

The Bookshelf.

By DELTA.

FEUILLETON.

Is it Art?

IN the last two issues I have been endeavouring to call public attention to the supreme necessity of putting down the pestilential "chronique scandaleuse" that is now so much the vogue. And I offer no apology for inserting in these pages the whole of Mr James Douglas' article in the "Daily News" of November 19, which shows the result of his manly appeal to the "Court of Letters" relative to this exploitation, for purely sordid or mercenary purposes, of the most private actions and affairs of dead and gone geniuses, in the guise of fiction, or "recollections," or "remembrances." So indolent is the haste of the "graworm" that he barely waits until physical corruption sets in before he begins to disintegrate the character of his lifeless victim, and, having elided over or distorted its integral parts, presents it again in the attractive guise of fiction, or a "chronique scandaleuse," regardless not only of the memory of the dead, but of the feelings of the living. That a man's worst enemies can be of his own household was never more painfully exemplified than in the publication of the late George Gissing's most private affairs in the form of fiction. Mr James Douglas says: "A fortnight ago, in an article entitled 'The Grave-Worm,' I drew up an indictment against the degradation of the English novel into a scandalous chronicle of private affairs. I pointed out that 'The Private Life of Henry Maitland' had provided the Court of Letters with a test case. I also stated that a novel is being written which deals with the private sorrows of one of our greatest living novelists, and I warned the world of letters that if this novel should ever crawl or creep into print it would raise a storm of wrath that would shake that world to its foundations. Here let me say that my main object in raising the question was to stop the publication of this novel. But since I wrote I have received information which proves that other novels, equally infamous, have been written, and have been suppressed by the determined action of their victims. Well, a good many writers have responded to my appeal for plain speech on this painful subject. I am grateful to them. Their letters have done great good. In future the path of the literary ghoul will be harder than hitherto it has been. And here let me say that when I wrote I did not know that Mr Morley Roberts had unveiled the secrets of the living as well as the secrets of the dead. But 'A Friend of Mrs Gissing' has disclosed the fact that Gissing's widow, and Gissing's last and best friend are both alive."

Overwhelmingly Hostile to the "Grave-worm."

But let me pass from this particular example of the cryptic novel to consider the verdict given by the jury. It is overwhelmingly hostile to the ghoul and the grave-worm. Mr W. J. Locke expresses the general view when he declares that "the roman a clef is an abomination," the only remedy for which is "public opinion," fearlessly awakened by the Press. He rightly excerpts books like Mr Mallock's "New Republic," or "a tender apology for a cruelly misunderstood life." Miss May Sinclair draws a just distinction between the indecency of making copyright out of the living or the lately dead and legitimate drawing from the living model. Miss Willcocks makes the same point, urging that the question is one of art, not morals, of taste, not ethics. Mr Reginald Turner contends that biography should not be written under the guise of fiction. "If the author fears to put the real names it should not be written at all." The only dissentients are Mr St. John Adeock, Mr W. L. George, and Mr Ellis Roberts. Mr Adeock wants to "know the worst" about the living and the dead. Mr Roberts thinks my language is "over emotional," and certifies that Mr Morley Roberts has "told the truth." He does not face the question as to whether that may not be another aspect of the truth as touching the two ladies still living. Have they no rights in the matter? As to Mr George's defence of Gissing's right to authorize Mr

Roberts to 'burn him to make warmth for literature,' I may point out that though Gissing had a right to say "Burn me," he had no right to say "Burn my widow." That would be literary suttee, indeed!"

Discussing Mr Locke's letter, "The Evening Standard" remarks that "there was a famous roman a clef issued two years ago; everybody enjoyed the book save the author's models; but they were mortified by one who had been their friend, and their mortification was—morally, not artistically, of course—the book's condemnation." An able critic, writing in "The Yorkshire Observer," says that "it has now become an established custom to make a certain type of novel—and generally a very clever novel—a thinly-veiled biography of real persons." Here are two independent witnesses who testify to the truth of my general indictment.

What the Dozen of English Fiction Thinks.

"And now I come to Mr Thomas Hardy's letter. It was not written for the public eye, and I am under a deep obligation to Mr Hardy for granting me permission to print it. Mr Hardy, as the acknowledged head of English letters, speaks with authority, and I hope his warning voice will be heeded. He thinks that I 'deserve great praise for having boldly opened up an inquiry into a matter so greatly affecting society and morals,' and I am more than content with that justification of my protest. He points out that 'infinite mischief would lie in the mixing of facts and fiction in unknown proportions,' and that 'the power of telling lies about people through that channel after they are dead, by stirring in a few truths, is a horror to contemplate.' He then proceeds to show that such a development has been almost inevitable nowadays, when the novelist has ceased to be an artist, but has become a mere reporter, and is told that he must be nothing else.' He goes on to say: 'I have been gravely assured by a critic in full practice that to write down everything that happens in any household is the highest form of novel construction, being the presentation of a real "slice of life" (a phrase which I believe I had the misfortune to originate many years ago, though I am not sure).' He concludes by remarking that he leaves untouched the question whether, 'even if every word be truth, truth should be presented (unauthorized) by so stealthily a means.'

"A Sign of Imaginative Impotence and Artistic Degeneracy."

"It seems to me that the question raised by Mr Hardy goes to the root of the mischief. Is the key-novelist an artist or a reporter? Men of letters may disagree about matters of morals and matters of taste. Putting these aside, let us ask whether the key-novel is art. For my part, I maintain that the key-novel is a sign of imaginative impotence and artistic degeneracy. If we are to judge 'The Private Life of Henry Maitland' as a novel, it is a bad novel—bad, abominably bad as art. If we are to judge it as biography, it is a bad biography—bad, abominably bad as art. In fine, the stealthy school of fiction and the stealthy school of biography are both irredeemably inartistic."

A Splendid Publication.

Last year I thought when I received my Christmas "double number" of the "Bookman" that it had eclipsed, both in literary and pictorial merit, any previous Christmas issue of this fine literary journal. But this year it is a quadruple number, and will surpass in every feature all previous issues. For, instead of one portfolio of beautiful colour pictures, it will present as good as two, as two lavishly illustrated supplements, dealing with the gift and other new colour books of the season, are included, besides a splendid presentation plate, portrait of Mr Rudyard Kipling, which, we take it, is to embellish Mr Dixon Scott's article on that distinguished writer. Space forbids a summary in this issue of the many admirable articles by Dr. William Barry, Mrs Alice Meynell, Professor Postgate, Litt.D., Mr W. G. A. Axon, Mr Holbrooke Jackson, and Mr Edward Thomas, but I

will return to some of these articles later. An article by Mr Edwin Pugh, on "Gissing," in view of the storm of disapprobation Mr Morley Roberts' "Private Life of Henry Maitland" has raised, will be of special interest to readers.

Interesting to Cliftonites.

Admirers of John Henry Newbolt's fine "Songs of the Sea" will be glad to hear that Mr. John Murray has announced a complete collection of his poetical works.

An Old Publishing Firm.

The name of John Murray as publisher on the title page of a book is always sufficient guarantee of its inner excellence, for no publishing house in London can show more creditable antecedents. Founded originally in 1768, it is one of the oldest publishing houses in London. But it was not until the Michaelmas of 1812 that the publishing firm of Murray entered into occupation of their present premises at 50, Albemarle Street, thereafter to become one of the literary shrines of London. "What a change," says a "Bookman" writer, "in literary times and manners those hundred years have seen! In 1812 the Peninsular War was in progress; Lord Liverpool became Prime Minister; and America declared war upon us. Earlier in the same year—in March, in fact—the two first cantos of "Childe Harold" had suddenly brought Byron's name into prominence. He had awoken and found himself famous. Since then Albemarle Street has been an intellectual centre of interest. In the drawing room, which in those days was over the shop, for the present business premises at 50a were opened subsequently, such men as Byron, Scott, and Tom Moore gathered; and among other great names connected with this house during its century are Gladstone, Disraeli, Harrow, Coleridge, Stanley, Livingstone, Milman, Darwin, and Dufferin." The present head of the house is Mr. John Murray, fourth of his line, and to him we wish many happy yearly returns of last Michaelmas Day, and to his descendants another century of publishing as successful as the one which has just been celebrated.

REVIEWS.

Charles the Great: Mrs. H. H. Penrose (London: Methuen and Co.)

Charles Benham reminds us not a little of George Eliot's creation, Mr. Cassaubon, though Mrs. Penrose, contrary to that author, has conceived her villain in light comedy vein. Charles Benham, like Mr. Cassaubon, was always posing as a great intellect, occupied in the making of a book which is to set him on a pinnacle of greatness unachieved by any previous genius. At least, this is the idea he has managed to instil into his only sister's mind, who breaks her engagement with her lover because Charles has managed to convince her that without her ministering care and inspirational presence near him always, "his creative faculty would suffer eclipse." How a conspiracy is hatched and brought to a satisfactory conclusion against Charles Benham, in which he literally forces his sister into the arms of her once rejected lover, is told more smartly and amusingly than could be imagined. "Charles the Great" is pure comedy or satiric reflection from start to finish, and, though in strict justice, Charles Benham's despicable act in taking credit for a highly successful work written by another man, should have been punished by public exposure, the reader will think him punished sufficiently when he discovers that the ultra-fastidious humbug eventually becomes engaged to a plain girl, who takes seven in boots, has a loud voice and tends, fond of strenuous, outdoor sports, and who may be trusted to see that he shares them willy nilly.

Perfect Health for Woman and Children: By Elizabeth Sloan Chesser. (London: Methuen and Co. 3/6.)

Few households nowadays, since good health has been considered of infinitely more importance than wealth, can afford to dispense with some expert, yet simple medical and hygienic manual which will teach the way to ward off ill and promote good health, rather than cure the actual disease. In Dr. Sloan Chesser's work is to be found simple yet comprehensive talks on health and hygiene. Many "family physicians" in book form are too technical and too involved to be of real assistance in the

house. But the present work deals with "Health and Hygiene," both from the woman's and the doctor's point of view—a happy combination, surely. It provides information on the preservation of health and youth, on sick nursing and first aid, and on everyday ailments and how to deal with them. A section is devoted to the care and management of children. It has fallen to my lot to review many works on the vitally important question of health and hygiene, but never one so all-embracing in its scope, so full of common sense, yet so inspiring to self-help and prevention of disease, yet wholly expert. Its price, too, and the extreme simplicity of its directions and prescriptions brings it within the reach of the very poorest and the most ordinarily intelligent housewife and mother to whom it will prove a help incalculable. The work was read and ap-

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