

# VARIATIONS

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Variations by James Huneker

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**JAMES HUNEKER**

# **VARIATIONS**



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*BY JAMES HUNEKER*

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*CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS*

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BY  
JAMES HUNEKER

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1921

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

MR. HUNEKER'S literary career was at its flood when ended by his sudden and unlooked for death. He was perhaps our only, certainly our chief, literary journalist, and his instructive, penetrating, and, above all, entertaining criticism in the field of what he liked to call the Seven Arts was almost always first seen in the periodical press, daily or weekly. Afterward it was sifted and the residue abridged or expanded, burnished or simplified, in its assimilation into appropriate permanent style and stuff. Needless to say it lost none of its brilliance in the process which was always minimized by having been largely forestalled, as it were, in the original composition. The result was not so much merely eminent as literally unique. His books have not only no rivals but no competitors. Alone among American belletristic writers he followed in the French journalistic-literary tradition, illustrated and rendered illustrious by the practice of a long and shining roll of *littérateurs*. Such a practice tends of itself to popularize its product by inevitably keeping the larger public more or less in mind and therefore eschewing professional pedantries. The element of personality acquires prominence as in conversation. Style itself becomes conversational. Huneker is as familiar in address as if he were not often crude in material. He establishes first of all, however imperceptibly, his relations with his reader. Whatever the effect, it is devoid of dulness, and accordingly the interest

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

of his writing is incontestable even when its value is indeterminate.

Composed of essays written since the publication of his last book — *Bedouins* — though of necessity lacking the advantage of his personal selection and supervision, *Variations* is a worthy companion of its shelf-full of predecessors in its possession of these qualities. Aptly named, it presents perhaps better than any of them a wide-reaching diversity of æsthetic material for the consideration, the illumination, and — pre-eminently — the entertainment of the cultivated. Perhaps, too, it shows a maturer treatment, a mellower temper without a whit less energy, and a greater opulence than ever of the author's stored acquisitions and spontaneous, even exhilarated, exposition of them. And here and there amid the wealth of literary and æsthetic miscellany which he displays and expounds one comes, with greater frequency than ever, upon memorable crystallizations of experience in the contemplation of these matters. Such truths, too, he exemplifies as well as formulates. No one ever, for instance, credited more completely his own maxim: "There is no disputing tastes — with the tasteless," or conformed more cordially to his own injunction: "Write only for the young. The old will not heed you, being weary of the pother of life and art." There was nothing, however, of which *he* was less weary, as this his last volume copiously attests, and the explanation, of course, is his unimpaired youthfulness of mind and spirit.

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