

...“I see you’re  
using it too”...



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*Somebody's  
going to be left!*

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*Some day.... Queen Anne  
Chocolates  
will be back again  
in full supply*

## "The Public Is Tired of Trash"

(continued from previous page)

else, any other *serious* books, that is. What a field those million and a-half highly intelligent men and women would offer to our publishers and our writers if only they could be made as interested in serious imaginative writing as they are in serious technical books!

### Literature as a Luxury

It is true that some of us, at any rate, are reading better books. And I am convinced very many more would do so, if they only realised the needs of the imagination as keenly as they have come to realise the needs of the practical intelligence. The technical books, the books on how to do things and make things and plan for a better world only answer the factual questions we ask ourselves in wartime. For enlightenment on the spiritual and emotional problems, we should go to imaginative literature; but we shall not go to it as long as we think of poetry, fiction, drama as a sort of luxury, like edible birds' nests, which would not be particularly good for us even if we had a taste for it.

Taste, of course, is not developed in the first place by thinking and criticism. Appetite comes before taste. And there must be many people to-day unconsciously developing a taste in literature by the accidental process of buying good books (because there is little else to spend one's money and leisure on), reading them, and thoroughly enjoying them — enjoying new fields of experience which, before the war, they assumed to be the private preserve of the "highbrows." In the creation of a popular taste for better books, the publishers could play a tremendous part just now. Paper rationing means that they are only able to produce a limited number of books every year: at the same time, they have never had less difficulty in selling their books. Add these two facts together, and you see what results? A publisher to-day could, without commercial risk, publish nothing but first-rate books provided, of course, there were the people to write them.

### Publishers Could Take Risks

A few publishers would claim they had always tried to do this; a few others — the mass-production boys — would say that their job is to give the public tripe, because tripe is what the public likes. In between comes the great majority of publishing firms which in peacetime published a number of second-rate books they knew would be popular for the purpose of profit only, and were prepared to risk a certain amount of this profit on good books they knew whose names had prestige value. Some publishers to-day, perhaps because there are not enough young writers of talent to go round, are sinking some of their profits in literary periodicals. Murray's, for instance, have revived *The Cornhill*; Nicholson and Watson publish *Poetry*, London. This is a useful and honourable way of gaining prestige for the firm, but it is not necessarily an indication that publishers as a whole, have yet realised that the public is tired of trash.

But to-day, even allowing for the fact that he must be preparing himself for a post-war slump, he could take more risks, I fancy, than he does. It would encourage the good writers to write their best, and then we should all at least have the chance of reading better books.