

The PHOENIX NEST

WHY don't our better writers write better? Why do not editors really edit? Do publishers read the books they publish? These inner interrogations occasionally assail us. Particularly when, upon the very first page of *Manuel Komroff's* "A New York Tempest" we are affronted by two frightful "howlers." Hearken to this mellifluous sentence:

But it was during the Great Fire that hatred made itself shown in lawlessness and it was during the trial, a year following, that the social fabric was ripped full open.

"Made itself shown"—"ripped full open"—ye gods and little fishes! What editor worth his salt would let such tortuosities pass. They may well rank with *Alexander Woolcott's* latest misprint, "There were all there."

It seems to us that in the old days more care was exercised in editorial offices. At least, the firm for which we once worked had one man on it, the late *L. Frank Tooker*, who was a real editor. Mr. Tooker sometimes became too meticulous, but he respected the English language. We suggest that most New York editors begin to consult those illuminating volumes by the Fowler Brothers, of whom *George Dangerfield* writes interestingly in the latest *Bookman*.

"A New York Tempest" is a rattling good yarn founded on fact, and it held us to the last page, but in the first section at least Mr. Komroff writes an English that often sounds like a bad translation from some foreign language. There are strange sentences. "The wall was not broken down in one blow." If one is referring to a high wind, a wall may be said to be toppled over in a "big blow," but if one means blow in the usual sense, surely the word is "by." On page 40, "He conceded to all her demands." What Mr. Komroff means is either "acceded" or "conceded" without the "to." We are all the more savage about this because Mr. Komroff is one of our most interesting novelists. There is no excuse for slovenliness in his writing, and there is no excuse for editors who allow it to pass into print. At the risk of seeming pedantic and hypercritical, we strenuously object.

We are glad to see a new novel by *Eleanor Chase* come from Sears. Four years ago she dedicated to *Arthur Somers Roche* her "Pennagan Place," which was a reckonable first novel. Miss Chase is now in private life Mrs. Maurice Fatio, and spends a lot of her time at Palm Beach. We first met her in the Algonquinized section of New York. But it is not of wise-cracking New York nor of social Palm Beach that she writes in her new story, "The Last of Wisdom," it is of a town in the Middle West called Eden. Miss Chase is at her best in characterizations that reflect the humorous cast of her mind. The title of her book is culled from a sentence by "Antoine Bret" (one of those Cabellian references?), "The first sigh of love is the last of wisdom."

A public park has just been dedicated to *Frank Dempster Sherman* in Peekskill, New York, and a tablet erected to his memory. Whereat we toss our cap in the air, for in our youth we regarded the late Mr. Sherman as one of America's foremost light versifiers, and we see no reason to change our opinion now. The Houghton Mifflin Company are the publishers of his poems, edited, with a biographical and critical introduction by his old and intimate friend, *Clinton Scollard*. In the famous old days of *Life*, the Gibson girl days, both Mr. Sherman and Mr. Scollard appeared frequently in its pages.

Not so long ago *Sophia Cleugh*, the English novelist, widow of *Denis Cleugh*, the actor, entertained as guests at her home on the Isle of Wight *Ben Ray Redman*, the poet and short story writer, and his wife, *Frieda Inescort*, distinguished both on the stage and in publishing circles. A new novel by Mrs. Cleugh, a story dealing with the French Revolution, has just been published in England.

Catharine Brody's "Nobody Starves" has, in advance of publication, received considerable encomia from such distinguished people as *Sinclair Lewis*, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, *Rose Wilder Lane*, *Arthur Garfield Hays*, *Faith Baldwin*, and

Margaret Widdemer. Her novel is published by Longmans, Green.

In regard to the price of seats for *Lillian Gish's* recent performance of "Camille" at the festival in Central City, *Lillian White Spencer* of Denver, Colorado, removes our bewilderment. She writes:

The seats (tickets, with tax) were \$2.75 each. The seats, at least some of them, were marked with names of pioneers or other noted Colorado citizens. Their families or friends were privileged to buy the labelling of said seats at one hundred dollars apiece.

A prominent American poet writes us of a letter recently received by him from the president of a well-known Southern State University. The Library of that University is making a collection of volumes autographed by authors and is asking the authors to send gratis at least one of their books complete with autograph. The letter also states, "postage to be reimbursed to you," which is certainly white of the president of a large university! The poet comments reasonably, "When even State University Libraries are unwilling to buy books, and presidents of universities are parties to the begging—how are authors expected to live, if at all!" We are entirely in accord with the poet. There is no possible excuse for this panhandling on the part of large institutions.

A wonder comes to light! *Monsieur George Sim*, of Paris, has, at the age of twenty-eight, already written two hundred and eighty published detective stories! He is said to be a handsome youth of Breton-Dutch stock who can write an excellent book in four days! One was started in a glass cage for the sake of the publicity! He has sixteen pseudonyms, of which "Simenon" will probably become permanent. *Covici-Friede* are just introducing him to the American public by issuing two of his books simultaneously, "The Death of Monsieur Gallet" and "The Crime of Inspector Maigret."

We look forward to Knopf's publication of "The Intimate Notebooks of *George Jean Nathan*," to appear on the fifteenth of September.

Miss *Vere Hutchinson*, an English novelist and the sister of the celebrated *A. S. M. Hutchinson*, died recently in London at the age of forty-one.

Speaking, as we were not, of the entertainment of literary personages, *E. F. Benson* turns back the clock to a long-ago London social-literary season in his "Charlotte Brontë" (Longmans, Green). *Thackeray*, it seems, gave a dinner, in that era, for *Charlotte Brontë*, and afterward invited a brilliant company to meet the new authoress. *Lady Ritchie*, *Thackeray's* daughter, recalls the affair in a letter. Hearken what befell!

Everyone waited for the brilliant conversation which never began at all. Miss Brontë retired to a sofa in the study and murmured a low word now and then to our kind governess. The room looked very dark, the lamp began to smoke a little, the conversation grew dimmer and more dim, the ladies sat round still expectant, my father was too much perturbed by the gloom and the silence to be able to cope with it at all. Mrs. Brookfield, who was in the doorway by the study near the corner in which Miss Brontë was sitting, leant forward with a little commonplace, since brilliance was not to be the order of the evening. "Do you like London, Miss Brontë?" she said.

Another silence, a pause, then Miss Brontë answered very gravely, "Yes and no."

Our felicitations to *Jimmy Reid*, textbook expert of Harcourt, Brace, and *Helen Grace Carlisle*, author of that remarkable volume, "We Begin." They were married recently. We hope they'll be most salubrious. Also, what about *Elisabeth R. Bevier*, editor of Harcourt's juveniles, who was married on July 21st, last, to *Edwin T. Hamilton*, author of one of their fall juveniles, "Handicraft for Girls?" Another huzzza! When the idea of marriage gets into any particular firm it sometimes spreads like wildfire. Within not so huge a space of time the Publisher of the *Saturday Review* took the great plunge, next one of the Contributing Editors fell off the raft, and now one of the pulchritudinous mermaids of the institution is contemplating like desperate measures!

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