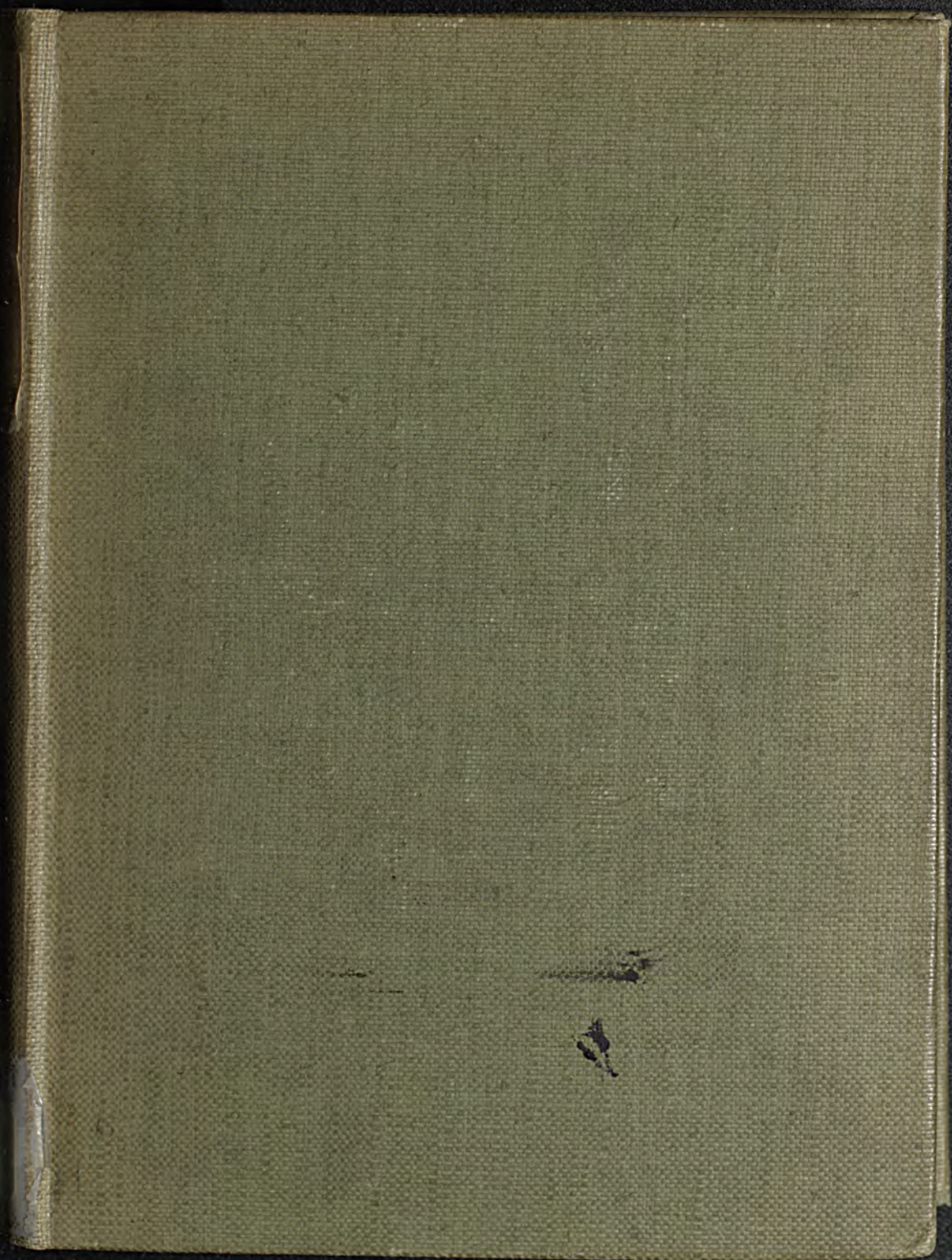
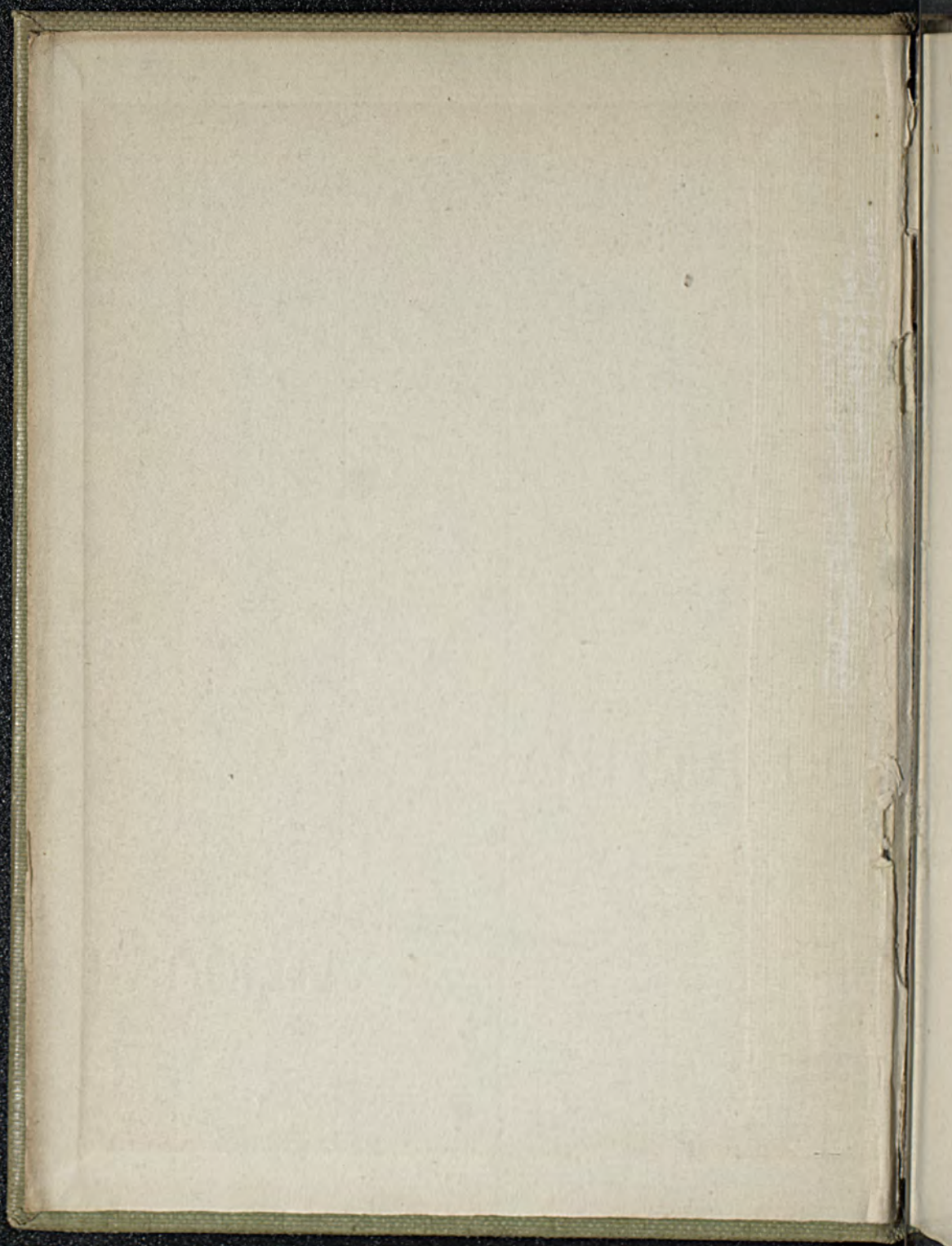




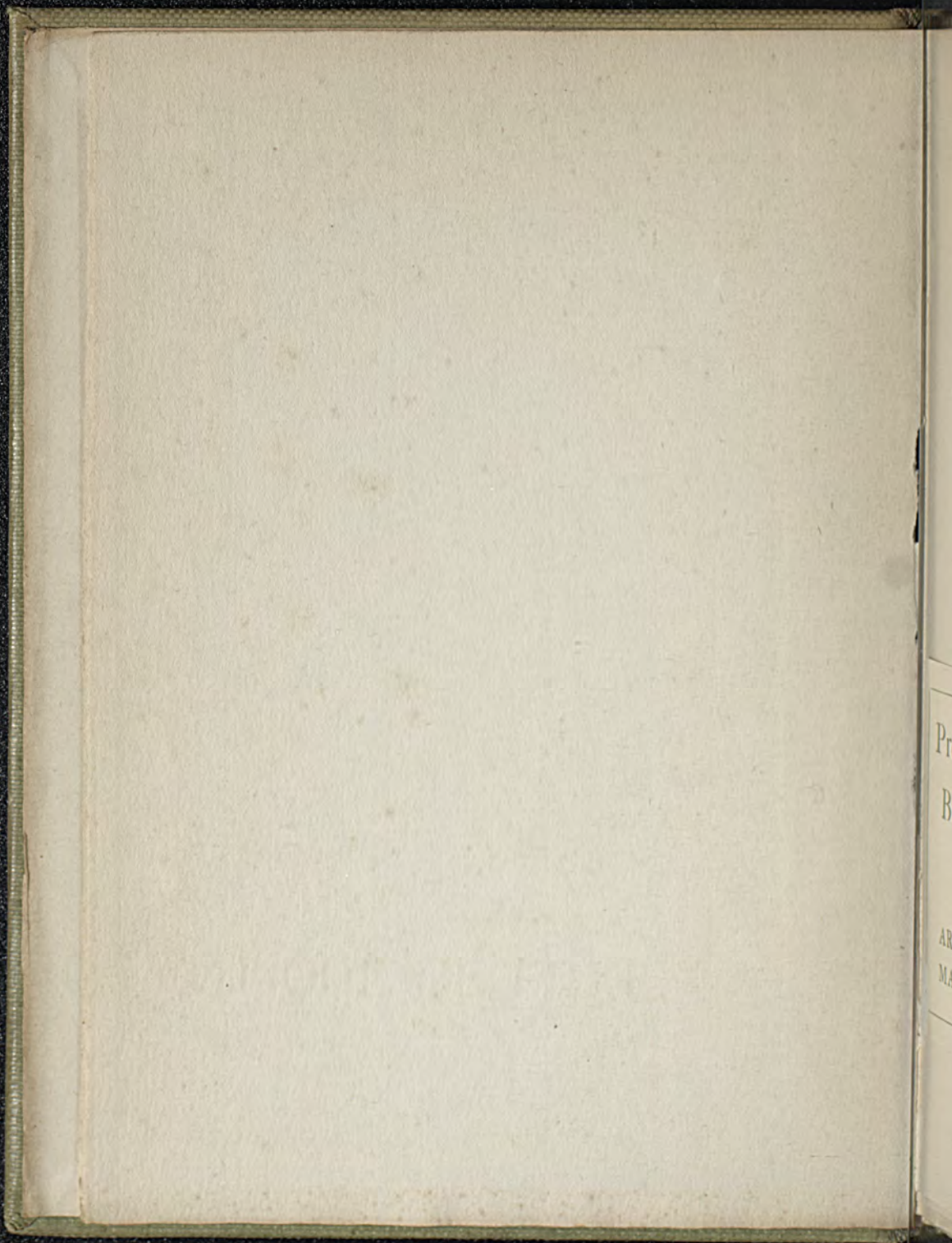


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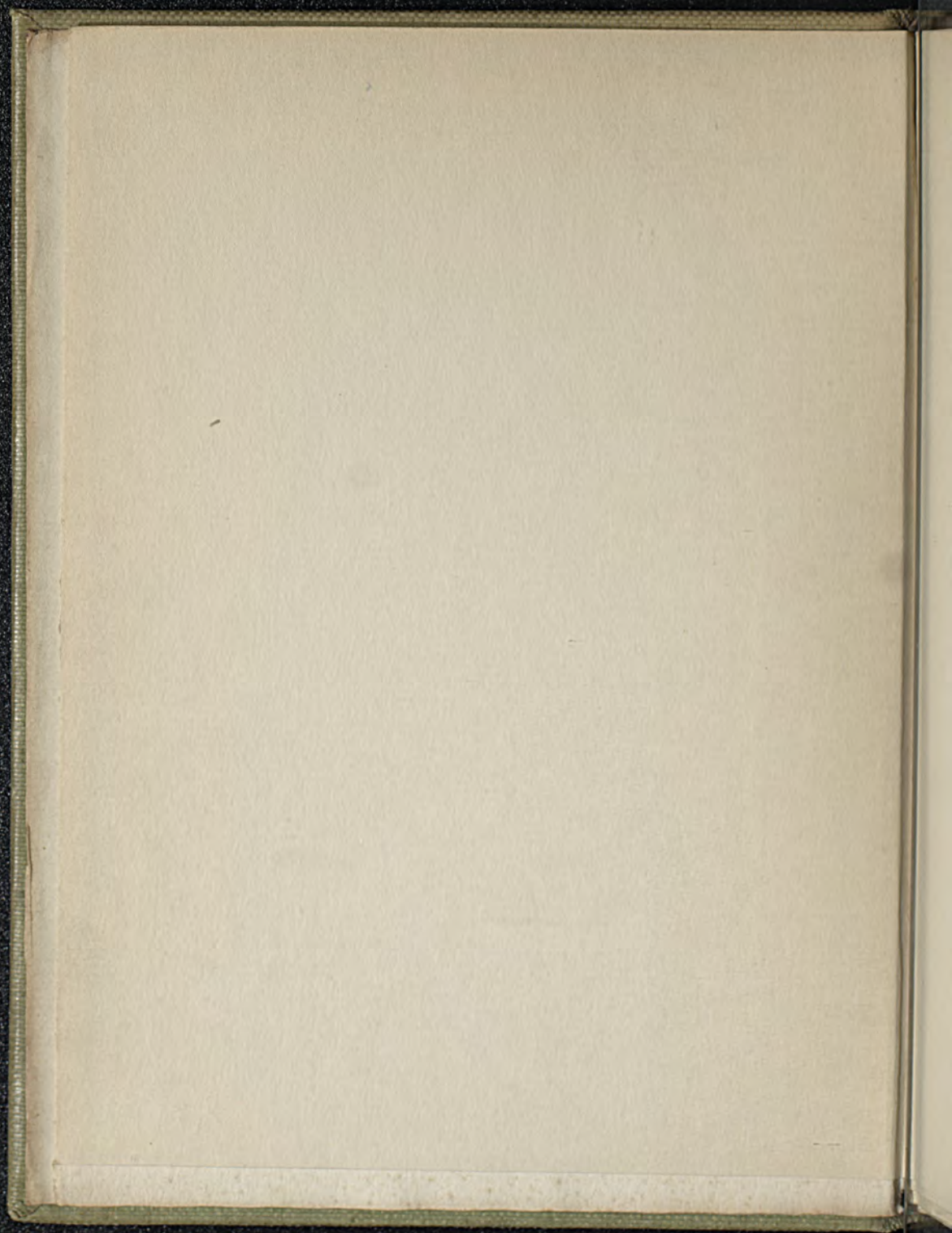
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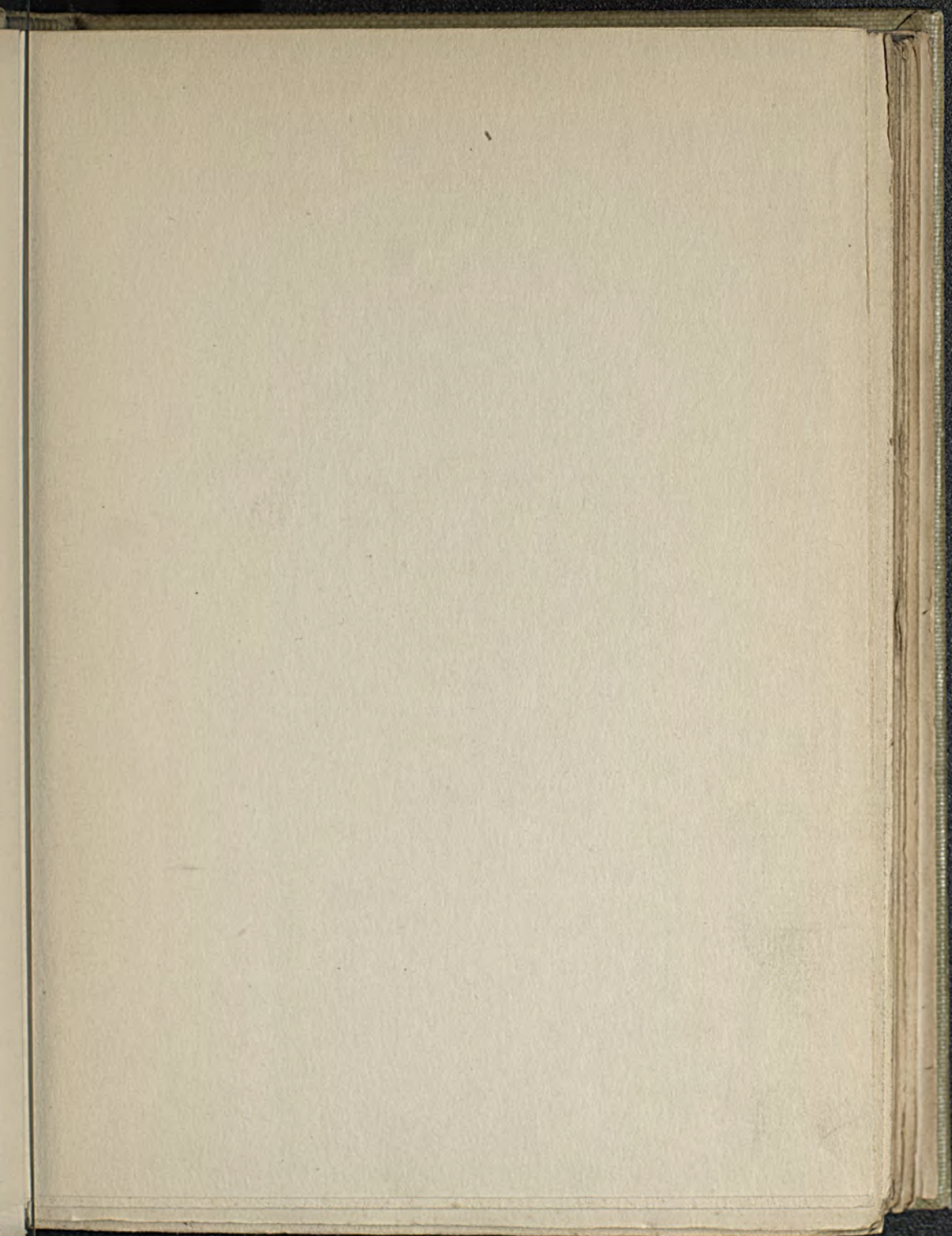
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Precious
Balms



ARTHUR
MACHEN





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Arthur Lachen

Precious Balms

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ELEUSINIA
THE ANATOMY OF TOBACCO
THE CHRONICLE OF CLEMENDY
THE GREAT GOD PAN
THE THREE IMPOSTORS
HIEROGLYPHICS
DR STIGGINS
THE HOUSE OF SOULS
THE HILL OF DREAMS
THE BOWMEN
THE GREAT RETURN
THE TERROR
WAR AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
THE SECRET GLORY
FAR OFF THINGS
THINGS NEAR AND FAR
THE SHINING PYRAMID
STRANGE ROADS
DOG AND DUCK

Precious Balms

By Arthur Machen

*Let the righteous smite me friendly and reprove me,
but let not their precious balms break my head.—*

Ps. cxli

London: Spurr & Swift

123 Pall Mall, S.W.1 1924

*Printed in Great Britain
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh*

MELINA PLACE
LONDON

May 1, 1924

My dear Spurr,

I am grieved, indeed, to hear your news about "Precious Balms." You say that during your recent visit to America, you were made acquainted with some very serious misconceptions as to a phrase in the "Precious Balms" prospectus. This document stated that for a certain period I was "languishing in the cells of Carmelite House, serving a term of eleven years' 'hard' for a series of obscure crimes." And now you tell me that in the United States, this small piece of jocularity has been taken in the most serious way. People were anxious to be informed as to the exact nature of the crimes aforesaid, and confused

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Carmelite House with such establishments as The Tombs, Sing Sing, Pentonville and Wandsworth.

I am extremely sorry. I had no intention of hurting anybody's feelings. I hope you will present my sincere regrets and apologies—in the proper quarters.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR MACHEN

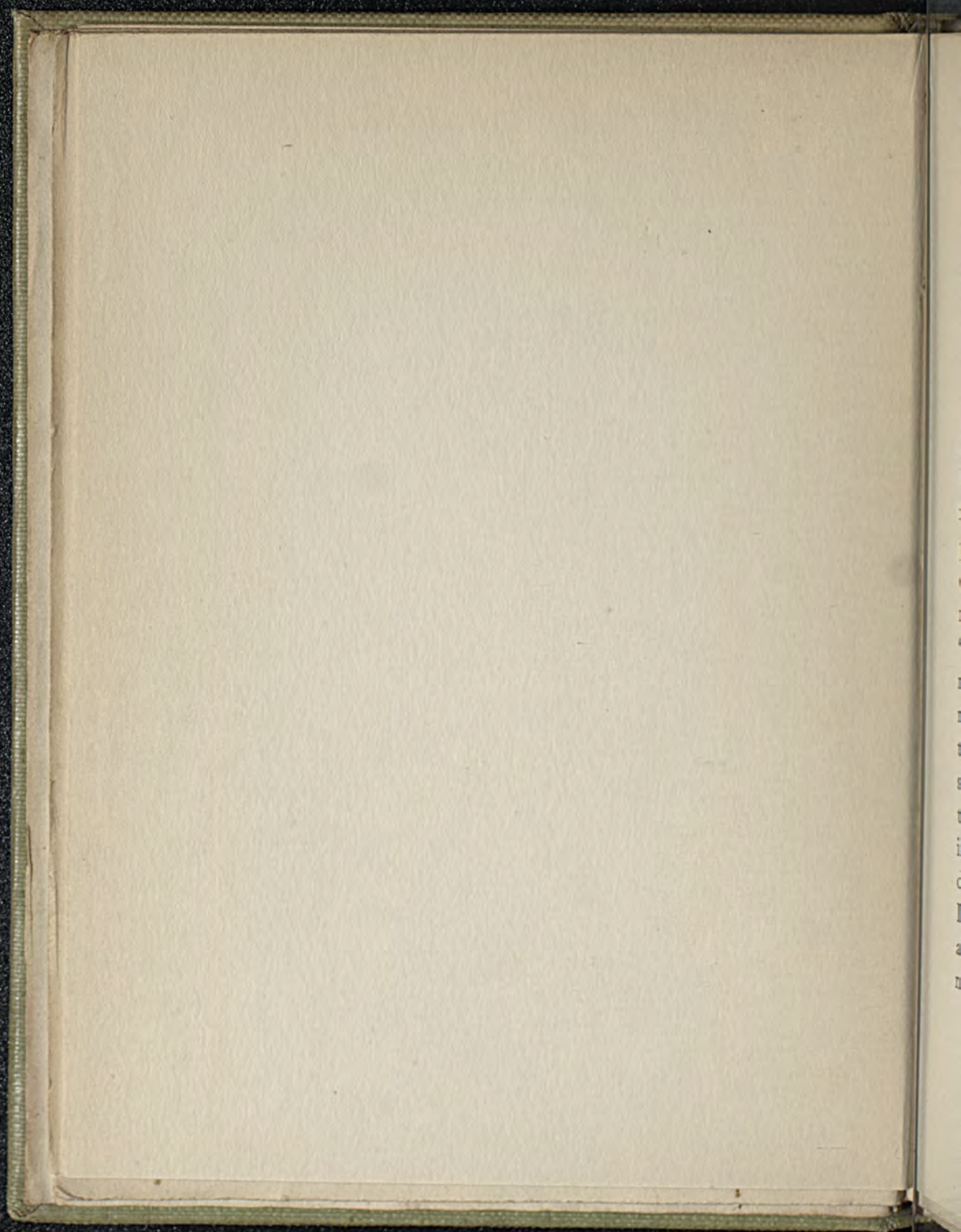
Harry Spurr, Esq.

Messrs Spurr & Swift

Pall Mall, London

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INTRODUCTION

Now and again I glance at the correspondence columns of a paper devoted to the affairs of those interested in writing—and find to my astonishment that authors have a great dislike of unfavourable criticism. I note, for example, the letter of a hurt and angry man, who protests that he has had hard measure from the critic of the *Cosmopolitan*, that the *Daily Mercury* has clearly not read more than three pages of his book, that “Judex” in the *Lyre* says he is ignorant of the elements of prosody: “a harsh judgment,” the poor man exclaims, “when directed against one who has the privilege of signing himself ‘M.A. Oxon.’” And sometimes the reviewer is entreated to remember that authors have their living to get; the suggested inference being, as I suppose, that the critic should do nothing but praise the books submitted to him. In fact, there are, it seems, authors who conceive that a word of blame is a word of injury, and that a harsh notice is a hardship.

Precious Balms

In my opinion, nothing can be farther from the truth. Could anything be duller than a monotonous song of praise? Is it not obvious that there is no sport in easy paths? If this were not so, what would become of the Alpine Clubs? A mountaineer would not thank you for a free excursion ticket to Romney Marsh or the Bedford Level. Opposition, whether it be that of a mountain side or a body of critical opinion, is one of the chiefest zests and relishes of life; and so profoundly have I felt this that for the last thirty years I have hoarded up my "notices," with a very special eye of favour on those "notices" which are foolishly termed bad. Foolishly, for many reasons, some of which I have suggested; but chiefly because there is only one sort of notice that is really bad, and that is no notice at all. I do not know whether there are critical writers who desire to extinguish, make to cease, and bring to nought this, that or the other author; but if there be such, I take it that they are far too skilled in their craft to think that a man can be blotted out by a column of words, be they fierce or jeering. Silence is the only fatal sentence; from that there is no appeal, for it there is no remedy.

Introduction

But this must be done thoroughly; and here I would submit is the error of the critic of *The Referee*, the late David Christie Murray, who will be found quoted in the chapter devoted to "The House of Souls." The writer desired to "slate" the book with all his heart, and devoted the entire front page of his paper to that excellent endeavour. He compared the book to an obscene waxwork anatomical museum at a country fair: "it poisoned everything." He was light: he said it was all "baby-Satanic-tommy-rot," that it was "buried nastiness." He declared that I was taking the ha'pence of the public and making a very decent "(and most indecent)" living by exhibiting the bestial side of my nature. All very well; but the critic tried to combine the method of the hearty attack with the method of silence: he neither mentioned the name of the book nor that of the author. This was faulty technique: for the next few months the Editor of *The Referee* was pestered by correspondents who wanted to know all about it; to ascertain for themselves the extent of the author's depravity.

A more delicate method was employed—in perfect

Precious Balms

good faith, very likely—by *The Bystander*. Here the critic gave the name of the book and of the author, and praised the stories. *But he pretended that I had no existence.* He said that he had a very strong suspicion that I was, in reality, Mr Montagu Wood, the author of “A Tangled I.” He added that Mr Montagu Wood’s humour was recognised in “Pop” at Eton, and afterwards at the Canning Club at Oxford.

Now, let us be fair. Honour to whom honour is due; I confess that the dart of this reviewer penetrated my armour. I was genuinely annoyed—I was a lad of 44 at the time—at being practically wiped out of existence. But, on calm reflection, I wonder what Mr Wood thought of it. Perhaps he, too, was not over-pleased. But I shall always think of *The Bystander* with the respect that one gives to a cunning craftsman.

There are some very tolerable examples to be found in the collection relating to “The Great God Pan” and “The Three Impostors.” Of course I reject the violent, especially the morally violent. These are not in the true tradition of the fine art of review-

Introduction

ing. When *The Manchester Guardian* said that "The Great God Pan" was "the most acutely and intentionally disagreeable" book it had seen in English, the *Guardian* blundered. Deplorable as it may be, we must confess that such a sentence constitutes a valuable free advertisement; and *The Manchester Guardian* did not desire to advertise the work. Indeed it said so; and thus blundered again. And so again *The Lady's Pictorial*: "Men and women who are morbid and unhealthy in mind may find something that appeals to them." This is all wrong. Again we must deplore the anfractuosit̄es of human nature; but to say that a book is morbid and unhealthy is to perform the office of a spielman, not of a censor.

No; the way to go about it, if you must leave the safe way of silence, is to take things lightly. Thus, in *The National Observer*: "In all the glory of the binder's and printer's arts we have two tales of no great distinction." So *The Sketch*: "his bogles don't scare"; *The Daily Chronicle*: "his horror, we regret to say, leaves us quite cold"; *The Observer*: "one shakes with laughter rather than with dread." All these are very well; and another manner is, I think,

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successful. The *Belfast News Letter* suggested that "sensationalism is the order of the day, and must be pandered to to make the author's pot boil." There is something intimate in this knowledge of the author's very disastrous private affairs which has a strange, elusive charm. Another favourite of mine is Mr Walkely's review of "Hieroglyphics" in *The Morning Leader*: here again you will find intimate knowledge of the writer's life which could not have been gathered from title pages. Thus, the opening sentence:

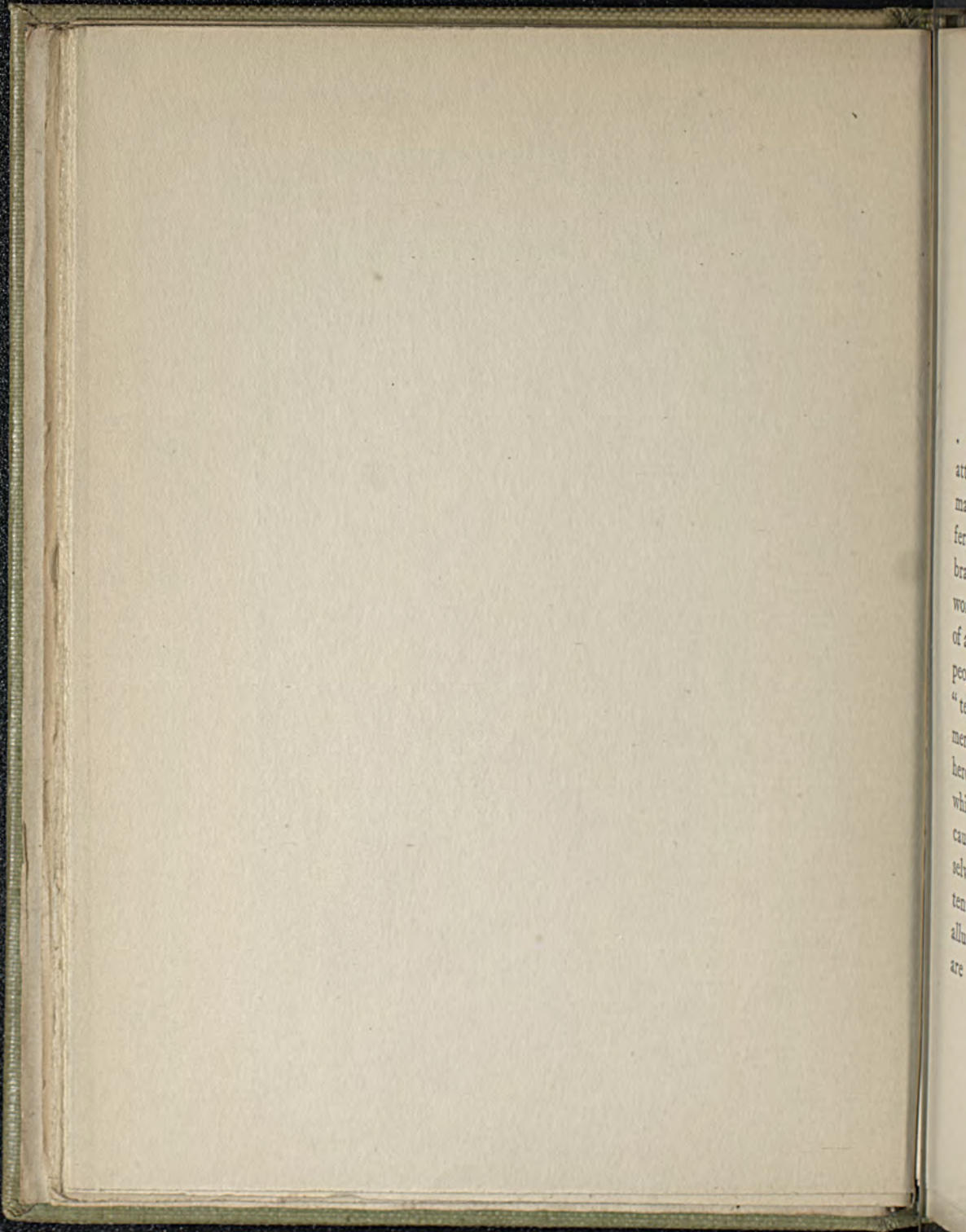
"I do not know whether Mr Machen is to be described as an actor who amuses his leisure with writing books or as an author who fills up his evenings by appearing on the stage." But the article which follows, though decisive as to the demerits of the book under review, is much too long. Brevity in these affairs is of the utmost importance. If you want to say that an author is an unimportant ass, you should say it in a paragraph, not in a column.

Other reviews which I should like to recommend to the notice of the *virtuoso* are *The Manchester Guardian* on "The Hill of Dreams," and on "Far Off Things"; also *The Boston Evening Transcript*

Introduction

review of "Things Near and Far." The heading of this article is: "The Reflections of a Man of Self-Conceit." The article displays my mean, sponging, irritable nature in a very masterly manner. And the very choice collection of "Outlook" reviews should not be neglected. And I have said that in my opinion the review of vehement denunciation is not of the highest merit: but I except Mr Murry's notice of "The Secret Glory" in *The Nation and Athenæum*. There is a completeness about it which satisfies.

Finally, it would not be honest to conceal that there is another side to this as to most other questions. I have had "good" reviews in my day, and I give a few specimens of these. The writers of these articles I leave to the judgment of their own conscience. I only hope that, in the words of Mr Pecksniff, they have not voluntarily deserted the flowery paths of purity and peace.



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THE GREAT GOD PAN AND THE THREE IMPOSTORS

. . . He imagines for us the horrible results of *The*
attempting by means of a surgical experiment to *Observer*
make a young woman "see the god Pan." Inter-
ference with the nerve centres of the young woman's
brain turns her into an idiot; but that is not the
worst of it, for she becomes in due course the mother
of a sort of she-devil who goes through life frightening
people out of their wits, and eventually causes a
"terrible epidemic of suicide" amongst fashionable
men about town. What is it about this mysterious
heroine which sends the friends of her girlhood crazy,
which ruins her husband "body and soul," and which
causes her later admirers to go out and hang them-
selves—this is never definitely explained. The in-
tention evidently is to make us shudder by vague
allusions to "awful unspeakable elements," which
are "triumphant in human flesh," and produce "a

Precious Balms

horror one dare not name." It is not Mr Machen's fault, but his misfortune, that one shakes with laughter rather than with dread over the contemplation of his psychological bogey. His art has been hampered by the limitations imposed upon it through his having to leave his ingenious horror "indescribable" and "unutterable" from first to last. Mr Aubrey Beardsley has no doubt come gallantly to the rescue with the admirably-realised repulsiveness of the nymph designed by him as an appropriate frontispiece. But the general effect of "The Great God Pan," as well as of the kindred tale which follows it in "The Inmost Light," is, we fear, hardly so creepy as it would have been if it had dared to be intelligible.

*The Daily
Chronicle*

. . . His horror, we regret to say, leaves us quite cold. Gallant gentlemen commit suicide at the mere sight of the accursed thing; here be murders, inquests, alarums and excursions—and our flesh obstinately refuses to creep. Why? Possibly because we have had a surfeit of this morbid thaumaturgy of late, and "ken the biggin' o't." Possibly, too, because, while Mr Machen describes the (literally) panic terror of the various people who behold the

The Great God Pan

monster, he never lets us have so much as a glimpse of the monster for ourselves. How can we be petrified unless we see Medusa's head? To be told that others have been turned to stone won't do. That is only what the soldier said: it is not evidence. . . .

. . . Sensationalism is the order of the day, and *Belfast News Letter* must, we suppose, be pandered to to make the author's pot boil; but, despite the ability in this direction—for the conception is cleverly carried out—we fail to see why such absurdities should be presented to intelligent readers. The Great God Pan, with his syrinx, cloven hoof, and pointed ears, may have been a serious bogey to the rustics Theocritus sings about; but to call in this mythical monstrosity's aid to work on our *fin-de-siècle* nerves is far-fetched, to say the least of it. Mr Machen's ability is worthy of a better *motif* than mystifying innocent people about the devil, or poking fun at his intellectual admirers about the unseen.

If Mr Arthur Machen's object were to make our *The Westminster Gazette* flesh creep, we can only speak for ourselves and say that we have read the book without an emotion. There are nameless horrors hinted at in every other

Precious Balms

page, which make other people turn green and sick, but it is beyond the power of the most susceptible reader to shudder at the shudders of these fictional people. The story is, in fact, most elaborately absurd—so absurd, indeed, as to save it from the less agreeable charge of being nasty, as it would inevitably be if Mr Machen meant us to take it seriously. We can at least congratulate him on having failed in the courage to make plain the mysterious horrors which are supposed to be in the background of this story, but the result is to leave an inchoate and confused series of impressions, as of a man who is trying to tell a story and fails to express himself. What the intention of the writer could possibly have been we cannot even conjecture. Mr Machen was possibly under the impression that he was writing a new “Jekyll and Hyde,” but “The Great God Pan” is as meaningless as an allegory as it is absurd from any other point of view.

The Echo

Mr Arthur Machen's story, “The Great God Pan,” published by Mr John Lane, is a failure and an absurdity. His meaning, if there is any, seems to be the presentation, or rather the suggestion, of Pan

The Great God Pan

as a hideous being or force behind nature, of which being the men who fall victims to an abandoned woman that appears in various disguises and under various *aliases* in the story catch glimpses, from the mere fact that they have yielded to her power—the obscene nature deity revealing himself in the person of the said woman. . . . Mr Machen tells us that the victims saw the horrors, but that is not enough. Doubtless the horrors would turn out to be mere grotesques, even if we did see them. Not the ghost of a “creepy” feeling will this story produce in the mind of anybody who reads it.

. . . If we may believe Mr Machen, those doings *The* are of the most horrible character ; but as he omits to *Speaker* tell us what they are, and leaves us merely with the impression that she is “a bold, bad woman” of a very ordinary description, we are compelled to take her special horrors upon trust. Fortunately for everybody, and for the readers of the story in particular, she comes to a speedy end, though whether she is hanged or dissolved into “a substance as jelly” the record fails to explain. All that we know is that Mr Machen writes of this unfortunate female as if

Precious Balms

he were in deadly earnest and she were something too terrible to be plainly revealed. There is another story, called "The Inmost Light," bound up with "The Great God Pan." It deals with a lady who is represented as having been in every way as horrible as the heroine of the first tale ; but as the only explicit fact recorded of her is that she frightened the passers-by by the faces she made at the window of her husband's house, the reader is left as much in the dark about her as he is about her sister in misfortune. . . .

The Sketch Mr Machen's "Great God Pan" (John Lane) is concerned more with the nerves than with the imagination. We respect such things as, aiming at the ghastly, do actually make us afraid in the dark and give us hideous dreams. Mr Machen's inhuman conceptions are put into ingenious forms, and exhibit many different clevernesses ; only, his bogles don't scare. In his next attempt, however, he may come out on the right side.

W. L.
Courtney
in *The Daily*
Telegraph

"Really," laughed the Hostess, "is the Yellow Book a disease ?"

"Assuredly," said the Physician, "a very virulent

The Great God Pan

form of jaundice, due to an imperfect digestion and a morbid condition of liver."

"Yes," continued the Philosopher, meditatively, "and 'Theodora' is a form of typhoid, due to ethical blood poisoning. 'Little Eyolf' and 'The Rat-Wife' are varieties of cerebral mania, Mr Aubrey Beardsley's figures are salient examples of locomotor ataxy, and as for 'The House of Shame' and 'The Great God Pan'—well, there are some kinds of maladies which are not mentioned outside medical treatises!"

The meaning of "The Great God Pan," by Arthur Machen, is very carefully veiled, and on the whole we are inclined to think it is quite as well that it is so, since such glimpses as we are vouchsafed of it are singularly repulsive. In fact, so far as we have been able to make out, to shock would seem to have been Mr Machen's sole intention. To achieve this desirable end he has ransacked the dark and hidden corners of Greek mythology, and so piled up innuendo and suggestion, to say nothing of the mere vulgar horror of five mysterious suicides and other unspeakable crimes, that we are afraid he only succeeds in being

*The Man-
chester
Guardian*

Precious Balms

ridiculous. The book is, on the whole, the most acutely and intentionally disagreeable we have yet seen in English. We could say more, but refrain from doing so for fear of giving such a work advertisement. The same remarks apply to "The Inmost Light," the second story in the book, in only slightly lesser degree.

The Queen "The Great God Pan" comes near being a book of genius with its originality and weirdness; but it distinctly misses it, because Mr Machen has not the power of indicating, even by a hint, the nature of the horror which made strong men destroy themselves rather than live with such a memory. There are two stories in the book, both dealing with villainous doctors, who make surgical experiments with the brains of living women in the hope, apparently, of turning human beings into devils. In each case the result is terrifying beyond human endurance, according to Mr Machen, but he does not succeed in imparting any of the terror to his readers. . . .

The Westminster Gazette *The English School of Diabolists.*—I pass now to the fourth class, that of the lurid and nonsensical. These, I take it, are written under the inspiration of the

The Great God Pan

French School of Diabolists. That school, as the reader knows, is possessed with ideas of black magic, spirits of evil, devils become incarnate, and numerous other nightmares of corruption. You are introduced to modern alchemists who use Latin incantations, pour mysterious fluids out of green phials, and by the black arts transform men into monsters, or penetrate the corrupt mysteries of their being. Several English imitators of this school have come into my hands recently, but the wildest is, perhaps, Mr Machen's "Great God Pan," published in the Keynotes Series. Here we have a physician who practises the black art, and by an operation on the brain releases for the time being the spirit of a woman, that she may visit the spirit world and "see the Great God Pan." She awakes, a lunatic "convulsed with an unknowable terror." Shortly afterwards she has a child whom we gather from certain lurid hints to be a she-devil incarnate. "When the House of Life is thrown open there may enter in that for which we have no name, and human flesh may become the veil of a horror one dare not express." (That is Mr Machen's favourite style. The unnameable, the unknowable, the in-

Precious Balms

expressible, and the unmentionable have a nameless fascination for him.) . . .

Sex-Mania Incoherent.—The wild absurdity of all this really makes comment superfluous. But note the sex-mania in it all. It is an incoherent nightmare of sex and the supposed horrible mysteries behind it, such as might conceivably possess a man who was given to a morbid brooding over these matters, but which would soon lead to insanity if unrestrained. I imagine, however, that Mr Machen's desire has simply been to emulate certain French practitioners in this line; indeed, the fact that he is so often reduced to gasping negatives proves that he has not made it clear even to himself what he is after. His work is innocuous from its absurdity, but the type is most truly decadent. . . .

*The
National
Observer*

In all the glory of the binder's and printer's arts, we have two tales of no great distinction. Indeed paper and form are worthy of much better things. We look for literature and find the old, old tale of man or woman who is possessed of a devil. Mr J. Sheridan Le Fanu made our youthful scalp tingle years ago with something of the nature (but infinitely

The Great God Pan

cleverer) of these tales. The doctor who performs weird operations we have met before but not one so fortunate as the hero of "The Inmost Light," the second story in this volume. For this gentleman digs for the soul and finds it in the convenient form of an opal—a dangerous theory surely. Men have committed murder for less. Dr Black murders his own wife, quite unnecessarily it appears to us, and it is her soul in the form of a jewel which he keeps for inexplicable reasons in a leather case in the back parlour of a toy shop in London. Mr Machen does his very best to thrill, and relates his horrors in a style which should carry conviction but fails. The incidents are too loosely strung together, and the form of narration, bringing in as it does characters who take no part in the central idea of the tale, inevitably cools the interest of the reader. Again, there is no motive assigned to any action except a vague love of science which certainly fails to convince. Men do not pursue an idea as does Villiers in the first story—doctors do not kill their wives as does Dr Black in the second tale—without strong incentive, and it is painfully obvious that in the

Precious Balms

present case their actions are a mere necessity to the author. Mr Machen writes somewhat conventionally and without affectation. It is in construction that he is as yet markedly deficient.

*The Lady's
Pictorial*

This book is gruesome, ghastly, and dull. Mr Machen has done his best with an impossible subject, but although men and women who are morbid and unhealthy in mind may find something that appeals to them in the description of Dr Raymond's experiment and its results, the majority of readers will turn from it in utter disgust. From first to last there is not one human touch in the story, and not a trace of psychology to awaken our interest in the actions of any one of the characters. Dr Raymond's apparent conviction that to see the Great God Pan would make up for any loss or suffering entailed by the sight, is almost childish; and as I waded through the dull list of horrors, which the too vivid imagination of Mr Machen inspired him to write, I bethought me of the curious old legend, so exquisitely told in verse by Mrs Browning, of the death of "The Great God Pan." It was waste of time for Mr Machen to bring him to life again. . . .

The Great God Pan

Mr Machen has apparently tried to produce a novelty in fiction by borrowing from Mr Conan Doyle some of the tricks of style of his detective stories, and uniting them with the rather gruesome studies in dehumanisation which Mr Stevenson justified by the fine turn he gave them in his "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," and Mr Rudyard Kipling essayed less successfully in "The Mark of the Beast." According to Mr Machen's postulate, "a slight lesion in the grey matter" of the brain is all that is needed to "level utterly the solid wall of sense," and enable "a spirit to gaze on a spirit-world." Fantastically enough, this is called "seeing the god Pan," with whom it appears to us to have about as much to do as the vulgar figure which Mr Aubrey Beardsley has placed on the title-page. The result on a lady of seeing the god Pan is that people feel cold shivers when they look on her, and that she initiates her male acquaintances into mysteries which either kill them outright with horror or send them home to commit suicide—also that she herself has eventually to be put to death by her husband or the amateur detective, and turns into all sorts of remarkable shapes in the

Precious Balms

process. Mr Machen frequently informs us that his story is very terrible, and tries to keep up the mystery by breaking off every now and then as if his tale were too dread for words—but these tricks have also their ludicrous side. Perhaps the most discreditable paragraph in a not very creditable book is the “note” at the end of the first story, asserting that the woman of whom it is told “was born on August 5th, 1865, at the Red House, Breconshire, and died on July 25th, 1888, in her house in a street off Piccadilly, called Ashley Street in the story.” Mr Machen should make his choice between the art of fiction and penny-a-lining.

*The Cork
Examiner*

. . . Arthur Machen wants to thrill us, and sets about his task by mixing surgical experiments, devil-possessed women of weird beauty, Latin phrases, and fantastic art, reminiscent of craftsmen of ages ago, into a pottage which, for our part, we find mawkish. The trick of the thing is at once apparent. Ever so many circumstances, feelings, sights, thoughts, etc., are unutterable, unnameable, unknowable, and unwhisperable, and there are nameless horrors by the hundred. . . . In our judgment this is what

The Great God Pan

children call "a frightened story," and, as an artistic piece of fiction, it calls for no serious consideration.

With this new volume Mr Machen boldly challenges *The Chronicle* comparison with Mr Stevenson's "Dynamiters." The plan of the book is the same; that is to say, a number of short stories are woven into the fabric of a long one. Mr Machen's literary method, too, is not unlike Stevenson's; there is the same careful turning of the phrase, the nice choice of epithets, the use of certain words in their correct, but not in their common meaning. . . . Mr Machen's intention in all these stories is to give us a grue, to curdle our blood, to make us think twice and thrice ere we mount the stairs and face the possible horror awaiting us in our dimly-lighted bedroom. Well, all we can say is that he has failed where few writers have succeeded. Edgar Allan Poe has done this thing over and over again. Le Fanu did it once; so did the author of a volume called "Phantasms" reviewed in these columns some months ago; but here the delightful thrill never quite comes off. Mr Machen lacks the power to create the necessary atmosphere, the atmosphere

Precious Balms

in which we shiver with apprehension as we breathe it. We all know how in dreams events in themselves commonplace and trifling enough, suddenly become ghastly, horrible, soul-devastating. And all because of our own state of mind. Now an author must somehow or other produce that state of mind in us before he puts us face to face with his creepy situation. He must compel "poetic faith" in us as Coleridge has it; bring us into the mental condition in which we are ready to believe anything. This Mr Machen never once succeeds in accomplishing. We are interested in his stories, and pleased extremely with the exceedingly careful and polished style in which they are told; we enjoy his humour and marvel at his ingenuity, but that worked-for and longed-for grue never happens. . . . The fact is that to triumph in the particular literary line which Mr Machen seems to have marked out for himself a certain peculiar sort of genius is, above all things, necessary. With this peculiar sort of genius the fates have not endowed Mr Machen, and the sooner he frankly recognises his want of it the better, for he has many other and most excellent literary accomplishments.

The Great God Pan

As tragedy and comedy go hand in hand, so the weird is seldom far removed from the ridiculous. *The Dundee Advertiser* Arthur Machen's volume, "The Three Impostors," furnishes an excellent case in point. The stories it contains form a connected narrative such as Poe himself might have evolved. These nameless horrors, however, weirdly fascinating as they are, have something in common with the dreaded gnomes and goblins by whose aid intelligent nursemaids are wont to charm little folk to sleep. What place the book will occupy in the literature of entertainment we cannot take upon ourselves to say. We can only regret that the author's singular inventiveness and great story-telling gifts have been employed in so undesirable a cause. What can any healthy-minded reader think of this: "There, upon the floor, was a dark and putrid mass, seething with corruption and hideous rottenness, neither liquid nor solid, but melting and changing before our eyes, and bubbling with unctuous, oily bubbles like boiling pitch. And out of the midst of it shone two burning points like eyes, and I saw a writhing and stirring as of limbs, and something moved and lifted up that might have

Precious Balms

been an arm." Such visions have before been given to little boys who complained of headache and divers other pains. The family doctor generally diagnosed the case as "mince pies and pickles."

Punch

"The Three Impostors," a novel ("Keynote" Series) by Arthur Machen, opens well, which, by the way, is more than the book does, being a bit stiff; but, though it has the machens of a good story in it, there is very little worth reading after page 64.

*Glasgow
Herald*

There are some books that produce a positive physical repulsion in their reader. Mr Machen's extremely disagreeable story is one of them. One may be fond of the gruesome, and even take pleasure in an occasional sup of horror, administered in the piquant and artistic style of which Poe and Baudelaire had the secret. Mr Machen himself, in his previous volume, led some of us to imagine that a share of the same gift might be found in him. But "The Three Impostors" changes our view. The horror in it is palpably and very literally sickening. Nothing but a smart turn in brisk air can cleanse the feelings of the person who has been unfortunate enough to read this volume through.

The Great God Pan

"The Three Impostors," by Arthur Machen, lacks *Black and White* the vivid sense of actuality genius alone can impart to the grotesque. In less able hands, as Mr Machen's, the weird tends to merge into the ridiculous. His connecting chain, too, is clumsily wielded, and you close the book, which opens with cleverness and promise, with disappointment.

"The Three Impostors: or, The Transmutations," *The Observer* by Arthur Machen, is a puzzling book. It is both good and bad; good in the clear presentation of some parts of it, in clever handling of some difficult characters, and bad because of the indefinite and unreal impression which, as a whole, it leaves on the reader's mind. It also reminds us a little too strongly to be agreeable of a work with which it cannot for a moment be compared—with Mr Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights." . . .

This is a singular effort of the imagination, suggestive of a mixture of Conan Doyle, Douglas Jerrold, and *Birmingham Post* the author of the "Murders in the Rue Morgue," seasoned with grim touches of German mysticism. It is not over-delightful reading, but to those, and they are legion, who are fond of being steeped in blood

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and mystery the book will commend itself highly. It is cleverly constructed, and that is about the best thing we can say of it. No doubt the author's true intent is all for our delight; but, all the same, it is a matter of wonderment to us how it is that men with evident literary talents, which might be pointed to fine issues, should exercise their brain power in the noble cause of bewildering the brains of other people, and this without an adequate purpose.

*The
Guardian*

We never expected to see the day when we should be tempted to regret that Stevenson had written "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." Nevertheless, when we had waded through the pages of Mr Machen's last production, we were disposed to feel that even that book was dearly bought at the price of so repulsive an imitation as that contained in "The Three Impostors." For the impressive and true use of the præternatural in "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," we have senseless and sickening—we can use no other word—pictures of mysterious scenes and of men returning to the bestial form which are meant to inspire terror and intense dread, but really leave us entirely unmoved, although he may imagine that his

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reader, like his hero, is left "white and shuddering with sweat pouring from my flesh." Language seems almost to fail the author at times; he heaps up epithets of horror, the words "bubbled and boiled out" of one man's mouth "in the fury of his emotion"; another person stands "shuddering and quaking as with the grip of ague, sick with unspeakable agonies of fear and loathing"; a doctor goes to see a patient, and reappears with "an unutterable horror shining in his eyes." If we are not mistaken members of the medical profession would welcome the chance of investigating such a case as that of the gentleman who took the witches' Sabbath drug. Wearied with this hysterical rubbish the reader hurries on to the end, to find in the last chapter that the unfortunate youth who has got tired of the fauns and the mysteries, and all the rest of the Greek burlesque, has been murdered amid most horrible tortures, which, together with his sufferings, are graphically described.

. . . Mr Machen errs by never trusting sufficiently *Pall Mall Gazette* to his reader's imagination, and his most elaborate horrors leave us "more than usual calm," except when,

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by borrowing from Catlin, they make us feel slightly unwell. It is impossible to admire the construction of Mr Machen's romance so much as if one did not know one's Stevenson. Its framework, with its amateurs of the odd in London; its set of characters who break at sight into ingenious tales of absolute and elaborate falsehood with no particular motive for using the decorative imagination; its choice of a tobacco divan for the amateurs' place of meeting, and sundry other details, is curiously reminiscent of "The Dynamiter." So, again, the incident of the powder, strangely altered from its pure condition until it obtained the power of "riving asunder the house of life and dissolving the human trinity," and giving a human form to "that which lies sleeping within us all," argues an uncommon boldness in the man who ventures to use it after its being worked into "Dr Jekyll." However, if Mr Machen thinks he can wear the armour of Achilles with grace, that is his affair. He has a sense of style, as witness his pictures of the deserted house and his conception of the possible history of a street. He is strong enough to walk alone, in fact; and we heartily wish him a little more invention

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and a little less anxiety to make his reader's flesh creep.

Mr Machen is an unfortunate man. He has deter-^{Saturday}
mined to be weird, horrible, and as outspoken as his ^{Review}
courage permits in an age which is noisily resolved
to be "ealthy" to the pitch of blatancy. His par-
ticular obsession is a kind of infernal matrimonial agency,
and the begetting of human-diabolical mules. He has
already skirted the matter in his previous book, "The
Great God Pan," and here we find it well to the fore
again. This time, however, it simply supplies one of
a group of incoherent stories held together in a frame
of wooden narrative about a young man with spectacles.
This young man falls into a circle of Black Magicians,
who are practising indecorums and crimes at which
Mr Machen dare only hint in horror-struck whispers.
. . . But it fails altogether to affect the reader as it
is meant to do. It fails mainly because Mr Machen
has not mastered the necessary trick of commonplace
detail which renders horrors convincing, and because he
lacks even the most rudimentary conception of how to
individualise characters. The framework of the book
is evidently imitated from Mr Stevenson's "New

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Arabian Nights," a humorous form quite unsuited, of course, to realistic horrors. . . .

*Lady's
Pictorial*

If you like the Prologue read the stories. I did not like the Prologue, but I was obliged to read the stories. They are a shade less odious than "The Great God Pan," but the comparison says but little in their favour, for, in the former, Mr Machen gave to the world a most gruesome and *unmanly* book. I should like to know how the imagination of the author would work upon clean and wholesome lines.

*The
Athenæum*

. . . "The Three Impostors" produces on the normal waking mind much the same effect as a hearty supper of pork chops on the dream fancies of a person of delicate digestion: "velut ægri somnia, vanæ finguntur species." It is Mr Machen's chief joy, in the words of one of his characters, to dabble "with the melting ruins of the earthly tabernacle"; to hint, rather than describe, the unholy joys and infamous orgies of those whose diet is framed in accordance with the recipes of the devil's cookery book, and whose esoteric acquaintance with the black art enables them to practise short cuts to the sundering of body and spirit. The result is never agreeable, occasionally

The Great God Pan

disgusting, but seldom really blood-curdling, since in the last resort Mr Machen generally takes refuge in a copious use of such words as "unutterable," "hideous," "loathsome," "appalling," and so on. . . .

. . . It is a pity, I think, that he does not confine *The Graphic* himself to the marvellous pure and simple, and eschew the gruesome—that he should not be content with following in the footsteps of Stevenson instead of entering into competition with Poe. For Mr Machen, though he has, it must be admitted, an occasional inspiration of "the creepy," is too anxious to produce "goose-flesh" in the readers, and in his desire to do so he is apt to seek his efforts in what I cannot but consider an "unsportsmanlike" fashion. For instance, he is too much addicted to the artifice of describing by telling you that things are indescribable. This is a device which, though perhaps not absolutely illegitimate, ought obviously to be very sparingly used; but in "The Three Impostors," as even more conspicuously in Mr Machen's earlier volume in the same series, "The Great God Pan," it is employed to an extent which is almost provocative of parody. A writer must, of course, leave something to our imagina-

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tion ; but when we are continually meeting with creatures whose aspect is too hideous to be portrayed in human language, who utter words too awful to be repeated, and take part in orgies so abominable and revolting that they must for ever remain nameless, even the most indulgent reader may reasonably begin to feel that he is getting rather short measure for his money.

The Echo . . . "The Three Impostors" is plainly based on Stevenson's "Dynamiters." The story opens in the same way, by a meeting of the principal characters in a West London tobacco-shop, and we have brought before us the same kind of house of mystery, and extraordinary men who haunt Italian restaurants, talk in archaic language, and unceasingly tell each other stories. Mr Machen would have stood a better chance of favourable judgment if he had not so needlessly invited comparison with one of Stevenson's masterpieces. He has a powerful imagination, and a careful, laborious style. The adventures he tells, centred around a golden coin of Tiberius, are exciting enough to satisfy the most jaded palate. There is no effort made to retain even a reasonable verisimilitude, and probability is

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cast to the winds. A gentleman looking in an Oxford Street bun-shop is accosted by a stranger, who takes him into an Italian restaurant to dine. There the stranger pours out, with little provocation, a long tale about how, when starving and shabby, he had answered an advertisement for a private secretary, been accepted, gone to America, and the adventures he met with there. Another sits down in the gardens of Leicester Square, when an unknown young lady turns on him and narrates all her family history. Some of the tales are as weird and horrible as anything written in recent years, and there are murders without number. Frankly, the subject matter of "The Three Impostors" is not to our taste. . . .

. . . There are scoundrels who stop at nothing to get possession of magic seals and coins ; there are foul creatures that come out of man ; there are attempts to make our blood run cold. These all signally fail. We remain unthrilled ; we pass from Mr Machen to our luncheon as easily as we change from one coat into another. He never stirs us. He tells his stories well, and that is all. Why are we so unmoved ? Does the fault reside in us or in the author ? We are willing to

*Literary
World*

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admit that as reviewers we run a risk of having our sensibilities blunted. We do not cry or tremble as easily as we wept and shook a few years ago, but we *can* shed an occasional tear over a book, and we *can* shudder when the real literary magician has us in his conduct. To this title, however, Mr Machen has no claim, a fact which explains our passive acceptance of his tame horrors.

*The New
Age*

Mr Arthur Machen's attempts are the more ambitious and elaborate and the least successful. He well illustrates the limitations and dangers of this class of composition. With all his fertile fancy and constructive ingenuity he cannot create that magic atmosphere of creepiness that we presume it is his chief object to attain. Both "The Great God Pan" and "The Three Impostors" are clever and ingenious stories; but as blood-curdlers they are almost failures. All the materials are there, none of the conjuring paraphernalia are wanting, but alas! we are not in the least deceived by the tricks, and vainly wish that the would-be magician would prevent us from seeing how the thing is done. The fact is that, while recognising the value of "suggestive" writing, and the imaginative effects

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to be obtained from obscure hints of "unknowable" and "unspeakable horrors," he works this style—that ought to be used with fine reticence—to death, and reduces the "suggestive" theory *ad absurdum*.

To climb Mount Everest is a great achievement, but there is always a secret hate in the heart of the man who did it first for the man who ascended after him. I do not mean to write this article on Arthur Machen and compare him to Mount Everest. Let us reserve the crests for an Ibsen, a France or a Plato. What I mean by my first sentence is that Machen, at present, seems to be the prized property of a very few persons. He has escaped what Ernest Boyd is pleased to call the æsthete, 1924 model, and sunk to the next lower circle of the intelligentsia, who have an exceedingly happy time springing him upon the ignorami. It has not been my achievement to have read all his work, and there is not enough genuine entertainment in him for me to do it unless The World pays me for the job. But I have managed to stow away "The Hill of Dreams," "Things Near and Far" (a truly beautiful book, by the way), "Hieroglyphics," a volume issued under the

Louis
Weitzen-
korn in
The New
York
Herald

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presentation of Vincent Starrett called "The Shining Pyramid," and his latest publication here, "Dog and Duck."

Without going through the rest of his writings I feel rather confident that I know something of him, and so far I have not yet read, in the encomiums of his enthusiasts, the one characteristic of Machen that, to me, lifts the man out of the ruck of those who just have a "beautiful style." It is idle to talk in praise of Machen's writing, as writing. He has polished up the language to a glittering surface. Each word he uses is carefully chosen, so carefully, indeed, that the writing often becomes of greater interest than the substance and the thought.

His latest volume, "Dog and Duck," is Machen taking a day off. The book is uninteresting except to his worshippers, it being a kind of vaudeville, essays under such titles as "Why New Year?" "April Fool," "Roast Goose: With a Dissertation on Apple Sauce and Sage and Onions." (Notice the recurrent "ands" for a clue to the man's careful style.) In the volume there is nothing of the Machen which brings him, for me, out in the first rank of the modern minors.

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But in "The Hill of Dreams" and perhaps, strangely, that imitative of Stevenson, "The Three Impostors," there is the trade-mark of the man, a psychological insight almost uncanny. Machen has plumbed to the foundations, not of obscenity, but of the obscene.

For something over a decade I have watched what is known to the surface observers of Greenwich Village as the Greenwich Villager, the type of the kidding newspaper story, of the Webster Hall dance and the table-d'hôte, where bootleg liquor hides behind the entree. They are a much more interesting study under the lights of Arthur Machen than the Sunday magazines know. Nor is it true that they alone are a lost tribe in this world. What they represent, I should say, in a rough guess, is about 20 per cent. of the habitable Occident and more of the Orient, and their kindred are to be found in all corners. One, specifically, is a prominent restaurant proprietor. Another is a fairly well-known business man, a third is an editor—in fact I could run pretty near the plane of professions and pick out striking examples of men and women who fall in the category discovered, so far as I know, by Arthur Machen.

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It is an exceedingly difficult task to express the thing, to present with clarity what I think Machen means in his major efforts. In "The Three Impostors" there is an episode that symbolically pictures what I mean.

A young man is infected by some loathsome disease. As the malady grows upon him he takes to his room, locks himself in, and his food is left at his door. Finally his sister discovers the food is untouched. Several days go by and the door of that room is unopened. Then the ceiling above the inhabitants below the room begins to leak. The door of the horrible chamber is burst, and upon the floor is a slimy mass from which two human eyes glitter.

I think Machen has intended a symbol here. It is quite possible, of course, that I am doing that famous trick of interpreting into an author something he never senses. Thanking myself for the compliment, I believe, however, that Machen has deliberately intensified a certain type of human being, too populous, alas, and that this slime with its eyes, and the eyes are the most significant part of the picture, is the emphatic point Machen makes. I know this, that after reading

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and swallowing and then chewing the cud of this particular fantasy I found myself casting up accounts with the world and making of myself a kind of census-taker. I began to remember that certain persons I knew were slimy. Perhaps if I put it this way I would be clearer. Certain persons I knew were possessed of a hidden sexual rottenness, and those persons fell under vastly different indexes. Let me make it specific.

A young man, connected with the theatre, to almost every one who met him was "clean cut, charming, boyish." I think I, alone, held a violent dislike for him, in spite of the fact that he was kindly, confidential, open, toward me—an almost irresistible combination. I was accused of jealousy. My oath of neutrality was sneered at. However, he was then the particular idol of a particular girl. That was two years ago. A few nights past I met that girl and asked about him.

"You never saw such a change," she said. "His face is grotesque. Over it is written the most bestial lines I have ever seen. Everything that was in his soul has come out—in his face. He is horrible."

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I think Arthur Machen has penetrated to the bottom of a certain type of man. He chooses to add to this type a touch of the unnatural or supernatural, the latter a wrong term. He speaks of mysterious demons, hill people, horrors that feed upon and devour human beings. He plays upon mythology and Welsh legend, which is all very well ; but beneath this penchant for legend there is revealed in this writer a knowledge of vile degeneracy, of inherited devilry that is as accurate as simple mathematics. These invented demons of Machen destroy and devour. In our own specific haunt of so-called Bohemia there exists the type of person who devours and destroys, and beyond this section of the city there are scattered innumerable individuals, the more dangerous because the better disguised, men and women whose foundation is slime, who cannot be caught and held because they slide from beneath the grasp and one says : " I cannot quite catch hold of this person, I cannot quite pin him down, he slips away from me, and yet I have him under my hand, I want to hold him and it makes me sick to feel the touch of his soul."

Those who have read " The Hill of Dreams " will

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recall the mystical woman of the slums who flits in and out of the night like a bird of darkness, who, not touching the story, gives it an odour—the odour of decay and flesh. To me, as the book has gotten farther away from my first reading, I get to thinking of this woman as a human skull possessed of two full, rich, red lips, the only living thing upon the bones. Perhaps I am heightening the symbolism of Arthur Machen, but then he has revealed in his method specific creatures to me, creatures, however, of the same general base, the same compound of greasy, poisonous elements.

Of course, that which Arthur Machen has been tortured with must necessarily be expressed in symbolism. Gorgeous, magnificent symbolism that is at once satire and tragedy. For these inhuman characteristics in human beings present unexplored windings and twistings. So far psychology does not light up the crooked pathways and metaphysics give little to the pragmatic mind. This unwholesome or unholy nucleus of certain persons is a basic quality which is not a quality, it is something which can be felt and never named, sensed and never touched. It is directly inhuman, remorseless, impenetrable. It is partial

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atavism, perhaps, but I can't see how much and to guess would be poetic.

All of this does not say one word to the person who has not come up against this quality, who has not felt it, not been made aware of "something wrong" in some one, who has not been pained and stricken with the fear of having looked at a weird and uncanny manifestation. The place to find it most often is in the eyes.

HIEROGLYPHICS

I do not know whether Mr Arthur Machen is to be A. B. described as an actor who amuses his leisure with Walkley in writing books or as an author who fills up his evenings *The Morning Leader* by appearing on the stage. He was a member of the Benson Company and is now to be seen in a small part in "Paolo and Francesca." He wrote some years ago a clever, disagreeable book, "The Great God Pan." He now publishes "Hieroglyphics," which has attracted me (it is just as well to confess frankly the queer reasons which prompt one to take up new books) by its quiet binding and clear type. Unfortunately the type is clearer than the matter. The book proves to be a discussion, in the form of a monologue, of the question, What is Literature? But the monologue is verbose and the reasoning circuitous—Mr Machen prefers to call it, after Coleridge, a "cyclical mode of discoursing"—indeed the question is not so much argued as begged. It would be unfair to Mr Machen to compare him with Tolstoy, who in putting a similar

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question, "What is Art?" has been as lucid and logical as Euclid himself. Apparently Mr Machen does not want to be logical. He says that there are only two parties in the world, the Rationalists and the Mystics, and as he happens to "plump for" mysticism, he despises logic as one of the vain shibboleths of the other party.

Now it is this partisan attitude, this desire to see only one side of the truth, which I think spoils Mr Machen's book. There is room in this world for both rationalists and mystics (as well as for rationalist mystics and mystical rationalists), and neither side can claim all literature for its own. Being a mystic, Mr Machen finds the touchstone of all real or, as he calls it, fine literature, as distinguished from mere reading-matter, in "ecstasy." What does he mean by that? "Substitute, if you like, rapture, beauty, adoration, wonder, awe, mystery, sense of the unknown, desire of the unknown. All and each will convey what I mean; for some a particular one term may be more appropriate than another, but in every case there will be that withdrawal from the common life and the common consciousness which justifies my choice of

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'ecstasy' as the best symbol of my meaning. I claim, then, that here we have the touchstone which will infallibly separate the higher from the lower in literature, which will arrange the innumerable multitude of books in two great divisions, which can be applied with equal justice to a Greek drama, an eighteenth-century novelist, and a modern poet, to an epic in twelve books, and to a lyric in twelve lines." Well, of course, "higher" and "lower" here are mere question-begging terms. If you choose to call what appeals to the sense of the mysterious "high" and what appeals to some other sense "low," there is nothing to prevent you. But all that you have established by your classification is the fact that you, being what you are, prefer one sort of thing to the other sort. This is not criticism, it is mere personal whim.

The essential whimsicality of Mr Machen's classification comes out when he proceeds to illustrate it by specific examples. "Pickwick," it seems, is literature, while "Vanity Fair" is not. Homer and Dickens are on the same shelf—the shelf labelled "literature"—while Jane Austen and George Eliot are on a lower shelf, labelled "reading matter." Why?

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Because the authors in the second class only give us pictures of life, adroit rearrangements of what we know; they do not appeal to our sense of the miraculous, our craving for the unknown, like the writers of the first class. "Pickwick" is not a representation of life; "the book is rather the suggestion of another life, beneath our own or beside our own, and the characters, those queer, grotesque people, are queer for the same reason that the Cyclops is queer, and the dragons and dwarfs of mediæval romance are queer. We are withdrawn from the common ways of life; and in that withdrawal is the beginning of ecstasy." What is here said about "Pickwick" is true, so far as it goes, though the comparison with the "Odyssey" is rather forced. All *picaresque* novels—"Gil Blas" or "Roderick Random" or "Pickwick" or "Lavengro"—have something in common with the "Odyssey," but not much. The "Odyssey" still remains noble poetry, and these others still remain rather ignoble prose. And no parallelism between the "Odyssey" and "Pickwick" will persuade me that the true *differentia* of the latter is its sense of mystery. It is for the fun of the book that the

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world cherishes it. But, like other mystics—notably M. Maeterlinck—Mr Machen seems to be somewhat lacking in a sense of humour. For proof of that, you have only to read him complaining of the “limitations” of Miss Austen’s characters or complacently calling the creator of Mrs Poyser “poor draggle-tailed George Eliot.”

One imagines for the moment that Mr Machen is really a humorist of a very subtle kind when he compares the brandy-and-water drinking in “Pickwick” with the Dionysiac orgies from which Greek tragedy sprang. He drags in Rabelais with his *dive bouteille*. “After all, what does this Bacchic cultus mean? We have seen that under various disguises the one spirit appeared in Greece, in the France of the Renaissance, and in Victorian England, and that in each instance there is an apparent glorification of drunkenness. . . . We are to conclude that both the ancient people and the modern writers recognised Ecstasy as the supreme gift and state of man, and that they chose the Vine and the juice of the Vine as the most beautiful and significant symbol of that Power which withdraws a man from the common life and the common conscious-

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ness, and taking him from the dust of the earth, sets him in high places, in the eternal world of ideas." The "symbolism" of Mr Pickwick's milk-punch! The "ideas" of a drunken man! Into such absurdities do writers fall when, like Mr Machen, they set out with the preconceived notion that all great literature is a form of mysticism, instead of quietly examining the question without any preconceived notions at all.

The truth is Mr Machen's new dichotomy of Literature and Not-Literature is simply the old dichotomy of Romanticism and Realism. Pater defined the Romantic as the element of strangeness in beauty, and what Mr Machen is in fact pleading for is the recognition of nothing but Romantic Literature as great or fine literature. In other words he wants to narrow down recognised terms to fit the limitations of his particular tastes. Well, it won't do. He calls himself, somewhat obtrusively, a Catholic, and says that "literature is the expression, through the æsthetic medium of words, of the dogmas of the Catholic Church." Keeping the word "catholic" untainted by any sectarian meaning, I should be inclined to say

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that "catholicity of taste" is precisely what Mr Machen lacks.

. . . Enter Mr Machen in the part of Boswell to a *The Academy* talker both "literary" and "obscure," who offers a test whereby to separate literature from "fine" literature or, in effect, talent from genius. One listens respectfully to a reading hermit, because, on the face of it, a hermit's opinions should be matured by study and conceived in the calm of one who rolls no logs and grinds no axes. But, to get an unpleasant thing said once and for all, Mr Machen's hermit is an indolent person, careless of accuracy, who has grudged the labour of justifying some extraordinary depreciations. He is, in fact, for all his anonymity, an egoist, whose object seems to be brilliance rather than elucidation. . . .

"Hieroglyphics" is a somewhat figurative title for *The* the latest book of Mr Arthur Machen, author of *Bristol Mercury* "The Great God Pan." It reproduces a series of monologues by and conversations with a kind of philosophical literary hermit whom the author discovered in a quaint old house at Barnsbury, an almost mythical region lying between Pentonville and the

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Caledonian Road. Now and again one discerns a faint and far-away flavour of Coleridge and Lamb in the dissertations, but the philosophy is not of the most profound. . . .

The Globe It is to be hoped that the title of this book, by no means a happy one, will not deter anybody from making its acquaintance. For it is a very readable book—at least, it will be found so by all who take any interest in things literary. It might very well have been called, “What, really, is Literature?”—a large question, which the author, Mr Arthur Machen, does not succeed in answering convincingly. His main theory is summed up in one of his sentences, early in the volume: “If Ecstasy be present, then I say there is fine literature; if it be absent, then, in spite of all the cleverness, all the talents, all the workmanship and observation and dexterity you may show me, then, I think, we have a product (possibly a very interesting one), which is not fine literature.” How this theory works out in practice is seen in another sentence: “Here is ‘Pickwick,’ and here is ‘Vanity Fair’; and, applying my test, I set ‘Pickwick’ beside the ‘Odyssey,’ and ‘Vanity Fair’ on top of the political

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pamphlet." It is impossible to treat with seriousness such propositions ; but that is no reason why " Hieroglyphics " should be neglected. There is a good deal in it, mostly incidental, with which we quite agree—such as, for example, the judgment passed on " Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." The book is suggestive and therefore interesting. Mr Machen ascribes it to an " obscure literary hermit," whose conversations he professes to reproduce ; but there is no apparent necessity for such machinery. Mr Machen should have the courage of his opinions—if they are his. Anyway, " Hieroglyphics " can be recommended to the well-read and the thoughtful.

Mr Arthur Machen, after diligently applying *The Daily* a microscope to sundry literary reputations, has *Mail* detected a number of spots, which he enumerates in " Hieroglyphics." This sheaf of essays is undeniably clever ; but it leaves an impression of cynical iconoclasm, which sees false gods in books which have fallen under the curse of popular approval. Mr Machen finds, for instance, that Jane Austen's works are not literature, and that Dickens reeks of Camden Town. Nevertheless, the book is piquant

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reading, and contains some shrewd pieces of analysis.

Pilot

The device by which vendors of patent wares tempt curiosity by giving them some curious name is hardly worth the imitation of men of letters, and we admire neither Mr Machen's title nor his other artifice of throwing what he has to say into the form of monologues delivered by a Coleridge-loving hermit in Barnsbury. His theme is the old one of "What constitutes Literature?" and his answer is given in the single word Ecstasy. The process by which the answer is reached has the merit of simplicity. Literature is explained to mean "fine literature" and (in an unguarded moment) "imaginative literature." "Ecstasy" is "the withdrawal, the standing apart from common life," and it is obvious that this is only our old friend "imagination" under a new and less happy name. Thus only imaginative literature deserves to be called literature, and what constitutes imaginative literature is the quality of imagination, a conclusion which we can reach without going to Barnsbury, but which yet, ere it is attained, gives Mr Machen occasion for passing some excellent criticisms

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on the books he reviews. Thus he illustrates his axiom, "Only the Idea is pure art ; with Plot and Construction and Style there is an alloy of artifice," by some admirable remarks on Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," and comes near the root of the matter in his criticisms of Mr Hardy and Mr Meredith. That he recognises his quality of "ecstasy" in "Pickwick," despite its cockney atmosphere, is creditable to his generosity. That he adopts "Vanity Fair," which he never tires of reading, as the supreme instance of "observation expressed with artifice" (and, therefore, outside his definition of "literature"), shows some blindness. Take away Thackeray's deep religious feeling, and the criticism would be true, but by the same process the "Agamemnon" may be reduced to the rank of a bad French novel, and the "Ædipus Rex" to a tale of horrors. To blunder thus seems the Nemesis of the straining after novelty which has made Mr Machen attribute the worth of literature to its possession of "ecstasy," and the ambiguous definition he has given to this word. To stand apart, not from common life, but from the common view of life, is surely the criterion of true literature, and we are surprised that

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Mr Machen should come so near as he does to making the subject rather than the vision (we are careful not to say the "treatment") of it the main test.

*The
Morning
Post*

. . . He talks (like the Walrus) of many things, of office boys, of Coleridge, of words that end in "ings"; of Homer and of Dickens, of literature, of art; of books that bore and "lonely" books, which have "a soul apart." . . .

The Star

"By what rule are we . . . to judge exactly in the case of any particular book whether it is literature or not?" When I read that question in Mr Arthur Machen's new book "Hieroglyphics" I pricked up my ears. Here at last, I thought, is the divining rod for which I have yearned. No longer need I vex my soul over the judgments delivered here every Saturday. Fancy a rule which will make me infallible! What is it? "A single word." Out with it! "Ecstasy." Is that all? "Substitute, if you like, rapture, beauty, adoration, wonder, awe, mystery, sense of the unknown, desire for the unknown"—Stop! these words are not "substitutes" or synonyms. They are, I suspect, merely amplifications of another word, romance. Your solution, in fact, is merely a

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statement of your attitude. You are a romanticist, and I like you, for I am one myself. But your golden rule does not help me, for it leaves me still under the necessity of questioning my own soul. By "ecstasy" you mean YOUR ecstasy, not MY ecstasy. For every man has his own private ecstasy. When you get to work I find that your ecstasy is whimsical. You earmark words and use them in a Machenian sense. You prefer to speak of "feelings" when you mean "the things of life," and you reserve "emotion" for "the influence produced (*sic*) in man by fine art." I challenge the distinction. It is arbitrary. "Thus it will be with emotion that we witness the fall of Ædipus, the madness of Lear, while we feel for our friends and ourselves in misfortune." This will never do. "Emotion" is simply a poor Latin synonym for the fine Saxon word "feeling." How on earth can I confine my "emotions" to literature and my "feelings" to life? No, Mr Machen, your sophistry won't help me to discover masterpieces for the readers of that "great pale bird," *The Star*.

And, really, your "ecstasy" leads you a mad dance. It makes you rate "George Egerton" above George

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Meredith. Mr Meredith, you say, "not only fails in the body of art but even more conspicuously in the soul of it." Clearly, your ecstasy is not mine. While you shut Meredith out of literature you let "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" scrape in! After that, nothing you say surprises me. Indeed, it is a relief when you damn Thackeray with Meredith, and canonise Dickens with—Miss Wilkins. For by this time I realise that you have gone *MUST*. Your "ecstasy" is merely the motor-car in which your preferences go out for a nocturnal ride without a light at seventy miles an hour. It is a very good vehicle if safely used. It is by no means new either. Mr Watts-Dunton has been employing it for a quarter of a century. Why, his famous discovery of "the renascence of wonder" has become a critical commonplace. Indeed, so thoroughly has it permeated criticism that the phrase is used as literary shorthand for the great generalisation which it connotes. You have, indeed, turned the shorthand into charming "Hieroglyphics," but you go astray in the application. Your "ecstasy" over that "thick white cloud" in the Tale of Gabriel Grub is quite funny. And if you identify the brandy-and-

Hieroglyphics

water scenes in "Pickwick" with the Bacchic cultus, what about Jos Sedley's rack punch? What about Mr Meredith's glorifications of old port? But much shall be forgiven you because you are a good Pantagruelist, though I think it is a mistake to identify Pantagruelism either with Dionysus and the Greek drama on the one hand or with Dickens and "Pickwick" on the other. Falstaff is the only piece of real Pantagruelism in our literature. And now, let me advise everybody to read "Hieroglyphics." It is brilliantly written, it bubbles over with pugnacities, and it is alive in every line.

. . . The author's main desire seems to be to utter a series of elaborate paradoxes, and he does utter them *Glasgow Herald* in a somewhat conceited fashion. Mr Machen has no doubt got hold of part of the truth, for it is indubitable that the sense of ecstasy, or whatever else one chooses to call it, is a main cause of æsthetic charm. As certainly, however, it is not the whole secret of literature, which admits much more of the pure intellect than Mr Machen will acknowledge. If there were nothing more in fine literature than he will allow, then our masterpieces of prose and poetry would

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be nothing more than so many pieces of music ; but fine literature and fine music are of course very different things. One judges theories by their results, and there must be something radically wrong about a doctrine which excludes Pope and Thackeray from the fine literary canon—which makes them “artifice” and not “art.” There is something wrong also about the critic who permits himself such trivial impertinences as “the egregious M. Voltaire,” “poor draggle-tailed George Eliot,” “our great false prophet Bacon, a wretch infinitely more guilty than Hobbes.” Even dramatically, as the utterances of an obscure literary hermit, such things are not witty—nor yet funny, except in an unconscious way. There are, indeed, better things in the book, and the author succeeds at times in saying a clever thing, as in truth, considering the earnestness of his efforts in that direction, it were hard if he did not. But, on the whole, the essay is the expression of a thoroughly false, unwholesome, and effeminate theory of literature.

*The
Graphic*

Mr Arthur Machen’s attractive-looking volume with the above quaint title is a little difficult to understand—namely, why was it written and why published ?

Hieroglyphics

It purports to be records of conversations listened to by the author during many visits to the house of a friend in Barnsbury. In the society of this friend, and in an "old mouldering room," art in general, and the art of literature in particular, seem to have been very thoroughly discussed. This unnamed friend may have been an author, though Mr Machen confesses himself ignorant, but "he was always ready to defend the thesis that, all the arts being glorious, the literary art was the most glorious and wonderful of all." Mr Machen has now constituted himself the Boswell of this Barnsbury friend, whose existence we take leave to doubt, and the result is a discursive volume of opinions, given conversationally, on literature and art—on what constitutes literature and what constitutes art, with some smashing of idols (as, for instance, George Eliot, George Meredith, and the already chipped Stevenson), all set forth with a certain amount of affectation in style by the author. Mr Machen, in point of fact, requires what he is pleased to call "ecstasy" in a book before it pleases him. He has found it in the Mr Hardy of "Two in a Tower" days, but not in the Mr Hardy who wrote "Jude," any

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more than in the work of the other writers mentioned above. It is well to know, though, that he fancies he detected this quality in "Keynotes," which circumstance may comfort Mr Meredith for his lack of it, unless, perchance, he admires that curious work. Those who would know more, however, of the ecstatic in literature must turn to the book itself.

*The
Pall Mall
Gazette*

Mr George Gissing's "George Ryecroft," in the *Fortnightly*, deals with a subject so like that of Mr Arthur Machen's "Hieroglyphics," that for a time one thinks that both authors must be writing of the same person. Both take as spokesman a sort of literary hermit, whose only companions are his books, and who therefore gives forth his views on men and their works with a real or assumed air of detachment. The setting, however, is a little different; for, while Mr Machen's protagonist is a gentleman with a past, not uncomfortably buried alive in lodgings at Highbury, Mr Gissing's is an ex-literary hack, who has been left an annuity by a thoughtful friend, and has retired to Devonshire to spend what fag-end of life the newspapers and the publishers have left to him. Yet both gentlemen prose a good deal, and awake in a

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contentious mind the doubt whether the general public really care so much for the opinions of literary men about books as they seem to imagine. Outside a certain circle the reign of the old favourite seems to be pretty well established, and although a new one is now and then adopted into the dynasty, the admission is always due to his own merit, and not to that of his backers.

THE HOUSE OF SOULS

Thomas
Lloyd in
*The
Sunday
Sun*

. . . He seeks only to entertain by what he considers legitimate forms of art. Nevertheless, there is a distinct likeness between his professor and himself—even to the suffering from overwork and brain exhaustion. The tales strike one as the work of one who has overtasked his imagination in London streets and been overcome by nightmares produced by excessive reading of the discussions of the British Association. An unusual but not uninteresting case! Time and a rest-cure may work wonders—may lead to Mr Machen's next book being altogether as acceptable as the first story in this, and the successor to "The House of Souls" becoming a house of bodies and hearts and minds.

Academy

. . . The particular mark at which this criticism is directed is the mystical tale called "The White People." This story, which is inset into a not particularly well-executed discussion on the nature and spiritual significance of sin, contains the narrative

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of a young girl, who as a child had lit somehow upon some of the secrets of Fairyland and whose initiation gradually widened as she grew. The thing is not wanting either in imagination or in a certain painful beauty of its own. It is, perhaps, the best-written piece in the book, and the childish, simple language, admirably suggested and maintained, heightens its undeniable pathos. But in the end the young girl is found dead, self-poisoned in time—whatever that may mean—and prostrate before an image which we are given vaguely to understand is symbolic of the “monstrous mythology of the (witches’) Sabbath.” We cannot satisfactorily follow the process by which this gruesome consummation is attained. Mr Machen has been inspired, no doubt, by wild, weird places. Their anciently reported spells, as Emerson has it, have crept upon him, but nowhere here does the enchantment of nature make for sober healing. And why should these influences be set to work upon a pure young spirit for sorcery rather than for sanctification? If Mr Machen should answer: Why not? we can only say how very greatly we should prefer the alternative. The other experiments with the “gurgoylesque”

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are at least legitimate. Weird and resourceful as they are, however, perhaps they rather fail of horror in their super-psychical parts. Nothing elsewhere in "The Great God Pan" approaches the effect produced upon the reader by the callousness of the experiment of the doctor (in the preliminary chapter) upon the brain of the girl who had once owed her life to him, and that incident is nearer to the possibilities of a lust for science than any part of the resulting coil, in which the devil became incarnate for a while and was made woman. In neither this nor the clever arabesque entitled "The Three Impostors" (which might well have been called "The Murderers' Fantasia") is the elaborate surrounding scroll-work quite as effective as it might be; and in the latter extravaganza we lose touch with the main event through the plethora of side tales with which it is garnished, though a word of praise is due to the various literary and artistic characters upon whose vagaries and idiosyncrasies the action indirectly hinges. . . .

*The
Standard*

It is a pity that Mr Machen has done several things in connection with his new volume of short stories. First and foremost, he might have very well dispensed

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with his preface. Mr Machen is clever, of course, but his bland references to the example of Mr Kipling and Edgar Allan Poe as "fellow-authors" does not convince—it only irritates. Also his diatribe about the Puritan elements in the English character is quite out of date. Nearly every man who has written decadent fiction within the past fifteen years has lashed himself into a similar fury because he fancies that it has been "tacitly, if not openly, ordered that the English novel is only great when it is a sermon, a tract, or a pamphlet in disguise." The success or failure of a book is not, as Mr Machen seems to think, governed by hard-headed men of business, who have never disguised their intolerance of imagination, *quâ* imagination, and who believe that "English fiction must justify itself either as containing useful doctrine and information, or as a manifest transcript of life as it is known to the average reader, due regard being had, of course, to the salutary conventions of the social order." It is almost invariably limited by its own qualities. Only let Mr Machen produce a work of genius—and his fame shall be known afar. Another source of difference which we have with this writer

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is the inclusion of the first story, "A Fragment of Life," in "The House of Souls." That story, in its particular way, is almost perfect—tender, true, intimate, and restrained—in its exhibition of how a small suburban clerk and his wife came to awake from their dream of a London suburb, of daily labour, and of weary, useless little things, and saw the things that really mattered in life, with the result that "the voices of men and women came to sound with strange notes, with the echo rather of a music that came over unknown hills." Its mystical qualities are both rare and beautiful, and, as a work of art alone, it deserves to live. But the other stories of *Black Magic*—of Pan, and of fauns and satyrs and other fearful wild-fowl of the occultist's stock-in-trade—frankly, they are failures. In one aspect, they would shame any respectable sensational novelist who practises a certain amount of natural illusion. In another—they are ineffective. They do not drive home the intolerable horror of the mystery of Evil. They suggest, on the contrary, the Fat Boy in "Pickwick." Mr Machen may have ransacked the whole British Museum for quaint and far-off ceremonies, simply to make our

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flesh creep, but, in sober truth, all he has accomplished is an engaging air of looking mysterious until the time comes for explanation—and then—well, then we yawn. Now, his “fellow-author,” Poe, would not have done this. If he had essayed to melt this too, too solid flesh, if he had striven to throw into atoms and reconstitute the primal elements of our existence, if he had essayed to summon the eternal spirits of evil, the blind forces of ill that are hidden in the constitution of man—we should have felt a rush of genuine terror, and the breath of genius would have touched our cheeks. As it is—Mr Machen only imparts a certain hot-house kind of atmosphere to several perfectly familiar experiments, such as an obscure operation on a girl’s brain, the secret of a wife’s disappearance, the reason why certain men of fashion are driven irresistibly to suicide, and the cause of an obscure, and, truth to tell, rather squalid murder in a deserted passage. He never makes us believe in those Black Masses, or in his theory of demoniacal possession, or in that wonderful jewel, the size of a pigeon’s egg, that glowed and glittered, and was really a woman’s soul. He should realise that poor

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Aubrey Beardsley, and the hot, impetuous souls that wrought as he did, are quite dead, and now should turn his attention to other and truer fragments of life.

*The
Bystander*

My reference, a week or two back, to the new form of humour exploited by Mr Montagu Wood in "A Tangled I," a humour which amusingly combined epigram and satire with literary power and imagination, has moved Mr Grant Richards, the publisher of the book, to draw my attention to another work of the same *genre*, entitled "The House of Souls," by Mr Arthur Machen. Certainly this book, which contains about six complete novels, is a notable production. If it lacks the sparkle of Mr Wood's book, it is, nevertheless, the fruit of a curious talent which seems to be of so very striking a resemblance to that work that I am moved to a suspicion that it is the handiwork of the same brain. "The House of Souls" stories are conceived largely with the desire to mix up the humdrum in life with the transcendental—to indicate the "appeal of Theosophy to atheists, men about town, journalists, and hard-headed men of affairs." The touch of humour is to be observed in the descriptions in the various

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stories—particularly “A Fragment of Life”—of prosaic suburban ways and manners, which reveal a very intimate knowledge of the lower middle classes; and as to the Theosophical aspect of the stories, undoubtedly it is interesting to find this theme exploited in fiction, especially by so brilliant a descriptive and imaginative writer as Mr Machen. I may add here, that Mr Montagu Wood’s humour was recognised in “Pop” at Eton, and afterwards at the Canning Club at Oxford, and that his skit, published some years ago, “An Island Story,” was highly successful in those sets wherein it gained a reading. I am more than confident that his is a literary talent which will, sooner or later, reach a wide and a startled public.

. . . It is by no means a new trick, of course, but *Liverpool Daily Courier* Mr Machen has it to perfection, and he is shrewd enough to heighten its effectiveness by sticking his nightmares in the very midst of the modern and the circumstantial and the familiar—by transposing Edgar Allan Poe into the key of “The New Arabian Nights.” Too obviously Poe, here and there, perhaps; and too unmistakably the manner of “The Nights”; but in these derivative days echoes of that sort will

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*Illustrated
London
News*

trouble none but the most fastidious of readers, and certainly not those who have a healthy appetite for robustious and not too conventional melodrama.

"My dear Sir," says Dyson in "The House of Souls," "I will give you the task of a literary man in a phrase. He has got to do simply this: to invent a wonderful story and to tell it in a wonderful manner." Judged by this test Mr Arthur Machen can scarcely be said to have made literature. As the reader is conducted, Sherlock Holmes fashion, through the House of Souls (there are six storeys to it) its wicked arabesques, its old cabinets and prehistoric flints and faded pocket-books, wear an unconvincing, property air. When wonderful gentlemen like Dyson having drawn from some antique bureau a tattered paper or a black seal, and presenting it for a chum's inspection the chum exclaims, "Take it away; never speak of this again. Are you made of stone, man? Why, the dread and horror of death itself, the thoughts of the man who stands in the keen morning air on the black platform, bound, the bell tolling in his ears, and waits for the harsh rattle of the bolt, are as nothing compared to this. I will not read it; I should never sleep

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again!"—then is the breath held, and the mind prepared for any delicious thrill. But the Manuscript at length, or the black seal fully deciphered, prove well-nigh soporific. And both lack the power of evoking that spiritual terror which, leaving Hawthorne and Poe and Coleridge out of the comparison, surrounds "The Island of Dr Moreau," by Mr Wells, and is imprinted in "The Mark of the Beast," by Mr Kipling.

. . . Whilst admiring the literary workmanship *Birmingham* and the weird fancifulness of it all, one wonders what *Gazette* it means and why the tales were ever written. Do *and Express* they purport to be works of imagination only, then the author has sought a singularly repulsive form of expression for his undoubted talent; do they seek to promulgate a theory concerning the link between the human and the bestial, between the natural and the supernatural in its most depraved possibilities of manifestation, then we would prefer to remain in ignorance, debating for not one moment the reasonableness or otherwise of such a theory. Really and truly, these awful stories strongly suggest the half-mad imaginings of a degenerate mind steeped in morbidity. They are too completely nauseous ever to have been

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permitted the publicity of print, and we sincerely trust they will secure few readers.

*Literary
World*

. . . But when our author attempts to handle such occult matters as are treated of in "The Great God Pan," he seems to lose his footing. He succeeds in giving his readers an impression of very disagreeable horrors, but he does not succeed in giving verisimilitude to his record. We feel ourselves in the presence merely of a somewhat morbid imagination. Mr Machen does not reveal, as he leads us to hope, any real arcana.

*East
Anglian
Daily
Times*

. . . We have conscientiously perused the 500 pages which the volume contains, and our conclusion is that we would not willingly repeat the experience. We have supped full with horrors, and the lurid abominations which are very plainly hinted at have sickened us. It is probable that there are some whose literary digestion is strong enough to swallow such pabulum with impunity; but we fancy that the great majority of readers will rise from the book with a shudder of loathing. Certainly persons of a sensitive temperament ought not to read the gruesome tales after dusk. . . .

Light

. . . The promise of the first story is not redeemed,

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and the book is given up to the blacker side of magical beliefs, wrapped up in a garb suggestive of "Sherlock Holmes." It is not Spiritualism, and we prefer to believe that there is no truth in such auto-suggested horrors. The book professes to indicate "the dangers of unauthorised research," but no such dangers as are here presented beset the path of the earnest and conscientious Spiritualist investigator.

Mr Arthur Machen writes a somewhat curious *Speaker* preface to his collection of decadent stories in which he attempts to turn the Puritan's flank in an ingenious manner. He claims that "it is entirely from the Puritan standpoint that I wish to rest my plea for these tales of mine . . . almost every page contains a hint (under varied images and symbols) of a belief in a world that is not that of ordinary everyday experience. . . . I contend that as an English novelist I am within my right in doing so ; since Science, the guide of Life, has done as much, has admitted many transcendental conceptions into her scheme of things." This is a neat apology for the subject matter, which may be summarised by the line, "the flesh is aghast at the half-heard murmurs of horrible things," but it may

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surprise the author to be told that in these clever artificial and decidedly sickly romances, penned apparently under the joint influence of Oscar Wilde's and Aubrey Beardsley's artistic example, he has proved his Puritan heritage better than he knows. There has always seemed to us something a little pathetic in the desperate attempt of the small school of young Oxford hedonists to break away from the moral code of the healthy Philistine and encounter and glorify the mysterious forbidden pleasures of Sin. For their world was an artificial make-believe affair, with an exhausted atmosphere, in which affectation stood in the place of real pleasure. We can respect in a measure the Puritan who cries out that pleasure is a sin, because he shows us thereby that it has a secret fascination for him, but the man who can only enjoy pleasure by making out to himself that it is a sin shows himself a Puritan *manqué*. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that Mr Arthur Machen's stories fail to thrill us, because the artificial horrors and nameless sins in which they abound are all carefully concocted and have practically no correspondence with the sins or horrors of real life. That is where our young school of modern

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hedonists fails in art ; it is divorced from nature, and its would-be spontaneity is palpably a carefully laboured, artificial affair. And this is a great pity, for the refined sense of beauty that the young hedonist starts with possessing can only create a stale preciousity when it is divorced from the freshness of nature. Practically all the stories in "The House of Souls" are so much labour thrown away, and the more carefully studied are their "nameless horrors," the more meaningless are they, and the worse as art. Take, for example, the story "The Inmost Light." Here is a most deliberate attempt to make our flesh creep, and the only result is to make the reader exclaim "stuff and nonsense." A certain Dr Black secludes himself with his beautiful wife in his house at Harlesden, and makes experiments in "occult science" :—

" . . . each night I had stolen a step nearer to that great abyss which I was to bridge over, the gulf between the world of consciousness and the world of matter. . . . In that work from which even I doubted to escape with life, life itself must enter ; from some human being there must be drawn that essence which men call the soul, and in its place (for in the scheme of the world there is no vacant chamber)—in its place would enter in what the lips can hardly utter, what the

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mind cannot conceive without a horror more awful than the horror of death itself. And when I knew this, I knew also on whom that fate would fall; I looked into my wife's eyes. Even at that hour, if I had gone out and taken a rope and hanged myself, I might have escaped, and she also, but in no other way. At last I told her all. She shuddered, and wept, and called on her dead mother for help, and asked me if I had no mercy and I could only sigh. I concealed nothing from her; I told her what she would become, and what would enter in where her life had been; I told her of all the shame and all the horror. . . . That night she came down to my laboratory, and there, with shutters bolted and barred down, with curtains drawn thick and close, so that the very stars might be shut out from the sight of that room, while the crucible hissed and boiled over the lamp, I did what had to be done, and led out what was no longer a woman. But on the table the opal flamed and sparkled with such light as no eyes of man have ever gazed on, and the rays of the flame that was within it flashed, and glittered, and shone even to my heart. My wife had only asked one thing of me; that when there came at last what I had told her, I would kill her. I have kept my promise." Page 286.

This passage is a very fair sample of the school to which Mr Machen belongs, and it illustrates its utter artificiality. No thrill can possibly come, because there is falsity in every line and human nature is violated at every turn. The leading idea of the opal gaining

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an unholy lustre from the commission of an evil deed is paltry in itself, and the whole psychological interest should lie in the study of the man's warped human instincts. But Dr Black is a lay figure in whom we do not even begin to believe, and so the piled-up structure of horror appears childishly inept. And so with the description of the strange sins in the story of "The Three Impostors." The strange sins are not real sins, that is why they fail to interest even a morbid imagination. If the author would go into the street and pick up with the first wastrel he meets and describe faithfully the workings of the man's mind, he would thrill us fifty times more than can this collection of concocted effects all alien to the truth of life, and so all remote from human feeling. In its horror of nature, indeed, our young hedonistic school shows but another phase of the old Puritan's distrust of art.

AN IMPURE IDEAL

A CHALLENGE TO PURITANISM

The Philistine as Art's Helper.—Every now and then David some person rises up in England to protest against the restrictions by which a vulgar and uninstructed

David
Christie
Murray in
The Referee

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Philistinism cribs, cabins, and confines the imaginative artist. Sometimes the protest is made by a man of genius, and whenever that is the case it is triumphantly proved by events that there was not the slightest real need to make it. The more daring and robust the assault upon the proprieties the more assured is the attention of an immediate audience. Mr Swinburne's career affords an excellent example of this truth. In some respects he is an artist of unique character, but it was not by virtue of his artistry that he made at his first coming so prodigious a noise in the world. Mr Swinburne's admirers now appreciate him for his literary excellences, but his earliest fame was accorded to him because of his so delicious naughtiness. A man of genius with a narrow intellectual field in which to disport himself, but with extraordinary gifts of melody and energy, he has found his proper place in the poetic hierarchy in his own lifetime, and to pretend that his fame was retarded by his defiance of Puritanism is a task for a fool—and a task which only a fool would undertake. The plain truth is that it is the very shortest cut to notoriety in this country to make a mock of morals, and there

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are not a few men and women who enjoy a public vogue simply and merely because they flout the Puritan Ideal, whilst if they had been content to ally decency with their native dullness they would never have been heard of beyond their own doorsteps.

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There has been sent to *The Referee* for review a book the pretensions of which I think it on several grounds desirable to examine. In an oddly pompous preface the writer expresses his surety that his fellow-authors will sympathise with him in the difficult task of finding for a collection of short stories a general title which is not obviously impertinent. He opines that the title he has chosen "will at all events hint at the nature of the contents." To me it afforded no remotest suggestion, and it would be easy enough to write a book which would justify the title with at least equal completeness whilst it would embody the actual anti-thesis of its idea. Before I proceed to the exposition of that idea it is just to set out such reasons as the author has to give for its expression in a work of fiction. In France, we are told, "it is agreed that imagination and fantasy are to work as they will and as they can,

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and are to be judged by their own laws. He who carves gurgoyles admirably is praised for his curious excellence in the invention and execution of these grinning monsters; and if he is blamed it is for bad carving, not because he has failed to produce pet lambs." In England we are said to judge very differently, and "Imagination itself is expected to improve the occasion, to reform whilst it entertains, and to instruct under the guise of story-telling."

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Where to Draw the Line.—It has to be objected here that the case is too broadly stated. It is not agreed that imagination and fantasy are to work as they will in France. There is a certain restraining sense which now and then moves the authorities to suppress a theatrical production like the "Timbale d'Argent" or a serial publication like "La Nature." Fantasy is nowhere in any civilised community allowed an unrestricted play. There is a point at which all modern peoples divide the endurably coarse from the intolerably indecent and abominable. You must arrange with your own sensibilities the precise point at which you will say to fantasy, "Thus far shalt

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thou go and no further," but every civilised man has a limit beyond which he will not permit himself to be carried. And, what is of at least equal importance, he has a limit beyond which he will not knowingly allow those innocences, ignorances, and inexperience which are under his guardianship or control to travel.

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There are many examples of literary, pictorial, and plastic art in the hands of lovers of the curious which are kept under lock and key. The owners are not necessarily persons of unclean mind, and they generally exercise some discretion as to the choice of the people by whom these objects shall be seen. The common sense of the world—not the art-hatred of the Philistine, but just the common-sense common decency of the world—has decided that they shall be jealously hidden from the immature in years and experience. The argument advanced by our author is that perfection in the presentation makes the nature of the thing presented of little consequence. I am not disposed to attach an exaggerated value to that contention, but even if it were wholly defensible in respect to a work of art in itself, it is impossible to argue that it is of little

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consequence to whom it shall be shown. There is nothing more sacred than that ingenuous shame which the growth of civilisation has fostered as a guarding instinct against the violation of the mind. I make no fight for prudery—pruriency aping modesty, and topping frank indecency by its lie. I have had my say in *The Referee* more than once already about those egregious persons who from time to time seek an *arbiter elegantiarum* in the police-courts. But I stand for cleanliness in art, and, above all, I stand for it in the modern novel, and not only because the novel goes into the hands of boys and girls whose premature introduction to certain dark places cannot fail to have disastrous results.

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A Public Pleasaunce.—Now here, of course, is an excellent opportunity for those ladies and gentlemen who think it one of the privileges of Art to be indecent to ask if I expect the writer of the novel to address herself or himself exclusively to the Young Person—if I intend to tie his or her soaring genius to a boy's coat-tails or a girl's pinafore. I say in answer to that query that it is not I who choose the medium through which the writers concerned have elected to reveal

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their genius to the world. I say that having chosen that medium for themselves they cannot rightly ignore certain responsibilities which the choice imposes upon them. The field of the novelist is a very spacious pleasure-ground indeed, and you may legitimately lay out in it almost any sort of garden plot or plantation, and may erect in it almost any sort of palace or cottage or mansion. But it is an open space, and it is dedicated to the delectation of the public. Incidentally the wanderer in its precincts may be instructed or warned or spiritually lifted, but his purpose in going there is primarily to be entertained. The operating theatre and the dissecting-room are out of place there, though there are some people who can take their pleasure in such places and get no harm. Most out of place of all conceivable things in a pleasure-ground which is free to everybody is the mural picture gallery of the unburied cities.

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An Intrusion on Privacy.—When I was a boy I was taken by a middle-aged fool who ought to have known better into a waxwork anatomical museum at a rural wake. The sight left an evil taste on my mental

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palate for years and years. A rural wake is no place for an anatomical museum. That was a day of days, and Wombwell's menagerie and that booth of Thespis which belonged to Messrs Bennet and Patch, and the swinging-boats and the merry-go-rounds, and the gingerbread stalls and the spangled lady on the slack wire, and Mr Merriman and the shooting-galleries, and the whole gay, harmless medley make clear pictures in my mind this minute, though the rain and sunshine of a half-century have made many another of memory's paintings dim. And the anatomical museum poisoned everything. The contention I desire to combat is that a literary craftsman has some right to intrude the most hateful side of his mind upon others because he is an artist. But who says he is an artist? A man may write fiction and be no more of an artist than a ledger clerk. "He who carves gurgoyles admirably is praised for his curious excellence in the invention and execution of those grinning monsters; and if he is blamed he is blamed for bad carving, not because he has failed to produce pet lambs." But has he who carves "gurgoyles" the double right to carve revolting shapes and to plump them down in the public

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pleasure-ground for any unsuspecting wayfarer to sicken at ?

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A Buried Symbolism.—I offer a most emphatic denial to the assumption that “imagination and fantasy” are anywhere justly to be “allowed to work as they can and will,” so long as their product is exposed for unrestricted sale in market overt. If I am to give fantasy free play I can quite easily imagine things which would excite the loathing of a savage. In every society which has raised itself above the intellectual level of the hog there are certain things which are not currently spoken of. There were certain obscure obscenities with which the ancients surrounded Nature-Worship. They expressed imaginatively the primal forces, and the emblems employed to represent them were candid and unashamed. Their open exposure and popular exhibition were the characteristic originally of a time of purest savagery and animalism. As civilisation grew these emblems became conventionalised, and finally they ceased to be symbolic. Some are in frequent use to-day, but their meaning is so completely lost to the popular mind that every

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modern cemetery displays an entire perversion of the meaning of one of them. Now, the root-idea of the book under consideration is the survival of all those old obscure obscenities into modern life. "It is in the character of a sober portrayer of a certain side of life," writes the author in his own person, "that I hope to add to the pleasure of many pleasant Sunday afternoons." I am armed beforehand against the simpering suggestion that I am impenetrable to the subtleties of irony. Solomon to the contrary notwithstanding, it is sometimes good to answer a controversialist according to his argument.

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The Naked Untruth.—In pursuit of this purpose of adding to the pleasure of pleasant Sunday afternoons our author introduces his reader to a girl-child in a modern rural neighbourhood in Wales whose mind is unutterably debauched by her nurse, and who at the age of five has for her playmate the very bodily devil of licentiousness. The girl thrives under tuition to such advantage that when she comes to her demoniac womanhood she has arrived at a knowledge of evil so complete that the revelation of it drives men of the

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world to whom it is displayed to suicide. Speaking for myself, I can aver quite honestly that this sort of baby-Satanic-tommy-rot will not add to the pleasure of many pleasant Sunday afternoons. It is offered, as I have said already, with a kind of pomp, as a protest against the degraded state into which imagination and fantasy have slipped under the withering influences of Puritanism. Puritanism is as a red rag to the author. We all know, so he tells us, "how Hampden died that England might be free, first under the martial law of the Great Protector, and afterwards under the Whig oligarchy." We are instructed that the Puritans hanged witches in Salem, and flogged the Quakers, baptised foals in cathedrals, hewed down the statues of the saints, shut up the theatres, and gave us the English Sunday. It is not quite a true bill. Hampden did not die for martial law and the *beaux yeux* of the Whigs. Nor did the Puritans—a really forbidding body of men, to my fancy, amongst whom I wouldn't have lived for any money—spend all their energies in hanging witches and baptising foals in cathedrals. Like many a tribe which went before them, and many another which has followed after, they obscured a noble

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cause by gross excesses. But it does not become a professed Iconoclast to get dancing-mad at the sight of a hammer in another man's hand.

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The Little Pig.—It is an assured thing in our author's mind that English Puritanism is going to take exception to his work. On the ground that it is a needless and offensive resurrection of the buried nastiness of early heathendom, I think it very likely that he is right. I was never very much of a Puritan myself, but my taste and inclination take me to the Puritan side for once. There was a dear old philosopher of a village doctor whom I knew years ago when I lived in the Belgian Ardennes. We were talking of the pornographies of French art one night, and with a shake of his wise old head he said, "Il y a, dans l'ame de chacun de nous, un petit cochon qui se grandit vite." I know my own little pig, and though I am compelled to find him house-room I have no liking for him, and I certainly have no desire that his manners should be corrupted by association with the little pigs of other people.

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I have myself been a modest market-gardener in the

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field of fiction now these thirty years, and I have been careful never to introduce my little pig to anybody who has come to look at my very humble patch. I try to keep him unseen and lonely in his sty. My attempt to starve him out of existence has unhappily met with but indifferent success; but I'll be hanged if I will take anybody's ha'pence to make a show of him. I decline to put him on exhibition either for praise or pudding. And yet I know that I could make a very decent (and most indecent) living out of him. For my little pig is not at all like your little pig, and it is the master-passion of the Artist to be different. We all know that a good half of the talk we hear about Art for Art's sake, with its accompanying malediction on the English Puritan, means nothing more than that the artist is setting the little pig on view for the gratification of a prurient vanity.—MERLIN.

. . . Like Poe, Mr Machen sets himself to make the reader's flesh creep; like Hawthorne, he abounds with subtle and suggestive symbolism, and, had neither of these writers existed, his work would thrill the reader even more ingeniously, although it lacks the originality of the one and the poetic austerity and wealth of

*The
Athenæum*

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imagination of the other. He deals in ancient mysteries; he is for ever hinting at the macabre, the sinister, the unspeakable. His puppets peep and mutter through an atmosphere of forbidden knowledge and obscure rites of remote antiquity, which, however, he would seem to suggest are not so remote as they ought to be, after all. He is an adept in the art of elusiveness—so much so, indeed, that some of his most horrific endings fail of their proper effect, and the piled-up agony topples to a fall, leaving the reader with just the ghost of a suspicion of the author's sincerity, and a haunting reminiscence of turnip-headed spectres and clanking chains. . . .

*The
Saturday
Review*

Mr Machen adds three new stories to the contents of two earlier volumes, and introduces the collection by a preface which is perhaps the best thing in the book. We remember reading "The Great God Pan" when it first appeared, and discussing it with brother-undergraduates. Most of us thought that the story was interesting chiefly as illustrating the difficulties which beset an ambitious English writer who wishes to describe transcendental beastliness. Probably we were right. Mr Machen's literary monomania takes

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the form of postulating that behind the veil of matter, in the centre of the material universe, resides an obscene and terrible power, the revelation of which brings to mortals infamy and madness. This pretty fancy is hardly relevant to his spirited attack on Puritanism, for the Puritans had a lively sense of the demoniac. As regards the execution of the stories, Mr Machen has style, and a talent for the fantastic (though "The Three Impostors" is in its scheme reminiscent of Stevenson), but he has not the power of creating horror. One feels that he is carving gargoyles (to borrow his phrase) just for fun, and his readers' blood will not run cold, though possibly their gorges may rise.

The Great God Pan is finding himself extremely *Tribune* popular among the novelists just now. It was Mr Benson who began it, earlier in the year, and since that time the number of novels in which we are vouchsafed manifestations of the goat-god—complete even to the hoofs, and with an attendant murky odour thrown in—increases almost daily. Of course it is natural enough, for nobody, not even a novelist, knows much about Pan, whence unlimited possibilities of mystery and thrills. Mr Arthur Machen is one of

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those who see in him all the possibilities of a "hair-raiser." Were it not disrespectful it might be said that "The House of Souls" is exactly the kind of book which would have been written by the Fat Boy in Pickwick, had he been possessed of literary ability. Had he also been, be it said, familiar with the works of Robert Louis Stevenson. For never was book more obviously written with the desire "to make your flesh creep." What with Pans and witches and mysterious keepers of treasures in hills, the half-dozen stories contain quite a population of queer folk, not one of which but has the potentiality of raising the hair upon the reader's head, until it resembles the quills upon a more than usually fretful porcupine. Potentialities only, however, for, truth to tell, the author never quite succeeds in raising our hair. He tells us either too much or too little. He so constantly hints at quite unmentionable horrors that we find ourselves mistrusting them, and when he does occasionally, greatly daring, venture to unveil a horror or two, they are a wee bit disappointing. This is, of course, as much the fault of the subject as of the author. None of us can take the great God Pan, nor witches, nor

The House of Souls

warlocks, very seriously nowadays—even if surgeons with alarming surgical instruments are introduced into the same story to keep them in countenance by their up-to-date associations. Because we know very well that did Pan put in a bodily appearance in a British wood to-day he would be given in charge by a stolid and unemotional gamekeeper for trespassing in pursuit of game. Pan was killed by the Game Laws, if not before, and not all the King's horses and all the King's men can put him together again—alas ! Of the various stories in the volume "The Inmost Light" comes the nearest to being convincing, while lovers of Stevenson would feel interested in the story series, "The Three Impostors," which at times is very successfully reminiscent of that writer.

The stories in the volume entitled "The House of Souls," by Arthur Machen, are all addressed to the ancient purpose of making the reader's flesh creep. It is a favourite pastime for easy people to play with fear ; from time immemorial men have amused their leisure by sitting round the fire capping horrors. It is not, we may concede, a very high form of art, but any essay in this kind must stand or fall by its

*Manchester
Guardian*

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success in imputing horror. Mr Machen has written a rather arrogant preface, in which the following passage occurs: "He who carves gargoyles admirably is praised for his curious excellence in the invention and execution of these grinning monsters; and if he is blamed it is for bad carving, not because he has failed to produce pet lambs." Conceded! We may even call it a necessary postulate of the reviewer; if he is writing of gargoyles he has no business to say, "I do not like gargoyles"; he must look for the curious excellence in invention and execution, and it is not to be found in Mr Machen's work. He understands what has long been known, that the emotion of fear is best induced by vagueness; he insists—rather heavily, indeed—on the mysterious power of the spirit, but he has not felt it; too often the horror adumbrated in his vagueness is no more than physically disgusting. Conjuring tricks with the grey matter of the brain, burning and mutilating of live bodies are the clumsy devices of an unimaginative man. The restrained intensity of feeling and economy of suggestion in such scenes as those of Maeterlinck's early plays are infinitely more moving than these violent assaults.—H. M. S.

THE HILL OF DREAMS

THIS is the first complete novel by the author of *East*
"The House of Souls." When writing of that work *Anglian*
we expressed regret at the prominence accorded to an *Daily*
unhealthy atmosphere. The suggestions of hideous *Times*
survivals in the under-world were not pleasant reading,
and it is our duty to insist that their repetition in the
present work is deplorable. No good can be effected
by a discussion of such esoteric matters, and we could
have wished that Mr Machen had refrained from
introducing such horrors into his book. The story
purports to be "a study of the temperament of a young
literary man, whose dreams lead him into strange
places, and bring him to a strange sequel." Expressed
more plainly, the plot is that of a crazy youth who
undergoes some particularly unpleasant experiences,
and finally commits suicide. Frankly speaking, it
was the best thing that could have happened, for the
"dreams" of this young man were repulsive. If
the reading public must have this kind of mental food,

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we can only deplore the taste ; but we protest with all possible strength against the dissemination of such sickly, and in some sense horrible ideas, as form the basis of Mr Machen's latest effort. It is not denied that the author writes cleverly. That, however, forms an additional reason why his talents should be employed in producing something more admirable than "The Hill of Dreams" can be said to be.

*The
Outlook*

It is safe to compliment Mr Arthur Machen upon having produced a book that stands, and will perhaps continue to stand, quite alone in English fiction. Fellows might be found for it in the modern letters of Germany and France, but not even the most determined of our own symbolists has produced such an elaborate account of the adventures of an exclusively æsthetic nature in the rough world. But apart from such praise as that acknowledgment confers, it is not at all easy to put a value on Mr Machen's "Hill of Dreams." It is written in a simple yet studied English that conveys in the deeper passages of the book as much of magic as words can impart ; yet the whole work is so unreal and so charged with spiritual disease that there is scarcely a place for it in the widest utili-

The Hill of Dreams

tarian view. Beyond an impression of intense agony of the soul, it leaves little behind it, and there is nothing to the purpose that a critic can say except that the book evidently answered to something in the writer, and may answer to something in others. The growth of Lucian Taylor's fervently mystic and quite inhuman nature, perfectly pure, perfectly egoistic, is traced with power. Most of his outward tragedy is that of the artist's struggle with the world, and of his association with gross and ordinary British barbarians, whose manners are described with a cleverness and a rancour in which we can find nothing but weakness; the inward story—if such a web of shadows can be called a story—is one of some strange insight into the obscurity of an essential evil in nature, of a strange development of the passion of love in the soul of the ascetic of art, of his sufferings, his dreams, and of his final destruction by the shadowy power of ill that laid its hands upon him as a child, on the hill where once the Romans camped. An undefined horror penetrates all the story, like an invisible vapour. It is an extraordinary performance and a work of art; but art fallen, we think, on unclean and fatal days.

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*Birmingham
Gazette
and
Express*

. . . There is much fine writing, but probably few other than literary craftsmen will follow with patience the detailed story of his striving after perfection in the use of language. The most pleasing part of the book is that which treats of his love for and idealisation of the simple, womanly country girl, Annie Morgan. It is scarcely a "healthy" book, but it is evidently the work of a man who has thought deeply and suffered much.

*Manchester
Courier*

It would be hard to classify "The Hill of Dreams," by Arthur Machen, for it is both unprecedented and unusual. Moreover, it is unpleasing and unconvincing, though its writer possesses a wealth of imagery and a power not often met with. The little story there is concerns the life of Lucian Taylor, but the plot of the book is but a peg on which the author hangs a detailed study of temperament. Lucian is a "dreamer," with literary aspirations. His early life is devoid of all humanising influences, and his character is only explicable, and then not very satisfactorily so, when this is remembered. Despite education and cultivation, Lucian never possesses any feelings which a barbarian might not be expected to have. He never

The Hill of Dreams

imposes the least restraint on his natural susceptibility, and both as a boy and a man is a sensualist. After living a life of failure, in which, apart from his vivid dreams, a passion for a country girl is the only important event, he commits suicide. The reader is left in doubt whether Lucian was a genius neglected by an unappreciative world or a fool totally incapable of understanding the beauty of the world. The writing of the book is astonishingly versatile. At times there is the gruesomeness of Poe, at others the charm of Hawthorne. The descriptions of country scenery show a love of the picturesque, and the chapters on London life a knowledge of the seamy side of nature. Though there is splendid capability shown in the book, it will not make a wide appeal because of its want of humanity.

Mr Arthur Machen's is hardly the sort of story that *Birmingham Post* is likely to win admiration from the average reader of current fiction. Perhaps it is as well, for "The Hill of Dreams" is not a healthy book, and the power of fascination that it exercises is tempered with a certain instinctive feeling of repugnance. Let it be said at once that it does fascinate. It is filled with

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passages of rare beauty. Mr Machen understands the magic of words; his sentences are as silk shot with rich, variegated, and harmonious colour; they have a fine rhythmic flow also; and page after page is filled with "a procession of images" (we quote the author's own words), "now of rapture and ecstasy and now of terror and shame, floating in a light that is altogether phantasmal and unreal." So far as charm of language and beauty of imagery go—and they go far—the season is hardly likely to see the rival of Mr Machen's novel. The weakness is that all this accumulated beauty is something fantastic, exotic, and bizarre. Mr Machen leads us through a forest of flowers; but they are *fleurs de mal*, in Baudelaire's phrase, sprung from miasmatic ground, and spreading a perfume by which the atmosphere is vitiated. Through his power of conjuring up visions of the world of long ago and living in a dreamland of his own Lucian Taylor claims some kinship with Du Maurier's "Peter Ibbetson." By the circumstances of his death he stands related to the English opium-eater. But Mr Machen has neither Du Maurier's light touch and sense of humour nor De Quincey's stern insistence on the

The Hill of Dreams

penalties of such visionary delights. His attitude is too accurately that which another exquisite artist, Ernest Dowson, assumed in the sonnet, now fairly well known, "To One in Bedlam":—

Oh, lamentable brother ! if these pity thee,
Am I not fain of all thy lone eyes promise me—
Half a fool's kingdom, far from men who sow and reap
All their days vanity.

So Dowson sang ; and in the same mood Mr Machen seems inclined, throughout the greater part of his book at any rate, to hold up his invertebrate hero—or victim—as a subject for sympathy and admiration. "Invertebrate" is too weak a word. Most of Lucian's peculiarities are definable in the terminology of specialists in mental alienation. He is a sufferer from what an expert witness in the American "cause célèbre" of the day called lately "exaggerated ego." Echolalia (in his attempts at authorship), melancholia, visual and auditory hallucinations—all these familiar phenomena of an unbalanced mind does he exhibit ; and doubtless the specialist in such diseases might trace more. It is because his attitude towards this "lamentable brother" is too nearly that of Ernest

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Dowson and too far from that of (say) De Quincey that Mr Machen has failed to produce a piece of great literature which is above all things sane and level-headed. On the other side of the scales must be put a fertile imagination, a great deal of acute psychological analysis, and an extraordinary sensitiveness to impressions of natural beauty. These are sufficiently enviable endowments, which one hopes to see Mr Machen exercising in the future on some more happily treated subject.

*Newcastle
Chronicle*

Mr Machen's story is all about a young man who adds to a temperament naturally neurotic a passion for examining the inner workings of his own mind, and a dislike for nourishing food. This combination of qualities reduces him to a skeleton, and enables him to see visions and dream dreams of the most fantastic variety. Those who are familiar with Mr Machen's work will recognise in such a subject one particularly suited to his *métier*. Step by step he traces, with fine imagination, the workings of the disordered brain until the inevitable end of complete madness and death is reached. Only Mr Machen, perhaps, would not have us believe that his hero is mad; preferring if

The Hill of Dreams

anything to think that he is of a sanity and clear-sightedness altogether denied to the devotees of plain living and plain thinking.

Mr Machen has chosen for his book one of those subjects that depend entirely on their treatment for their success or failure. "The Hill of Dreams" provides an analysis of the character of an imaginative young man consumed with literary aspirations. Unfortunately, the treatment of this theme is marred by the two faults of exaggeration and monotonous insistence on the psychological note of alternate despair and exultation. The delineation of moods must be made variable if it is to be palatable to the reader; otherwise weariness of the mind ensues as a necessary consequence. Lucian Taylor's continuous habit of selfish introspection ultimately leads him to madness and "death by misadventure," but these misfortunes do not induce sympathy in the reader when he has become satiated with the morbidity which itself brought them about. At the same time, the book has style and is full of so many well-written descriptions of scenery that one is inclined to forget about the dreamer and only to dwell in fancy on the

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beautiful "Hill of Dreams" which prompted his visions.

P.T.O. Mr Arthur Machen's first long novel, "The Hill of Dreams," fails in humanity. The hero's literary struggles are desperate; the hero himself is an abstraction. The author labours too much over his work for it to be wholly satisfactory; we are obliged to him for the pains he takes in these days of careless writing, but could wish the effort less apparent. In his pictures of Welsh scenery he is at his best; in suburbia he lays it on with a trowel, and makes himself more unhappy than ever he will make the worthy folk he dislikes should they chance upon his book. In a word, Mr Machen has yet to find a story, yet to create real living people.

The Scotsman Mr Machen's novel displays a singular ability in giving a sustained and varied interest to a theme of which the material is to the last degree simple and monotonous. He has no more story to tell than how a young man, a country clergyman's son, feeling that he had a gift for literature, went up to London, and kept writing and writing and writing while he lived in a world of dreams, quite misunderstood and untouched

The Hill of Dreams

by the outer world of everyday circumstance, until at last he came to kill himself, having accomplished nothing. Such is the subject, and it seems, thus stated, to afford little matter enough for a full-length story. But the work goes with such a skilful psychology into the workings of the unhappy young man's mind, and shows such fine imaginative artistry in varying the light and shade of his emotions and contrasting his outward with his inward life, that it proves interesting from first to last without even for a moment disturbing its air of soft tranquillity. It is a story that will readily impress a reader of quiet tastes who can reach to the more subtle refinements of fiction.

. . . In the emotional adventures of the hapless *The Athenæum* youth who is a victim of a species of nympholepsy and intellectual loneliness combined, we cannot, after the first hundred pages, feel any adequate interest. His agonies while engaged in the long-drawn-out struggle with his stubborn literary gifts are too protracted, too remote from any human sentiment, to hold the interest of the reader. Their recital is almost as monotonous as, and far more fatiguing than, the artistic *débâcle* of the painter in Zola's "L'Œuvre," which had at

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least some elements of humanity. But the spirit of place which informs the book, whether it is the forlorn, illimitable dreariness of suburbia that the author chooses to show us, or the mysterious and melancholy beauty of that wild Wales he knows so well, could only have found expression at the hand of an adept. It is perhaps a pity that so clever a writer as Mr Machen should bestow such infinite pains on astonishing the bourgeois, who in all likelihood will never have the privilege of reading his books; it is an obsession that brings to mind the unprofitableness of flogging dead horses. But, after all, the main matter for regret is the utter formlessness and the arid inhumanity of his work. His Muse is a kind of Lilith—not a drop of her blood is human—and thus, except from the decorative point of view, he leaves us cold. . . .

*The Daily
Graphic*

A curious and fanciful book, which shows much misdirected ability. It is the study of the temperament of a young man, who devotes himself to literature, but his imagination is abnormal, and his mental condition diseased. The book is not of much practical interest, as one feels that his death, with which the story ends, is the best possible solution of his difficulties.

The Hill of Dreams

Mr Arthur Machen has written "The Hill of Dreams," we take it, not with a view to saying anything in particular, but rather with a view to saying something in a particular—almost a precious—way. We fancy that he would not greatly object to identify himself with his hero, of whom he says :—

*The Daily
Chronicle*

Language, he understood, was chiefly important for the beauty of its sounds, by its possession of words resonant, glorious to the ear, by its capacity, when exquisitely arranged, of suggesting wonderful and indefinable impressions, perhaps more ravishing and farther removed from the domain of strict thought than the impressions excited by music itself. Here lay hidden the sensuous art of literature, it was the secret of suggestion, the art of causing delicious sensation by the use of words. In a way, therefore, literature was independent of thought; the mere English listener, if he had an ear attuned, could recognise the beauty of a splendid Latin phrase.

One would like to have Mr Machen's criticism of that majestic line of R. L. Stevenson's :—

Opulent orotundo strike the sky !

"The Hill of Dreams" is a long, and in many respects, a clever psychological analysis and demonstration of the mind of a young degenerate. It is a deliberate and

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careful study of morbidity. It is well written, but written not quite well enough. The good writing is just a thought too obvious ; one cannot help noticing it. It has what Mr Machen calls "the secret of suggestion," but it suggests some things which we would much rather had not been suggested. It is a thoughtful piece of work though, and it is often lighted up by swift and penetrating flashes of satire. We wish the word "sonorous" did not occur quite so often in it. "Sonorous" is a very good and effective word in its way, but, like "sinister," "sombre," and one or two others, it should be used sparingly. It does not do to make a pet of it.

*The
Manchester
Guardian*

Without a refined susceptibility to sensuous impressions there can be no high art. But there is always a danger that the artist who recognises this theoretically may give rein to susceptibility and sensitiveness as such and be drawn headlong along the road to mere sensationalism. For in art, as in everything else, the ultimate value of a sensation lies always in its content. The fact that your sensations seem to you "exquisite" or "delicious" no more gives them artistic than it would give them moral import ; in the one case as

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in the other, there is the further question to be asked, the question what kind of person you are who feel them so. Which question leads in its turn to other questions, all pointing unmistakably one way. Sensation, you find, gives you no principle either in art or in anything else. It can open no locked doors. Take it for your guide and there can be no doubt but you will be landed, sooner or later, in the ditch. Mr Arthur Machen in his new story "The Hill of Dreams" drives perilously near this dangerous territory. He recounts the life of a hypersensitive youth of whom the world is not worthy, upon whose delicate nature the violence of healthy humanity rasps and jars, who therefore, shut up within himself, runs riot in a fantastic maze of morbid mystic fancies, constructs an impossible romance out of a chance meeting with a farmer's daughter in the dark (for whose sake he afterwards inflicts upon himself nightly penance with a gorse bough), and finally drifts up to London and laudanum and an untimely end. This kind of story could only fail to be suffocating in its effect upon the reader if the oxygen absent in the hero were supplied by some sort of exhilaration derivable from the background against

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which he moves. But he moves, alas! in an atmosphere as exquisite and as exhausted as he is. "He knew that he himself had solved the riddle, that he held in his hand the powder of projection, the philosopher's stone transmuting all it touched to fine gold, the gold of exquisite impressions." It is of these impressions, this "powder of projection," that the bulk of the narrative is composed. If your air is full of dust, it is no matter what kind of particles the dust is made of; let it be powdered gold, the effect is just as choking. Many objections might be advanced against a story like "The Hill of Dreams" on the score of its subject matter: the artist would be ready to dismiss these as ethical and irrelevant. But the unrelieved preciousness of the style is equally open to criticism, and this is the rock upon which the book finally founders. "Only in the Court of Avallaunius is the true science of the exquisite to be found." It would be wise to leave it unmolested there; here in these lower courts, this "land of sin and woe," there is nothing that more quickly tends to tedium.—B. S.

The Hill of Dreams

Arthur Machen's "The Hill of Dreams," according to the introduction included in a new American edition, was written in 1897. It was published first in 1907. Mr Knopf would have been much fairer to Mr Machen had he left this book to perish in the dust of things forgotten. It has a great beauty of writing. The Machen style is clearly a deliberate and successful attempt to get melody into prose. But it strikes us that music is not the first element of a prose style; in fact it is one part that, under compulsion, might be omitted without injury. After all, the poets are entitled to something.

Our first demand from a prose work styled a novel is living characters. Except in the last three paragraphs, not one breath of life shows up in "The Hill of Dreams." Mr Machen confesses his plan to have been the writing of a "Robinson Crusoe" of the mind. As to that there is a touch of similarity here to "Peter Ibbetson," and more to Jack London's "Star Rover." Naturally enough, Machen didn't see this latter work of fiction before he began his. But it is to the analogy of "Robinson Crusoe" that we mainly object. After all, that cast-off sailor had a man

Louis
Weitzen-
korn in
*The New
York
World*

Precious Balms

Friday who was every inch alive. Good, deadly arrows fly through Defoe's book. Ships and savages and hot sunlight beat down.

Whatever there is of Lucian Taylor beyond the author's frail beating against life, is something of a masculine and British Carol Kennicott. That's crowding a reputation, even a fictional one, pretty badly, but the futile protest and final escape of Lucian Taylor through suicide doesn't follow as four does two plus two and as true tragedy must. Not once does the book move us to feel for this hero, who lives like an essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*. He and the British countryside aristocracy—the British Main Streeters—are so many children's toys. They are dolls that get from one end of the room to the other only when lifted up and moved.

Machen has written this book as if he had been young and angry. He seems to have wanted to nail his old neighbours to some sort of cross. He forgets that the Babbitts are the very ones who read "Babbitt" and make the author rich.

The book will not enhance Machen's rather high reputation here. His incident of the hanging of a dog

The Hill of Dreams

by a set of children, not one of whom protests, will never be swallowed, at least by American readers. The rest of the book is just as impossible. We are willing still to take our knowledge of Main Street Britons from Mr Bennett's "Five Towns."

THE SECRET GLORY

Manchester Guardian It is a little difficult to know what kind of readers "The Secret Glory" is intended to please, and there is a temptation to believe that its author wrote it simply and solely for his own amusement. The greatest works of art are no doubt those in which an artist insists on satisfying his own standard of taste, but Mr Machen's game on this occasion seems to have been rather that of "letting himself go." He begins with a vivid indictment of the English public school, but does not produce either an original or a convincing picture of its faults and failings; and he then proceeds to cut the painter and to launch forth into a juvenile description of a juvenile escapade in London which his schoolboy hero, half mystic, half Bohemian, is supposed to share with a young lady of his choice, though not of his class—the whole embroidered with wonderful pæans to punch and poetry, surrounded with a sort of religious halo, and penetrated with a peculiar flavour of what one might call inebriate innocence.

The Secret Glory

There are perhaps deep lessons to be drawn from the perusal of these singular heroics, but we have not succeeded in discovering or profiting by them. The narrative itself is allusive and obscure. Huge jokes are supposed to be concealed on one side, and on the other the profound, impenetrable import of things. But, judging by what is actually communicated to us, we remain in doubt whether what is withheld was either very funny or very significant.—B. S.

I have always understood that what St Paul calls *Punch* "visions and revelations of the Lord" were sent to forward their recipients' progress in virtue; and that if glimpses of the supernatural resulted in *Schwärmerei*, or sin, they were the work of the Devil. On this hypothesis there is no doubt whatever concerning the origin of "The Secret Glory," a latter-day variant of the Holy Grail revealed in a Welsh farmhouse to the boy *Ambrose Meyrick* and his father; although its exposition is accompanied (if I may credit Mr Arthur Machen) by a vision of "The Mystery of Mysteries." *Ambrose*, still harping on his mystic experiences, is sent to an exquisitely odious public school, where he becomes first a cowed and isolated

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dreamer and last a furtive and malicious rebel. Both reverie and rebellion are natural enough, the school being what it is, but they are not particularly creditable to a devotee of "The Mystery of Mysteries." Nor is a *liaison* with a sympathetic parlour-maid, though this is set down as part and parcel of the "wonders." Nor is *Ambrose's* subsequent career, which continues a marvel of irresponsibility until his extremely unconvincing martyrdom at the hands of "miscreants" in Asia. And, talking of irresponsibility, I cannot help wishing that Mr Machen himself, who shows considerable savage humour in his guerilla campaign against the public school system, would occasionally come to closer grips with one or other of the problems his extravaganza has evoked.

Forrest
Reid in
*The Daily
Herald*

In "The Secret Glory" the happenings are neither sober nor probable, yet the effect is prosaic and even tedious. Here, again, it is all a matter of treatment, or, rather, in Mr Machen's case, of the absence of treatment, for he has left his subject a mere kernel rattling in the dry shell of didacticism. I have seldom been so disappointed in a book. What has happened to Mr Machen? Have we gained a missionary and

The Secret Glory

lost an artist? His gift was always narrow, apt to lead him woefully astray when he departed from the presentation of states of abnormal, or morbid, consciousness; but it was vivid, haunting, and intensely individual. "The Secret Glory" is little more than an elaborate tract in which Mr Machen champions mediævalism and tilts at his usual windmills—the public school system, athletics, suburban life, etc.

In "The Secret Glory" Mr Machen attempts to describe the rebellion of a Celtic mystic against Anglicanism and the public school traditions. I say "attempts," because neither Anglicanism nor education interests him sufficiently to make him barb his satire. But the mysticism excites his dark and fantastic imagination, and there are bursts, in the latter half of the book, of successful paradox. Ambrose Meyrick, who had seen the "Holy Chalice of Teilo sant," and had an affection for Gothic architecture, was well whipped for absconding from football practice. Thenceforth he exerted himself to be in all things the most loyal Luptonian, but at night he walked in strange places and heard the voices that outsing the Fairy Birds of Rhiannon. After winning a Balliol

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Scholarship and performing some remarkable cricket at the Oval, he broke away and joined a troupe of actors, and was for ever lost to Lupton and its like. An effect of a kind Mr Machen certainly produces. He incants Welsh names, and, as so often on lighter ground, he displays a great power of giving a queer twist to the least uncanny events. Naturally, he fails to inform us what there was so remarkable in the Welsh Church which was ruined by "the Yellow Hag of Pestilence, the Red Hag of Rome, and the Black Hag of Geneva"; consequently, he fails to show why Ambrose should not have had all the spiritual experience desired in his own school chapel. True, Lupton Chapel was built in 1840, and the neighbourhood was slummy. But, then, Ambrose was capable of ecstasy in Bloomsbury and Soho. No, Ambrose's unhappiness is too like that of Mr Bultitude when, in "Vice Versa," this gentleman took his son's place at Dr Grimstone's academy, and proceeds from an intelligible dislike of small boys.

*The
Evening
Standard*

A schoolboy is also the central figure in "The Secret Glory," by Arthur Machen. But Ambrose Meyrick is an unusual boy, not at all the sort of boy to conform

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to the average type turned out at such a public school as Lupton. It is to be hoped, by the way, that not many schools are like Lupton, or at least that there are not any public schoolmasters like Mr Horbury, who takes such a savage delight in using the cane.

Mr Machen's satire on the public school system, and especially public school games, is a little too heavy-handed to be effective. Neither boys nor masters are very convincing, and now and then the story gets lost in the mystical atmosphere with which Mr Machen surrounds his hero. Altogether "The Secret Glory" is rather an incoherent and tiresome production, and certainly does not represent Mr Machen at his best. Schoolboys and mysticism do not mix.

Mr Arthur Machen has attempted an ambitious character study in "The Secret Glory." He has also tried to give us a new version of the Grail, introducing a mystical cup preserved in a cottage in Wales. But neither the character nor the cup are very convincing, and it must be said that Mr Machen has this time failed to get into his story any deep sense of the mystical. His principal character, Ambrose Meyrick, is a queer chap, as he is meant to be, but there is no

*Liverpool
Daily
Courier*

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reason why he should be as irresponsible as he is, and less reason why he should finish up by getting himself crucified somewhere in Asia. These improbabilities would matter less, however, if Mr Machen had made Meyrick vital, and his adventures interesting. The story never runs with sufficient sequence to ensure this. It is all confused with propaganda, and very bitter propaganda at that, against the public schools, and criticism of Welsh Nonconformity when it combines religious revival fervour with sensuality. Mr Machen knows how to tell a story, but he does not demonstrate that capacity in this work.

*Sheffield
Daily
Telegraph*

Ambrose Meyrick said that "people who pushed . . . always reminded him of the hungry little pigs fighting for the largest share of the wash"—but though a reasonable aversion to Extravertism is comprehensible, it is really unnecessary to be so exaggerated an introvert as the hero of "The Secret Glory," by Arthur Machen. Ambrose carried his mental "Secret Doctrine" to perverse, even morbid, excesses; he lived in a *paysage intérieur* peopled by mystics and martyrs, and visions of the jewelled Grail hidden by the descendant of Celtic Saints in some humble cottage

The Secret Glory

on the Welsh mountains ; and all this was naturally incompatible with the brutal facts of life at an English public school. An unpleasant school, certainly, but not more so than most.

It is to be assumed that Ambrose possessed a sense of humour, since he could enjoy, and even parody, Rabelais, but there is scant evidence of the quality otherwise than as stated. Extracts from his famous book, "In Praise of Taverns," are equally unconvincing.

Some of Mr Machen's arguments on religion are interesting. "In my heart," he says, "I have always doubted whether moderate Anglicanism be Christianity in any sense, whether it even deserves to be called a religion at all," and he objects to Protestantism because of the fundamental heresy on which it "builds its objection to what is called Ritual. I suppose this heresy is called Manichee ; it is a charge of corruption and evil made against the visible universe, which is affirmed to be not 'very good' but 'very bad'—or, at all events, too bad to be used as the vehicle of spiritual truth. . . . Incense, vestments, candles, all ceremonies, processions, rites—all these things are

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miserably inadequate ; but they do not abound in the horrible pitfalls, misapprehensions, errors, which are inseparable from speech of men used as an expression of the Church."

Mr Machen is trying to present Celtic Paganism in the guise of Christianity, he confuses the Greek philosophy of restraint, "Nothing in excess," with a mere negation. There is very little glory in the book. It is concerned with the tortuous byways of a perverse soul through which the free wind from the mountains has never blown.

*The
Morning
Post*

Though issued as fiction, this is not a novel. It is composite of story, autobiography, essay, satire, philosophy, criticism, poetry, and too formless to be brought within any literary mode. Presumably it was not written all of a piece, and that just yesterday. Spatchcocked passages point to times when there were as yet no Boches, only Boers, and "'E dunno where 'e are" was still a music-hall ditty. These were the days of Ambrose Meyrick's youth, true ; but—though this need not (and will not) trouble the shade of Mr Blackmore—the most consistent romancer, as to time and place, would not now suggest the Valley of the

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Doone as even a bogus field for the adventure of the Sangraal. Other times, other fashions, even in that high Quest. Pieced or wrought whole, the book nevertheless is unified by one idea. The "secret glory" of its title is the imaginative life, to which its every line and circumstance is meant as acclamation and appeal.

There are in it, among others of rare and rich beauty, a thousand absurd lines and circumstances we could willingly blot. For Mr Machen's own purpose, Lupton School is a prejudice ; like its Headmaster it is too much "commerce with mortality." "A deeper transport and a mightier thrill" are communicated in wise, rapturous praise of wine and humorous discourse on the marriage of Panurge. Here Nelly Foran is cunningly kept with Ambrose, aloof and aloft in a fragrant old Bloomsbury whose "stinks" in reality were neither better nor worse than the Midlands'. More understanding still of its own "secret glory" would Mr Machen's fascinating book have been had he realised that its ecstatic vision, being of the spirit and the imagination, is as likely to occur in a "Bethel with the stucco front" as in the Celtic Church with

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its Cup of Sacrament. But Mr Machen, in his own exclusive way, does catch it, and for that we are grateful.

Rose
Macaulay
in *The
Daily News*

"The Secret Glory" is, like most of Mr Machen's books, very odd. It is the story of a mystic, of the inner and the outer life. The outer life of Ambrose Meyrick is passed at Lupton, a typically commonplace and materialistic public school, whose masters talk of "playing the game" and write horrible school songs of the "Forty Years on" type; while his inner life, which is alone of significance or importance to him, is spent in exploring mystic realms of Celtic Christian legend with or without his dead father, a Welsh architectural enthusiast. "I do not know," writes Ambrose in later life, "how it all happened; I had been leading two eager lives. On the outside I was playing games and going up in the school with a rush, and in the inside I was being gathered more and more into the sanctuaries of immortal things." Ambrose's mystical adventures are described with a good deal of beauty; it is his contacts with actuality which strike one as distorted and unreal.

Both he and Mr Machen loathe public schools and

The Secret Glory

all pertaining to them with such intensity that neither of them can see straight. They set up a monstrous figure of savagery and idiotcy and call him a typical schoolmaster, adding that schoolmasters are just like schoolboys, the implication being that nearly all schoolboys also are savage and imbecile. Even public schools are not really quite as bad as all that ; and Mr Machen would have been more effective if he had been more temperate. There is quite enough to be said about the savagery and stupidity of schools without resorting to distortion. Psychological accuracy is not, indeed, the strength of the book, which is full of unlikely actions. For instance, was Ambrose really the kind of boy who, in his quest for beauty, would have absconded with one of the school housemaids ? Surely his dead father would have told him that this was conduct unworthy of an inquirer into spiritual mysteries. But the whole book is a fantasy, and not to be judged as a tale of real life. Its curious occurrences and characters are made odder by the difficult, obscure, and fragmentary method of narration. There is, in fact, a good deal of silliness in the book, as well as some bad taste, but there is also a good deal of

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beauty, and the beauty and the silliness and the bad taste are all the work of a writer.

Middleton
Murry in
The Nation
and
Athenæum

Even if we wished we could not tell the story of "The Secret Glory." Mr Machen manages to combine an onslaught on the public school system with some watery Paterian mysticism. Personally we have an equal dislike of those who belaud and those who denigrate the public school system. Besides, "there ain't no sich person," there are as many systems as there are public schools. But Ambrose Meyrick, if he could have been jerked for a moment by his creator into a semblance of real existence, would justify the worst outrages wrought upon him by his equally incredible *alma mater*.

He is a sentimental philanderer with æsthetic Catholicisms, a mystic Celtic dreamer, a Soho Bohemian (before Soho was ruined, of course); but these crimes are as nothing compared to his incorrigible penchant for "poetic prose." Mr Machen has encouraged him in it. He will have a great deal more to answer for in the day of judgment than the schoolmaster who tried to beat it out of him.

FAR OFF THINGS AND THINGS NEAR AND FAR

IT is difficult to know quite what to make of Mr *The* Machen's two most recent books. "Far Off Things" *Outlook* was a rather scrappy chapter of what might have been an excellent autobiography not written in the first place for publication in book form. Like the new volume it spoiled a great deal of good material and was not organised in any way that tends to make lasting literature. For all that, both volumes are excellent reading. There is a great deal to be said for Mr Machen. And he himself has a great deal to say. He is not quite at home in the twentieth century. Spiritually he belongs to the years before the 'nineties, to Charing Cross Road as it was in the days when he translated Casanova at the rate of thirty shillings a week. The Strand is not what it was, and he paints the difference for us in no uncertain terms. Nor do the modern restaurants know their business half so well as the old chop-houses did.

Precious Balms

So through this monstrous incursion of women with the war and nursery hours of to-day, the old tavern life has gone ; utterly and for ever, I am afraid.

This is one of the chief grudges he urges against the modern age ; and he can give us chapter and verse for it.

Going there (to Herbert's) in these latter days I used to wonder why all the meats seemed to taste alike. . . . I had business, oddly enough, in their kitchen. One of the cooks showed me the joints roasting on the jack ; and I perceived that three different meats were cooking at the one fire, while beneath, in a common pan, their juices mingled, ready for the basting ladle. It is not much wonder, I think, that veal and lamb and beef taste all much alike in this unhappy place, once so high, now fallen so low.

On another occasion, when he asked for Stilton cheese, the waiter replied that only English cheeses were supplied ! And just as the food has deteriorated, so has the journalism. "Always remember that we appeal not to the cabman, but to the cabman's wife," said one of Mr Machen's friends, a distinguished journalist ; and Mr Machen, who, to say the worst of him, prefers the cabman, might have been a little more disgusted than he is, and that is not a little. He does his best to fix a considerable share of the blame for

Far Off Things

our present condition on this "monstrous incursion of women."

Such things as these are not, however, the main features of Mr Machen's confessions—for that is what his pages really are. He is most interesting when he hints at his incidental experiences at novelist, journalist, and actor. And here, at the same time, because of his brevity, he is most disappointing. Mr H. B. Irving once said to him of his book "The Great God Pan"—"You shouldn't have done it; you destroy the illusion. Never take people behind the scenes. I never do." Mr Machen's great mistake in his two latest books is that he never takes us further than the stage-door. Although he is telling us about himself all the time, we learn very little about him because he does not tell us enough of other people. We enjoy his story, but always with a sense of irritation that he has not dotted more of the i's and crossed more of the t's. Time and again, following on some succulent anecdote, he seems almost to be about to paint for us the whole moving pageant of the 'nineties, and just as often he turns aside to trace something else into other and less interesting channels.

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The truth is "Things Near and Far" is not really a book at all because it was neither conceived nor written as a book. It is a collection of amazingly good snippets, a sort of prearranged notebook that might have borne such a title as "Towards Biography." One feels about it as about something that might have been, that almost was, but is not. One is left wondering whether Mr Machen is a good journalist or a good author, for it seems fairly evident that he cannot be both, at all events, not at the same time, as he has tried to be in his two latest books.

*Liverpool
Daily Post
and
Mercury*

. . . It is debonair, it is graceful, it is dignified and extraordinarily at its ease, it is essentially belles-lettres; it is not much more than that; it is not specially memorable, nor does it presage very brilliantly of the book to come (in the indefinite future), where "an interior tale of the soul and its emotions" is to be told through the shapes of "hills and valleys, woods and rivers, sunrise and sunset, buried temples and mouldering Roman walls." Mr Machen has humour, poetic sensibility, a sense of style; he is reflective, open to the influences of nature, appreciative of the town's common and uncommon interests, readily

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responsive to the appeal of art and literature. What perhaps his work lacks to make it true literature is virility, and it wants substance to make it really worth while, though it is—this must be one's last word—exceedingly pleasant.

Mr Arthur Machen has his full circle of readers, who will be delighted with this sumptuous edition which Mr Secker has so ably prepared. It is limited to a thousand sets; five hundred of which have gone to America. Mr Machen loves the unusual and the mysterious. They appeal to his imagination and set him thinking on a train of thought which seems without end. Someone has said that few men can more agreeably fill a column. The remark finds justification in these volumes. This gift is the strength and weakness of his writing. It might be said of Mr Machen that he has at once too much and too little imagination. Too much, that his ideas flow on like the summer brook; too little, that his style lacks incisiveness and the power of expressing instantaneously some thought.

“The Great God Pan” is a fair example of this weakness. He tells us in “Far Off Things” that he

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was persuaded to write this tale of horror by a wish to "pass on the vague, indefinable sense of awe and mystery and terror" that he had received in childhood days spent in the valley of the Usk, above Newbridge. The feeling that all the best in human beings is built on a treacherous morass which may engulf it at any moment has often been expressed. Mr Machen's effort does not compare with Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." Its terror is dissipated through failure to bring any definite incident of horror before the reader. The alternative would have been to envelop the story in such a wealth of strangeness that the impression would have been created through atmosphere; the method of Poe. Mr Machen is neither sufficiently dramatic nor sufficiently keyed to the weirdness of his tale. It certainly lacks resemblance to the dark gravity of deep woods.

From a consideration of this point we notice another peculiarity in Mr Machen's work. It is not plagiarism, but the ignoring of any reference to ideas which other men have worked upon. True, there is no monopoly of thought, but we are led sometimes right up to a thought which has been superbly expressed

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before. It would seem more natural if Mr Machen directed us to the poet or writer instead of enlarging in his own words on that idea. It would certainly be more effective from the point of view of art.

It may be that we are somewhat critical. There is much to enjoy and admire in these books with ever a word for the weak and distressed, and the fascinating hint of "worlds unrealised." But library editions are becoming increasingly popular, and we wonder whether they may not be overdone. These fine books are delightful to handle, but the thought creeps in if their matter is quite up to the high standard of production; whether anything but the very best should find a home in these limited editions, which rise so readily in mere marketable value. Still, Mr Machen has his admirers. No doubt they will think nothing too good as a home for his thoughts.

In "Far Off Things" Mr Arthur Machen describes his rambling boyhood on the borderland of South Wales and his adolescence (a rather sad affair of lonely lodging and penurious journalism in London) as far as the publication of his first book. His memories have been laid up in lavender, and they emerge rather heavily

*Manchester
Guardian*

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scented. The result is the praise of old and simple things in a style that has too glib an antiquarianism to be pleasing over a long stretch. The reader finds himself predicting Mr Machen's reaction to each situation as it arises and trying to forestall the phrase which the author's sentimental conservatism will use. For instance, when he describes how his mother made "fermety" or "frumenty" in the autumn he must allude to it as "a very honourable dish and a most ancient and Christian pottage." One feared in advance some such pomposity. It is the more pity because Mr Machen is sensitive as well as sentimental, and when he allows his memories to flow in unprinked English he achieves a beauty apt to the object he describes, notably in his landscapes of the Usk Valley and the surrounding hills.

*The
Outlook*

Literature and the journalist do not always rub shoulders nowadays; at all events few people look to find anything claiming to be prose in the misprinted, smudgy sheets of our raucous evening Press, unless, perhaps, in newspapers published North of the Trent. So that it does not promise well to read in Mr Machen's preface that his new book appeared seven years ago in

Far Off Things

one of the best-known London evening papers under the title "Confessions of a Literary Man." It sounds like Mr Bennett all over again, and misgiving increases when he adds that the confessions were written to editorial order when he was a reporter. It is an old truth that Fleet Street has ruined more good writers than Fleet Street ever made. Only at a first glance does Mr Machen appear to be an exception, for in spite of the extraordinary quality and power of his present book, though it challenges comparison with Gissing's best work and surpasses it in parts, Mr Machen is quite clearly not the writer he might have been. "Far Off Things" is one of the most entertaining and familiar books one remembers ; a vivid autobiographical chapter, condensed and complete in much less than two hundred pages, but it is without that distinctive art that makes Mr Gosse's "Father and Son" one of the great pieces of autobiography of this or any time, and it has not just that sense for the right word in the right place which knits language into abiding literature. He cannot wrestle with the conventional :—

Now winter has its splendours ; but with what joy do we welcome the yearly miracle of spring. We and the whole

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earth exult together as though we had been delivered from prison, the hedgerows and the fields are glad, and the woods are filled with singing; and men's hearts are filled with an ineffable rapture. Israel once more has come out of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

That is the prose of the best journalism, but not the prose of the man who is, first and foremost, expressing the pure content of his mind with all his mind's power through the power of words.

But the real charm of the book lies elsewhere, chiefly in the zest with which he describes the places he has loved and the people he remembers, the curious, quiet anecdotes, his sense of poetry in all things, and, especially, his literary enthusiasms. Cervantes and Scott come into his range, and even De Quincey, who "wrote in the great manner because he thought in the great manner." He is inspiriting about Carlyle, and there is a tone of voice meant for the detractors of that great man in the quiet statement: "I know not any man of these days that is worthy to dust Carlyle's hat or to clean his pipe for him." But the journalist comes out badly in that sentence. The best thing in the book is his description of the Strand

Far Off Things

as it was in the 'eighties, and there is a curious parallel with one of Mr W. H. Davies' best poems when he writes of Gwent and Twyn Barlwm. He is equally happy proving that the Rosicrucians never existed as in describing the conventional garret of author-hood's infancy, and there is one magnificent anecdote of a lesson in Welsh pronunciation :—

I said, "Yn oes oesodd"—from ages to ages. "That is right," said my Welsh friend, "speak it so that it makes a sound like the wind about the mountains."

And, as he says himself, the spirit of that sentence is very near to the heart of true literature. Mr Machen knows what true literature is. There is a good critic in the man who can define realism as "the depicting of eternal, inner realities—the 'things that really are' of Plato—as opposed to the description of transitory, external surfaces; the delusory masks and dominoes with which the human heart hides and drapes itself." Though he is digressive he is never garrulous, even when he writes about food and drink, and he does that well enough to whet the reader's appetite.

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"Far Off Things," if it is not a great book, is a book too good to be read lightly. It contains a great deal of wisdom and more than a little humour. The author throws out hints of a book yet to be written, in which hills and valleys, woods and rivers, sunrise and sunset will be described so that a story is suggested to the reader; something of Wordsworth's method, and certainly a method of poetry, though Mr Machen does not seem to realise it in that way. Such a book he has in his mind, and if, when it comes, it improves on "Far Off Things," Mr Machen will have done his work better than he knew.

*Liverpool
Daily Post
and
Mercury*

Mr Arthur Machen is a modest man: he says so himself; but his modesty is of that most profitable kind — to the world, we mean, of course — which inspired Montaigne, Cowley, "Elia," and other famous "egoists." In "Things Near and Far" he continues the tale he began in "Far Off Things," published a few months ago, the tale of his life, outer and inner, public and private. He is, it is increasingly evident, a man of letters, a complete man of letters, and nothing but a man of letters. The landmarks of his life are either one or other of his books, or one

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or other of the events out of which a book is to grow. He has a positive flair for making literary capital out of life. He is a very appreciative collector of experiences, and always has plenty to say on any point; he is fairly fertile in ideas, though no great thinker; and he is interested and can communicate his interest—even in his own books and the reviews they called forth. That notable modesty of his takes on, by the way, in presence of those reviews, an aspect too like self-complacency to leave us quite assured of his ingenuousness. There are, however, many books less worth 7s. 6d. than this.

“Far Off Things,” by Arthur Machen. “Heaven *Daily News* lies about us in our infancy.” Nevertheless, few sensitive men recall a really happy boyhood. Mr Machen is one of them. The only child of the rector of Caerleon-on-Usk, in the romantic solitudes of Gwent, he looks back on his earliest days as a secluded yet intense experience. The power of association is strong; and the vein of mysticism which characterises Mr Machen’s writings both derives from, and is heightened by, the gleam of such fond recollection. With Sir Thomas Browne, he finds those years “a

Precious Balms

miracle . . . which to relate were not a history, but a piece of poetry."

We all know that the author of such diversities in unity as "Hieroglyphics," "The Great God Pan," and "The Bowmen," is a thoroughly illogical and genial spirit. The incredibly genuine sense of wonder that runs through his excursions in practical journalism somehow prevents us from being irritated as we ought to be. His new book is good, if not a "piece of poetry." We are glad to have his apologia, it is oddly convincing. It must be a great and unbalancing thing to find miracles all the way.

When Mr Machen writes of his studies, his early yearning for London, and the hard times he knew in the capital, it is in the same untroubled spirit. His temperament is unchanged through all these years. "Omnia exeunt in mysterium"—the thought brings him the mystic's consolation. If one loves the unfathomable, why go about to probe it? Yet he demands realism from literature: De Quincey was his first idol by virtue of this possession. The old inference is made clear again. The mystic lives not in experience, but in the aura with which he encases it.

Far Off Things

To us others this way of acceptance is an illusion, an escape from the perplexed soul. But can we make anything better of life ?

THE REFLECTIONS OF A MAN OF SELF-CONCEIT

An extremely pleasant philosophy harboured by *The* literary folk of a certain class in regard to the stress of *Boston* bread-winning is that there is monotony about such a *Evening* humdrum occupation. It is not agreeable to work *Transcript* at something you hate when you long to be literarily productive. Nevertheless, despite Carl Van Vechten's sympathetic explosions all over the yellow cover of this book, we wonder just how much self-respect and inclination may war with each other in a young man's soul when the young man lives as Mr Machen did in his youth. A book called "The Anatomy of Tobacco" was an early effort. That achieved, he seems to have lived on his father, a clergyman who had no money. He speaks of the situation thus : " My mother had been a hopeless invalid for fifteen years ; my father's health had failed, and he had become very deaf ; the poor living of Llanddewi Fach had grown poorer still through the agricultural smash of 1880 ; he was in

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dire and perpetual straits for money ; he underwent most of the mortifications which are allotted to the poor. It makes me grieve to this day to remember with what piteous sadness he would lean his head on his hand ; he had lost hope."

Thus Mr Machen summarises his family's situation financially. He does not appear to have been much comfort to his father. He speaks now of "grieving." Better indeed if he had done a little honest work. He goes to London. He reads manuscripts for a bookseller. Some intelligent people like that sort of occupation. He calls it a "weary business." In fact, this book is filled with complaints, constant, unstinted in their outgo, because he, Arthur Machen, could not do exactly what he wished to do, on all occasions. There is a good deal of what we might term the pseudo-classic touch to his style. He likes to pose as an intellectual deserving of immortality. He is not content to be one of our leading contemporaries. He prefers, as in one instance, to "abide by the verdict of M. Octave Uzanne, who is said, I believe, to be a good judge of letters. He said that it (a certain work called 'The Chronicle of Clemendy') was 'le renou-

Far Off Things

veau de la Renaissance,' and that I was sure of my place beside Rabelais and Boccaccio, on the serene immortal seats."

We quote the above from Mr Machen because it is wholly typical of the man. Another remark in reference to George Moore's "A Mummer's Wife" shows his attitude toward the age in which he lives equally well. He complains because no good novel of stage life has been written. And then he adds that in the old days, the days of the Crummles Company, it would have been easier. That is nonsense. This age and generation is adequate for all, provided some effort at adaptation is made by those of us who have been too overburdened by the weight of the glorious past. A good novel can be written as well in the twentieth century as in the seventeenth, provided some one has the brains to compass it. The whole book shows the reflections of a conceited man of mediocre ability, who buries his talent in the ashes of the past, mumbles over it incessant Latin quotations, pats himself on the back because he knows so much Latin to quote and then . . . is continually irritated because the world hurries by without digging

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into the ashes, or listening respectfully to his incantations.—D. F. G.

Maurice . . . "To be in the Strand," he says, sighing,
Hewlett in "was like drinking punch and reading Dickens." So
The it was—but one can read Dickens the better without
Evening the punch, either within or without the pages. It
Standard was a strange chapter of literary history where human
happiness could not be imagined or pictured without
too much to eat and too much to drink. I will be
sentimental with almost anyone, for the mingling of
tears is as wholesome a vent as the chiming of laughter—
but I cannot cry over the bad smells of yesteryear to
save my life. When I remember Holywell Street I
turn with thanksgiving to Charing Cross Road. It is
nothing to write home about—but you can feel the
wind in it. So much for that. . . .

DOG AND DUCK

THE brief essay is a friendly form of literature; it enables the writer to say zestfully just what is in his mind to say, and no more. The moment his zest diminishes he can leave off, and another day start fresh on a new subject. So, in small measure, it gives us the man, the natural everyday furnishings of his brain, the room he lives in, the mental paraphernalia with which his taste for life has surrounded him.

The brief essay is, therefore, a personal test of character. Its writer need not make you, or even wish to make you agree with his opinions, he may have that type of minority mind which prefers to annoy people; he may be unlovable, provocative, sceptical, superstitious—I could string you any number of unvirtuous qualities from which a good brief essay may be compounded—but he must be himself, he must be interesting, and he must have a point of view.

I have not the pleasure, or the pain, of Mr Machen's personal acquaintance. I do not know whether I

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should like him ; but I do know that he would interest me—that he is himself, and that he has a point of view. I think that often we should differ and sometimes quarrel, that his point of view occasionally invites as much ridicule as it casts on others, that it is now and then inconsistent. But the inconsistency is all of a piece with the character : he has a mind with a certain focus, outside which the view becomes blurred, perhaps a little distorted. It is the kind of mind which Mr Chesterton invented for himself, the better to attract attention to the good which God had given him : he has a mind credulous toward folk-lore and the past, incredulous toward modern history and science ; but he does not explain why folk-lore should be believed and modern history rejected—beyond giving us a few instances where folk-lore has been proved true, and modern history proved false ; as to which one need only say that the means for correcting modern history are more abundantly to hand than those for correcting folk-lore. He is a romantic, and has a romantic detestation for the impossibilities of Euclid, whom he therefore dismisses as unworthy of the wise man's consideration. But I could be just as romantic

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in favour of Euclid, on those very same grounds. It is only by giving it impossible things to believe that Euclid provides the human brain with foothold for clear logical thinking. It is only, as Mr Chesterton might say, by accepting the impossible that man can attain to true belief. It is on those lines that theology has provided us with a spiritualised Euclid of its own: and only by believing in its impossibilities shall we ever get to eternal life—which in itself is to the human mind an impossible condition, unless miserable science, through the theories of Einstein, is now going to help us to accept it. It is quite possible to be as romantic in one's acceptance of science as Mr Machen is in his acceptance of folk-lore.

But it is when Mr Machen is sceptical of human nature's ability to recapture the good it has let go that I quarrel with him most. As surely as I could train an intelligent child to be superstitious about going under a ladder, so surely could I train it to enjoy the bracing and rhythmical exercise of the Morris dance, on which Mr Machen throws a black and a wicked doubt for which I do not readily forgive him.

This only means that in his twenty-eight essays, his

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Dogs and his *Ducks*, Mr Machen has not always scored a complete "Duck," and brought his point home with conviction. For the meaning of which I refer the reader to the first essay, which gives the book its unexplained title. But every one of them is interesting and attractive, even when provocative.

*New York
Herald*

Some twenty-odd little essays by Arthur Machen have been gathered into a book carrying the title of the first essay, "Dog and Duck" (Knopf), on its cover. This singular combination refers to an ancient game that is still played in a Georgian setting in London, but before Machen gets through describing the game he takes the reader through a famous criminal trial of the eighteenth century. Carl Van Vechten says for the publisher that these essays are "in the Dickens manner," but we found little of that savour in "Roast Goose" or "Martinmas" or "Christmas Mumming," just the kind of subjects Dickens wrote about but in a so different manner and spirit. But, on their own merits, they make very agreeable reading.

*Boston
Transcript*

This collection of rambling essays represents a late phase of its author's work and presents an interesting contrast with some of the earlier books recently reissued

Dog and Duck

as the result of the growth of a Machen cult in this country. The newer Machen is revealed as a less eccentric, healthier, but not less sensitive writer than the old. There is in "Dog and Duck" and its companion essays little trace of the author's former prepossession with things occult and ghastly, while his more pleasing qualities as a writer are fairly well represented. When Machen writes with a gentle regret for things past or passing, such as old sports and old enjoyments, or the disappearance of the vulgar Valentine and the "fogs of yesteryear," he is altogether charming.

A number of the essays have a satiric tinge, often sharply pointed and telling, as in "Simnel Cakes," wherein Machen pays his respects to the professional etymologist, or "A Midsummer Night's Dream," with its observations of the development of the popular idea of a fairy. Elsewhere there is a good deal of matter that is trite and obvious, as when the author demonstrates that Shakespeare was a practical man of the theatre rather than a university "don," or that the Victorians were not strait-laced on all occasions. Briefly, in a number of the essays one perceives the journalist

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writing to fill space. There is much in the book that will not enhance Machen's reputation as a man of letters.

*The
Manchester
Guardian*

The suspicion which assails the reader who is familiar with the present state of the "first edition" market as he takes up Mr Machen's new book of essays is very natural. In a note on the dust-cover is the announcement that the issue is limited to less than a thousand copies, and that the author has autographed a considerable number of them. This, taken in conjunction with the news from America that at the auction of Mr John Quinn's library two first-edition copies of Mr Machen's earlier works were sold at impressive figures, irresistibly suggests that one, at all events, of the immediate purposes of "Dog and Duck" has been to "catch the market." If this be so, then the modern craze for book-collecting has for once been useful. The essays are selected from the author's most recent journalism, and the reader will have rich enjoyment in them. A characteristic corn-cob atmosphere is created in the very first pages, describing with a quiet and mellow humour the ancient pastime of "Dog and Duck," which is so simple, we are assured, that only a

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soft india-rubber ball and a garden surrounded by an unbroken path are needed ; yet it takes a lifetime for the player to become an expert. Dissertations on valentines, simnel cakes, old port, the only good way to make chocolate, fogs in November, and Shakespeare, Bacon, collops, and astrology follow handsomely ; and through them all we have ample evidence that Mr Machen has kept intact his creed that, in his own language, "it is the love of splendour—the splendid robe, the splendid word, the splendid picture—which constitutes the vital distinction between man and brute. Many beasts have reason, the faculty of using means for a certain end. But only man has art, which is the love of splendour and the desire to create it." The wistful note introduced a year since into his "Things Near and Far" develops occasionally into a page-long phase of sighing ostentatiously and regretting angrily, for he cannot help remembering the glories of his own youth in London that are no more.—T. M.

About most of the essays in Mr Arthur Machen's *The Times Literary Supplement*. "Dog and Duck": A London Calendar et cetera, there is a graceful tenuousness which compares interestingly with the fiercer note of the other few.

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While he is gravely and reflectively tuning his discursive pen to the changing seasons of the year, he is grave, tenderly reminiscent, a trifle elderly. He discourses of the New Year and French influence in Scotland, of bygone valentines in February, of March and simnel cakes, of May and the decay of joy, of July and why young men row races at Henley, of roast goose in September, of first fogs in October, and so forth. These essays, with the charming account of the (we suspect) apocryphal game of Dog and Duck which constitutes the first, are nearly all in the wistful note which is characteristic of this author.

Mr Machen excels at the picturesque-peevish, when he complains that the joys which he knew in his youth are no more, that joy has vanished like the fogs and horse-omnibuses, that the race of Englishmen has perished to give place to a generation of inmates for a convalescent home. Then all of a sudden he flares up, and the hidden reason seems to be that some misguided doctor once tried to put Mr Machen on a diet : at all events the flare-up takes the form of violent diatribes against any interference in the name of science, health, or intelligence with the freedom of

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the stomach to indulge in wine, beer, stout, roast beef, kidneys, oysters, and other fleshly delights. At one moment he attacks poor old superseded Euclid under this inspiration, at another he satirically concludes that on scientific principles we had all better spend Christmas in gaol; and he will fire off a broadside at any moment against those who object to self-indulgence, who disbelieve in a primitive roystering Shakespeare, and who show any tendency to explain away anything at all. They hate life, says Mr Machen; but apparently he himself confesses to finding the actualities of life repulsive. One must get away from them somehow, then; young men do it by rowing themselves blue in the face, pure scientists by turning to abstractions, applied scientists by interfering with old ideas, and Mr Machen by imagining that he knew what Merrie England was like, somewhere about Caerleon in the day of Chaucer. Now he need never be dull, for he can revile the present in musical language.

Mr Machen has the one great requisite of a popular H. P. journalist: he holds the reader's attention from the beginning to the end of his article, and holds it no longer. He is never dull; and he is never profound.

Collins in
The
Outlook

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To adopt a simile from the ingenious old game of "Dog and Duck" into which he initiates us : he brings his ball to rest between the chases without going to earth in "grounds" or "green," scores five points or maybe ten—he never rounds the last corner and attains the Duck for a score of forty.

Mr Machen has a spirited and genial manner ; but it does not proceed from a really robust and consistent personality. He is akin to Mr Chesterton in his gusto, his love of good fare, and his faith in medievalism and Merrie England ; but he has none of Mr Chesterton's wit and intellectual vigour. In "Far Off Things" the author's mystical attitude brought him through in a qualified triumph ; it has thinned unawares to sentimentality in these laments for valentines in February, Victorian bonhomie, and the fogs of yesteryear. He is vexed with Hewlett for his dislike of "the universe in general and human nature in particular" ! It is nothing to the cheery tribe of Machen that there are and always have been those to whom history is not a pretty game, those who cannot afford milk-punch and those who cannot stomach roast goose and sage-and-onion. What Mr Machen,

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for all his gestures, cannot stomach is reality. He lives in a world not of experience but of legend, where it will please many to visit him.

It is with relief, though as must needs be a touch of sadness, that one turns from Mr Machen to these posthumous essays of Maurice Hewlett. From rose-coloured and enervating mists we pass to the keen air of Wiltshire and the keener stimulus of the voice that is now still.

Mr Machen is a good journalist because he writes clearly and simply, and, for some reason or other, makes us finish reading his articles. We may think that his god, Commonsense, is often an uncommon fool, a creature of shallow thought and indolent prejudice, but we read on and enjoy the author's company—often with a yawn. It is boring to hear that the world of to-day is degenerate, that the spirit of joy left England somewhere about the time of Elizabeth; for such talk recalls the conversation of the clubs, and the bores who always buttonhole us when we are particularly depressed by the weather or the political situation. Mr Machen is inclined to overdo this old “stunt” of the golden days of thirty, forty, fifty, five hundred years ago.

Richard
Church in
The Nation
and
Athenæum

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In one article after another it appears, like the conventional "sea-runs" in the Norse and Keltic folktales. Our exasperation may be due to the fact that these articles are read one after another in the book, whereas they should be, and originally were, scattered in the periodical Press. Mr Machen has a hearty way with him, and a humorous and observant eye which informs a mind never weary of the pageant of passing events. In his description of old scenes and games, of personal adventures, of the flotsam and jetsam incidental to the daily life of his neighbour—and all the world is his neighbour—he is delightful and Dickensian. When he dogmatizes he tends to become "lowbrow," which is equally as unpleasant as being "highbrow." The publisher is to be congratulated on the perfect production of this book.

THE OTHER SIDE

LA littérature anglaise contemporaine possède peu Marc Logé de figures plus curieuses ni plus sincères que celle de ^{in La} M. Arthur Machen, mystique et satiriste, lettré et ^{Revue} rêveur, qui traverse le prosaïsme de la vie moderne ^{Hebdomadaire} comme un étranger revenant de très loin,—du moyen âge pour le moins—et qui se trouve sans cesse choqué, peiné et dépaycé par ce qu'il voit et entend. L'œuvre de M. Machen compte déjà une vingtaine de volumes, dont plusieurs sont fort recherchés par les bibliophiles pour leur rareté. Et il vient de publier deux nouveaux récits,—autobiographiques ceux-là,—“Things Near and Far” et Arthur Machen, une “Bibliographie,” agrémentée de notes et de souvenirs, qui éclairent singulièrement sa si originale personnalité.

M. Arthur Machen passa une grande partie de sa jeunesse dans un presbytère du pays de Galles, dont l'ambiance mystique a mis sur sa pensée une empreinte ineffaçable. Il a, toute sa vie, été hanté par le profond mystère de la beauté, et toutes ses œuvres sont comme

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frémissantes d'un émerveillement incessant, qu'il s'efforce de communiquer à ses lecteurs. Et ce n'est pas sa faute si ceux-ci ne connaissent point le charme de Caermaen la Blanche, ou la magie du doux pays de Gwent. Ses héros, dont la jeunesse ardente et tourmentée doit ressembler, on le devine, beaucoup à celle de M. Machen, laissèrent envahir leurs âmes rares et étranges par des rêves que les gens sensés et ordinaires qualifieraient de folies. Mais M. Machen excelle à dépeindre ce qui se trouve "sur les confins mêmes de l'inconnu." C'est pourquoi il aime pardessus toute la Nature.

Pourtant l'impérieuse nécessité de la vie l'obligea à quitter ses bois, ses collines et ses montagnes de Galles pour Londres, où l'on vit ce mystique exercer consciencieusement à Fleet Street le métier de journaliste qui lui répugnait. Il possédait heureusement le don de s'intéresser à tout, même à ce qui lui déplaisait le plus. Mais, comme il l'a dit lui-même dans le *Lignes écrites en contemplant d'une hauteur de Londres une école communale éclairée par le soleil*,—"celui qui n'éprouve ni émerveillement ni mystère, ni crainte, ni le sentiment d'un monde nouveau, ni

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d'un royaume inconnu dans les environs de Gray's Inn Road, ne découvrira jamais ces secrets,—ni au cœur de l'Afrique ni dans les cités cachées du Thibet. 'La matière de notre travail est partout présente,' disaient les anciens alchimistes ; toutes les merveilles se trouvent à un pas de la gare de King's Cross " . . . Peut-être, lorsqu'elles sont transmuées par le soleil ! . . .

M. Machen connut bien des vicissitudes ; il fut reporter, puis libraire, et il put ainsi satisfaire son goût insatiable de livres rares et curieux, et en particulier d'ouvrages occultes du moyen âge ;—il fut traducteur,—il compila des catalogues ; mais il continua toujours, malgré toutes les difficultés d'une vie laborieuse, à écrire et à proclamer la permanence de la beauté.

Il est pourtant curieux de noter qu'à côté de ce mystère de la beauté, il fut également pénétré par le mystère de l'horrible : et l'influence de Poë est nettement apparente dans ses deux œuvres de jeunesse, "The Great God Pan" et "The Three Impostors." Pourtant sa conception de l'horrible diffère de celle de Poë, en ce que le pessimisme morbide de ce dernier l'entraînait, ainsi que ses lecteurs, vers un désespoir

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sans fond. M. Machen, dans sa foi, persiste à voir le soleil et la beauté filtrer à travers les ténèbres les plus denses et la plus terrible hideur.

L'œuvre la plus curieuse de M. Machen est, nous semble-t-il, "The Hill of Dreams," dont le héros, Lucian Taylor, est un des caractères les plus troublants du roman anglais moderne. Lucian vit une vie de rêves peuplée de présences invisibles pour les autres : il circule dans l'aujourd'hui sans y appartenir ; sa sensualité, éveillée par les caresses d'une petite paysanne perverse, qui ensuite se marie bien sagement avec un bon fermier,—se transforma, sous l'effet de son imagination et de son désir, en un étrange mysticisme maladif. Lucian ne vivra désormais que par son imagination qui est féconde et morbide, et sur laquelle la "magie celte" exerce une influence puissante. Sa plus grande joie fut désormais de "rêver,"—laissant son esprit errer parmi des idées à demi imaginées et délicieuses, en permettant à son cerveau vierge de vagabonder à sa guise. D'une sensibilité qui allait s'exaspérant avec les années, Lucian se retrancha de plus en plus dans sa thébaïde spirituelle, inaccessible à tous les êtres qui l'entouraient. Dans Caermaen, dans sa propre maison,

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on le considéra comme un demifou. Mais que lui importait ?

“ Il se plongea de plus en plus dans ses livres ; tout ce qui était ancien et désuet était devenu son domaine. Dans le dégoût qu’il éprouvait pour les stupides questions habituelles : ‘ Cela rapportera-t-il ? A quoi bon ? ’—il ne voulait lire que ce qui était étrange et inutile. La pompe et le symbolisme de la Kabbalah, —pleine de suggestions de choses encore plus terribles, —les mystères de la Rose-Croix de Fludd, les énigmes de Vaughan,—les rêves des alchimistes, faisaient sa joie. Tels étaient ses compagnons avec les collines et les bois, les ruisseaux et les étangs solitaires. . . . Parfois, lorsqu’il était plongé dans ses livres, une flamme de plaisir montait en lui tout à coup, lui révélant toute une province, tout un continent inconnu de sa nature, brûlant et embrasé,—et devant ce triomphe et cette exaltation il reculait, un peu apeuré. Il était devenu ascète dans son isolement studieux et mélancolique, et la fusion de pareilles extases l’effrayait.”

Lucian se met à écrire et ses tourments redoublent, car il “ devinait les immenses difficultés de la carrière

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littéraire, sans les comprendre clairement." De ses longues promenades solitaires à travers les bois silencieux et crépusculaires, balayés par le grand vent, il "revenait rempli de pensées, d'émotions et d'imaginations mystiques qu'il souhaitait ardemment traduire grâce au mot écrit"; mais il ne peut le faire, et connaît toutes les amertumes.

"Et dans ces moments-là, la vision habituelle du paysage l'alarmait, et les sauvages collines, arrondies comme des dômes, et les bois sombres lui paraissaient les symboles de quelque secret terrible de la vie intérieure,—de cet étranger, lui-même."

C'est ainsi que Lucian se débat et souffre dans les rets de sa propre imagination, alimentée par toute son hérédité celtique, qui crée autour de lui des visions tour à tour mystiques ou païennes, sacrées ou charnelles, qui torturent et broient son âme et son corps.

Comme fond, contre lequel se détache si douloureusement le pâle visage tourmenté de Lucian, M. Machen a brossé, avec une ironie mordante, mais sobre, un tableau de la société bourgeoise de Caermaen;—et le contraste entre la placidité prosaïque et repue des "county families" et l'âme inquiète du fils du pasteur,

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est indiqué par quelques traits fins et satiriques qui prouvent que M. Machen n'a point perdu son humour à feuilleter avec amour les bouquins poussiéreux d'autrefois.

Son dernier livre, "The Secret Glory," est l'histoire d'un autre jeune Gallois, Ambrose Meyrick, qui s'efforce, *lui*, d'accorder sa nature pleine d'élans, de curiosités et d'aspirations vers un idéal tout gothique, avec la routine conventionnelle prescrite et acceptée. Inutile de dire qu'il échoue. Mais ce livre est aussi la critique âpre et passionnée de ces "publics schools" qui sont l'orgueil de l'Angleterre, et dans lesquels M. Machen ne voit, assez justement, que des machines à broyer toute individualité, et il condamne sévèrement l'esprit de ces grands centres d'éducation, où toute "excentricité est impitoyablement réprimée, où toute conscience individuelle est détruite." Pourtant Ambrose Meyrick échappe à temps à l'annihilation de sa personnalité, car il découvre la *gloire secrète* qu'il porte en lui, et cela le sauvera. La terre entière devient pour lui "un sanctuaire," toute vie un rite et une cérémonie dont le but tend à la possession de la sainteté mystique,—la découverte du Graal. Pour cela seule-

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ment,—pour quelle autre raison ? toutes choses ont été créées ? C'est de cela que le petit oiseau chante dans le buisson, en émettant quelques notes faibles et plaintives dans les soirées crépusculaires, comme si son petit cœur regrettait ne pouvoir élever que de si piteuses louanges. C'était cela aussi que célébrait la splendeur de l'aube blanche sur les collines,—le souffle des bois à l'aurore. C'était cela qui était figuré dans le cérémonial rouge du couchant, lorsque des flammes brillaient au-dessus du dôme de la grande montagne et que des roses semblaient s'épanouir dans les plaines lointaines du ciel. C'était cela aussi le secret que connaissaient les endroits obscurs des bois ; le mystère du soleil sur la hauteur, et chaque petite fleur, chaque petit fougère, chaque roseau était chargé de célébrer secrètement ce sacrement. Ayant compris ces vérités, “ tout ce qui était beau et merveilleux fit dorénavant partie pour lui de la sainteté ; toute la gloire de la vie était dans le service du sanctuaire.”

L'œuvre de M. Machen est inégale et parfois confuse, —mais il s'en dégage toujours un charme étrange et pénétrant,—une espèce de fascination qui provient sans doute de l'extase dont elle est tout imprégnée.

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Car l'extase, nous dit-il dans son essai intitulé "Hieroglyphics," est révélatrice de l'art véritable; celui qui ne cherche à exprimer que le quotidien, le visible, l'ordinaire, usurpe le titre d'artiste,—qui n'appartient qu'à ceux qui savent croire à l'invisible, en se fiant à leur imagination et à leur désir, et tendre de tout leur être vers l'inconnu. Car l'art, pour M. Machen, ne remplace pas la religion : il en est une forme !

Wonderful indeed are the changes and chances of the literary life ! Many years ago—let us say thirty—a judicious student of fiction who happened upon one of Mr Arthur Machen's early books might well have thought to himself, "There can be no keeping down an imagination and a power of style like these. Whether one likes it or not, this man's work is literature, and some meed of fame will undoubtedly be his." A generation which had revelled in "The New Arabian Nights" and in "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" must, it seemed certain, have rewards in store for the writer of "The Three Impostors" and "The Great God Pan."

And then year after year went by, and Arthur Machen remained practically unknown. One or two more of his singular books appeared, written ex-

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clusively to satisfy himself, and in total disregard of the existence of any school of public taste. The mystical tragedy of modern life called "The Hill of Dreams" is not a book for everybody; but it is undeniably the outpouring of a strangely gifted spirit.

The war broke out in 1914, and Mr Machen invented a fable about the "Angels of Mons" which flew all round the English-speaking world, and was passionately believed by vast multitudes of simple people to be a plain account of an actual miracle; so that its fabricator naturally got no credit for them, and met, indeed, with no little abuse for strenuously declaring that the story was a lie of his own imagining. Then there came out a curious essay in mystical Christianity, about the coming of the Holy Grail to a secluded place in Wales. Next appeared a gruesome little nightmare of a story about an attempted revolt, during the war, of the animals against mankind, the truth about which was supposed, in the tale, to have been rigorously suppressed by the censorship. Then the oddest, certainly, of all that class of recent fiction which has occupied itself with savage criticism of the English public school system and spirit.

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Still nothing seemed likely to win a wide recognition for this peculiar talent. And then, quite suddenly, one began to hear it talked about on all sides among literary people, and especially those of whom Mr Machen was by this time old enough to be the father. Now, after a remarkably brief period of celebrity, as these things go, his "Collected Works" appear in nine stately volumes, beautiful with wide margins and severely tasteful binding; an edition such as any writer living might be proud of, and any lover of the externals as well as the substance of books might delight to see on his shelves.

It is only too likely that recognition in this very substantial form has come too late to give Mr Machen more than a fraction of the pleasure which it would once have yielded. Indeed, one may say it is certain; for the two volumes of reminiscences included in this edition are sometimes very painful, though always quite absorbing reading. There is nothing in them so petty as mere embitterment; but they are the writings of a man who has suffered deeply. Most deeply, perhaps, during those recent years of journalistic hack-work of which he definitely declines to give any

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straightforward account, but of which melancholy glimpses are to be had from time to time in one of the most discursive works of autobiography ever penned. These were the years of acknowledged, and apparently final and irredeemable, failure, and they can hardly be lived down at such an age as Mr Machen has reached.

Success was denied to his earlier books, it may be surmised, because there was so much less feeling than exists now for the spirit of poetic mysticism which went along with the gruesomeness of those extraordinary tales. They were dismissed by some as "morbid," and perhaps they were, although morbidity, by all accounts, is the last quality which one would attribute to Mr Machen as a man. But the horrors of sorcery and the embodiment of evil were mingled here with a feeling for beauty and a severity of style which became more and more apparent in Mr Machen's later books; and all through his work runs that thread of sombre preoccupation with the life of the spirit which, contrasted as it is with an unusually vivid perception of the colour and detail of the life about him, makes his personal reminiscences so strangely interesting, and

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even his tales of diabolism more plausible than a man merely attempting to exploit a popular liking for "the supernatural" could possibly have made them.

Mr Machen's talent is certainly one of the most marked and individual that has appeared in his generation of English writers.

UP FROM THE RANKS OF GRUB STREET AUTHORSHIP

Ten years ago weekly explorations of second-hand Robert bookshops in Boston never failed to yield me a copy Hillyer in of the American reprints by Dana Estes & Co. of *The New York Times* Arthur Machen's "House of Souls" and his "Hill of Dreams." *Book Review* They were a regular feature of the rubbish counter. For these I usually had to pay about 50 cents a copy—though I bought one "Hill of Dreams," which I still possess, for 10 cents. I must have purchased about twenty of these books. I gave them to friends, I lent them to friends—it does not matter which; the volumes disappeared one way or another. It seemed at the time a method within my means of bestowing great riches on the people I liked or admired. Few of my friends went away without their copy of a book they had never heard of, but which they would

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read for friendship's sake. When I had only two copies of "The Hill of Dreams" left, and could find no more, I decided to suppress my prodigal instincts, but a burst of generosity brought on by some green chartreuse disposed of one of the two. The other one, saved by the banishment decreed to monastic liquor, is still with me.

And beside it on the shelf is Mr Knopf's new edition of the book. "The Hill of Dreams" will never again be found on the rubbish counter; the old red edition is a collector's rarity; the new yellow one is a substantial proof of the advance of good literature in America. During the last ten years Mr Machen's art has been recognised; he is almost the only example of a fine writer rescued from oblivion in his own lifetime. Yet he has made no concession to the world in general. He has not changed a word of "The Hill of Dreams" since he wrote it twenty-six years ago. It is the same book—a failure in 1907, rubbish in 1913, a success in 1923. Obviously, the world has made concessions to the ideas which he represents.

The triumph of mechanism, which is shown in its full glory by the late war and the wars that follow it,

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has, like all bad tyrannies, engendered a reaction. For years isolated voices were raised against it, but they spoke in syllables that were incomprehensible to the minds of men spellbound by the wonder of Things. In differing accents, protests came from writers as diverse in talent as Samuel Butler, Walter Pater and Arthur Machen. People took it for granted that such protests were the inevitable whine of the Old Order against Progress, an explanation at once so simple and inclusive that it could dispose of any objection calculated to disturb their satisfaction in the machinery of manufacture and the machinery of life. The world, indeed, was fast stampeding into a herd which would not tolerate the existence of unconverted individuals. Then suddenly the machine itself went wrong, and threatened, like the machine in the ballad, to transform its inventor into sausage meat. There was a wild flight of worshippers from the crumbling shrine of Moloch—whither? Into Spiritism, Bahaism, neo-Buddhism; into every cult, in fact, that offered even a temporary shelter from desperation. This headlong rout into faddism of all sorts was a superficial earnest that the mind of the race was turning, had in

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fact turned, back toward an acknowledgment of the final mystery of life.

Of this mystery, Arthur Machen has from the first been the consistent exponent. His mind is that of a medieval Christian; a liberal monk, perhaps, who has taken many an appreciative peek at the classics in the library of the foundation. To him all that is beautiful builds walls of the celestial city in the mind of man; all that makes war against that beauty is unutterably evil. There is no middle ground. And "The Hill of Dreams" is the epic of this spiritual battle.

In the new introduction, written for the new edition, the author tells us that he intended to write a Robinson Crusoe of the soul: the soul, and not the body of a man, solitary amid an alien sea. It would have been impossible for Mr Machen to write any other sort of Robinson Crusoe, for he never leaves the material world untransmuted; everything becomes, either for good or for evil, the shadow of an overwhelming portent. Thus "The Hill of Dreams" shows us life, carnal and ethereal, as heightened by the over-sensitive imagination of the hero, Lucian Taylor.

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The boy grows up in the outland country between Wales and England; all the glamour and terror of ancient forests become a part of him. Left largely to himself by his pathetically frustrate father, the vicar, and repelled by the lapses of taste and decency in the provincial society around him, he wanders over the domed hills under violently blue Summer skies, the hard glare of Winter and the sad wet twilight of Autumn, while the Roman past and the Celtic past, whose ruined fortresses and tumuli are only half-concealed by the moss and the thicket, gradually take possession of his imagination and ally themselves in his mind with an already established love of medieval lore, ecclesiastic and occult. All hidden beauties become his preoccupation, but, driven inward by the vicious sordidness of actuality, corruption also fascinates him. Year by year this struggle between the rapture of the inner life and the staleness of the outer aggravates an intolerable situation to be solved only by expressing it all in adequate style. But words fail, and the reasonable mind finally collapses under the weight of the imaginative.

It is obvious that Mr Machen does not want Lucian

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to become the victim of this combat between modern existence and the life of the imagination. He staves off the conclusion again and again until, forced by the inevitable, he yields his hero to fate. His unwillingness to surrender the youth may be accounted for by the fact that, up to a certain point, Lucian's life was his life—his autobiography—a circumstance which has made the book suspiciously bitter in spots. He satirises the moneyed, the hypocritical, the snobbish, with a fine cruelty and vivid fidelity to life—but are these shoddy creatures, after all, worthy of so much attention? Yes, perhaps—if their mere existence is an obstacle to the higher sanity. And they are such an obstacle to Lucian, who magnifies their imbecile gestures of futility into really monstrous evils. They are a part of that wall of loneliness which isolates a naturally friendly and convivial spirit, driving it in upon itself, until all the beauties that it loves become, for lack of some one to share them, horrors and madness.

Fortunately for Mr Machen, he is of stronger stuff than the hero of his masterpiece. In his two-volume autobiography, "Far Off Things," which appeared last Fall, and "Things Near and Far," which has just

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been published, he describes the loneliness which enhedged him and the means he took to cope with it. Now in his middle fifties, he can look back over that struggle with no bitterness, but certainly with no complacency. One cannot be complacent before the materialism of modern life, which not only fails to help a man whose interests are elsewhere, but will not even tolerate him if it knows him for what he is.

Like Lucian, Mr Machen was born in the Welsh borderland, faced poverty in its fearfulest form—"genteel" poverty—went to London hoping to obtain the necessities of life by writing, and ended by nearly starving to death on the wages of tutoring, translating and cataloguing second-hand books.

In bookshops, he came in contact with alchemical and occult works which were to influence, though not dominate, all his later writing. Much of the interest of "Things Near and Far" lies in his treatment of various phases of mysticism, from its faddish to its serious manifestation. Very wisely, as I think, he has carefully guarded himself against seizure as an "adept" by any Spiritistic or pseudo-Oriental cult.

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In his burlesque description of a séance, he closes the doors of Spiritism against him :—

The room is in total darkness. One of the sitters proclaims with exultation that his nose has been tweaked by Joey, who, on this side, was a clown. John King, understood to have been a master mariner, sings "Tom Bowling" in a falsetto voice through a speaking trumpet. On this Cardinal Newman, known to be a lover of music, is gratified, and utters the word "Benedictine." . . . "This spirit's name is Milton. Henry—no, John Milton, the author of the 'Faery Queen.' He says that they are very happy. . . . All repeat the Lord's Prayer, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle expresses his intense gratification. . . . Well, it may be so. But I hope it isn't, and I never shall believe that it is so."

And the Oriental fanatics receive small comfort at Mr Machen's hands :—

There is one thing that I hope I may be spared, that is the comment of the Oriental Occult Ass. . . . I do hope nobody will say, "Why, this is only Ruja-Puja! You get it all in the first chapter of the Anangasataga Raja! It's all perfectly elementary. Little Hindu children learn their A.B.C. out of it in the Svanka Visatvara."

Despite his contempt for the physical phenomena of the Spiritists, Mr Machen concedes their possibility.

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His one question remains : Is this of consequence ? And he puts the same question concerning his own experience. During a fit of the most uncontrollable melancholy, he sat down in his apartment in London, and attempted, by some mental process which he does not describe, to rid himself of depression. Suddenly the pictures on the wall

trembled, dilated, became misty in their outlines ; seemed on the point of disappearing altogether, and then shuddered and contracted back again into their proper form and solidity ; that is the closest description of what I witnessed : with a shaking heart, and with a sense that something, I knew not what, was also being shaken to its foundations.

He was filled with dread, yet, at the same time, with an almost unendurable ecstasy. For a moment the fear of death was upon him. Then gradually the fright passed, leaving him in an exalted and serene frame of mind that lasted for an entire year. Concerning the physical phenomenon of the pictures, he remarks :—

This is all wonderful ? I suppose that it is ; but let me here say firmly that I consider an act of kindness to a wretched mangy kitten to be much more important.

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But the year of peace that followed was, decidedly, of consequence, since he was lifted above the petty emotions that degrade and destroy humanity, and he saw life in its true colours. His implied conclusion is, therefore, that no occult experience is of any consequence in itself; its sole value is to enhance the dignity, decency and happiness of the human race.

All of Mr Machen's fiercest satirical passages against humanity are dictated not by hatred but love of humanity. Nothing is so maddening as to behold a beloved being or race of beings degenerate into Yahoos. We observe the same quality in Swift, who was the most virulent of satirists because he was, fundamentally, the tenderest of humanitarians. When Mr Machen is at his bitterest, we find no desire for vengeance; merely an infuriated, baffled perplexity that his fellows should sink so low. And even this emotion he reserves for types; for individuals he exhibits a friendliness, a conviviality, an understanding, which are worthy of the rich variety of his nature.

Indeed, though the mystical side of his character is the most interesting and the satirical the most enter-

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taining, his Rabelaisian gusto for the good things of life sets them both off to advantage. He can recreate London or Touraine with a phrase or give us the play of sunlight on the brim of an old cup filled with clear wine. All phases of life interest him, since he has entered into more of them than most men. For example, in the opening years of the present century he was one of a company of strolling players. The single chapter he devotes to this pilgrimage might well be expanded into a sort of Thespian Lavengro. And in literature, all of whose halls, ante-rooms and little dark corridors are known to him, we always find him where we should wish to find him—on the side of rapture and care against emotionalism and slovenliness. For to him "Literature is the sensuous art of causing exquisite impressions by means of words":—

To win the secret of words, to make a phrase that would murmur of Summer and the bee, to summon the wind into a sentence, to conjure the odour of the night into the surge and fall and harmony of a line; this was the tale of the long evenings, of the candle flame white upon the paper and the eager pen.

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His style approaches the gift of music, and will repel such readers as consider words to be utilitarian vessels for measuring out their quart or bushel of meaning. But those who find reality in "Kubla Khan," "The Fall of the House of Usher," or the "Dream Fugue" will find it also in the books of Arthur Machen, who is of that small group of Coleridge, De Quincey, Sir Thomas Browne, Poe and Malory—a group where each is a master. In a vision we use the language of vision, and if on waking we would interpret what we have seen and heard into the language of waking, we can only suggest. If we state, the magic slips out between the syllables. By the marvellous orchestration of his prose, its undertones and overtones, Mr Machen has suggested to us his vision of the battle between Light and Darkness—a vision that is far more real than this seeming reality which shifts with the passing years. It is not strange that he has been misconstrued as the artist of Terror and of Madness; he has seen so clearly the titanic war in the troubled spirit of the world, compared to which all the wars that have scarred the body of the world are but as the twitching of a sleeper in whose brain the nightmare

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rages. And, because of the same limitation which makes Dante's "Inferno" infinitely more convincing than his "Paradiso," Arthur Machen's lurid darkness shines with a grander beauty than his open day. For this reason the superficial minded will persist in calling that great book "The Hill of Dreams" a "morbid" piece of work.

Objections of this sort, which entirely overlook the real robustness of the author's nature, grow fainter and fainter as the world swings around to his point of view. In brief, Mr Machen's outlook on life is similar to his opinion of occult phenomena: external facts, valueless in themselves, are only important as they affect the imagination or spirit of man. They are merely the symbols of the great sacrament that lies behind them. For him, literature became the escape from circumstance, and he could not, if he would, relinquish it or write what was not in him.

And my total receipts for these eighteen volumes, he says, for these forty-two years of toil, amount to the sum of six hundred and thirty-five pounds. That is, I have been paid at the rate of fifteen pounds and a few shillings per annum. It seems clear, then, that my literary activities cannot be

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adequately accounted for on the hypothesis of mere greed and money-grubbing.

It is this kind of devotion that gives us our masterpieces, this slow-burning, indomitable desire, independent of all consideration but the building up, phrase by phrase, of an enduring structure. That America, long the source of uninspired materialism, should recognise so fully the value of Mr Machen's work, is a happy augury for the future of our literature.

THE CHRONICLE OF CLEMENDY

Octave
Uzanne in
Le Livre

Je ne sais si la dédicace de ce livre rabelaisien, je veux dire de haulte graisse, adressée au *Right Honourable, Illustrious and Puissant Prince*, Humphrey, duc de Glocester, chevalier de l'ordre très noble de la Jarrettière, etc., etc., est une satire barbelée ou l'hommage sérieux d'un humoriste. Le noble duc me semble le mieux situé pour en décider, et là dessus je m'en rapporte bien à lui. Mais ce que je constate dès les premières pages, sans l'ombre d'un doute, c'est l'esprit, le goût littéraire, la connaissance familière et intime de la langue jusque dans ses sources vives, le renouveau de

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Renaissance, si je puis dire, qui éclate à chaque ligne dans ce qu'écrivit Mr Arthur Machen.

Des contes en eux-mêmes, je ne dis rien, sinon que, les ayant lus, je les relirai souvent, à petites doses, sans me lasser, comme on visite ces flacons qui contiennent une fine et réconfortante liqueur. Gervase Perrot de Clemendy, gentleman, seigneur du manoir de Pwllcwrw, —ce qui, au pays de Galles, je crois, veut dire “ flaque de bière,”—et marechal des pots aux assises de l'Ale, ne m'est, je l'avoue humblement, pas autrement connu. Il me suffit de savoir que, depuis “ The Discourse of Ale,” traduit, paraît-il, du latin, jusqu'au dernier conte des neuf joyeuses journées, il se montre franc compère, aussi bon Gaulois qu'Anglais rabelaisien peut l'être, gai à miracle, spirituel à plaisir, fécond en histoires réjouissantes où les personnages n'échappent au ridicule que par l'amour, comme le peuvent désirer et faire des créatures en chair et en os, différentes de sexes et de natures semblables ; en un mot, tel que nous connaissons les conteurs d'Italie et de France : Boccace, Marguerite, le seigneur des Accords, Camille Blessebois, l'Arétin, Beroalde de Verville, le Pogge, La Fontaine, et tant d'autres, au premier rang desquels

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le traducteur anglais de Marguerite de Navarre et de la "Chronique de Clemendy" est désormais sûr de sa place. . . .

*The New
York Times
Book
Review*

Mr Machen, it will be recalled, is that author who, in the late 'eighties and the early 'nineties, was so overshadowed by his contemporary, Robert Louis Stevenson, that it is only of late years that his own varied genius has received the praise that was its due. Machen has recently been republished in England and in this country, but "Dog and Duck" does not belong to his earlier work. Some of the essays may date back several years, either in whole or in part, but it is clear that most of the papers are new, and that such as may embody earlier material have been elaborated and rewritten.

In "Dog and Duck" Arthur Machen has treated of nearly a score and a half of subjects; but he has neglected to write on the subject which would be of greatest use to his reviewer—namely, the art of being casual. For the essay—the true essay, that is, as defined above, not the thesis essay or the editorial—must, of all things, wear the air of absolute casuality. In actual composition, of course, there may have

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been nothing of the casual ; and the very contrary is probable, painful delivery having, very likely, followed on long gestation. But when the essay is spread upon the pages, when the last revision of the proof has been made, it is a literary product or it is not according as a reader will be left with the impression that it sprang as spontaneously as Minerva from the head of Jove. And now that we have been carried into mythology, it might not be amiss to press the figure a little further. Minerva was the Goddess of Wisdom ; and the burden of the essay—again distinct from the thesis, the burden of which is knowledge—is wisdom ; and moreover, as Minerva, issued full-panoplied and radiant of jewels and gold. And one thing more ; the true essay will have wit—not loud and boisterous humour, but the wit that mellows while it stings ; in short, the wit of wisdom.

To return to Arthur Machen : Does “ Dog and Duck ” satisfy the demands of our questionnaire ? There can be but one answer, an unqualified affirmative. And that is why the complaint was raised that Mr Machen had omitted an essay on the art of being casual. How does he achieve his illusion of apparent

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chance, of absolute spontaneity, when we well know that his essays must have been deliberate, as deliberate as any poem? But let it go; the question is not to be answered of Machen any more than it can be answered of Stevenson or of Lamb.

The title essay, it appears, has to do with an English outdoor game of venerable age, although Americans, apparently, are unfamiliar with it. As Chase Mallard the pastime of Dog and Duck takes on veritable antiquity. Yet the reader will not follow Machen through any desire to learn the technique of this simple outdoor sport; he will, however, be infected with the gusto of the author in trailing the game itself back through several generations, mention of it in literature, and especially—for here one will come upon the Machen of that fascinating psycho-romantic tale, "The Three Impostors"—in the part Dog and Duck played in a celebrated murder trial of the eighteenth century.

Yet, if Machen is entertaining and enlivening when he discourses upon antique sports, he is none the less so when he directs a flashing eye on "Valentines and Other Things," when he turns to the matter of holidays—as he does more than once—when he talks of April

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Fool, of Twelfth Night, of fogs, of February stars, of the vice of making collections (to which we all are prone), to the matter of splendour, to the art of unbelief. In his best vein—though to single out any one essay from the teeming sheaf is invidious—is the one to which he gives the title “The Poor Victorians.”

We all know [he writes] what the poor Victorians were like. We have heard all about them over and over again. To begin with, they were prim. They were proper. They went to bed early. Their only form of revelry consisted in tea parties. The laws of their lives were dictated to them by maiden ladies and the vicar's wife. As for the arts in the Victorian era, they could not properly be said to exist. Nobody spoke out: nobody dared to be “daring.” No picture was painted that went beyond the vision of the Young Person. No poem that the curate could possibly dislike was ever written. As to love, the word was, beware! Above all, there must be no faintest hint of the vital things, of any sort of realities. And so on and so on, the general conclusion being that the Victorians couldn't write, couldn't paint, couldn't think, and couldn't properly be said to be alive at all.

And thus, having stated the case of the moderns against the Victorians, Mr Machen suddenly whisks from his pocket several documents. The first is a

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love poem by the Victorian Tennyson that does not in the least remind the essayist of Miss Pinkerton's Academy for Young Ladies or the vicar's drawing-room. And then, lest this be a little solemn, he adduces one of Swinburne's stanzas on "lazy, laughing, languid Jenny," who was equally "fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea." And from this frankness he turns to Rossetti; then to Dickens. He finds that there were theatres in Victoria's day, and theatre parties; that there were also supper parties, and rich food, and Burgundy. And, finally, having presented the evidence, he comes to the summing up.

The truth is, of course, that the Victorian Age, more especially the early and mid-Victorian Ages, were times of jollity and times of liberty, both in life and in letters. Those people who took a dozen oysters in the Haymarket at midnight and strolled off to Covent Garden would not have believed that their grandsons would submit to be smacked and sent to bed like naughty children. And as in life, so in letters. What the mid-Victorians wrote, whether it were well or ill, was written with a relish. We have lost all that. Cubism, Vorticism, Post-Impressionism; verse that doesn't scan and doesn't rhyme; novels that make one think of a stupid post-mortem or a dissection: that is what we have in place of Tennyson, Swinburne, Rossetti, Dickens, Thackeray, the pre-

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Raphaelites and the great illustrators of this despised age, the wood-cutters whose work has become to us miraculous. Those poor Victorians !

Arthur Machen is himself—outside of this volume—a late Victorian ; so that this is a defence and an exhortation by one who not only knows what he is talking about, but whose emotions have been aroused by the slurs cast upon his people. And there is one phrase of his defence that we shall do well to linger over for a moment : “ Whether they wrote well or ill it was written with a relish.” It is the relish for life—the relish of letters—that Machen in the “ Dog and Duck ” essays would have us recapture, would help us to recapture. And this is important : as he himself says, too few of our present-day writers either care to relish life or evince any desire that their readers should relish letters. Indeed, this is a phase of English literature which seemed, in the main, to end with Stevenson, and Machen’s little book is one of the few modern volumes able in any degree to win it back to us. Thus is “ Dog and Duck ” literature in the highest sense.

In more than one essay does Machen go back even further than to Stevenson ; his little homilies on

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customs, and especially those on viands and potations, remind one of Dickens. When he discusses "Roast Goose: With a Dissertation on Apple Sauce and Sage and Onions," he even outdoes Lamb himself. And all these papers are shot with shafts of wit, stuffed with matured advice; and if Machen, as a philosopher, might fail in a rigid test, even the most quarrelsome of metaphysicians will be forced to bow before his sagacity.

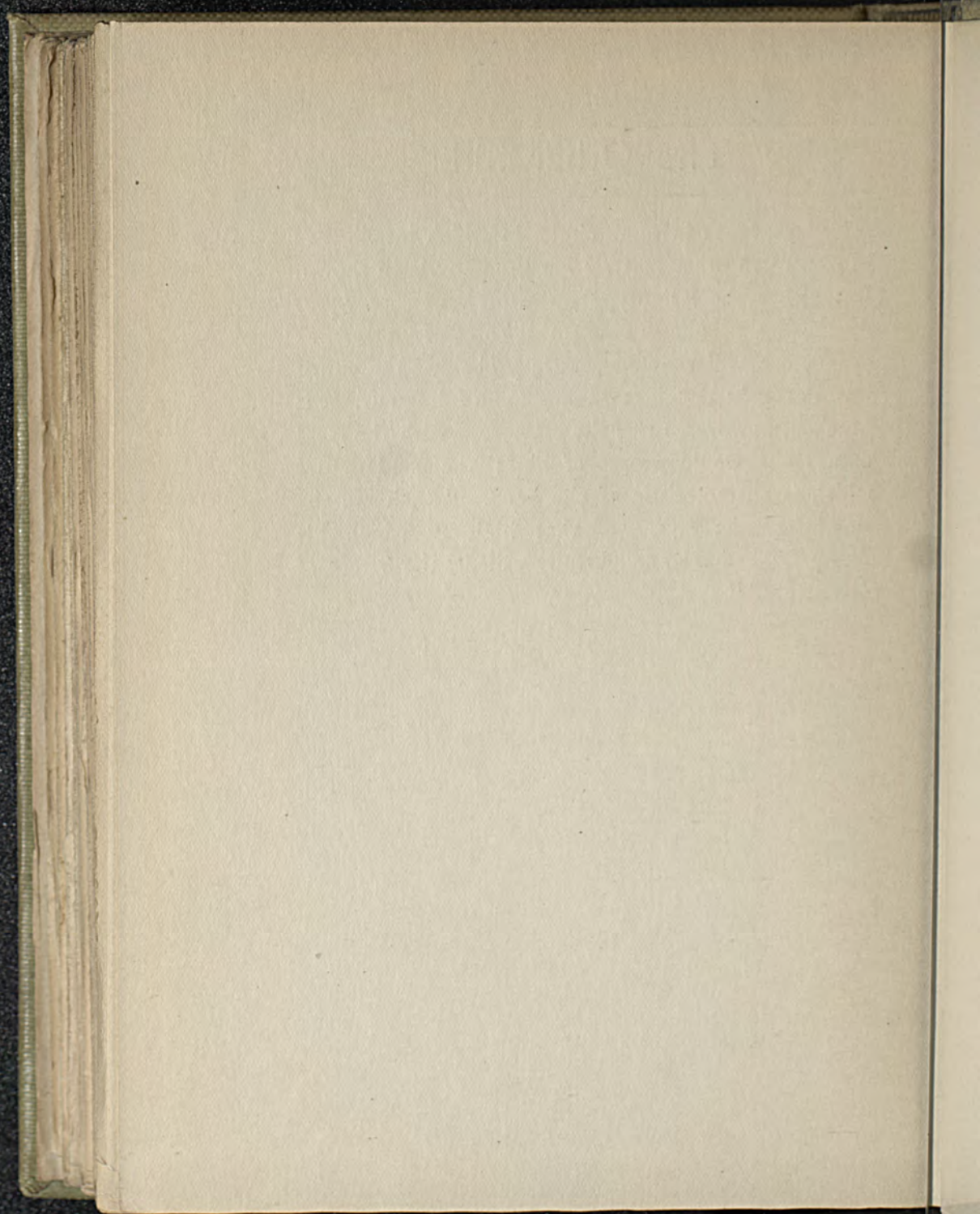
There is a curious note appended to the final essay of the book, a paper on what the author calls "The Art of Unbelief." The editor of *The Lyons Mail*, who had accepted and printed all of the preceding essays, refused this one with the words:—

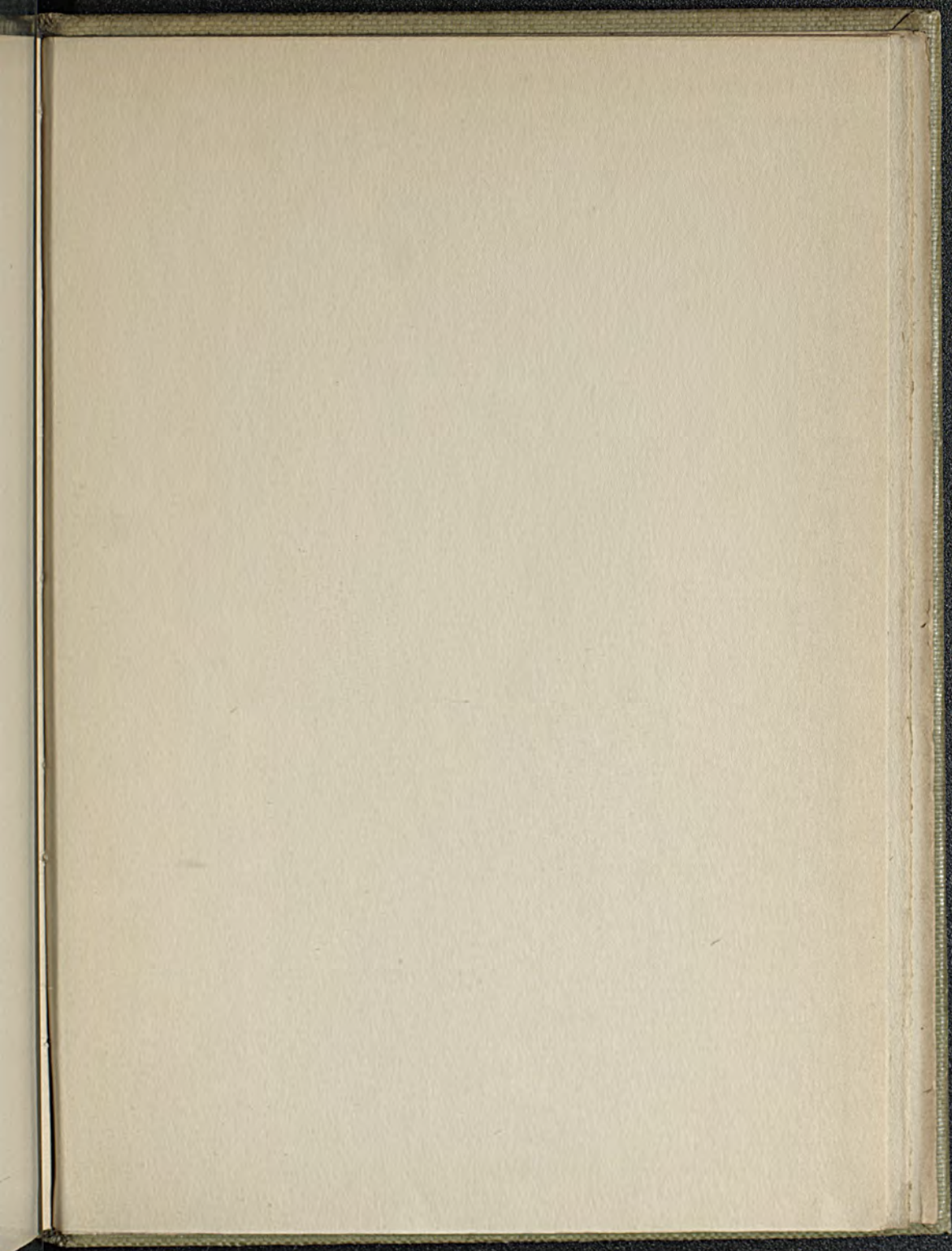
I cannot deal with the enclosed. . . . I am afraid my readers would not understand it; . . . a mass of dissertation, some of which I would not ask our linotype operators to translate.

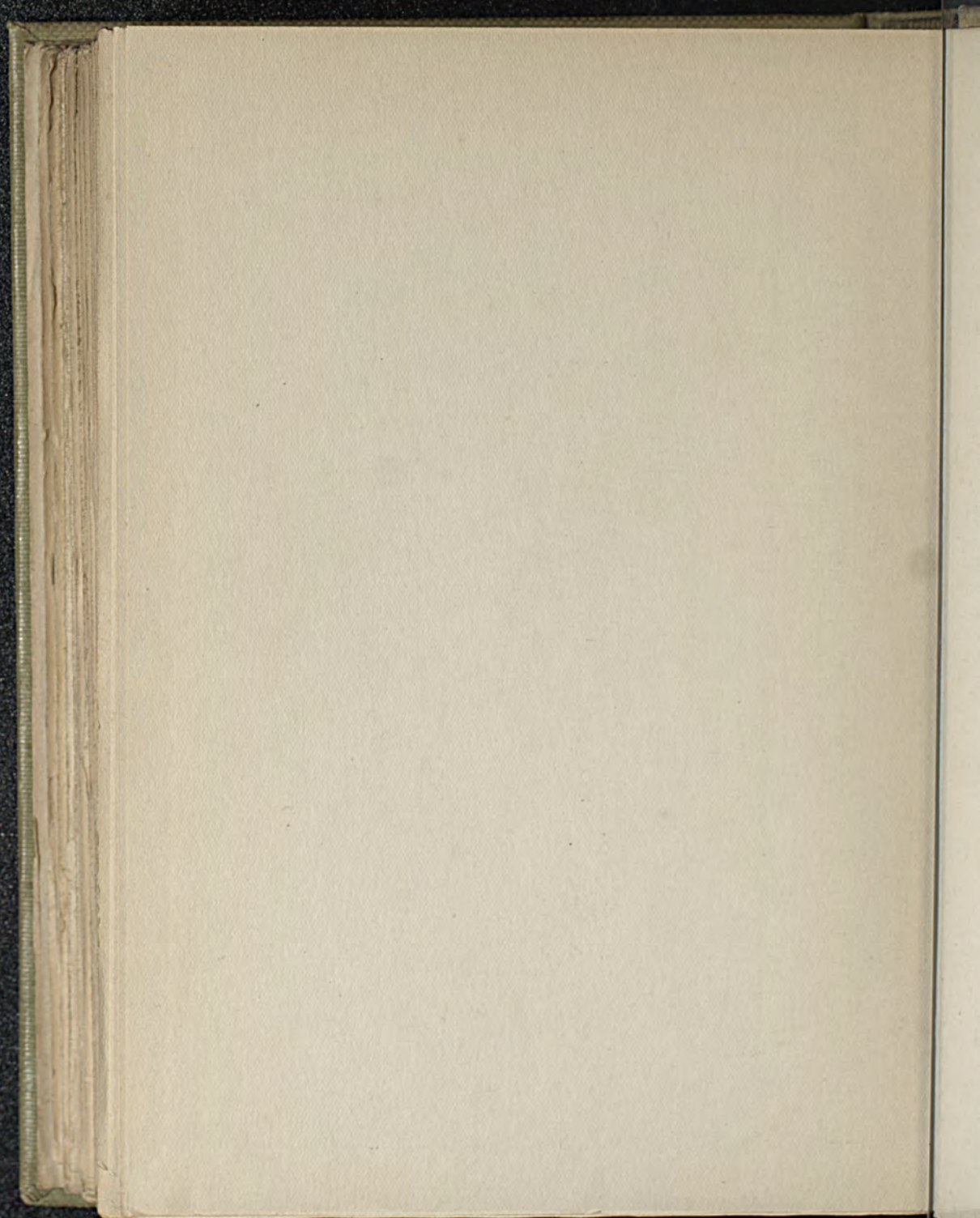
The essay deals with the survival of the primitive capacity for myth-making, a recrudescence of which Machen discovers in the absurd legends surrounding the death of Lord Kitchener which appear to have

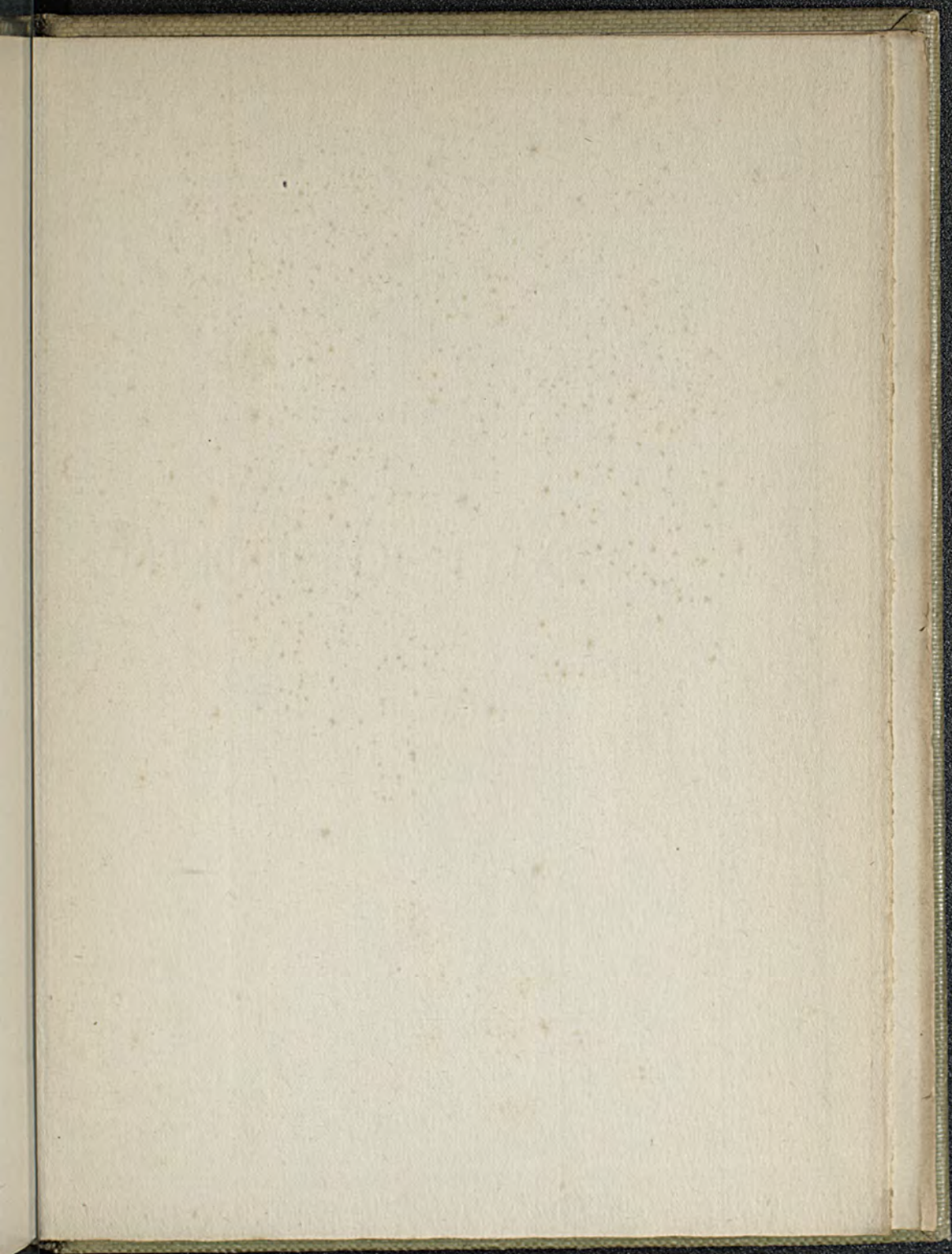
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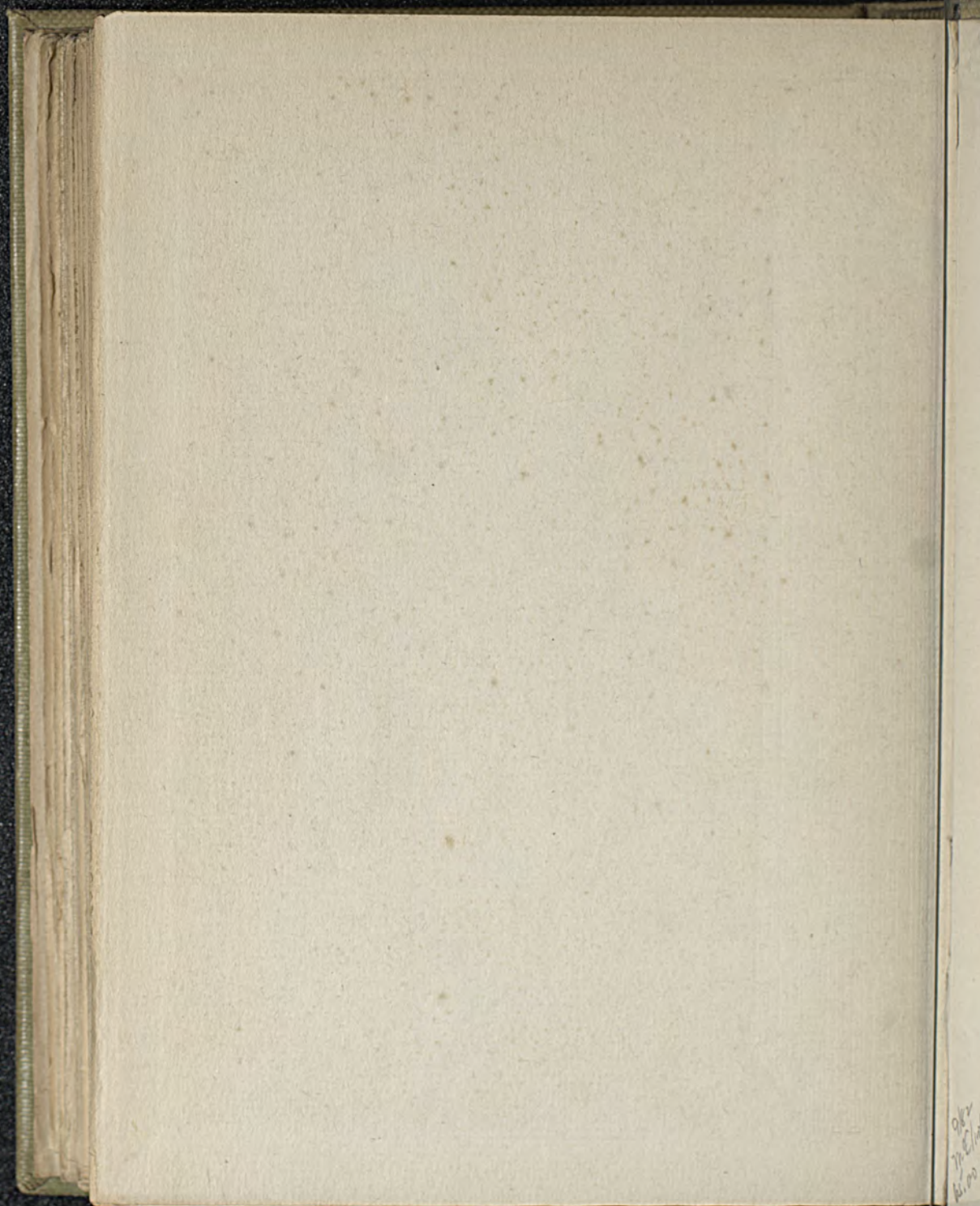
gained credence in some circles in which intelligence in respect to other matters has generally been shown. But either the "linotype operators" of *The Lyons Mail* are a peculiarly susceptible force of workers, or—and, one will conclude, more probably—the editor was strangely deficient in a sense of humour. Mr Machen, however, turns the matter off with the good nature one would expect of him; the good nature which is characteristic of the book. "Such are the amenities," he says, "of that highway which Sir Philip Gibbs has so delightfully called 'the Street of Adventure.'"











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