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Exit

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL.

"The signs are many that there has been a slump in Cabell stock. The literary supplement that only recently had a 'Cabell number' now has a review of his latest book, *Figures of Earth*, written by Maurice Hewlett, who has himself made a specialty of the mediæval romance, and who says he never heard of the word 'geas,' and who contemptuously dismisses Cabell's work as a pretentious and often meaningless jargon—'parading a science it does not possess'—elaborately concocted to impose upon the credulous reading public.

And still another Englishman, the scholarly Solomon Eagle, as we recall, has expressed a similar opinion... Now if only the agreeable Mr. Hugh Walpole will turn a similar flip-flop, the Cabell balloon may completely collapse."

—Thus far the *New York Globe*, with rather unaccountable omission of any applause for Mr. Richard Le Gallienne's recent fulminations against Cabell,—unaccountable, I say, because the erstwhile fumbler with the Golden Girl's underwear went about his assassinary labors with far more dexterity than did either of the other British battlers for nineteenth-century traditions. Indeed Mr. Hewlett did but arise—with words more keen than the scissors with which he nowadays writes novels "based upon" Icelandic sagas—to proclaim that, since he personally had never heard of a variety of matters to be found in any encyclopædia, for anyone else to have knowledge of these things was wanton-

ness and coxcombery and mere frivolity; whereas Mr. Squire evinced his somewhat less readily explicable wrath with inarticulate bellowings and beatings upon the editorial desk, and with objurations against *Jurgen* for failing to satisfy his curiosity. I do not know what he was curious about, and it would be, perhaps, imprudent to inquire; but upon one point, at least, it was clear that the critical ingénu of the *London Mercury* was in whole-hearted accord with the two hardier survivors of no inconsiderable talents. All were agreed that either the lungs of the right-minded or else the Cabell balloon must be burst.

Well, I shall be, in some ways, rather sorry to see this Cabell pass to oblivion. For I foresee that he will pass quickly now. He was nourished, he was bred and fattened and sustained, entirely upon newspaper paragraphs; and our literary editors retain a naïve faith in anything, except, of course, the pound sterling, which emanates from England. You may notice the decisive turn of the above "And yet another Englishman," as if that quite settled the affair. But that is hardly all. Most of the reviewers, I fancy, are sufficiently like me to have grown a little tired of so much tall talk about Cabell, and to think it high time the monotony was varied. So this Cabell, too, must pass, with all the other novelists who have had their brief hour of being "talked about"; and this Cabell, too, must presently be at one with Marie-Corelli and Maurice Hewlett and Elinor Glyn and Richard Le Gallienne and Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe.

II

I repeat that, in some ways, I am sorry to see the passing of this Cabell. I found it interesting to read about this Cabell's romantic irony, his cosmic japes, his bestial obscenities, his well-nigh perfect prose, his soaring imagination, his corroding pessimism, and all the rest of the critical chorus. It loaned each Wednesday (when the clippings from my bureau come in on the first mail) quite an exciting morning, and it sustained me well toward lunch time with prideful thoughts that I was more or less identified with such a remarkable person.

To the other side, I shall, upon the whole, rejoice at the passing of this Cabell. One very positive benefit, for example, will be the saving in the matter of my bills for the aforementioned press-clippings; and the devotion to some better purpose of the time which I of late have squandered on the process of inserting these clippings (almost uniformly idiotic) in my scrap-books. I shall be left unmolested by the bother of autographing my novels and wrapping them up again, and, occasionally, of supplying the return postage, and, not infrequently, of finding these same volumes on sale next week at the second-hand book dealer's, as "presentation copies." I shall no longer be invited to lecture before mature and earnest-minded and generally appalling females, whom it is not possible to convince that the fact of my having written a book or two can no more qualify me to enliven their foregatherings with a lecture than with a violin solo. The younger of the sex will no longer evince via voluminous epistles their willingness to marry me, or even to dispense with the ceremony; and I shall be spared the trouble of concealing these letters from my wife, who emphasizes her disapproval of such notions by an offensive eagerness to pack my things for the suggested trips. And I shall even return, in time, to the old orderly enjoyable reading of newspapers and magazines without any first feverish skimming through the pages to see what this issue contains about me.

Yes, certainly, oblivion has its merits, to which I now direct a brightening eye. Now, no longer will the publishers' agreement, not to woo away the writers brought out by some other house, be honorably preserved by each deputing his pet author to transmit nefarious suggestions through personal visits to me; and now, chief of all, will magazine editors desist from disturbing my entranced concoction of a book with offers of incredible and iniquitous prices for "something in the short story line." Yes, but iniquitous is a too mild description of these allures when, as may happen, you have a wife uncursed by dumbness or a child to whom in common-sense you owe it to earn as much money as can be come by reputably. For you can think of no possible excuse, none plausible at least to domestic inspection,

not to put by the book, and let it wait, while you "dash off" a few thousand words, in full consciousness that if you turn out balderdash your employer will be as touched you quite satisfied, and as concerns his readers' approval of the speculation vastly reassured. And the artist really must—though there is no explaining it—work either just at what he chooses or else toward exhaustion as an artist.

In fine, the passing of this boom will permit me once more to do, unmeddled-with, what I prefer to do. That is, for some of us, a privilege not at any price to be purchased exorbitantly. So I stand ready to join forces with Messrs. Hewlett and Squire and Le Gallienne. I yield to the right-minded. I dismiss him, this overmuch be-paragraphed Cabell, into the limbo of out-of-dateness wherein abide, with always rarer and more spectral revisitations of the public eye, the wraiths of Marie Corelli and Maurice Hewlett and Elinor Glyn and Richard Le Gallienne and Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe.

III

And in departing I would smile friendly toward those who understand the nature of this withdrawal; but to others I would say, as courteously as may be, that—well, that, at the request of friends, a considerable portion of my original manuscript has here been deleted.

In any event, the general public has now very tolerable authority for abandoning all talk about this Cabell's being a literary artist. This paper, to begin with, may be regarded as exculpatory evidence. Moreover, Hewlett and Le Gallienne were no great while ago quite respectable names, and even in their owners' auctorial decrepitude may still pass muster among, anyhow, the general public; whereas, Mr. Squire enjoys, everywhere that anybody has read as much as is humanly possible in the *Solomon Eagle* essays, a deservedly high repute for many very handsome expressions of the mediocre in terms of the academic. Such are the not unformidable trio that have emulated Goliath,

and come forth beautifully clad in brass to battle for the faith of Philistia. And I, for one, can feel no hesitancy in endorsing these gentlemen's protests that, by every standard illustrated in their recent writings, I have no claim whatever to be considered a literary artist; and I, for one, derive from their admonitory utterances a warning perhaps more salutary than intended.

For the moral which I personally deduce is that, in this world, wherein no fervor endures for a long while, and every clock-tick brings the infested tepid globe a little nearer to the moon's white nakedness and quiet, the wise will play while playing is permitted. The playthings will be words, because a man finds nowhere any lovelier toys. The wise will have their small, high-hearted hour of playing, with onlookers to applaud.

Then vigor abates, and therewith dwindles their adroitness at this gaming. The skill that was once their glory has become their derision; to Richard-Yea-and-Nay succeeds a Mainwaring, and gray Narcissus bleats angry pieties. At this season will the gamester who is truly wise—thus I console myself—give over his playing, sedately, without any corybantic buttings of a bald head or any gnashing of old teeth to affray his juniors who may, as yet, thrive at this game. His hour is over, but the end of their hour too approaches, not to be stayed. He will make this savory thought serve as a drug to envy, and as a liniment to his bruised vanity, and as a muffler to the thin-voiced spite of all outworn old women that inhabit Oblivion's seraglio. Wherein abide—but you already know my refrain.

Dusk

BY MARY COLES CARRINGTON.

The homing hills, broad-flanked and proud of crest,
Shaggy with forests, gather to the west;
The herdsman Sun departs, but leaves them safe
Within night's wide, encircling walls to rest.