

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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## A VICTORIAN RETROSPECT.\*

Every active member of the legal profession holds Sir Frederick Pollock in high esteem for his contributions to the practical literature of English law. But his learned pen has not been confined to that domain alone. Its activities have extended into the wider fields of pure jurisprudence, history, ethics and philosophy; and whatsoever it has touched in those fields it has always ornamented with fine scholarship. To read the varied list of his works makes one marvel at his industry no less than at the sweep of his knowledge. In his latest volume, under the guise of instruction to his grandson, he gives the rising generation of Englishmen at home and abroad a fascinating story of intimate contacts with his fellowmen and their doings for a period of eighty years and more. Born as the scion of a distinguished family in the first decade of Queen Victoria's reign, and educated at Eton and Cambridge, his facilities for knowing the ideals and achievements of the notable men and women of his time and his country were exceptional. Hence the value of his witness to the yesterdays that precede our own troublous days and the help such witness yields us in estimating the effect of the culture of the past on the present time, and to what extent the Victorian habit of mind deserves the reproof laid at its door by critics in the reign of Victoria's grandson.

Sir Frederick is frank in his confession that early Victorian Englishmen thought too much of themselves, but palliates the offence with the arch remark that this "was natural enough when most of Europe was copying us." As for the charge of prudery against the Victorians his excuse is that it was a carry-over from an earlier period. "If you want to see Mrs. Grundy's terrors at their highest, you must not look at Thackeray's or Trollope's novels but at Jane Austen's, written before Queen Victoria was born. . . . Mrs. Grundy was only a kind of martinet adjutant to the battalion whose majors were those worthy veterans Paley and Delolme. As it was, so it may be again." He would have us limit the application of the epithet "Victorian" to the two last generations of the nineteenth century in Great Britain when the "ossified formulas" and the burdens of prudery and cant inherited from the earlier age were being thrust aside. Limiting the period thus, Sir Frederick overlooks the achievements in this direction by Matthew Arnold who was born only three years after the Queen but who in Mr. Chesterton's phrase, "found the window of the English soul opaque with its own purple" and proceeded to clean it with the acid of his criticism.

Sir Frederick wonders when his grandson comes to read these remembrances for himself if there will still be "smart youngsters despising the

\**For My Grandson: Remembrances of an Ancient Victorian.* By the Right Honourable Sir Frederick Pollock, Bt., K.C., London: John Murray, 1933. Price 10s. 6d. net.

Victorians"; but to him the Victorian age appears as "a time of daring adventure and fruitful discovery." Undoubtedly this opinion is a sound one. The nineteenth century was in truth an active period of adventure and advancement in science, in the industrial arts, in literature and in humanitarianism. The interests of civilization as a whole were better served by it than by any preceding period in the history of England. But it appears as if the Great War closed the door against the intrusion of its culture into the present century; a renaissance of ideals and adventure is needed if civilization is to emerge from its present state of staleness and inefficiency. Unfortunately the creative springs of that renaissance are not likely to be quickened by the satirical gibes of our "smart youngsters" at the expense of the past. A literature drenched with satire is nothing more than a symbol of *faiblesse* and decadence in a people.

Sir Frederick does not present his book as a story of his life, modestly explaining that he has not been directly concerned in great events and has not had any surprising adventures. He seems to entertain no great reverence for autobiography nor for the historical writer who pins a blind faith on official documents and declarations "forgetting that persons in authority are not infallible, and sometimes have been capable of wilful falsehood." In support of the view so held by him he cites a pithy observation once made to him by G. S. Venables: "Historians have never made sufficient allowance for the deliberate lying of witnesses incapable of deception." Sir Frederick's remarks in this connection serve to recall for us Boswell's lament that Dr. Johnson had not written his own life and so given the world "the most perfect example of biography that was ever exhibited." The world has reason to rejoice that Johnson either under the suasion of modesty, as we would hope, or lack of "persevering diligence," as Boswell asserts, did not add a dull contribution to the literature of autobiography which to most is attractive only insofar as its content of malice and servant's hall tattle overrides its vain parade of the author's personal history.

Not only young people but also the ancients who have strayed into the twentieth century from Victorian times will respond to the allurements of Sir Frederick's reminiscences. He presents us to a motley but eminent company of people. For a brief but entertaining moment we may rub shoulders with Browning and Lord Macnaghten, Tennyson and Samuel Butler, Bishop Stubbs and Eleanora Duse, Huxley and Sarah Bernhardt, Forbes-Robertson and Herbert Spencer. If the society of these shining ones becomes oppressive, Sir Frederick will take us over to the Inns of Court, tell us of their function as nurseries of law and order and relate a bit of their absorbing history; or if we prefer it, he can lead us in a scramble up the Aletschhorn or Schreckhorn whose thrills for the climber he experienced in the seventies of last century.

In sum, the book is a medley of unpretentious and, therefore, captivating talk by an octogenarian of excellent memory keenly alive to the things that interest and instruct both the young and the middle-aged. It is the literary product of a lawyer who sees things outside the range of his professional interests with the eyes of a humanist.

CHARLES MORSE.

*Whereas and Whatnot.* By Wilfrid Heighington. Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Limited. 1934.

It is not often that we have laid down a book after reading it with the conviction that the only thing in and about it that we didn't like was its title, but that is what happened in the case of the book under review. We were simply unable to read the title clear in the light of the contents of the book—even where the author discourses on “Titles of Distinction”—but as this disability may be entirely due to our own dullness we shall not attempt to argue that so good a book deserves a better name.

When a new author swims into our ken it is always interesting to know something about his personal history. *Imprimis*, Mr. Heighington may still be indicted for the “atrocious crime of being a young man.” But that crime did not deprive him of being accepted for military service when the Canadians paid a visit to Europe in 1915. He is now a lawyer in active practice and a parliamentarian of five years' experience, with prospects of cabinet rank if his party is retained in power at the ensuing Ontario elections. Moreover he is a frequent contributor to periodical literature. Such a programme of activities is first-rate evidence that Mr. Heighington is no sluggard.

There is an old saying that the Law is a jealous jade and permits of no dalliance with such things as politics and literature if those who serve her tables would win her best rewards. But the history of the English Bar from Coke to Birkenhead demonstrates the un wisdom of the saying. Coke was the founder of the modern common law, he was an active parliamentarian and a prodigious literary worker to boot. Blackstone, a lesser lawyer than Coke, repeated his career somewhat closely. Later on in the same *galère* we have Brougham, Campbell and Talfourd; and in still more recent times Haldane, Birkenhead and Darling. It would seem, therefore, that the limitation of activities embodied in the old saying was a counsel of prudence intended only for the lawyer who possesses a ‘one-track mind.’

In the book in hand the major part of its contents finds expression in the form of the essay, a *genre* created by Montaigne, who was somewhat of a lawyer, and introduced into English letters by Bacon who was more than a lawyer. So Mr. Heighington has some professional countenance for his first adventure in the making of books. Here and there, between his “dispersed meditations” in prose, we have some bits of verse, so clever that A. P. Herbert would not be ashamed to father them. Referring to the initial essay, entitled “Osgoode Hall,” it would be a dull reader indeed who would not chuckle over the observation that in that august pile “only a proportion of the occupants are aware that Queen Victoria is dead.” But our author can close the shutter on his wit when he is moved to speak for our edification on such a topic as “What and When is Parliament”—the longest essay in the book and one full of instruction for those who would know whether the provincial legislatures in Canada may properly be called “Parliaments.” But we need not particularize; the whole book is full of witty and knowledgeable things. We shall be glad to look upon its like again.

CHARLES MORSE.