

say, as I could not when I wrote this essay, that his sublimity has never been surpassed. There are passages in the "Oscar Wilde" more profound, more poignant, more passionate and more eloquent than in any other modern writer.

A year ago I should have ranked Wells and Kipling with Frank Harris in the matter of short stories. I should have put Arthur Morrison a length behind them. I should hardly include Conrad, for his are not short stories proper; nor are Alexander Harvey's exquisitely whimsical trifles. I know no other regular writers—outside the "growler" class, with a Pegasus only fit for the knacker, and a cabby who never wakes up till he thinks it is time for his tip. Bennett, Chesterton, Doyle—I forget any more of their meaningless names—have all written themselves down into this class.

On reading his stories again, I found Wells excellent in "The Time Machine" and "The Island of Dr. Moreau," written before he had tasted the whisky of Esteem doped with the knock-out drops of Profit; and these two books are not short stories. I was amazed to find that those which were technically so, are, with scarce one exception, the merest magazine stuff, slop poured on a plate—a sad mechanic exercise—like the men with those soggy flat round things in the window at Childs'.

The ideas are often good, Nature's wonders being always worth watching. But what of Nature's wonder that Wells should ever have fooled me into thinking him a stylist, even in the days when I blushed at the word "razor"? These stories are not stories of life at all. Wells never saw life; he was too busy trying to dovetail his teeth and his aitches with coronets and black silk stockings on real ladies, and to acquire the Grand Manner of the blasé but still naughty statesman with the blawsted career—and to adopt ad hoc the strangely naive plan of assiduously aping the Fabians.

He has a bag of tricks, the Absent-minded Professor, the Earnest Enquirer, the Ingenious Engineer, the Fussy Female, the Mild Male, the Bloke, the Moke, the Toque and the Joke. They all work on wires. There is not one character in the whole weary series of wax-and-whiskers.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, Wells without end, Amen!

Kipling, not quite so plastery, crumbled less completely. His stories—thanks to the sheer interest of the themes—are good enough, many of them. Sometimes there is a capital plot, once or twice a good sketch of a character, once at least, in "The Madness of Ortheris," a fine bit of psychology,

evidently from observation. But the vulgarity of his Snob-in-the-Smoke-Room pose, the fellow-that-knows-it-all-and-you-chaps-may-as-well-hear-it tone, is appalling. There are lands which accept the artistry of a goggle-eyed penny-patriot with a simian profile who grins and leers and nudges you with an elbow and tells you a near-dirty story with the air of having heard it an hour ago from his dear old pal the Archbishop. But after a year in Cefalù, I cannot stand it.

Frank Harris is never easy to read; he has not the glib way that suits the deck-chair and the long glass with the ice in it. But he stands to the short story where Balzac stands to the long. He is interested primarily in men as men; for him their adventures are mere clues to their characters. He is above the story-teller of even the Smollett type as Rembrandt is above Court Painters and daubers of battles. We do not ask a Master, "Who sat for this picture; what happened to him?" The face, as a face, is all in all!

Frank Harris would probably deny it with an oath; but he knows the ultimate secret of existence, that everything soever is supremely interesting and sublime on the sole sufficient ground that it is itself. Any attempt to bring it into relation with anything else is to insult and soil it.

"An English Saint" is for me the finest short story of its kind in English. It gives us the most pitiful phase of England infinitely intense. Its form is more austere than that of Butler's masterpiece; and the presentation is quite as adequate. Not one word is wasted. It is astonishing, moreover, considering the age of Frank Harris, that the spirit of the story, the intention of the irony, is as modern as that of Lytton Strachey in "Eminent Victorians." Frank Harris dwells in an eternity free of the fashions of temporal order.

The etching of Montes is superb; that of Rossetti is more real for being only a faint suggestion, the impression which his genius and personality made on a man whose shop he sometimes patronized, than if the narrator had been Mr. Know-All-And-Then-A-Bit, as a coarser artist might have tried to make him.

I must confess to a congenital incapacity to endure Epics. I could never enjoy Homer, Milton, Dante or Zola. Even Cervantes bores me, and the Viscomte de Bragelonne teases. I agree with Aristotle and Poe about the limits of enthusiasm. The vast compositions of the Renaissance fail to charm. I insist that Art shall be ultimate, simple and intense.