

## Galahad the Illegitimate

GALAHAD. By JOHN ERSKINE. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1926. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CHAUNCEY BREWSTER TINKER  
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"You've no more heart than a fish," said Lancelot [to Guinevere]. . . . "If I weren't your father, I shouldn't have wasted so much breath on an impudent young fool," said Lancelot to Galahad. . . . "The kingdom, in my humble opinion, has gone to the dogs," said Arthur.

SUCH, reader, is the conversational tone of the Knights of the Table Round and the ladies of King Arthur's court as set forth in the latest embodiment of the legends. The Younger Generation shall have Galahad and Elaine brought up to date, so it shall, and Guinevere and Lancelot shall be planed down to democratic standards. They were perhaps not unlike the "Mr. and Mrs. —," with whose domestic difficulties Mr. Briggs regales us weekly in the Sunday supplement—he, something of a dolt, she, something of a vixen, but human exceedingly, and as common as husbands and wives,—or lovers and mistresses.



Of course every era has treated the Arthurian myths exactly as it chose to do, without any antiquarian regard to folklore or the history of romance. Professor Erskine has but done what a score of distinguished predecessors have done in other ages. Thus, for example, Arthur has been at various times, a world-famous conqueror, spreading his conquests to the gates of Rome itself; later, a "very parfit, gentyl knight," the mirror of chivalry; then a magnanimous but deeply-wronged husband. As for Galahad, he is not the original knight of the Holy Grail, but a hero, devised, it would seem, by monks, to replace Sir Percival (or Parsifal) as a pure and single-minded knight worthy of his high quest. As a late-comer into the Arthurian cycle, Galahad has undergone fewer transformations of character than the rest, but there is no reason to suppose that, if he had appeared in as many romances as Arthur himself, he would not have undergone as many alterations. Each age puts its interpretation on the masterpieces of the past; and such work is not without significance as revealing the mind of the new age. Thus when Anatole France tells the story of the Magdalene or of St. Nicholas, the reader may find out nothing new about the history or character of the saint, but has certainly learned much about an age which has acclaimed such tales. What is it, we may well ask, about this modern spirit of ours, which drives us to represent King Arthur as a weary and cynical husband, with a doctrine of *laissez-faire* for his wife, and a final conviction that his court has throughout made too much "of the women"? Why are we amused by the picture of Elaine without her lilies and her barge, and why are we convinced that Lancelot could never have died "a holy man"?



Mr. Erskine's formula for the construction of one of these denatured romances is simple enough. One begins by casting out the supernatural and miraculous elements of the legend. All the trappings of knight-errantry are disregarded or smiled at. Antiquarianism, whether it concerns the representation of ancient manners, costumes, and ways of speech, or the attempt to understand the mediæval mind, is regarded as a waste of time. The contention seems to be that there is *no mediæval point of view needed* to explain what happened, but only the behavior of human beings as we see them acting, loving, and suffering to-day. Having reduced the story to the bare outlines of plot, the narrator then applies to the framework such modern motives, characterizations, and "psychology" as may hold it all consistently together, without recourse to any special pleading regarding the Middle Ages with its dragons, its magic, its love-potions, enchanted castles, sorcerers, and what not. We know enough of the men and women about us to explain whatever is truthfully set down in legend regarding the heroes and heroines of romance. There is in it, you see, nothing of the antiquated historical novel; but, rather an eager desire to assert an eternal identity of motive and character. A similar conviction led us to have Hamlet acted in modern clothes. Such startling revisions may wound our susceptibilities and rouse our prejudices, but they express an odd sort of confidence in the vitality and permanence of the story concerned.

If it had not been for "Helen of Troy," this story would probably have been entitled "Guinevere." Guinevere is the leading character, and it is round the representation of her peculiar passions that the criticism of this book will rage. Nobody believes enough in Galahad, with his silver armor and his pure heart, to care whether the author understands his life or explains his reputation; but Guinevere, with her desire to impose her will upon the world by means of her lovers, is a much more "intriguing" person, to speak in modern slang. She is that type of female who believes it to be her peculiar gift to form and inspire the souls of men, and she is eternally on the watch for victims. She is the sort of woman to whom dutiful men dedicate books with the inscription, "To G—e, to whom I owe all that I am."

It is needless to labor this point when it is all stated by Lancelot in his confession to Brother Martin, which forms one of the most delightfully witty passages in a witty book:

Soon after their wedding, he [Arthur] said, he found out she had married him to reform him. He wouldn't have minded, he said, if he had had more leisure, but with the kingdom on his hands he was too busy to be reformed. Then he saw she had turned her attention to me [Lancelot], and, though it hurt him, yet there was something to be said for the arrangement.

Now Lancelot has his turn. He is prepared to be a "great lover," but discovers that his lady has a soul above mere adultery.

"I, too, have a conscience," she remarks to her man. "My one excuse is that through our love you became the best of living men—or so I thought."

Then come Lancelot's affair with the earlier Elaine and the birth of Galahad the Illegitimate.

"She was jealous of his mother and jealous of him, and angry at me," said Lancelot, "and it occurred to her to get the best of us all by making a masterpiece out of him. Before she got through, she loved him, I think."

Exactly. The irony of the whole situation is that, without the adultery, the scheme worked admirably. And the first result of Guinevere's idealism was to break down the boy's faith in his mother and father, and substitute herself and her theories as the inspiration of his life. Then she is obliged to reveal her own baseness, and the boy-knight, with his little world in ruins and his passion for the ideal still driving him, makes off into distant parts of the earth, there, presumably, to search for ever after some embodiment of that holiness which he had glimpsed. It is the Quest of the Holy Grail.



The author of "Actæon" is no cynic; the Centurion is no "spirit that denies." But he has lived long enough—among the young, I mean—to know that there is no easy prescription for the formation of character. And so he flings the psychologists and the ladies' clubs, with their chatter about "character-building," a paradox so vivid and so blasting, that even they can hardly miss it. Lancelot sinned with the first Elaine, and the result was Galahad and a life devoted to a search for "the holiest treasure in the world." Out of evil came forth good. Next, Lancelot flees from temptation, refusing to sin with the second Elaine, and the result is suffering and death. "The one time I did right, when I spoke so gently and wisely to that little girl, it killed her." Out of good came forth evil!

And so Professor Erskine triumphs in the end. Wisely eschewing the task of reproducing an impossible mediævalism and forgetting, for the moment, even the beauty of the ancient legends, he has told the tale as he has apprehended it. To him the ancient story is a revelation of the strange inversions and paradoxes of life, high aims withering away into futility; and then, to the confusion of all law and system, pettiness suddenly blossoming into splendor. It is in the setting forth of such contradictions as these, and not in the mere presentation of the story in modern dress, that the genuine novelty of this book consists.

There is no end to literary surprises. A French tax-collector, Jacques Noir, has been awarded the national prize for poetry for 1926, which includes a sum of money destined for travel. The real name of the laureate is Armand Geoffrit. He was born at Niort in 1881. While still very young he published a volume of verse entitled "L'Âme Inquiète." This was followed by "Malédiction." His new volume is called "Heures Profondes." These titles seem to indicate that a tax-collector has troubles of his own.

## Out of Little, Much

THE SUN ALSO RISES. By ERNEST HEMINGWAY. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by CLEVELAND B. CHASE

THE sense of unbounded vigor and enthusiasm coolly repressed and controlled that characterized Ernest Hemingway's book of short stories, "In Our Time," is also the most striking feature of this notable first novel. Written in terse, precise, and aggressively fresh prose, and containing some of the finest dialogue yet written in this country, the story achieves a vividness and a sustained tension that make it unquestionably one of the events of a year rich in interesting books.

Nothing, the adjective is used advisedly, that Hemingway describes has ever been more convincingly described. It probably never will be; for while he writes with spareness and economy, his gift for seizing upon the essential qualities of whatever occupies his attention leaves the reader with nothing to learn. There is a truly Shakespearian absoluteness about his writing. But the things he writes about—bull fights, Spanish fiestas, shallow philanderings, and the petty subtleties of café disputes and *amours*—seem scarcely worthy of the care, of the artistic integrity which he devotes to them.



It would have been difficult for Mr. Hemingway to have chosen a more dreary or aimless setting for a novel. Having picked, apparently at random, a handful of those disillusioned and degenerating expatriates who make their headquarters in the cafés along the Boulevard Montparnasse, in Paris, he sends them on a fishing expedition to the Pyrennees which ends up in a week of riotous drunkenness at a fiesta and bull fight at Pamplona. He describes these people with photographic exactness. Anyone who is acquainted with the habitués of the cafés of the Boulevard Montparnasse will recognize most of the characters at once. Not one of them, I think, is the product of the author's imagination. Even the fishing trip about which the story centers is an actual event that took place, if my memory is not at fault, in the spring of 1924.

If the characters are intrinsically uninteresting, it is the greater tribute to the power of the author's style that the story never loses an almost painful tension. It is a supreme triumph of style over matter, and if the reader be tempted to question whether the triumph is real, let him turn to almost any one of Mr. Hemingway's passages of dialogue. As, for instance:

"Sit down," said Harvey, "I've been looking for you."  
"What's the matter?"  
"Nothing. Just looking for you."  
"Been out to the races?"  
"No. Not since Sunday."  
"What do you hear from the States?"  
"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."  
"What's the matter?"  
"I don't know. I'm through with them. I'm absolutely through with them."  
He leaned forward and looked me in the eye.  
"Do you want to know something, Jake?"  
"Yes."  
"I haven't had anything to eat for five days."  
I figured rapidly back in my mind. It was three days ago that Harvey had won two hundred francs from me shaking poker dice in the New York bar.  
"What's the matter?"  
"No money. Money hasn't come," he paused. "I tell you it's strange, Jake. When I'm like this I just want to be alone. I want to stay in my own room. I'm like a cat."  
I felt in my pocket.  
"Would a hundred help you any, Harvey?"  
"Yes."  
"Come on. Let's go and eat."  
"There's no hurry. Have a drink."  
"Better eat."  
"No. When I get like this I don't care whether I eat or not."  
We had a drink. Harvey added my saucer to his own pile.



Mr. Hemingway's most pronounced gift as a writer is his ability to seize upon the precise details in any setting or situation that lend it meaning and individuality. In consequence he has developed a crisp, terse, staccato style which consists largely in setting down innumerable details, which are left to be fused and blended in the reader's mind. The most obvious comparison, of course, is with the

And so in short, abrupt sentences he piles up details—petty, unimportant details, details that are frequently on the verge of being boring. "In the morning I walked down the boulevard to the rue Soufflot for coffee and brioche. It was a fine morning. The horse-chestnut trees in the Luxembourg gardens were in bloom. I read the papers with the coffee and then smoked a cigarette. . . ." "Why," we are tempted to exclaim, "not leave something to our imagination?" But in the end he justifies his method. By the very profuseness and precision, of his details he achieves an eventual economy that is astounding. There is a cumulative richness in his staccato statements of fact. He says one thing, implies another, while the whole atmosphere of a passage implies infinitely more than is to be found in its individual parts. We find ourselves in the presence of unsuspected subtleties of mood and of emotion which are arrived at not through the medium of an author's hyperbolic and roundabout statement of them, but because their essential qualities are actually present upon the printed page. It is an interesting fact that neither in his short stories nor in this novel does Hemingway make use of a single simile. To him things are not "like" other things. He does not write about them until he has been able to grasp their essential qualities.



## Goat

HERE wasn't any wind  
But thorn tree was rustling  
And out of its dusty leaves  
Gazed a yellow eye;  
Leather lips and curly beard,  
Shaggy shanks up-rearing,  
And the old, cold topaz  
Of a Billy-goat's eye.

What, thought I to myself  
Quite suddenly,  
How can he relish  
This bitter kind of provender,  
Plucking with his leather lips  
Aloft and alone?  
How can such a wise,  
Such a human looking critter,  
Relish so heartily  
This prickly, this bitter  
Thorny kind of diet  
On a mountain all alone?

How can he linger,  
When down along the water-side  
The bells of the nannies  
Go tinkle through the grasses;  
When all along the water-side  
Willing little nannies  
Are fattening on the grasses  
Of the brook-side dell?

Far from the mountain-side  
Down where the water curled  
Talking through the bottom lands,  
A shepherd blew his horn,—  
A hoarse little blast  
Upon his reedy horn.  
Twitch went the stubby tail  
Of coarse old Billy-goat  
Down he dropped from thorn tree  
And twitched his stubby tail,  
Leaping down the mountain  
To his nannies in the dell.

Ha, thought I,  
There goes old Billy-goat,  
Shaggy shanks, leather lips  
And cold yellow eye.  
Jesu! I repeated to myself,  
Quite suddenly,  
Its funny how time passes.  
I wonder if he was a goat  
That just went by?

HENRY CMAPIN.

## The BOWLING GREEN

### A Casual Anthology

We feel that we are privy to a source-pot of art and literature from which can be culled a definite and salient contribution to the nebulous mosaic of American art.

—Prospectus of a new literary magazine

I have found some of the best reasons I ever had for remaining at the bottom simply by looking at the men at the top.

—The Colby Essays

A "new thinker," when studied closely, is merely a man who does not know what other people have thought.

—Ibid.

The journalism of gentle contemplation has become a profession in itself. All a writer needs to know is when a thing is bosky and when a thing is lush, the wonderful hour that is neither night nor day, and the tang of salt air, and the skirl of the haw-bird, and where the bumbleberries cluster thickest and the wild pomatum blooms. . . . American *belles lettres* are a superior sort of needlework.

—Ibid.

About 9-10ths of the stuff going on under the guise of Art is the Banana Oil. They call it art to get it off the clothes.

—Will Rogers, *Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat*

At fourteen, with the aid of a large cast of undergraduates and others, Naomi Mitchison produced at Oxford a play on Eugenics. The scene was in a country where to have more than three children was a crime punishable by death, and the play opened with an expectant father awaiting the announcement of his third baby's arrival, to whom enter an agitated nurse: "My God, twins!" At this point several Oxford ladies rose and left.

—*Sixteen Authors*, an eloquent pamphlet issued by Harcourt, Brace and Co.

Count Keyserling realized that he was now a philosopher, yet he realized also that he had not become one through introspection or study, but empirically, and he had no notion of what to do next. He travelled, he wrote a second book, he went back to solitude and waited. While, however, he was leading the life of a gentleman farmer, he was aware that inside he was maturing, and he read and meditated patiently.

—Ibid.

Morley is only another of those gay night moths that persist in scorching their little wings in the forty-thousand candle-power light of Walt's vast Schopenhauerian philosophy. Instead of regarding him for what he is—a prophet-bard, they will keep applying to him their ridiculous little professional mete-wands of conventional literature, and then, sadly shaking their heads, they fall dead in heaps around his Pharos tower.

—W. S. Kennedy, *The Fight of a Book for the World*

Shoes of genuine reptile leathers, thought by certain factors to be losing popularity with smartly dressed women, have taken a turn for the better.

Sheer silk hose with a cashmere sole has been introduced and designated "The Stroller." The sole does not show above the throat of the shoe, but protects the feet against cold weather, since it is assumed that if the toes are warm one is comfortable. The semi-annual style conference of the Allied Shoe Industries emphasizes the importance of the beige tonalities and mauve.

—*Women's Wear*

There is no Scheherezade offering an Arabian Nights Entertainment but instead there is the Edison Ensemble seeking to hold the ear of Their Imperial Majesties, Mr. and Mrs. Radio Listener. Not a thousand and one nights are to be filled, but only twenty-one for the nonce.

Through the series you may expect to find yourself in Happy Spirit, in Tragic Mood, in Agitation, in Calm. You will find yourself in the Jungle, and battling with the Elements. There will be an evening of Heroes; and one will bring Shakespeare himself. Now we shall go into the Nursery and now to the Opera and again into the realm of devotional music. In an Art Gallery! The World of Romance! Melodrama and Tragedy! A sheaf of doctor's prescriptions, all will be among the diverse programs presented.

—21 *Adventurous Nights*, The New York Edison Company

A season of mental anguish is at hand, and through this we must pass in order that our posterity may rise. The soul must be sacrificed; the hope in immortality must die. A sweet and charming illusion must be taken from the human race, as youth and beauty vanish never to return.

—Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872)

The Americans are not in the habit of drinking absinthe like the French are, but a drink of it occasionally will hurt nobody.

The Germans and the Swiss have the simplest way of drinking absinthe that I met with in my travels through Europe. If a person goes to a café, or bar room (as we call it), and asks for absinthe, the bartender puts a pony-

glass of absinthe into a large tumbler and sends this and a pitcher of water to the customer, who helps himself to as much as he desires, and there is no mixing or fixing up about it. I consider this a very simple style of drinking absinthe, as it tastes just as good to them and answers the purpose.

—Harry Johnson's *Bartenders' Manual* (1882)

I saw —, the well-known British novelist, at the close of his lecture tour, during which he has been deservedly well hosted. He looked tired and had rings under his eyes. "I suppose you'll be glad to get home," I said. "Well," he replied pensively, "it will be pleasant to be in a country where one doesn't have to drink so much."

—John Mistletoe, *On the Brevity of Bliss*

Because the symbolic principle is implicit in religion, it follows that religion itself is in constant danger of explicitly discovering it, and this at the very moment when religion attains its highest and purest form. Ordinary religion maintains its equilibrium, so far as it does so, because of its low potential. It is not religious enough to upset its own religiosity. But an intensely religious person, one who takes seriously the highest and deepest elements of his own faith, is bound to come into conflict with religion itself. Very religious people always shock slightly religious people by their blasphemous attitude to religion.

—*Speculum Mentis*, by R. G. Collingwood (Oxford University Press, 1924)

### SOME LETTERS

There is a young man of 22 or so whose letters I am privileged to look over from time to time. Perhaps a man of 36 shouldn't be allowed to read these letters; yet though they are so gorgeously young they are also very wise and shrewd, and sometimes nippingly humorous. As young men should be, he is proud and sensitive; when he feels lonely or has a swimming in his head he gets out Shakespeare and rereads him; occasionally, in a burst of enthusiasm he slips into his letters a sonnet or lyric of his own. But even without that you would know him a poet by chance phrases. "If a sparrow comes before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel." Or this comment he makes on Shakespeare's sonnets—"they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally." Yes, there he hit upon a big truth; and again: "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth."

Some of his letters that I have seen are addressed to a publisher; occasionally, and with most engaging humor, appealing for an advance payment; occasionally discussing less tangible matters. He remarks, for instance, that poetry should surprise the reader "not by singularity but by a fine excess." This is a nourishing thought to ponder; though he himself, with his clear honesty, would not care for any casual dicta to be too fiercely solidified. "My dear fellow," he writes, "I must once for all tell you I have not one idea of the truth of any of my speculations—I shall never be a reasoner." And he speaks of "the innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials" before it reaches any particular perception of beauty.

Specially young are his rather cavalier depositions as to the irrelevance of women in any rational scheme of life. They are mere children, he remarks, to whom he would rather give a box of candy than his precious time. When you hear him saying that, you tremble a little for him. It was not much later he was writing that to express his devotion he needs "a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair." And concludes with the world's oldest cry—"I know before night I shall curse myself for having sent you so cold a letter."

My reason for mentioning these letters is that I happen to see in a catalogue that they can be had (Charles W. Clark Company, 235 West 23 Street, New York) for \$1.98, in the handsome Houghton Mifflin edition that usually costs \$5 or thereabouts. For the kind of people who are worthy of such infinitely precious confidences, and who won't blab about them, that would be a real Christmas present. The name of the man who wrote them was John Keats.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

A quarterly review edited and financed by a group of young negro artists and devoted exclusively to the newer negro art has just made its appearance. It is to be called "Fire," and its format will be somewhat comparable to that of *The Theatre Arts Monthly*. Its purpose will be to encourage the art of the younger negroes and also to give the works of the group a chance to appear.