

NOTES AND REVIEWS

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Notes and reviews by Henry James & Pierre de Chaignon la Rose

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HENRY JAMES & PIERRE DE CHAIGNON LA ROSE

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By

Henry James

With a Preface by PIERRE DE CHAIGNON LA ROSE

A Series of Twenty-five Papers Hitherto Unpublished in Book Form



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Preface

THE youthful Henry James, a few months beyond the age of twenty-one, began his literary career as critic, in *The North American Review* of October, 1864, with an unsigned review of Nassau W. Senior's "Essays on Fiction." In the present volume the editor has collected all of James's printed writings during the first three calendar years of his apprenticeship (1864, 1865, and 1866), with the exception of six papers which have already appeared in "book form." Of these six, two are stories: "A Landscape Painter" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1866) and "A Day of Days" (*The Galaxy*, June 15, 1866). Both were reprinted by Henry James himself in his collection of tales called "Stories Revived" (1865). The other four are unsigned book-reviews and may be found in Mr. Le Roy Phillips's volume of "Views and Reviews" (1908). These are "Matthew Arnold's Essays" (from *The North American Review*, July, 1865), "Mr. Walt Whitman" (from *The Nation*, November 16, 1865), "The Limitations of Dickens" (from *The Nation*, December 21, 1865), and "The Novels of George Eliot" (from *The Atlantic Monthly*, October, 1866).

The re-publication of the twenty-five papers

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contained in this volume, all unsigned book-reviews from either *The North American Review* or *The Nation*, is an attempt, not at predatory "book-making" in the manner of the egregious Mr. Wise or Mr. Shorter for the sake of unrestrained "collectors," but at presenting to the many lovers of Henry James, in a worthy form, a series of his writings hitherto comparatively inaccessible which may fairly be considered to constitute his literary journal — his reading from day to day and his passing but considered critical reactions thereon.

To reprint all the forgotten and unsigned journalistic scraps of an eminent author, fleeting papers which he himself refrained from reordering and reissuing, is often to do his memory a cruel disservice. For many of the most eminent men of letters have been obliged, especially in youth, to stoop to "pot-boiling," and many under the shelter of anonymity have lapsed into the common frailty of haste and slovenliness. The average "gentleman's library" is freighted with vast, polyteuchal, "definitive" editions of popular great authors which, to a literary taste as sensitive, let us say, as James's, would seem very largely impressive monuments to national deforestation rather than to a discriminating national literacy. But in the case of Henry James, fortunately or otherwise, we shall, I feel, be spared a completely "definitive" edition. A few devout Jacobites, the editor included, will regret this; but the reason is

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not far to seek. James, despite his present posthumous eminence, was never a "popular" author; and even the most devout Jacobite must admit, albeit with serene tranquillity, that he was not a "great" one. This is not quite the place to enter upon a discussion of fundamentals. I may be permitted to waive the point and aver merely, to the common agreement, that his work was endowed with a distinction and a personal charm which, to ears attuned to his peculiar appeal, will always be unrivalled. He was decidedly what he himself would have called a "special case." Even his youthful journalistic work will at once strike his accustomed readers as redolent of his personal "note." It was not "pot-boiling," as he was never quite under the economic necessity which resorts to that; and this being so, it could not be, with his temperament, either hasty or slovenly, however impenetrably anonymous. One may acquit oneself, therefore, of any disservice to his fine memory in collecting his early papers to give them out to his friends and lovers. One may even go to the lengths he prescribed in the case of Geoffrey Aspern, if in so doing one, as it were, draws from an old cabinet, in this instance unlocked, a forgotten daguerreotype of the '60's, a portrait for which he knowingly sat and himself autographed — eager, fresh, and charming.

But before analysing the revealing young portrait which these papers present, it will be well to consider for a moment the general literary task

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with which they concern themselves — that of “book-reviewing.” Nowadays, unfortunately, in America at least, one must discriminate between the art of literary criticism and the trade of book-reviewing. Originally one and the same thing, to-day, thanks to a commercialized press and a generation of publishers who regard their operations chiefly as a species of speculative manufacturing, in the United States what was once the art of reviewing has sunk to a level of degradation where it either contents itself with the dullest of pedestrian comment or is indistinguishable from the publisher’s unenlightened paid advertisement. In general, it is so abysmally and notoriously beneath contempt that it is scarcely worth while to mention the fact. It is, however, worth while, I think, to point out that half a century ago the case was quite different, that reviewing was among us by no means contemptible; and that not the least promising among our anonymous critics was a youth of twenty-one who quickly assumed an easy and distinguished posture among his elders in *The North American Review*. In the beginning, Henry James’s critical performances were not, of course, “first-rate,” — his youth, if nothing else, would militate against that. I am willing, reluctantly, to admit that, to the end, he was not a “great” critic: his steady preoccupation with problems of technique rendered that ultimate philosophical eminence unattainable (a constant, tragic paradox in all art).