

modern and progressive thought. And what disquiets a Philistine is, that it is apparently coming to be seriously accepted by respectable critics. There were a few protests at first, but as the doctrine infected novel after novel, and as the exponents of it had unusual opportunities of being vocal in the Press, the old-fashioned critics (anxious, as I have suggested, to be thought appreciative and up-to-date) simply gave in, and joined the chorus of praise at the astonishing cleverness of these new performers. You may now see the most advanced sexual fiction advertised with a string of glowing eulogiums from the most respectable papers. The Philistine, therefore, finds his citadel betrayed. He reads with amazement that a book which seems to him unusually disgusting is pronounced on unimpeachable authority to be "exquisite" and "dainty." Here is a positive invitation to every writer of fiction to go and do likewise, as well as a guarantee of immunity for those who are tempted by the market value which attaches to an outrage on good taste. "The Philistine" observes, also, that the writing which seems to him to be indecent is almost invariably declared to be art, while that from which the element of indecency is absent is apt to be dismissed as indifferent hack-work. Under these circumstances, it seems to me high time that the Philistine should speak up for himself, and examine some of these propositions. I therefore propose to examine the new fiction very briefly (1) as art, (2) as life, (3) as modern or progressive.

Is Sex Mania "Art"?

I. *Is it Art?*—A Philistine has always a wholesome suspicion when he is told that a thing which is repugnant to ordinary taste is "Art." He knows the extraordinary capacity of the artistic temperament for persuading itself that the morbid or abnormal is high art. I myself have heard a painter say that a Gorgonzola cheese in a certain state of decay appeared to him as the most subtle and beautiful combination of colour in the world. In the present case it is urged that art has nothing to do with morality. There is a sense in which this expression is a truism, but the sense which it seems generally to convey to the people who use it is that art has a preference for the immoral. For these so-called works of art are, as I have shown, not merely indifferent to morals, but almost invariably hostile to what is ordinarily called morality. So much so is this the case, that a judicious reader of current reviews might infer with reasonable certainty that the novel which is praised in certain quarters for its "art" has a special eminence in nastiness. But whether it is "art" depends also in some measure upon the next question:

Is Sex Mania "Life"?

II. *Is it Life?*—Upon this question I have tried to give the reader some material for forming his own conclusions. The "defiant man's" view of life seems to me to differ hardly at all from that of precocious schoolboys who imagine that they know all about this wicked world. We have all met these schoolboys, and a very disagreeable type they are. In their superior wisdom they pity your green and innocent disposition, if you think that anybody does more than pretend to be moral, or has what Philistines call a "character" to lose. They "know all about it," they have long ago outgrown all illusions on this matter. The "defiant man's" assumption is precisely of this kind. He doesn't argue about it: he just takes for granted that the world is his world—a place inhabited by dissipated men and loose women, faithless husbands and intriguing wives. The business of these people is to "pursue pleasure," and their diet seems to consist mainly of brandy and soda by day, oysters and champagne by night. This naturally makes them anemic and liable to constant headaches. They have no occupation, and nothing apparently to do except think about women. They are mostly without a sense of humour, and their manners are atrocious. Children they consider a nuisance, and from their conversation they appear never to have gone beyond a few streets in the West End of London. I will not argue the question whether this is "life." There are people, no doubt, who live thus for a small fraction of their lives; but not a great number at any given time. The reason is simple, and it is that after a certain time, shorter or longer, as their constitutions may be, they must either come out of it or die. "Life" it may be, but it is also "death" to ordinarily-constituted human beings.

I do not wish to be more dogmatic about the "revolting woman's" conception of life, but it is open to similar objections. It represents life as one monotonous problem of sex, from which there is neither escape nor diversion. Every situation is pervaded with sex, the world itself is penetrated with "erotic mysticism." The exponents of this view of life are "surgeons who lay bare the hidden places," or "pathological hunters in the terra incognita of the human soul." They interpret human action by "psycho-physiological keys"—which is a grand and nonsensical way of saying that they peep at and probe and analyse the sexual nature. It is surely sufficient to say that life does not present itself thus to any normal human being. The most sensual man or woman has a hundred places of escape from the question of sex. I observe that most of the men and women in these books are represented as idle and rich, which, I think, is rather significant. But most people are not idle and rich: they have their bread to win, their families to keep, professions to follow, businesses to pursue, and a thousand and one ordinary relations with other men and women in which the most lurid imagination could not spy the question of sex. Nature, art, literature, sport, friendship, hospitality, travel, politics, philanthropy—all these go to make life. The man-and-woman literature either excludes these things or treats them as incidentals to its interminable sex question. And—not least of its offences—it sees life almost entirely without humour, for the "defiant man" laughs sourly, and the "revolting woman" hysterically. To a Philistine, then, the new fiction is not life, but a morbid abstraction from it. And since it excludes most ordinary motives and enormously exaggerates one, its knowledge of human nature is very imperfect, and its boasted psychology often very absurd.

Is Sex Mania "Modern"?

III. *Is it Modern?*—The claim for the new fiction that it is in any sense "modern" or "advanced" is one that puzzles a Philistine exceedingly. Its theory of life is, apparently, that everyone has a sacred duty to yield to their impulses, whatever inconveniences and upheavals may result to other people in consequence. They must obey the "ruling passions" and defy all laws, rules, conventions, or supposed moralities which dictate any other course. This is called "being true to themselves"—the "triumphant doctrine of the ego." Holding this view, they naturally "wear their sexes on their sleeves," become proud of their passions, and talk about them incessantly, without reserve or shame. Now this, I should have thought, instead of indicating an advance towards "modernity" and civilisation, was rather like a relapse into savagery. Not savagery, perhaps, for savages are rather reticent, but a sort of Rousseauism or return to the infancy of the world. For it sets up the natural and animal man against the civilised and cultivated man, and it repudiates the discipline upon which civilised society is built. In any case, this kind of relapse is in no sense modern. There is not a doctrine to be found in the new sex literature which has not already been exploited by some ancient or medieval decadent, and there is hardly one which has not been practised on a large scale at some period or other of the world's history, with results that are well worth studying. From this point of view I think some of our modern decadents might do much worse than study the later periods of the Italian Renaissance.

An Appeal to my Fellow "Philistines."

I do not suppose that in anything I have said here I shall have

made the smallest impression upon any devotee of the new fiction. On the contrary, I despair of saying anything in which most of them do not absolutely take pride and pleasure. "The Philistine," as a correspondent points out to me, is in this respect in a very awkward dilemma. For the "Martyr to Art" positively revels in his martyrdom, and his case is such that you can only attack him in terms which increase his vogue with a certain section of the public. So well is this appreciated by certain publishers that they are now in the habit of selecting the darkest expressions of disapproval from an unfavourable notice of a book, and deliberately printing it in their next advertisements. Thus, if a reviewer says that a book is "loathsome," "naughty," or even "unwholesome," he may count on seeing that opinion set out in a prominent place among the notices which commend that book to the attention of the reader. How, in that case, asks my correspondent, is the critic to act? Is he to keep silence and simply abdicate, or is he to run the risk of increasing the vogue of a book which he may positively detest?

My own view is that he had better run the risk and make his protest. For if no one speaks up on the Philistine side, there will be immunity for any author who likes to commit any outrage upon good taste, and the impression will go abroad that these things are accepted unchallenged as "art" and literature. That will be profoundly untrue as regards the bulk of the public, and it will be seriously unjust to those authors and publishers who do not practise in this line. My hope, therefore, in writing these articles is that I may encourage some of my brother Philistines to pluck up heart and say what they really think about much of this literature. For the worst feature of the case is, as I have said before, that critics of repute and respectable newspapers have, from a morbid anxiety to appear up-to-date, been drawn into praising, or at least countenancing, these "works of art." If on this side there is no corrective, and if on the other there is a band of critics, themselves often practitioners in the "new fiction," bent on booming it in every quarter to which they have access, then we cannot complain if the nuisance overruns all literature. The "defiant man" and "the revolting woman" have their liberty of speech, and it is time that we should claim ours, even though we risk a reputation for enlightenment with the emancipated youth of both sexes.

[The preceding articles of this series appeared on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, March 5, 6, 7, and 8.]

To the EDITOR OF THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE.

SIR,—I do not wish to be allowed to argue in your columns with "The Philistine," whose very readable "slashing" of a little book of mine has just reached me. But I should like to suggest that he has made two mistakes, which are of wider interest than my own offences. He says I "describe the world as peopled exclusively by licentious men and faded women, whose life is a round of intrigues," and so forth. It was untrue to say that my book was made up entirely of such people, but that is a valueless detail. What I wish to point out is the folly of supposing that a writer of a book of short stories "describes the world" at all. If, for the sake of coherence of motive, one chooses to make the majority of a set of sketches deal with one class of emotions, one does not therefore imagine that these emotions are the whole of life. The second mistake is the implication that the opinions expressed by the characters in a book are those of its author. I should have thought these mistakes might have been avoided by this time, but I venture to indicate them, because, while I think "The Philistine's" exposition of my own poor book as accurate as it is polite, I sympathise very much with the general purpose of his protest.—Your obedient servant,
3, St. James's-place, S.W., March 8. G. S. SIBLET.

NOTES OF THE DAY.

The hitch that appears to have occurred in the negotiations between the Progressives and the Moderates on the question of the "odd Alderman" ought clearly to be settled as we suggested the other day. Let each party have four, and let the fifth be a man who could be claimed equally well by either party, or neither. There are still a few hard-working, philanthropic men who are in that position, and the choice of one of them would relieve the disputants from a rather ridiculous dead-lock.

The *Standard's* storm-signalman keeps us well informed of the inwardness of the present prolonged discussions on the Estimates.

The slow progress in Supply is causing a great deal of anxiety among the supporters of the Government. The absence of the Chairman of Committees makes it impossible for the Government to apply the Closure, even if they wished to do so, and it will probably require the whole of the time which they can command to obtain the necessary votes in sufficient time before the close of the financial year.

To "anxiety among the supporters of the Government" we may add "satisfaction among the members of the Opposition." But what is meant by saying that in the absence of the Chairman the Government cannot apply the Closure? Is it that the Deputy-Chairman cannot put the Closure, or that there is reason to suppose he won't? If the latter is meant, that seems to us an assumption which the Government ought not to accept, and, indeed, have no reason to accept, until they have tried.

Meanwhile, the meaning of the slow progress in Supply is very obligingly explained to us by the same storm-signalman.

It is now certain that the debate on the second reading of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill cannot begin before Monday week, and, in all probability, it will not be read before Thursday week.

It is very unlikely now that the second reading of the Irish Land Bill can be taken before Easter.

"Some of the Ministerialists," adds the *Standard*, "assert that the Government will make the Easter holidays dependent upon this stage of the Bill being obtained before the adjournment, but such a course would be extremely unpopular with some of their supporters." That is the old trick. An obstructive plan of campaign is put out, and it is then declared that any plan for checking it would be "extremely unpopular," not with the obstructionists, but with the Party obstructed. We hope we are justified in saying that this unpopularity has no terrors for the Government.

The lunar eclipse which will be visible, given favourable weather, during the small hours of Monday morning affords one of the somewhat few opportunities occurring each century in these islands of witnessing the complete veiling and unveiling of the lunar disc under favourable circumstances. The time of first contact of the moon's rim with the cone of the earth's shadow will be 1.54 a.m., and totality of eclipse will occur at 2.52. It does not follow that the moon will remain invisible from this moment until the shadow passes. That has not been the case since the eclipse of June 10, 1816, although that of October 4, 1884, saw the face of our satellite very nearly extinguished. A much more usual phenomenon upon such occasions is the assumption of a dull flush or bright ruddy glow upon the lunar disc. Whether the cause of this is the absorption of the blue rays from the solar light which steals round our planet by

reason of the refractive power of our atmosphere, and so ultimately reaches the moon, is still a matter of conjecture. Perhaps, with so good an opportunity for observation, English astronomers may be able to do something to confirm or refute this hypothesis.

The Proportional Representationists have really been very slack in pointing the obvious moral which they can draw from the County Council elections. Sir John Lubbock does it in letters to the papers this morning, declaring that "no one yet has pointed out the contrast between the results of the last two elections as illustrating the anomalies and uncertainty arising from the present system of voting." Sir John is decidedly late in the week, since this aspect of the matter was prominently set out in THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE on Monday last. He might, however, have supplemented his studies by calling attention to the equal anomalies and uncertainties produced, in the case of the School Board Elections, by the cumulative system. That was devised to protect minorities. On the School Board it has done it by wiping out all the little minorities altogether, and installing the big minority in power over the majority.

A fine issue for the new novel of sex is suggested by the shooting case now agitating St. Petersburg. A woman, called Olga Paten, was recently tried for the murder of a young student. He had lived with her for several years; he declined to make her his wife; she shot him dead; a romantic jury acquitted her; and popular opinion has made her into a heroine. On the other hand, persons described by one of themselves as "the thinking portion of the community," point out that Olga made the acquaintance of the unlucky youth when he was only eighteen, and when she had been already for several years the mistress of another man—"an old man in Odessa." This does complicate matters, and as the Government takes the view of the "thinking portion," and the scene of action is Russia, it is possible that the errant jurymen will in turn be put on their trial for misdirection of justice. On the whole, even if silly in this particular case, the popular feeling points to a stirring up of the current ideas on the general subject, which may be far from unhealthy in any country, and especially far, perhaps, in Russia.

The Leicester Boot and Shoe Operatives are not, we fear, likely to gain very much sympathy if their case is no stronger than from this morning's accounts it appears to be. For the reports substantially agree in describing it as a protest against the increase of machinery, and though the men have ultimately been locked out (or "booted out," as they call it by an appropriate metaphor in Leicester), the quarrel has apparently started from their side. Upon this matter most people, we imagine, will agree with Mr. Picton, who writes as follows to Mr. Inskip, the men's leader:—

I am bound to add that Mr. Ward's statement of alleged facts calculated to affect public opinion very much. You cannot stop machinery, and you cannot prevent its full development; nor can you exclude the capital which buys it from all share in advantage from it. The fair apportionment of advantage, i.e., increase of gain between labour and capital, seems to me a matter for friendly discussion, and if that fails, for arbitration.

Hard as it is for the man who is superseded by machinery, there is nothing else to be said than this. The Union, according to a correspondent of the *Times*, has actually endeavoured to fine men for serving certain machines. A circular letter sent to the men of a certain firm, he declares, read as follows:—

Sir,—You are hereby requested to appear before the committee on Friday night next, at 7 o'clock, at the Cherry Tree Hotel, Bond-street, to answer to a charge made against you by . . . of assisting the latest machine to do its work.

The men, it is alleged, attended, and were fined from half-a-crown to five shillings each.

What can be done is to follow Mr. Picton's advice and arbitrate on the question of the workers' share of the increase of profits which presumably comes from the introduction of machinery. The masters allege that the men will not abide by the results of arbitration, and the men, we dare say, allege the same of the masters. In that case let both sides agree to deposit a certain sum as a forfeit in case the arbitrators should decide hereafter that the agreement of bad faith against either: it will be merely entering into a bond as business men do every day. Here it is that we specially want a permanent Conciliation Board to whom every alleged violation of an agreement could be at once referred. A board created for this special purpose in the moment of a dispute will never command the confidence of one that is ready and waiting for all purposes. It is in such cases that the Government Voluntary Conciliation Bill ought to be specially useful.

From the fact that everyone was apparently agreed on the subject of ground values, a judicious reader will rightly conclude that yesterday's debate was of no practical value. For of this we may be pretty certain, that when we do get near any practical or effective measures, there will be something very different from acquiescence among a large number of those who yesterday consented to Mr. Provand's motion. The situation is practically this. While everyone admits that the taxation of ground values is "in theory" both just and desirable, the owners of ground values and their friends are boldly confident that no method of taxing them can be discovered which they will not be able to pass on to tenants and occupiers. It is therefore highly desirable that we shall not waste steam and energy in some futile measure which, while seeming to tax the landlords, will in reality do nothing, or even increase the burdens of the occupiers. Of many proposals already made, the municipal death duty is the only one which seems to offer any prospect of escaping from this dilemma.

The most sensible view of our position in Cyprus is to regard it as a means of bargaining with the Unspeakable Turk. The island itself is simply a piece of Imperial lumber. It is of no use as a military station, it does not pay as a business speculation, and regarded as philanthropy our occupation of it is apparently a failure, if we may judge from the (original) statistics. But, as Mr. Stevenson pointed out, one of our ostensible objects in acquiring it and holding it was that we might have the means of compelling the Turk to carry on the necessary reforms in Armenia. If the Turk, therefore, continues to be recalcitrant, we shall be more than justified in knocking off the tribute of £92,000 which we pay him for Cyprus, and which comes largely out of the pocket of the British taxpayer. On the other hand, if the Turk behaves himself, we might undertake to supply him with ready cash by capitalising the tribute at a reasonable number of years' purchase. At all events, we are there; we apparently have no means of getting out, and we may, therefore, as well use our position for all it is worth.

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