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LAMENT for a LOST POET

by
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A FRIEND of Galsworthy, becoming playfully cynical at his later performances with the novel and a little bored by the endless fecundity of the Forsytes, suggested that the young might yet live to see the age of family encyclopaedic novels—novels written not only about families but by families about families. The day would come when a family would no longer be proud of its lineage and ancestry but of the fatness and length of its family novel and its generations of family authors. And reviews would then begin: "The second volume of the fifteenth trilogy, 'The Silver Monkey,' the Soandso family novel, appears to-day. The author is the granddaughter of John Soandso, who began the novel in earliest Edwardian days. It gives us much pleasure to welcome Miss Soandso, who appears likely to uphold the magnificent traditions of her novelistic family."

Behind these playful ironies lays a painful truth. At that time the second Forsyte trilogy had only just begun, but it was already obvious that there was a sad falling away in the literary quality of their histories. The Galsworthy of "The Silver Spoon" and the subsequent novels was the mere ghost of the Galsworthy of "The Man of Property." It would have been better for contemporary literature if no Forsyte had been allowed even a shadow of an existence after "To Let." And Galsworthy himself might have died with a more secure, if narrower, reputation.

How tired, indeed, one gets of those Forsytes. And one resents their large and solid existence also, for they did much to obscure the younger Galsworthy, the more exacting artist, the writer of short stories, the man of whom Conrad could write enthusiastically and declare: "There are things in it ('The Man of Devon') that I would give a pound of my flesh to have written."

Living in an age when the short story was unpopular and when the novel was about to make a fantastically gigantic appeal to the public mind, Galsworthy did much to keep interest in the short story alive in England. "The fiction market," he wrote, "is supposed to require of short stories a certain pattern full of 'pep' and sting in the tail." (There still exist editors with the watery minds of vegetable marrows who will tell you this.) "The scorpion, it is said, if sufficiently irritated will sting itself to death. So will the short story when worried by the demands of editors. The inveterately independent will resist these blandishments, go their own ways, imitate no one. . . . Those who dutifully confection the short story to the sacred pattern of the hour may well become of the company which shakes its taintourines in hell."

In 1900 it did indeed look as if the scorpion was about to sting itself to



death—if it could summon vitality enough. There was no Maupassant in England, and Tchekhov was hardly known, though the stories of Turgenev were just beginning to appear in an exquisite translation by Mrs. Constance Garnett. The literary world was deafened and deprived by the bombastic voice of Kipling, that imperialistic playboy of the Eastern world, who, in writing the most impossible stories, had also achieved the most impossible popularity. In America a brilliant flame shot up, was briefly dazzling, and died again. And after the death of the brief fire which was Stephen Crane, the short story, hardly alive enough ever to sting itself to death, crawled on through the damp long darkness towards the gradual light of 1920.

It was Galsworthy who helped to keep it alive. The translations of Turgenev, appearing at a critical moment in his life as a writer, touched, influenced and inspired the poet in him. The influence of Turgenev may be seen on any page of "The Man of Devon" and "The Apple Tree," certainly two of his finest stories—stories of delicate and beautiful texture against which the later Forsyte novels look like cheap machine-made cloth. That influence may still be seen in the Forsyte interludes. It vanished completely before the end. By that time, however, we could afford to close it, for the short story had reached the end of the awful Kiplinguesque end of darkness and was out in the light.

For the next ten years a stream of literature on Galsworthy is, I suppose, inevitable. By the autumn of this year the first tributes will be upon us: great novelist, social historian of late Victorian and Edwardian England, champion of the oppressed, propagandist, lover of justice, great playwright, incomparable painter of the upper propertied classes, lover of beauty, humanitarian.

It will be interesting to see what tributes, if any, are paid to him as a short story writer. It will be more interesting still to search among that mass of homage and praise for the odd lament—the lament for a lost poet.

Oscar Wilde on Man and the Machine

ALDERMAN A. EMIL DAVIES writes: "For an economic truth to become apparent to economists takes about twenty years, to the man in the street thirty years, and to some politicians—not at all. About thirty years ago an article appeared in the 'Fortnightly Review,' by Oscar Wilde, under the title of 'The Soul of Man in Socialism,' from which the following is an extract:—

"There is something tragic in the fact that as soon as man invented a machine to do his work he began to starve. This, however, is, of course, the result of our property system and our system of competition. One man owns a machine which does the work of five hundred men. Five hundred men are, in consequence, thrown out of employment, and, having no work to do, become hungry and take to thieving. The one man secures the produce of the machine and keeps it, and has five hundred times as much as he should have, and probably, which is of much more importance, a great deal more than he really wants. Were that machine the property of all, everyone would benefit by it. It would be an immense advantage to the community. All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must work for us in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man. There is no doubt at all that this is the future of machinery, and just as trees grow while Humanity will be amusing itself, or enjoying cultivated leisure—which, and not labour, is the aim of man—or making beautiful things or reading beautiful things, or simply contemplating the world with admiration and delight, machinery will be doing all the necessary and unpleasant work."

"Is there one among the so-called technocrats or among the economists who has expressed the whole dilemma so perfectly?"

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