

# LONDON LETTER.

Written for THE NEW YORK TIMES SATURDAY REVIEW by

WILLIAM L. ALDEN.

LONDON, Sept. 10.—Mr. Hall Caine's "Eternal City" has been slated with unanimous enthusiasm by nearly all the London papers. On the other hand, some of the provincial papers have praised it warmly. Mr. Caine's admirers are to be found chiefly among the religious people of the nonconformist variety. As Mr. Caine is a nonconformist his co-religionists seem to think it a matter of duty to support him. This is rather odd, especially in the case of such a book as "The Eternal City," which, in spite of its religious platitudes, must contain very much that is contrary to the convictions of the evangelical nonconformist. However, this is a matter which chiefly concerns Mr. Caine's admirers. If they can approve of the irreverent way in which Mr. Caine speaks of Christ, and of his admiration of the saintly Pope of Rome, that is their own affair.

The critical weeklies, whose opinion is certainly of much more value than the opinion of the provincial press, have ridiculed Mr. Caine's new book without mercy. The daily papers are also nearly unanimous in their condemnation of it. Nevertheless, it will sell to an extent that will soothe Mr. Caine's outraged feelings. Mr. Caine is sure of an enormous sale for any book that he may write. Hall Caine, Marie Corelli, and Silas Hocking are, judged by the test of sales, the three leading novelists of England. Doubtless they are one and all proud of being classed with one another. It would be grossly unfair to Mr. Caine to judge him exclusively by the gush and ignorance of "The Eternal City." When Mr. Caine writes of what he knows he can write in a way that is thoroughly acceptable, although he has never yet shown the slightest distinction of style. He knows his *Manxmen* and their ways, and he can make them live again when he paints them on his canvas. But the trouble with him is that he will persist in writing of things of which he knows nothing. He writes of Roman Catholicism, of which, according to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, he "knows no more than a cow knows of a clean shirt." He writes of the Derby, where he tells us that horses are weighed. He writes of a clergyman of the Church of England who is made a Bishop while he is as yet only a Deacon. He writes of hospital nurses in a way that is an intolerable libel on a most exemplary class of women. He writes of Italians and of Italian affairs, although he knows no more of the subject than the man knew of Chinese metaphysics who read about metaphysics and China in the encyclopedia, and combined his information.

Mr. Caine is distinctly on the wrong

track. If he confines himself to writing about *Manxmen* he may yet recover some of the reputation which he has lost since he began to write of "Christians" and "Eternal Cities." Just at present the newspapers contain accounts of interviews with the great Hall Caine, in which persistent mention is made of his "great forehead" and his "burning eyes." Advertising of this sort may sell Mr. Caine's books, but is it quite worthy of a great artist?

When "The Aristocrats" was published we were told by the publisher that it was the work of the most beautiful woman in London, "which her name"—it is Mrs. Atherton. The sort of advertising to which Mrs. Atherton evidently lent her assent is decidedly worse than the sort which deals with the great brow and the burning eyes of Mr. Caine. What has the merit of her book to do with her personal beauty? The public which read "The Aristocrats" did not care a straw about the personal appearance of the author. If there is any person who bought the book because of the publisher's assurance that the author was the most beautiful woman in London, such person has a good ground for suing the publisher. Should he bring a suit pleading that he was induced to buy the book because of the publisher's representations as to the author's appearance, the latter would have to prove that Mrs. Atherton is really the most beautiful woman in London, or he would have to pay damages. Very possibly Mrs. Atherton honestly believes that she is the most beautiful woman in London, but it is not in good taste for her to permit her publisher to advertise the supposed fact. Mrs. Atherton is not a ballet girl who depends for applause on the display of shapely limbs. If she were as ugly as the portraits of Mr. George Moore the fact would have no bearing on the merit of her books. I have never seen the lady, and am not in a position to form a judgment as to her alleged beauty, but the claim that she is the most beautiful woman in London is one which probably no one but Mrs. Atherton herself would have dreamed of making.

If London publishers are bent upon sensational ways of advertising, let them follow the Hall Caine plan of disguising an advertisement as an interview. We can tolerate the interviewer who speaks of Mr. Caine's personal attractions, but were Mr. Caine himself to announce that his next novel will be the work of a man who possesses the broadest expanse of naked forehead, and the most brilliantly incandescent eyes to be found in all London, we should, to put it mildly, howl at him. Mrs. Atherton might have asked some one to interview her, and to fall into spasms of admiration over her alleged beauty, and the resulting article would have been a good advertisement, and would not have greatly shocked the public. But her an-

nouncement that she is the most beautiful woman in London is rather too much.

It is time to speak plainly in this matter. Unless publishers' advertisements are henceforth to rival those of patent medicine men, they should be made to understand that advertisements dealing with the personal beauty of authors will not be tolerated. It is bad enough to have books like those of Mrs. Atherton and Mr. Caine foisted upon an innocent public as literature. We may at least be spared comments on the beauty of the one and the burning eyes of the other.

Mr. Yeats, the Irish poet, has announced his belief in magic. If he derives any satisfaction from this belief no one will grudge it to him. It is odd that quite a number of persons, who are thoroughly convinced that spiritualism is an imposture, are, nevertheless, ready to admit that there may be something in magic. It was from people of this class, rather than from Spiritualists, that Mme. Blavatsky gained her recruits. Mr. Yeats's arguments in support of his theory that magic is a true science are not particularly convincing. But then professors of magic are not, as a rule, convincing, except to those who are anxious to be convinced. I remember Mme. Blavatsky after a good dinner, smoking her interminable cigarettes, and asserting that no one could attain to her magical powers except by the path of strict asceticism. Mr. Yeats is evidently sincere in his belief, and the article in *The Monthly Review*, in which he makes his profession of faith, is certainly a readable one. But we must remember that Mr. Yeats is not only a poet, but a Celtic poet, and that it is, therefore, a matter of necessity for him to be mystical above his fellows. At the same time it is not very probable that he will gain many converts to his creed. The public may find magic in his verse, but they will hardly accept the assertion that he can make his thoughts visible in corporeal form.

Mr. George Moore recently wrote a letter in reply to those who have found fault with "Sister Theresa," in which he claimed that an author is a much better judge of his own work than any critic can be. There is enough truth in this to make it plausible, but Mr. Moore forgets that there are authors and authors. I know one author whose judgment as to the merit of anything that he writes is virtually infallible. At any rate it is always sooner or later the judgment of the most capable critics. On the other hand, I know another author whose judgment as to his own work is invariably wrong. Whenever he writes anything particularly bad he is delighted with it, and when he writes some things that the foremost writer in England might own without shame, he is plunged into grief because of his utter inability to do any decent work. Very possibly Mr.

Moore is one of those who are capable of forming a sound judgment as to what they have written, but it is the experience of nearly every editor that, as a rule, writers are not good judges of their own work.

Mr. Wells's new serial, in which a mermaid is the heroine, rather disappoints me. For this I am extremely sorry, for I always look forward with confidence to the pleasure which any new work of Mr. Wells is to give me. The story is certainly entertaining, but so far as it has gone the mermaid is not convincing, and in fact is a little bit tedious. Perhaps she will improve as the story goes on, but I am a little afraid that Mr. Wells has been doing too much work and is too tired to do full justice to himself. Still I may be entirely mistaken. Because the mermaid does not strongly appeal to me is no reason why she should not appeal to others, and it may very well turn out that Mr. Wells's new story will please the public better than anything that he has yet done. I am sure that I hope it will.

Dr. Conan Doyle's "Hound of the Baskervilles" improves with the second installment and promises unusually well. There is a fine suggestion of the weird and appalling in the title, especially after one has read the opening chapters of the story. I fancy that Dr. Doyle will make an excellent story out of his new subject, in spite of his resurrection of Sherlock Holmes.

Does any one remember the classical stories that we used to read in our college days in the hope of learning what manner of people the Greeks and Romans really were? Probably the most oppressive of these was a book entitled "Charicles," and written by some particularly tedious German, whose name I have forgotten. There were quite a number of books of the same sort, but beyond giving one the impression that no Roman could speak to another without prefacing his remarks with "What, ho! my Balbus!" they have left nothing in my memory. Mr. Duffield Osborne's "The Lion's Brood" belongs at first sight to the same class of books, but if it is read with some little care it will reward the reader, who will discover that on the whole it is a clever work. The *Lion's Brood* are the sons of Hamilcar, of whom Hannibal was the greatest, and Mr. Osborne's study of the great commander and of his Italian campaigns is not only full of information, but it can be read without the feeling that one is laboriously improving one's mind.

Another clever book is Mr. Eden Phillpotts's collection of stories entitled "The Striking Hours." They are Dartmoor stories, and they give us portraits of Dartmoor peasants that are vivid and distinctly artistic. Mr. Phillpotts is at his best in these stories, and those who know know that this is no slight praise. W. L. ALDEN.