

"Adventures in Indigence"

LAURA SPENCER PORTER is one of our great originals. Her essays come as a fresh draught in a waste of dusty platitudes, easeful and captivating where so many writers in this field are flat and dreary. *Adventures in Indigence* will not disappoint those who have learned to expect satisfaction and delight from this versatile entertainer. In addition to being an original she is an intellectual and she struggles in vain against being classed as a sentimentalist. This charge her greatest admirers must admit, but we need not admit it as a fault. It is sentimental to cherish mice in one's heart. Brooms and umbrellas follow hard on the discovery of their presence among the practical, and yet we would not sacrifice *The Disappointments and Vicissitudes of Mice* for any vaunted superiority.

In speaking of our custom of describing mice as destructive she imagines one seeking newspaper for his nest, "suddenly endowed with the ability to read the inky characters. He pauses in amaze," she continues, "his eyes bulge and devour the news beadily. And what news it is! Staggering statistics of men and officers killed since our great war's beginning! His hand goes over his heart to quiet its violent beating. Ah, what a race of gods they are! Or he reads from a recent account of the bayonet practice at Plattsburg:

"Aim for the vitals. Do not fire until you feel your bayonet stick. Thus you will shatter the bone and you can then withdraw the blade. At the same time try to trip your enemy with the left foot, so that he will fall forward."

"None of this is clear to him. This is the deportment, without doubt, of the immortal gods! Fancy the consequences of his attempting to trip his enemy, the mouse trap, or the cat, or the terrier, with his left foot!"

The *Adventures in Indigence* concern "the mysterious and imponderable powers of the poor;" a wealth of philosophy and humor which we could ill spare. Here you may become acquainted with Musgrove, most delectable of beggars, and his lessers. The essays cannot be said to be in praise of beggars but rather in appreciation. Beggars and mice and Mrs. Porter's inexhaustible fund of originality, and what a charming thing has been made of them! Nothing more fitting could be imagined as a gift book than this gayly bound little volume.

ADVENTURES IN INDIGENCE. By LAURA SPENCER PORTER. The Atlantic Monthly Press.

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Modern American Writers



Howard W. Cook, author of "Our Poets of To-day." Drawing by Kahlil Gibran.

By **CONSTANCE MURRAY GREENE**

MOFFAT, YARD & CO. are bringing out a library in instalments. The *Modern American Writers Series* has begun and is going by leaps and bounds. Volume I, *The Women Who Make Our Novels*, by Grant M. Overton, covers thirty-two of the foremost women novelists. A gigantic task you will think, but wait until you see Volume II, Howard Willard Cook's sixty-eight yard dash, each yard representing one of *Our Poets of To-day*.

The choice of Mr. Overton as curator of novelists is a singularly wise one. In such a work it is very essential that we be not given the flights and fancies of "literary highbrows." "There is no such thing as literary values in writing," he says. "There are no literary values, only values in life." And again, "It is to be feared that this is no book for the 'literary highbrow.' But a lower forehead and a broader outlook have their advantages." They have, for instance, as his famous chapter in defence of the author of *Laddie* shows, great advantages for Mrs. Porter. This chapter and several others appeared in *Books and the Book World*. Mr. Overton can almost make you believe that you would love to read a thing that you already know you hate, such is his power of persuasion and the sanity of his arguments. Not even a friend would dare accuse him of being a "literary highbrow," which by the way is his pet detestation, or an enemy of having sacrificed, by the breadth and generosity of his outlook, penetration or spontaneity.

This young man who has been called a literary reporter stirs up the women and their novels with a large, honest spoon, and the result is a volume which we will read for pleasure and refer to for information, delightful in the first instance and invaluable in the second. "The best thing in the book," he says, "is not mine, but the letter from Mary S. Watts." The best thing about the book to our mind is that it is written by a person who is absolutely unafraid and who gives us with never failing freshness of expression and from a wholly original viewpoint an amazing amount of new material concerning interesting people.

He explains why a novelist who writes "wretchedly" keeps one up all night when work as ravishingly beautiful in form as the Winged Victory fails to live for us. Many such things are explained in his philosophy and explained in a friendly and appreciative manner, but when Mr. Overton says, "Bah!" as he sometimes does, he means it.

The task which fell to Mr. Cook in this series, that of including sixty-eight con-

temporary poets in a 200 page volume, was almost insurmountable. If he had died, as he had every right to after it was done, criticism would be a painful matter. It would be hard to say anything against a task which had killed its master. If you are clever at arithmetic you will be able to calculate at once that for each author,

had the space been equally divided, there would be three pages. When we say that a sample of the poet's verse has been given in every case in addition to a sketch of the poet's life, you will know just about what to expect. It's a *Who's Who in American Poetry* with the verse added and some list of the poet's published works.

There has never been, to our knowledge, so unbiased a book written about poetry. It is an unknown thing for any one to write with absolute kindness of such a variety of this most personal of arts. But the wrapper of Mr. Cook's book says that his purpose "is not that of critic, but that of one who would present for poetry lovers and those who would know more about living American poets their most distinguishing characteristics." Personally we should have preferred less Christianity and more individuality, and yet we realize the impossibility of doing justice in any measure to one's opinions where you haven't room to stretch. His idea of balance puzzles us. He gives seven pages to Cale Young Rice, six to Charles Divine, six to Carl Sandburg, to Ridgely Torrence and Francis Carlin-one apiece, and to Margaret Widdemer two short paragraphs and a poem.

Mr. Cook has covered his ground industriously and he has done it without once showing the cloven hoof of the poet-critic. He has dealt with Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Clement Wood, Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters and all the rest, and he has done it (cover your faces!) without one unfriendly word! His book should be useful to those who want to make a first general acquaintance with present day American poets.

The publishers promise as a third volume of the series *The Men Who Make Our Novels*, by George Gordon, to appear late next spring.

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