

IN THE BOOKMAN'S MAIL

DEAR SIR:

Referring to Edward Larocque Tinker's article about Lafcadio Hearn, in the January BOOKMAN, I want to say I think it extremely doubtful that Mr. Hearn ever knew Eugene Field. My husband, Marion Baker, was Sunday editor of the New Orleans "Times-Democrat"—now the "Times-Picayune"—and Mr. Hearn was on the editorial staff. He and my husband were intimate friends; but although I saw Mr. Hearn often I cannot recall his ever mentioning Eugene Field. My husband himself did not make the acquaintance of Mr. Field until some years after the Cotton Exposition, when the last named paid a long visit to New Orleans; and Mr. Hearn had then left the south definitely. Mr. Field was often at our house; and it seems strange that he never said that he knew Mr. Hearn, though we had spoken together of his works. As for there being "yet people alive who saw the two together", I am sometimes amused, and sometimes provoked, at the wild tales circulated by persons who never had any acquaintance with Mr. Hearn. He seems to have become a sort of legendary character.

Very truly yours,

J. K. W. BAKER.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE BOOKMAN:

"No," said my friend, "I seldom read poetry—there is so little of it that I can understand."

This set me thinking. Now, my friend is a clever woman, in her way, and represents the vast horde of the uneducated, American working class.

They have a natural desire for the beautiful in literature, but have not the education to appreciate anything but the simplest poetry. Few of them have ever attended high school, and the boy or girl who has had the advantage of a college education is the exception, rather than the rule. This condition is to be regretted, but it exists, nevertheless.

To this class of people Tennyson's "Synnoria Over the Dead Body of His Rival", or "Comma's Love for Sennatus" are as so much Greek. They enjoy Longfellow's "Children's Hour", or "The Bridge", and others of these simple and beautiful poems, because they understand them.

The papers today are all too often filled with poetry, and prose too, that is appreci-

ated by the student, but by the common people it is termed "highbrow" nonsense. I do not wish to criticize the modern poets for their work is fine and uplifting, but I do wish to emphasize what the common people want and need. Shakespeare had his critics, but his work still stands immortal.

Men or women who have worked all day often desire to read something besides the scandal in a newspaper, before retiring. Their eyes alight upon a poem; they scan it, and if it is filled with unfamiliar words and expressions, they pass it by. If it is a simple understandable poem, they read it with enjoyment.

This does not mean that the poetry must be light or foolish, nor does it need to be nursery rhymes. We would not call Lowell, Whittier, Longfellow, or Burns commonplace, yet their poems have endured and are loved by the common people because they can comprehend them.

A little child is not given a Latin grammar as his first textbook. Give him something his mind can grasp, and he is delighted and anxious to be taught.

The very fact that the laboring class is hungry for suitable reading matter, proves that they are intelligent, and some of them, self educated though they may be, have reached a higher plane than the boys or girls who have been carried through college by the money they would have scorned to earn for themselves—we have a Lincoln to our credit.

So much is being said about establishing reading courses for the poorer classes. This would be a great thing for them. Come on, modern authors and poets, with good, wholesome reading matter for the common people. I speak in behalf of them. I am one of them, and know their needs.

Yours very truly,

(MRS.) FERNE BERRY.

DEAR SIR:

In the November issue of THE BOOKMAN, Mary Austin began a series of articles under the title of "Making the Most of Your Genius", in an attempt to show that genius can be acquired by those who were not fortunate enough to be born with it. This, however, has always been contrary to our belief, and it is altogether probable that it will remain as such.

If we are to make both sides balance we

must first let Mrs. Austin know that our own reading sustains the same thought she had in mind when she penned the following lines:

"Probably I am the only person to be found who will insist that it [genius] can be acquired, and very likely I shall not be able to make you agree with me." She further states that—"The earliest intimation the possessor of genius has of its operation is the sudden appearance of ideas or concepts, often of the greatest complexity, in his mind, seeming to come not by way of observation or intelligence, but from somewhere above or beyond him, with sourceless connotations of authority."

This, however, is one of the characteristics of every human being; every living person has innumerable ideas stored away in his or her mind, but for the reason that they have not been brought to light does not substantiate Mrs. Austin's theory.

To maintain that a sudden appearance of ideas or concepts is a sign of genius is erroneous. A writer can be alone working on a novel with two or three concepts before his mind—First—he knows he's alone, second—he has a knowledge of the past, and besides creating new ideas for his novel, he has the pleasure of anticipation which is an extension of looking forward. Does that prove conclusively that he is a genius or that it can be acquired?

Genius is exalted intellectual power capable of operating independently of tuition and training, and it is marked by an extraordinary faculty for original creations, inventions, etc.

Isn't this more philosophical than the theory presented by Mrs. Austin? If we are to hold the truth as the truth, we are not justified in accepting any metaphysical theory in a modern disguise.

Another objection to Mrs. Austin's theory—"That genius is simply the capacity of the immediate-self to make free and unpremeditated use of racial material stored up in the deep-self, as well as of material acquired in the course of individual experience." In other words, she means that genius is nothing but a mental product created from the deep-self and dependent on the immediate-self for its development—which is absurd.

Immediate-self and deep-self are two inherent phases of life. The former is represented by the five senses and the latter is represented by the ego. Deep-self is that which places the supreme end of human conduct in self. It is the better self and its purpose is to inoculate the immediate-self with things which will defend the immediate-self from the treacherous poisons—such as worry, etc. Is that any capacity for genius?

Mrs. Austin further states that "genius is the most natural thing in the world". It is not the most natural thing in the world. It is the rarest thing in the world. A genius in the world is out of the ordinary, as much as the exceptional faculties by which a genius is distinguished.

There is indisputable and overwhelming evidence that Henry Ford is a successful man, but there is no good evidence that he is a genius. No one would think of calling Rockefeller a genius just because he accumulated a large sum of money. To class all successful men as geniuses would be manifestly incorrect.

Every day we read of fearless and indomitable minds, who, by dint of preserving application and energy, rose from the lowest of ranks to the most exalted positions in the land, but we don't read of geniuses every day.

What Mrs. Austin has mistaken for genius is the individual spirit of self help, which is an energetic effort to make the most of small opportunities. If Mrs. Austin can substantiate her theory by selecting from the men of today—another Bell in science, Reynolds or Wilkie in art, Homer or Shakespeare in literature, then, perhaps we will accept her theory truthfully.

It should be distinctly borne in mind, that in all theorizing there is an element of faith and volition which is hidden. Where things cannot be proved, they have to be regarded or in other words believed.

The conclusion is that Mrs. Austin has set up a natural selection as the determining principle of her belief. Still, it seems clear that whoever will reason should regard the conditions of reason, and should not set up theories which undermine reason.

Yours respectfully,

W. B. MINOR.

THE BOOKMAN'S LITERARY CLUB SERVICE

Believing that clubs will welcome an outline which combines range of subject with an authoritative understanding of the end to be achieved, the editors have brought together representative committees of authors, students, and critics to present for the use of women's clubs an outline which will contain both elements. The divisions of the series are: I. Contemporary American Fiction (see THE BOOKMAN for October, November, December, 1922, January, 1923); II. Contemporary American Poetry (see THE BOOKMAN for March, April, May, June, July, August, 1923); III. Contemporary American Drama; IV. The Short Story. After contemporary American literature has been covered, programs on the historical background of our literature will be given and these will be followed by a survey of the English field.

The BOOKMAN programs are formed, not by the editors of this magazine but by a board of advice which has been organized to include names from various lines of literary thought in America, so that the result will represent no one group. The executive committee of advice is as follows: Mary Austin, the novelist; Dr. Arthur E. Bostwick, librarian of the St. Louis Public Library; Dr. Carl Van Doren, one of the editors of "The Century"; Mrs. L. A. Miller, chairman of literature, General Federation of Women's Clubs; May Lamberton Becker, of the "Reader's Guide" of the New York "Evening Post"; Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, rector of the Church of the Divine Paternity, New York City; Booth Tarkington, the novelist; and Rose V. S. Berry, chairman of the fine arts committee, General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The Editor of THE BOOKMAN and his advisers and associates will answer promptly and to the best of their ability any question confronting any literary club. Such questions should be addressed "THE BOOKMAN'S Literary Club Service".

THE BOOKMAN'S outline of contemporary drama, which began in the November issue, consists of studies of the following playwrights:

November: Augustus Thomas, Owen Davis, Edward Sheldon, Eugene O'Neill.

December: Susan Glaspell, Zoe Akins, Rachel Crothers, Alice Brown, Zona Gale.

January: Louis K. Anspacher, Charles Rann Kennedy, Lewis Beach, George Cram Cook, Theodore Dreiser, Gilbert Emery, Arthur Richman, Algernon Tassin.

February: James Forbes, David Belasco, Eugene Walter, Elmer Rice, Jesse Lynch Williams, George M. Cohan.

The committee has met several difficulties in preparing this outline. In the first place, there are innumerable dramatists whose work should be examined for an understanding of the real theatre of America. Then, how should these dramatists be divided? After various classifications had proved unsatisfactory, the committee decided upon a purely arbitrary divi-

sion. In each group presented we hope that you will find an interesting afternoon's study.

A word of warning. Many clubs when they study the drama are likely to stick closely to what is generally known as "closet" drama, often historical or poetical dramas by intellectuals of one sort or another whose plays have seldom been produced with success. We urge you not to sniff at the commercial theatre. It is, after all, the root of drama. If you would understand the technique of the theatre, you must know Avery Hopwood and George M. Cohan as well as Eugene O'Neill and Percy MacKaye.

For each of the following dramatists we give a selected list of his published plays, as well as the names of any easily procurable magazine articles dealing with him and his work. As a general bibliography the following books are suggested: