

**CRITICAL CONFESSIONS  
AND JOHN MARSHALL  
AND HIS TIMES**

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Critical confessions and John Marshall and his times by Neal Brown

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By NEAL BROWN

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A N D R E W L A N G

I N pessimistic mood, one feels that the world of letters has squandered most of its genius, and is traveling toward an intellectual poorhouse. The great poets have certainly departed. Stevenson has gone, and there are but two or three story-tellers left. Fiction has become short and choppy; a matter of fragments, without sustained flights. The few mountain peaks that are left are nodding. The fruits of letters seem over-ripe and ready to fall rotting to the ground. It is a transition time, and perhaps the soil is being fertilized by the rank growths that spring up, for something better to come.

We are seduced from healthy standards by *fin de siècle* tendencies; the colour of nature is gone, and we have green carnations and unsubstantial, unreal things. Men are made to seem like shadows walking. We are non-creative. We either imitate, or else we rebel against imitation, and the pendulum

swings as far the other way. The result is strange, uncouth, fancies in art and literature, and our romancists make monkeys of men, to borrow a phrase from the vernacular. The commercial autocrats of magazinedom, and certain of the hack writers of newspaperdom set the fashion. With the small arts of puffery they build up small reputations that die in a day. How often the announcement; "a genius is coming, watch for him, he is here,—he has written a great novel, a great poem, or what not." We are put on the *qui vive*, and by and bye when the poor little puffed-out product struts upon the stage we find that he belongs to the ephemera. These strains are common. We watch anxiously for the pool to move that we may be healed of these grotesque vagaries of mental disease. We gaze longingly up the road for a rescuer and see but wind-piled columns of choking dust.

We comfort ourselves a little with Kipling; and Besant and Black are still with us, but we sigh to be healed of Hardy's decadence, and of the tastelessness of *THE MARTIAN*—poor withered fruit of DuMaurier's dotage.

We cry out for something in place of this dry rot, this attenuated intellectuality; this

vain struggling after startling effects. Our sensibilities are mangled and scarified day by day by the rude contact of a crowd of weird, grotesque figures, who flit their fantastic way across the stage.

We are surrounded by writers of queer distorted verse, drunken with their own turgid, muddy, rhetoric; dancing fauns and satyrs holding revels over social uncleanness like crows over carrion; dreamers of meaningless visions, makers of verse full of incomprehensible gibberish. Are they of healthy human kind who beat time in this rout? Is that young woman who writes tigerish verses of a tigerish passion, all the Sappho we shall have? Must we call a plain case of erotic mania, poetic fervour? Is that jingler of little verselets, that journeyman carver of odd forms of speech, to be our Tennyson? Shall we force ourselves to see deathless harmony in a mere mush of words, simply because it is labeled poetry? Must we give JUDE THE OBSCURE and THE MARTIAN a place with VANITY FAIR and DAVID COPPERFIELD? We "have been nollod by holy bell to church, have sat at good men's feasts," and we cannot forget those feasts. If there is nothing else, give us some good stories