

the older world's fraternity of critics, and it succeeds. You may think there is nothing new to say about Byron or Shelley, or the Brontës, or Jane Austen, but you would be wrong.

We accept Byron in the way that we accept the uncontrolled forces of nature, and this may indicate the fundamental cause of his solitude . . . Something of the same energy was at work in Shelley; but in his case its way was smoother. Though Shelley was a rebel, his revolt was little more than a sense of direction. He rose out of the world and lay like a gull in the currents of air. With Byron there was always a turmoil of waters below and a fury of winds above."

Or, being an admirer of Arnold Bennett, and having read more than once "*The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger*, you will find something fresh to hold you in Mr. Holcroft's analysis of and comparison between these two books. It is an example of his faculty for seeing more than most of us. A lover of Thomas Hardy, you may have wandered many times in imagination over Egdon Heath, but if you go again with Mr. Holcroft you may find you have not seen everything. You may have decided views on the writing of novels. You may think that in his last essay, "The Portrayal of Character," Mr. Holcroft might have elaborated his main point more fully, that character is not enough and that a novel must have an "idea" or "central thought or spiritual impulse." You may find in this study, however, much that is enlightening.

Mr. Holcroft is an alpinist among essayists. You can see the muscles of his mind working as he climbs. I don't know any New Zealand book of the kind that presents such plain evidence of hard thinking. He is profoundly interested in human nature and in landscape, and in the effect of the second on the first. Moral and spiritual values are never out of his sight. He is a poet who writes in prose and a mystic with his feet on the ground. The old-fashioned Roman considered "gravitas" to be the essential quality in a man. There is no one word to translate this. It means weight, dignity, poise, self-control, or what we often mean when we say "character." Mr. Holcroft has this. It is in his style. There was a certain amount of mistiness in *The Deepening Stream*, but in this book of ten years ago the waters are uniformly clear. They flow steadily and with power. The beauty in the writing has a grave quality.

I have thought that in New Zealand there is a primeval quality of earth which will yet find its expression in literature. Our hills rise up above the plains in magnificent folds of earth. They are bare to the influences of light, and in the moods of their slow days they can disclose to us important truths and quiet beauties. In their ridges I have found reportings and comments on the geological labours of the world; and when a gentle light falls like a veil upon their shoulders it is possible to feel strange and unexpected affinities. Into such barrenness of hills (we think) could Moses have retreated from his stiff-necked followers in search of guidance; on rocks such as these have been enacted dark old dramas of history. These things are ours. The towns and young cities to be seen along the plain are temporary things that will vanish. And it has seemed necessary to me that this primeval quality should enter into our literature and become its secret strength—not in novels and tales of our small isolated life here, but in the manner of writing and in the substance of thought.

This alpine air is invigorating to the body and strengthening to the soul. It is

true that the reader may occasionally desire some light relief. There is evidence that Mr. Holcroft is sensitive to humour, but he uses little humour in his presentations. Irony, the salt without which so much written and spoken matter seems insipid, he avoids. His writing would be more effective if these savours were added, but it is proof of his insight and integrity and his skill as a builder of sentences, that he can do so well without them.

If there were an International Conference of Literary Critics, we could send him to it in full confidence that he would keep his end up in scholarship and appreciation of aesthetic values.

## THE ARTS

**LISTENING TO MUSIC**, by F. J. Horwood, 11/6 posted.—This is a book for amateurs in the art of listening to good music. It consists of a general survey of form, harmony, the instruments of the orchestra and a brief introduction to the lives and work of the major composers. There are many musical illustrations.

**PICTURE APPRECIATION**, by E. V. K. Grayson, 7/9 posted.—Art appreciation is gaining an increasing place in education. It is to assist teachers that this book has been written. The excellent black and white plates are suitable for use in the classroom. Exercises and correlated work for the pupils are included.

**YOUTH AND MUSIC**, by Desmond Macmahon, 8/8 posted.—How to widen the interest of youth in music of all types is the problem Dr. Macmahon has answered in his book. It is a guide and refresher course for all who wish to help young people in their appreciation of music.

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