperfect artistic vision which imparts to their utterances so outré an atmosphere.

The Gidlow-Mills creed, so far as may be discovered from their writings, is that Life is a compulsory quest of beauty and emotional excitement; these goals being so important that man must discard everything else in pursuing them. Particularly, we fancy, must he discard his sense of humour and proportion. The skeptical bulk of humanity, who cannot or do not enter upon this feverish quest, are (as Miss Gidlow tactfully tells us) "unnecessary."

And of what do these great objects of Life, as revealed in the pages of Les Mouches, consist? The reader may, up to date, unearth nothing save a concentrated series of more or less primitive and wholly unintellectual sense-impressions; instinct, form, colour, odour, and the like, grouped in all the artistic chaos characteristic of the late Oscar Wilde of none too fragrant memory. Much of this matter is, as might be expected, in execrable taste. Now is this Life? Is human aspiration indeed to be circumscribed by the walls of some garishly bejewelled temple of the Dionæan Eros; its air oppressive with the exotic fumes of strange incense, and its altar lit with weirdly coloured radiance from mystical braziers? Must we forever shut ourselves in such an artificial shrine, away from the pure light of sun and stars, and the natural currents of normal existence?

* From "The Conservative," vol. 4, no. 1, January, 1918.

It seems to "The Conservative" that Miss Gidlow and Mr. Mills, instead of being divinely endowed seers in sole possession of all Life's truths, are a pair of rather youthful persons suffering from a sadly distorted philosophical perspective. Instead of seeing Life in its entirety, they see but one tiny phase, which they mistake for the whole. What worlds of beauty—pure Uranian beauty—are utterly denied them on account of their bondage to the lower regions of the senses! It is almost pitiful to hear superficial allusions to "Truth" from the lips of those whose eyes are sealed to the Intellectual Absolute; who know not the upper altitudes of pure thought, in which empirical forms and material aspects are as nothing.

The editors of Les Mouches complain very bitterly of the inartistic quality of amateur journalism; a complaint half just and half otherwise. The very nature of our institution necessitates a modicum of crudity, but if Miss Gidlow and Mr. Mills were more analytical, they could see beauty in much which appears ugly to their rather astigmatic vision.

LOOKING BACKWARDS

I

If cultivation in literature and literary imagination teaches anything, it is that Time is a purely physical phenomenon; powerless to affect the mind and personality of him who consciously resists its changes. The eternal youth of Endymion is more a striking allegory than an idle tale, for does not the dreamer escape the engulfing current of years, remaining ever able to perpetuate or re-create whatsoever age or scene he wills? We speak superficially of "obsolete" and "modern" things, fatuously fancying that the latter are different and superior; yet will not reflection prove that all are of one essential nature, occupying an equal place and importance in an eternity which has neither beginning nor ending? The abstract and independent mind belongs to no particular age or period; it can dwell for an hour within the walls of Neneveh, and in the next hour sport with Pan on Maenalian slopes. It can exchange thoughts with Ben Jonson at the Mermaid and with San Johnson at the Mitre; or, narrowing down suddenly to the microcosm of amateur journalism, can with suitable material live over again the DIES HALCYONEI which so great a throng lament as lost.

Such is the train of reflection awaked by hours of browsing amongst the yellowed amateur papers of long ago, a privilege which lately befell the writer through the unfailing kindness of our indispensable "Tryout." Confronted with this array of journals, none could fail to visualize the early days from which they have survived; and at the desire of the editor this visualization will be shared by "Tryout's" readers. If our backward glance seem to the elder generation to contain any irreverence toward tradition, or to betray any grievous ignorance of old-time conditions and motives, our excuse must be the necessarily limited data at hand. EX PEDE HERCULEM is a proverb rather inapplicable to an institution as heterogeneous as amateur journalism. But it may none the less be of interest to revive old scenes for the eyes of a later age, and to arrange our fabled past by the side of the present for a comparison, be it ever so imperfect.

Our curtain rises in 1882 upon a nation freshly mourning the martyred Garfield and still vigorous and optimistic despite certain vague shadows of socialism, foreign immigration, and other forms of decadence

* Reprinted in part from "Tryout" where it appeared serially from Feb. 1920 (Vol 6; No 2) to June, 1920 (Vol 6, No 6).

Telephones and electric lights are novelties, the automobile is undreamed of. Horse cars still jingle over the streets. Letter postage is three cents, soon to descend to two (unconscious counterpart of Great War conditions), but amateur papers can be mailed at second class rates.

Amateurdom is taking itself seriously—more seriously than the future age of 1920 can conceive of. It is a group of ardent souls, mostly young men and youths, who have apparently concentrated all their recreational activities in this one field; living therein their whole non-professional lives, and lavishing upon it a devotion which in 1920 hardly four members will be able to show. Their seriousness is a part of the spirit of the age; of an America yet young, simple, and hopeful; fundamentally untroubled with the unsophistication, cynicism, and doubt of value which are later to creep in. There is great confidence—abounding faith in the external forms of life and demeanour. Mid-Victorianism is in the air, and trifles often loom large.

Papers are large and exceedingly numerous, and in many cases of substantial literary merit. As in later times controversies rage endlessly. Here a hater of the late Professor Longfellow carps about the poet's tameness or dependence upon foreign literature; there an idolater lauds to the skies his polished and musical mediocrity. The beginning of rationalism are appearing, and clear thinkers are waging unequal combats against legions of the dully orthodox. Activity and prosperity abound, and one member deems the institution so important that he records in book form his "Career and Reminiscences."

But there is a darker side to the picture. It must be admitted that not all of our members are literateurs. Unpleasant official controversies are numerous, and interest in vapid politics is tremendous. Contests for empty offices, involving not a single literary issue, are conducted with incredible earnestness and sometimes doubtful scrupulousness. Political animosities and ballot scandals ring disagreeably above the general turmoil. Frequently the law is invoked in the form of affidavits with notarial seals. Obviously, as it will in 1920, amateurdom contains many persons of marked commonness, whose objects are far from scholarly. Convention reports do not always chronicle a very high type of diversion, and the future generation would be reluctant to follow the New York delegation of '83, whose sociological research took them to such places as McGlory's dance hall, the Empire saloon, and Allen's dive. Later we shall see the reaction which naturally arose from such intrusions of lower standards.

In this age activity centres in the National Amateur Press Association, the United standing over a decade in the future. Sectional associations, however, are abundant from north to south, and east to west. Conventions of these associations are often of more importance than those of the National itself, that of the N.E.A.P.A. at Gardner, Mass., in 1883 being especially memorable. Gardner is the seat of much local activity, including high-school activity—being in a sense the Appleton of its time. New England amateurdom, it may be remarked,

seems to have a tone more uniformly high than that of any other section
....

II

An old timer of the highest type, still active, has classified the amateurs of the past into three distinct species: the literati, the plodders, and the politicians. That classification undoubtedly holds good today, although we are fortunate enough to have the third class much less numerously represented.

The literatus was the true apex of amateur development. He and he alone upheld the highest ideals of our institution, and upon him alone the credit for our intellectual achievements must rest. At the same time, however, the plodder must not be slighted. To him is due in great measure the existence of the amateur press; for although many of the literati were active publishers, the real impetus for publication undoubtedly arose amongst a more unliterary class who preserved to a large extent their boyish love of print and publicity. Many of the so-called plodders possessed much native taste; and although not active as authors, were in a sense genuine patrons of letters. Certainly they are to be commended above the type of person who, failing to acknowledge a want of artistic inspiration, perversely scribbles on without it.

Of the politicians it is difficult to speak without a smile. Many of them were recruited from the other two classes, and when coming from the literati, they often conferred substantial benefits upon amateurdom. But in all too many cases they were a distinct set of bright, shrewd and none too patrician youths, with much skill in handling their fellow-men, but with little or no aesthetic interest or aspiration. They sought office for its own sake and their ideals and triumphs were of tinsel only. They had no issues to champion, and their standard of success was merely the ability to sway those about them. Office to them was not an opportunity to serve, but a mere prize to be captured for its own intrinsic value as an advertisement of cunning and popularity. The politicians saw in amateurdom an easy field for the exercise of cheap subtlety on a small scale; and they do not seem, on the whole, to have realized very clearly its artistic ambitions. On the other hand, many of them served faithfully and well, and relieved the literati of the dull drudgery of routine administration. Such politicians regarded amateurdom with affection and gratitude, because it had conferred upon them the things they sought.

Raising the curtain once more upon the bygone scene, we are confronted by a pleasing and varied array of papers...

In the remarkable GRANITE STATE AMATEUR of a year ago we were treated to a reprint of a very effective short story—missing from the files before the writer—which originally appeared in the LANCE for July, 1884. "Mr. Dean," by Joseph Dana Miller, was founded upon a posthumously discovered synopsis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's; and its development

does credit alike to Mr. Miller and to his age of amateurdom. The imaginative atmosphere and gruesomely suggestive conclusion are handled in a manner which certainly cannot have caused Mr. Hawthorne's shade any marked dissatisfaction.

... Of these Massachusetts journals "Northern Breezes" easily takes the lead. Appleton itself could not produce two brighter boys than the cousins Charles Heywood and Frank H. Green of Gardner, whose mature language and instinctive final choice of amateurdom's most worthy side placed them on an equal footing with the older youths about them. Like other persons of ability, they had enemies. Their genealogical researches led to their denunciation as "aristocrats," yet who in these days of democratic decadence will condemn their just pride of lineage?

The brilliant and incisive critical articles of these young editors are a delight to the lover of literature and of precocity. Not always are they entirely just, as witness the over-zealous attack on Mr. Edkins, then a new recruit; but they are always candid, observing, and honestly analytical, drawn from a satisfactory fund of culture and solid reading. Master Green's defence of the classics against the clumsy strictures of a practical soul who declared that "Greek and Latin never help a man make a living" ought to be republished today....

III

Amateur Journalism has always been particularly rich in striking contrasts. Side by side have flourished the most exclusive and meritorious, and the most primitive and barbaric, of publications. Yet the latter are not always to be condemned, since they frequently represent the first faltering steps of young editors who will one day stride with the gods. In the early 'eighties no better example of literary contrast can be found than that afforded by Mr. Brainerd Emery's SENTINEL, and Mr. Finlay Aron Grant's YOUNG NOVA SCOTIA. With one member purely literary and the other frankly juvenile and popular, this pair furnish a typical case of extremes....

... the SENTINEL evidently strove to occupy the front rank among the really literary journals of its day, and without a doubt succeeded. The substantial articles, good stories, acute critical paragraphs and really inspired poetry all attest its excellence.

... the SENTINEL's fiction, like the fiction of modern amateurdom, was a weak point. Conspicuous for its utter, unrelieved crudity, was a serial by one George H. Raymond, entitled "Butterfly Villa." Certain esteemed contemporaries sedately censured Mr. Emery for publishing a piece representing such vulgar manners and boorish conduct; but the average critic's censure is necessarily anything but sedate. For an equally absurd yet seriously intended picture of social life, one must look to such narratives as "The Young Visitors." Miss Raymond seems to have been a school-girl devotee of the popular dime novels of her time, for surely she could nowhere else have derived such a grotesque set of artificial stock characters and situations. Perhaps the

most completely hilarious feature is the impossible and unpronounceable pseudo-Cockney dialect placed in the mouth of one evidently meant to be an English gentleman of birth and cultivation; though the Pamela-like epistolary conclusion, wherein all stray ends are gathered up, is a close second...

IV

... Mr Harrison attended the New York Convention in July, 1883—the famous convention at which the destruction of proxy ballots caused so great a sensation—and published his experiences in a serial narrative entitled: "A Midsummer Ramble." This serial at once brought added notoriety to the VISITOR, a notoriety resulting from the nature of some of the events chronicled. At that period the fastidious artist was not the typical amateur, and much of the convention sightseeing consisted of the sort of "slumming" so popular among certain visitors to the metropolis thirty or more years ago. To the raw, lively young Westerner the sordid dens and barrooms of the great city were a fascinating novelty, and in his article he dwelt upon them with such evident zest and ardour that the more refined amateurs protested quite emphatically. However, it is to be doubted if Mr. Harrison was disturbed by the criticism. He and his convention associates had had what they considered a "good time;" and their very enjoyment of the sport of "seeing the seamy side of life" argues a temperament not especially sensitive to the reproaches of good taste.

This underworld convention has a singularly amusing echo in the amateurdom of thirty two years later. Many readers of "Tryout" will recall the attack upon active amateurs made by members of "The Fossils" five years ago, when the latter were so anxious to drive from amateurdom everyone over the age of twenty. One of the chief Fossil spokesmen at that time was a certain Charles C. Heuman, who seized upon the delegates to the 1915 convention (Brooklyn) as his especial prey, and prepared an article in which he denounced with virtuous and vehement ire the harmless excursions of these folk to a few of the insipid "Bohemian" haunts where curious bourgeois observers are shown what is supposed to be the atmosphere of real aestheticism. Mr. Heuman's eloquence against such abysmal iniquity was really touching—one may find it in the December, 1915 "Fossil"—and he was especially thankful that his son, the offspring of so spotless a sire, had never been contaminated by contact with modern amateurs. Now the humour of Mr. Heuman's position comes from a comparison of his 1915 utterances with his part in the 1883 "Midsummer Ramble" so vividly delineated in the VISITOR. The ensuing parallel columns will tell their own story, and point their own moral.

THOMAS G. HARRISON
IN THE VISITOR,
NOVEMBER 8, 1883

CHARLES C. HEUMAN
IN THE FOSSIL,
DECEMBER, 1915

"As yet we had seen but little

"It was my fondest wish that my

of New York by night, but we commenced going the rounds. Charley Heuman ((!!!)) whom we hunted up, escorted Reeve and ourself one evening, and we were taken to a number of resorts on Fourteenth St., Prince St., Six Avenue, and others. Of these the "Haymarket" was the most interesting. This used to be a famous theatre, but is now a dance house some grades better than McGlory's. It is the home of the Dude and the ablest representatives of this class can always be found there. The women who frequent it are better looking and better dressed than at any other place we were in. At the "Empire Saloon" Heuman fell in with an old friend who introduced us to an interesting specimen of the London cockney, fresh from Britain; a genuine London 'Array, who dropped his h's most elegantly. He wouldn't reciprocate the numerous "treats" however; in revenge for which we got in a mash on his girl, about which the two men came near quarrelling. About the worst place we were in was "The Allens," which is a most disreputable dive, the loafing place of pickpockets, cracksmen, and all classes of thieves and criminals."

boy would follow in my footsteps, ((!!!)) and I looked forward year after year to his initiation (into amateurdom). He is fifteen now, and ripe for it; but there is school, there is football practice, there are his bicycle, his camera, his wireloss. Besides, he has a sufficient outlet for his literary leanings through his school paper. But even if one of the barker's vulgar appeals to send a dollar and become 'literary' should escape my censorship, would I permit him to mingle with a crowd of sophisticated men and women, who would try to drag him to cho-suey dives, cheap cabarets, and like at convention time and try to teach him to insult his father's life-long friends? Not that I have any fear of the boy—he is only fifteen, and it wouldn't take him fifteen minutes to discover that he had ventured into the realm of humbug, and that these people were not the kind of people with whom he was accustomed to associate." ((?))

Vale, Heumane, censor moralium!

V

It is characteristic of human nature that every age should look back upon former times as a period of happy superiority. Today amateur journalists recall as the "halcyon era" any and all eras beyond the scope of their experience. Forty years ago it was the same, as we learn from the advertisement of Harrison's "Career," where the author says: "Every amateur who wishes to read about the halcyon days should not fail to read this book." But it is nevertheless possible for one who surveys amateur

history as a whole to point out a definite age which in combined literary tone and publishing activity stands out above all others. This is the decade of 1885-1895, during which the amateur press attained practically the same cultural level that it possesses today, yet boasted a quantitative prosperity but little below the standard of former times...

During this period amateur literature developed a polish and urbanity hitherto lacking. The younger members were growing up, and the artistic and intellectual influence of the literati was asserting itself to a degree which quite overshadowed the cheap machinations of the politicians. In 1886-7 the cultivated and uncultivated factions met in a sharp struggle; which, though resulting in a nominal victory for the uncultivated, really aroused amateurdom to a sense of its shortcomings, and spurred the majority on to higher types of endeavour. The opening number of "Athenia," dated October 1886, contained some stirring arraignments of amateurdom's cruder side. In his "Letter from an Amateur of Nowhere, who is visiting the United States, to his friend Lorenzo, Grand Scribe of the Amateur Authors' Association of Nowhere," Mr. James J. O'Connell of Brooklyn touched drastically and intelligently upon the dullness of politicians, the pompous emptiness of officialdom, the commonness of conventions, and the inanity of over-puffed authors; whilst in the editorial columns Mr. Emery vigorously advocated the radical regeneration of the National. These capable and cultured writers minced no words, and their utterances appear to have created a profound stir in amateurdom. But discouraging replies from the "Philistine" element poured forth plentifully, so that the reformers finally decided on separation as the only dignified course. Accordingly there was announced in ATHENIA for January 1887 a secession of amateurdom's best element from the recognised associations, and the formation on a vastly higher plane of "The Literary Lyceum of America." The Lyceum, under the leadership of Mr. Emery, planned to "draw only its nucleus from amateur journalism." Further recruiting was to proceed on a more select basis, and to embrace elements with literary rather than journalistic or fraternal interests. This design, in theory, was admirable, but it involved practical difficulties well nigh insuperable. To cut loose from the amateur world, with its far-reaching ramifications and stimuli to publishing activity, was an extreme step; and it soon became apparent that the despised "plodder" with his commonplace ideas is the real mainstay of the amateur press. It is sounder policy to form alliances with dullness when it is not antagonistic, than to reject all ties with the crude. The safety of amateurdom can be sufficiently ensured by war on only the active and malignant opponents of progress. So we find that many literati, notably Mr. Spencer, refused to leave the associational world; and that in the end the Lyceum seceders returned to the fold with recantations of their separatist doctrine. But to assume that the movement was a failure is a mistake. The crudity of the older amateurdom had been held up to the light, and henceforward the element of pure literature reoccupied a

larger place. ATHENIA is perhaps a perfect type of the select amateur journal of the halcyon age. Edited by Brainerd Prescott Emory, its contents were selected with commendable care, and included the best contributions of the best amateur writers, as well as the editor's own keen criticisms... In this issue we find... a powerful poem by Charles Heywood (editor of NORTHERN BREEZES) entitled "In Praesentia Mortis," and a supremely artistic bit of weird genius by Ernest A. Edkins—a bit of night-black poetical fancy so arresting in its sombre power that we cannot refrain from reproducing it here in full, as a specimen of the older amateur literature at its best.

"The Suicide"

by Ernest Arthur Edkins

O what is abroad in the night, in the night
That I needs must awake from my dreams,
And seek the lone bridge, and the sight, and the sight
Of a sullen deep river that rolls in its might—
Of a horrible river that seems
Like the treacherous tide of my dreams?

I lean over the rail in the toils of the trance
And the tide flees away from my face,
But in its broad breast I encounter the glance—
The wild ghastly glance of two eyes that advance
Not an inch in the current's swift race—
That stare blankly up at my face.

Long shuddering swords of resilient light
From the furthestmost sinuous shore,
Trail over the waters or bury their bright
Keen blades in the tide—but they point to a sight
On the glistening, watery floor
That freezes my heart to its core

For the eyes, the calm beautiful unseeing eyes
That hold me enthrall'd in their spell—
No longer are mortal—their swift vision flies
Up a moon-riven path thro' the Stygian skies,
And away from this earthly hell
Where the spirit disdain'd to dwell.

O delicate form down there in the dark,
O pitiful sight that I see—
Thy golden hair cruelly caught in the bark
Of a half-sunken tree, and thy body a mark
That the world of tomorrow, by thee,
May its own inhumanity see!

Can any reader declare that a higher level of amateur achievement has ever been reached? Some of these lines and images are strokes of nothing less than pure genius, and it is doubtful if any contemporary writer can more than approach them. Mr. Edkins was one of a brilliant coterie of young poets devoted to the exquisite and the exotic; a coterie which, though occasionally derided as "affected," did much to inculcate the importance of literary form in the amateur mind.

... Our survey has now brought us to a stage where the beginnings of the present may be discerned... Here the file before us ends; and here, though we may some day record our impressions of later ages, our present task is done.

We have viewed the most prosperous period of a hobby which will probably never expire, though it may undergo many modifications. Amateur Journalism is a pastime, but it is more than a common pastime. It is at bottom a spontaneous striving for untrammelled artistic expression on the part of those unable to speak as they choose through the recognized literary channels; and as such it possesses the fundamentals which make for permanent endurance.

