

**SOME
CONTEMPORARY
NOVELISTS (WOMEN)**

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Some contemporary novelists (women) by R. Brimley Johnson

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R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON

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CONTEMPORARY
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1896

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CONTEMPORARY
NOVELISTS
(WOMEN)

BY
R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON

"Think of the real things, the deep things, the lonely frightened things in our souls."

1879 22
22.12.00

LONDON
LEONARD PARSONS
PORTUGAL STREET



INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

THIS volume is neither a judgment, a comparison, nor a prophecy. I do not affirm that the writers treated represent completely the work of women in fiction to-day; I would not assert, dogmatically, that theirs is even the *best* contemporary work: I have no desire to anticipate the judgment of posterity.

But just now they all count. They are conspicuously of the moment: keen to seize, and eager to present, the manifold currents of thought, experience, and philosophy, that make up the big wave of mental activity through which we have been hurried by war and its consequences. Inheriting those now far-off pre-war emotions and ideals amidst which we were all living (in normal sequence from Victorian placidity); they have "found themselves" during the upheaval, and they offer us their interpretations of new Truth.

Free and vital, curious and analytic, these women have read the "writing on the wall."

It would be extraordinarily difficult to deduce from these authors how far the war has influenced the art of fiction: but there is no doubt some analogy between their work and certain facts which have been maintained, with varying confidence at different times, by partial, or impartial, observers.

However temporary or limited its extent, either in the army itself or at home, there is too much evidence to altogether neglect or deny, that wave of religious revival or awakening to faith which did pass over mankind. Emphatically not for all men or at all times, but no less certainly in most unexpected quarters, a new spirituality arose among us to influence thought and emotion.

This movement was no doubt reflected in that hostility towards materialism which is obvious in much current fiction, that passionate search for Truth and Reality which characterises our most definitely advanced novelists.

The sudden, and startling, advance in the position of women was, naturally, not so new to women writers as to men: because it was, after all, merely the speeding of what their minds had been concentrated upon in the immediate pre-war days. The more thought-

ful, at least, were not unprepared, because they had already given themselves to secure it; and that restless hysteria (of which superficial observers made so much) was only exhibited by those who before had been careless, indifferent, or prejudiced.

Women, of course, are no less than men, alive to the dangers of forced progress. They see that emancipation, suddenly acquired without effort, has produced in many a lack of heart and conscience, which makes youth hard, and is hurtful to middle-age. The new novelists, on the whole, show themselves rather surprisingly sympathetic to the parent, though only Miss Fulton (and once Mrs. Mordaunt) have used the particular problem as an occasion for generalisation.

Social changes, again, are rather assumed than dwelt upon, or made the subject of discussion; save that Miss Fulton, again, declaims, rather savagely, against the modern lack of morality. The indifference to class distinctions, and the decline of exclusiveness, so apparent to-day, is simply taken for granted; while our novelists are evidently quite aware that even now all differences (which may, or may not, mean superiority) are not wiped out by material readjustment, or the extension of opportunity. Such changes are not, moreover,