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The AMERICAN SPECTATOR A LITERARY NEWSPAPER

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not built up by devotees of the midnight oil. Where women are concerned, the superfluousness of the Higher Learning is even more obvious. Young men, at least, can be bemused by the thought that intellect has made men immortal, but girls are only too well aware that the women who have inspired poetry, overthrown kings and empires, and made their names in history, were never distinguished

We're beholden to John that Shakespeare and Ben humors of men daily. In intimation of Aubrey's that Shakespeare in the act of

The AMERICAN SPECTATOR

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EDITORIAL

People who are young enough nowadays not to have participated in the horrors of the feminist movement are spared an acute realization of the stupidity of the intelligent woman. Owing to the ravages of education and of feminist progress in the years before the war we found ourselves confronted with countless samples of the species who were almost as, if not more, stupid than what often pass for intelligent men. This was the result of the shortsightedness which lay back of the theory of the equality of the sexes. The sexes, in the divine plan of nature, are not equal, not even in their stupidities, and a woman displaying masculine stupidity is as obscene a spectacle as a female pugilist in an encounter with Max Schmeling.

THREAT

by R. S. ALLEN

If the government of the United States is overthrown by violence at any future time the responsibility will belong to the Supreme Court of the United States. This remote, austere body is an ally of radicalism as literally as the fanatical dry has been the ally of the bootlegger. It is the stumbling block in the way of all attempts to make this government adaptable to a changing world and responsive to changing social conceptions; and an insuperable obstacle to peaceful progress toward a saner and more stable order of things.

During the past three years it has become obvious that sweeping economic changes must take place, if this country is to avoid the tumultuous upsets inevitable when part of the people become too rich and most of the people become too poor. Legislatures have been fumbling with the problem, not unintelligently, and even Congress has shown a willingness to do so. These bodies have been discussing economic planning, government con-

agony to which human bject, while satire appears raged observation of the ities of human character humor, on the contrary, f pain at all and seems to b of incongruities and pect would seem to say, "See t he is! He ought to be s Shakespeare and George appear to maintain the co how priceless he is! Pra touched!"

In risking this associati getful of Falstaff's basket My purpose is to su practised his ear upon bumpkins and tavern gos about "Doc Horne" and " reason. Neither Shakespe of these contacts what his are called "serious book-

STUDY IN SINCERITY

by *BRANCH CABELL*

You have forwarded me, my dear madam, an advance copy of your forthcoming volume of fiction, with the suggestion that, if I "like the book," your publishers would be glad to have me write a few lines concerning it, to appear on the dust jacket. You have thus put me to the unpleasant necessity of saying I do not like your book. Your latest book appears to me to resemble each one of its predecessors in being a tedious and a meagre and a valueless performance, about which no civilized being could say anything kindly except by lying outright.

Hardly any other exercise in the unveracious could much trouble my indurated conscience, for I find that I lie daily to preserve my quiet, my solvency, my social position, and my domestic peace. Yet I cannot—it is an odd thing—lie about books with a mind wholly at ease.

That your most recent book should be refined, dependable, and dull reading-matter, appears to me rather an affair of necessity; and whether this particular book be much more insulse and humdrum than is the average book acclaimed by our more serious-minded readers, I am not qualified to declare. I know only that for years each one of your books, madam, has revealed, to my casual inspection, the sincere and ambitious and painstaking exercise of third-rate endowments: and I decline to figure, even on a dust jacket, as an admirer of that against which my auctorial life has been a protest.

I make bold to differ with the most of those who review your books. I have read duly their admiring remarks upon your delicately chiseled style, your serene nobility, your unerring choice of the right word, and all that other bleated balderdash which proves how acceptable among us as a substitute for authentic art is your sedate hebetude. It puzzles me sometimes, I confess, to note our intense admiration for the merely inadequate: it troubles me thus to be bidden to a banquet of Lucullus when the entertainment is really modeled after a tea-party among the ladies of Cranford.

Yet I do not, I hope, grudge you your success as a purveyor of sane and harmless and mildly edifying fiction. None can deny your somewhat muzzy admiration of the homelier virtues. One admits the whole-hearted sincerity which transfers to the pages of your books all the more tediously tender features of actual existence. One can charitably imagine that even the too long preserved virginity, whose staleness appears to permeate all your later books like a small smell, is not in the least your fault, but remains chargeable to the delinquencies of quite a number of men. All these things I, at any rate, concede you with an equable mind: and only when the merits of your prose style are held up for our adulation does my blood boil. Here, to be sure, I am a fanatic: and it is an ebullition, even then, far less of rage against you, madam, than of despair

for my native land, which continues in this fashion to regard the third-rate with profound seriousness and respectful awe.

You must bear with me. I speak pettishly, no doubt: I have cause. You are to me an unfailing bother precisely because we both dote on the unmodish idea that writing is an art demanding in its execution almost as much constant painstaking as is needed by a cook in the kitchen or by a chauffeur in the driver's seat. I at least am so unimaginative, so uninspired by æsthetic fervors, as to believe that all words are in the dictionary, ready for anybody's taking, and that the best writer is simply he who extracts them with the greatest discretion and rearranges them most adroitly. That is why it bothers me, madam, to see all your patient labors result in volumes which I find wholly unreadable: it is an outcome which suggests my theories may be wrong, and no male can face any such suggestion calmly.

It seems to me, in brief, that your new book, and all your books in so far as I know them, are not for my reading. I would like to like them. Yet I most obstinately don't. I have tried my honest utmost to think otherwise. Time and again I have made a sortie into your writings, accompanied by hope and charity: faith, I admit, declines to be of our little party any longer. And always I fall back repulsed; always I find you invincibly dull.

Very blessed are the dull: they need not seek to inherit the earth; they already possess it. Very blessed are the dull in their peculiar felicity, that they cannot ever perceive their own dullness, nor ever be convinced of its existence. As well might a blind man be fancied to discover the sallowness of his own complexion. Thrice blessed are the dull in that they admire dullness with entire sincerity. Quadruply happy are the dull in that their numbers are strong and many.

Thus does it follow, madam, that the best-thought-of editors, and the best-thought-of reviewers, and the best-thought-of writers of every kind, must necessarily be dullards, without any of them ever suspecting it, for not out of policy and time-serving, and not, as heaven well knows, by taking thought, do they achieve preëminence, but solely by virtue of their innate large gifts for dullness. Such gifts, if a little cultivated through altruism and some earnestness of purpose, will enable the fatuous to admire one another with entire sincerity, and to be admired also, at a respectful remove, by the un-literary legions of book borrowers—who revere in their reading-matter, as in every other matter, dullness, with an entire sincerity.

I can for these reasons, my dear madam, think of no fit and kindly sentiments wherewith to adorn your dust jacket save only that epitaph, slightly altered, which Joe Gargery composed in "Great Expectations": "Whatsoever the failings on her part, Remember, reader, she were that good in her hart." This much I am willing to allow you: but only, be it understood, as an epitaph, in so far as I am concerned. Do not bother me any more.