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financial stability, it has put forth in Europe the flowers of a conscientious and distinguished art—an art which could not bloom until it had been transplanted. Paris, London, and Rome were the chief conservatories, Henry James the outstanding exhibitor; Proust looks in through the window panes, Joyce and D. H. Lawrence do not.

The atmosphere, though artificial, is not exotic. And the art, though cosmopolitan, is never international. It is connected with great cities and with the country houses dependent on them, and takes no stock of a new social order.

Though Mrs. Wharton is an excellent gossip and well-informed *diseuse* she is at her best when she talks about this beloved art. The chapters on her own work and on Henry James', and the references to that neglected novelist Howard Sturgis, are all illuminating. She tells us, for instance, that her characters come into her mind with their names attached, that she is still seeking a fictional home for a lady called Laura Testvalley. If Mrs. Testvalley gets as well suited as was another homeless character, the Princess Estradina, who finally arrived into the Custom of the Country, she will not have waited in vain. But, as her creator realises, she may take some suiting. All this discussion about books and the ways they are created and worked up is stimulating for readers as well as writers. And Henry James! She knew James well and was devoted to him, and her patience with his fussifications and affectations will strike the outsider as miraculous. But she is detached enough when she comes to his work, for the reason that she is serious about literature. She passes some very shrewd remarks about his later novels and she sees that his very conscientiousness as an artist led him to be a narrow critic, because he required all writers to be conscientious in exactly the same way.

She was also a friend of Howard Sturgis, her account of whom made me take down *Belchamber* again. *Belchamber* was published in 1907, by Constable (can it still be in print?), and it seems to me now, as it did then, brilliant, amusing, unsparing, poised, full of incidents and characters, indeed, well on the way to a masterpiece. The public ignored it, Henry James deplored it because it did not conform to his rules, and for the latter, rather than for the former, reason Howard Sturgis abandoned literature for embroidery. Perhaps he was before his time. The public was not yet ready for that wide yet careful canvas of aristocratic life. But now that Henry James is coming into his own again, and young men in their twenties are reading and admiring him, Sturgis may have his revival also. If he does, Mrs. Wharton will have promoted it by her amusing and sympathetic tribute. He wrote two other novels—*Tim*, and *All That Was Possible*. But, as she says, his triumph is *Belchamber*.

How much did the war destroy? It destroyed "good society" though the butler still brings the tea out under the cedar on occasion. Did it damage poetry too? And will writers ever recover that peculiar blend of security and alertness which characterises Mrs. Wharton and her tradition, and which has served her art so well?

E. M. FORSTER

THE SUPERQUACK

Cheapjack. By PHILLIP ALLINGHAM. *Heinemann.* 7s. 6d.

Cheapjack is dedicated, affectionately dedicated, to "My clients." It might very well have been dedicated to those who believe in the honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, general moral calibre and gumption of the English people; or equally well to those who believe that superstition and quackery are dead; or equally well to those who are accustomed to think of English life as something highly respectable, dull and prosaic, without the picaresque and romantic qualities we are told it possessed in other days. There would, of course, have been some irony in these dedications. For *Cheapjack* contains what must surely be the best rogues' gallery since *Oliver Twist*; a collection of prize gullible fools, English fools, that it would be hard to rival in fiction; and finally almost as much of picaresque and romantic life as could be found in a novel of Defoe. It ought to have been called *The Autobiography of a Super Quack*, for *Cheapjack* is a little misleading, and the book is also a very close companion to W. H. Davies' *Super Tramp*.

After his education at Oxford had come to an abrupt end, not through any misdemeanour, but simply because the Provost "pointed out to my father quietly but firmly that my chances, etc.," Mr. Allingham resolved to try to earn his living as a fortune-teller on the still numerous fair grounds of this country. He was out of a job, and though he was not psychic, he had a knack of making pleasing deductions about the future lives of his friends. So he bought a tent, some Birmingham-Arabic trinkets from Woolworths, some incense, a top-hat, and set off for Southall fair. I am not sure which was the more cunning: the incense or the top-hat. Together, at any rate, they were devastating. Religion and the Nobility! "Your Prince," Mr. Allingham had printed up over his tent, "has had his hand read. Why not You?" The desire to emulate Princes was, as always, terrific. And it was not long before Mr. Allingham was earning from five to thirty pounds a week merely by telling young girls, old women, iron-fisted Welsh farmers, policemen, and countless other folk that the dark-haired or the fair-haired were going to leave them money or play old Harry with their future lives. He must have been astonished at the number of gullible fools in his native country. "I estimate," he says, "that two thousand pounds are spent on fortune-telling at Hull Fair alone." When, later, he decided he would like a change from fortune-telling he was already familiar enough with the diversity of the "grafter's" craft to know that there were a hundred and one games he could play on that same gullible public with equal success. He chose hair-curlers; they were fairly honest and extremely profitable. Of the hundred and one other "larks," equally profitable and not quite so honest, he might have chosen to be a crocus, a windbag-worker, to work the stinker or the spread; the first is a quack-herbalist, the second one of those gentlemen who places a pound note in an envelope, etc.; the stinker is a fortune-telling device, and the spread is the herb-cure again. Mr. Allingham explains them all and exposes them all. There isn't a single one of them by which the grafter doesn't get the buyer (alas! you and me) on toast. And when I next wander about a fair-ground or a market-place and listen to the conglomeration of seductive shouts I shall remember London Joe and Cross-Eyed Charlie, and Mad Jack, and Peter the Whistler, and the rest of the grafters in this book—including Mr. Allingham himself.

In short, the book is a plain warning to fools. How much of it is true I don't know. It is written with extreme persuasiveness, flexibility and charm—in fact in that very same frank and seductive manner of which the grafter is a master, and with which I imagine Mr. Allingham must tell his clients' fortunes. As truth, therefore, I hesitate to recommend it. As entertainment, however, it is first-class. There is, of course, a snag somewhere. And on reflection I can't help concluding that it is that only one person, as usual, is going to make his fortune—and that's not you nor I.

H. E. BATES

MR. POUND'S EXHIBITS

The ABC of Reading. By EZRA POUND. *Routledge.* 4s. 6d.

This book is intended as a simpler "How to Read": it should, says the author, "be impersonal enough to serve as a text-book." It is almost entirely about poetry, but includes a few remarks on the novel, and some "composition exercises"—"Let the pupil write the description of a tree"—"Describe the light and shadow on the schoolroom clock"—and so on. We are supplied with a list of "the minimum that a man would have to read if he hoped to know what a given new book was worth"—consisting, of course, largely of Provençal poets. It may be depressing to think of learning Provençal, but there is balm in Gilead, you can neglect German. "During seven centuries a lot of subject-matter of no great present interest has been stuffed into German verse that is not very skilful. I can see no reason why a foreign writer should study it." (He never can remember that he is not teaching us to *write*.) Among the very few books in English that you *must* read are Gavin Douglas's *Aeneid* and *Golding's Metamorphoses*, "the most beautiful book in the language." *Sordello* is recommended for its "extraordinary limpidity of narration." Don't think too much of Shakespeare, "English opinion has been bamboozled for centuries by a love of the stage."

"The harsh treatment here accorded a number of meritorious writers is not aimless"—it is part of an attempt, by singling out the very best, to dispel the "pernicious current idea" that good books are dull. To those infected with the notion he presents *Sordello*.

Section Two is devoted to "exhibits"—poetic extracts with commentary. Students are urged not to look at the footnotes "until they have at least tried to find out WHAT THE EXHIBIT IS, and to guess why I have printed it. For any reader of sufficient intelligence this should be as good a game as Torquemada's crossword abominations. I don't expect it to become ever as