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OUR SHORT STORY WRITERS. By Blanche Colton Williams, Ph. D. Fourth volume in the American Writers' Series. New York: Hefner, Yard & Co. \$2.

MR. AND MRS. GENERAL READER are probably just as keenly interested in the private lives of the men and women who write their favorite stories as they are in the personal doings—and undoings—of Dolly Twinkletoes of the Gotham Girls and of the curly haired Apollo of the Perfect Pictures.

Their curiosity about the individuals who supply them with entertainment from the printed page instead of from stage and screen is given far less to feed upon, however. The differing methods of publicity and advertising employed by theatrical producers and publishers are primarily responsible for the fact that a great writer's private life often remains his own, while the world and his wife almost always share the stage star's intimate secrets. It is the convention for the producer to hire a press agent whose duty it is to get the star's name into the newspapers as often as the name of the play in which that star is appearing. That most of these press agents earn their salaries is evidenced by the fact that the brightest luminaries of the world of make-believe enjoy "no more privacy than a goldfish." Another factor contributing to the comparative obscurity of the author is the greater amount of space given by metropolitan newspapers to theatrical gossip. And few publications outside the largest cities publish book pages, while the newspapers of even the smallest towns have their weekly, or even daily, column of movie and theatrical chat.

In "Our Short Story Writers" Blanche Colton Williams turns a considerable flood of limelight upon the daily lives of a score of America's leading makers of fiction. Her book is primarily a collection of critiques of their work, but a portion of each chapter is given over to biographical facts about the subject of it. And in analyzing an author's output, she inevitably lifts the curtain of his workshop.

Many of the writers discussed by Miss Williams are as well known for their novels as for their short stories, in some cases better known as novelists. Foremost among these must be placed Edith Wharton, whose "The Age of Innocence" is among the finest literary offerings of the current season. Mrs. Wharton's artistic achievement is too widely recognized to lend interest to a repetition of Miss Williams's estimate of her literary worth, but the acclaim which her most recent novel has met is justification enough to repeat a few biographical facts about the distinguished author: Edith Newbold Jones was born in New York City fifty-nine years ago.

The world of her childhood was a smoothly gliding one socially. After studying under tutors at home and traveling rather widely, she was married, at the age of 23, to Edward Wharton of Boston. She began to publish fiction in Scribner's Magazine in the late nineties. Almost from the beginning of her career Henry James was her encouraging critic and warm personal friend. They met for the first time in 1905 while Mr. James was on his American tour in that year. In 1907 he visited Mr. and Mrs. Wharton in Paris, later accompanying them on a motor tour of France. "Mrs. Wharton's 'A Motor Flight Through France' (1908)," writes Miss Wil-



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iams, "is a testimony to her love for adventure, in a rapid car, with lingering moments at a favorite cathedral or the home of an admired writer—George Sand, for instance—and illustrates what Mr. James called her 'great heroic rushes and revolutions,' her dazzling, her incessant braveries of far excursionism."

In the discussion of the influence James had on Mrs. Wharton's work—which, by the way, is almost inevitable in any discussion of her, no matter how brief—it is interesting to note that, although her mentor advised her that her real field lay in depicting life in England, she wrote "Madame de Treymes," one

of her greatest accomplishments, almost immediately after receiving the letter which contained that advice. The present reviewer may be convicting himself of deepest ignorance, but he must confess that until reading "Our Short Story Writers" he never knew that it was Mrs. Wharton who translated Sudermann's "Es Lebe das Leben" into English under the title "The Joy of Life." Nor did he know that about a dozen years ago she published a book of verse entitled "Artemis to Acteon." He did, of course, share the general knowledge about Mrs. Wharton's superb work during the war and was familiar with all she has done to strengthen the ties between France and the United States, but he was surprised to learn that she is sufficiently interested in the controversial side of biology to have published a collection of short stories which reflect her attitude toward the subjects of evolution, scientific research and progress.

Three times in the course of her chapter on Mrs. Wharton Miss Williams refers to "an unhappy period in her life." Naturally enough, she does not enlarge upon this period, but she does start the reader speculating anew as to whether or not Mrs. Wharton may not have been the author of "In the Mountains," anonymously published last Winter. This book was written in the form of a diary of a woman who, during a period of great suffering, retired to a Swiss chalet to regain her faith in humanity. In the text was quoted a letter, intimate in tone, from Henry James to the author of the diary.

It is a considerable drop in the scale of literature from Mrs. Wharton to Robert W. Chambers; but in selecting the subjects of her papers

Miss Williams says she has been guided not necessarily by an author's intrinsic merit. Her aim has been to include representative writers. (In passing, it may be said that the author of "Our Short Story Writers" holds a much higher opinion of Mr. Chambers's work than does the average reviewer.)

How many of the myriad readers of Mr. Chambers's fifty-odd volumes of novels, short stories, nature books, poems and his one play ever knew that he began his career as an artist of the brush and gave every promise of succeeding in that line until the triumph of "The King in Yellow" determined literature as his field? How many ever knew that

at the age of 24 he had painted pictures acceptable to the Paris Salon? "There is a legend," says Miss Williams, "that after returning to America in 1893 he and Gibson [Charles Dana Gibson] both submitted sketches to Life and that his were taken but Gibson's returned." Gibson and Chambers were classmates at the Art Students' League in New York. From 1886 to 1893 Chambers was an art student at Julian's Academy. His story "Rue Barrée," which begins "One morning at Julian's," presents Kid McCoy "drunk as a lord." Of this study of intoxication Miss Williams says that it is "equaled only by Owen Wister's in 'Philosophy Four,' and is as indubitably drawn from life."

In addition to presenting Mr. Chambers as a man of the world, ac-

ret that Miss Williams neglects to explain how Mr. Hergesheimer managed to live between the day he "retired to that farmhouse" and the day, fourteen years later, when he first "found acceptance with the editors." Hergesheimer was born at Philadelphia some forty years ago. Like Chambers, he also studied art, attending the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

The long years through which Mr. Hergesheimer worked before winning recognition were the lot also of Fannie Hurst. Miss Hurst, who was born in St. Louis, Mo., in 1880, had, by 1913, collected a mountainous pile of rejection slips, thirty-five coming from one national weekly alone. Among these was one from The Saturday Evening Post, which accompanied the return of a masque in blank verse. One of her first sales



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quainted with States and Kingdoms, the author shows him to be a man of many and varied interests. She records his keen interest in butterflies, in armor and in falconry, and in the questions of metaphysics. She tells of a book he published in 1907 under the title of "The Tree of Heaven," a title more recently used by May Sinclair and of another book, written a quarter of a century ago, one of the stories in which commences "Toward the end of the year 1920. * * * The end of the war with Germany had left no visible scars upon the republic."

Any one ambitious to write will find many heartening pages among those that Miss Williams devotes to Joseph Hergesheimer. The author of "Java Head," of "Linda Condon" and of "The Three Black Pennys" wrote steadily for fourteen years before finding acceptance with the editors. On his grandfather's death Hergesheimer received a sum of money "which he immediately dissipated in Venice, where he had a private gondola and gondolier." When his money was exhausted he came home, for a while "manifested a desire for 'low company,'" hobnobbing particularly with a nighthawk cabman who had been a prize fighter, and with whom he went to remarkable balls, but finally tired of his mode of living. Then he retired to a farmhouse with a second-hand typewriter and addressed himself to "the difficulties of creative writing." Of his first novel Mr. Hergesheimer is quoted as saying that "a thousand copies were exempt from royalties and nearly nine hundred were sold." The aforementioned people with literary ambitions will re-

ceived \$3 from Reedy's Mirror. Today she is one of the best paid American short story writers, her check for a single story running to four figures. Four years after selling the vignette to Reedy's Mirror she was asked by an editor to write a personality sketch of the most interesting man she knew. She wrote an appreciation of William Marion Reedy.

Before she was 20 Miss Hurst came to New York, against the will of her family. When she obstinately refused to return, her allowance was cut off. But a woman acquaintance sent her an unsolicited loan of \$300, and her relenting mother secretly sent her \$200 more. When these funds ran out, she became an actress at a salary of \$20 a week, appearing in Leo Ditrichstein's "The Concert." Between the first and fourth acts, which were the only two in which she appeared to speak her twenty words, she wrote a short story for which Smith's Magazine paid her \$30. During the next six months she sold nothing; but she managed to keep going by working as a salesgirl in a New York department store, as a waitress in a Childs restaurant, as a worker in a Polish sweatshop and in half a dozen other places.

Then at last came the accolade of a great editor who told her, "Fannie Hurst, you can write." From that moment on, all obstacles seemed to melt magically away. Soon she was getting \$300 a story, and before long even this "big money" began to look small to her. What her income

(Continued on Page 21)

America's Short Story Writers

(Continued from Page 2)

is now is food for pleasant speculation: nearly a hundred of her stories are being filmed, and only the income tax people know what her annual royalties total. New York has changed from her battleground to her playground—and she's still gaining momentum both from the viewpoint of popularity and from that of artistic development.

Shortly after the publication of her first book, Fannie Hurst was married, at Lakewood, to Jacques S. Danielson, pianist and composer. For five years the couple succeeded in keeping their marriage a secret from all but the few intimate friends to whom they chose to reveal it. When they did finally decide upon a public announcement, the newspapers "played up" the story to such an extent that every reader of *The New York Times* is doubtless familiar with it.

Edna Ferber is another of the authors treated of in "Our Short Story Writers" whose road to recognition has been anything but easy. And even now that she has indubitably "arrived" to stay, this champion of the Carlylean philosophy of Work—with a capital W—still sticks to her last, or, rather, her typewriter, *three hundred and fifty mornings* a year. Work has been her joy ever since she was a child out in Appleton, Wis., the town to which her family moved soon after she was born in Kalamazoo, Mich. After finishing high school in Appleton, Miss Ferber became a reporter on *The Daily Crescent*, in that city. During the next six years she worked on various newspapers, both in the country and in cities. At one time she corresponded for two Milwaukee papers and, later, for *The Chicago Tribune*. Before she was 24 she finished her first novel, "Dawn O'Hara." After its publication she found a ready market for her short stories. The script of this story, which is to some extent autobiographical, Miss Ferber threw into the scrap basket because she was dissatisfied with its literary

quality. From that ignominious end her mother rescued it, for which she is hereby tendered the thanks of the reviewer, who remembers reading it with great pleasure.

Since success has come her way, Miss Ferber has gratified her love of travel, her stories testifying to their author's familiarity with places as far apart as Rome and Buenos Aires. And we recall having seen Sunday supplement pictures of her, both in the Rocky Mountains and on the porch of a house in Hawaii.

The obscurity in which a distinguished author's life may remain is well illustrated by the case of James Branch Cabell. We have been so eager to know something about the personal affairs of the author of "Jurgen" that we opened Miss Williams's chapter on this master of beautiful prose with high hopes that our curiosity might be partially assuaged. Alas, the gleanings of biographical data are meagre in this case. True, we learn that Mr. Cabell is 42 years old, that Richmond, Va., is his birthplace; that after being graduated from William and Mary College he worked on *The Richmond Times*, *The Richmond News* and *The New York Herald*; that he has traveled in America, France and England; that he was married in 1913 and that he has lived the greater part of the time since then at Dumbarton Grange, Dumbarton, Va. But these are bare, unsatisfying scraps of fact. We can't help wishing that Miss Williams had taken the space used in announcing that he is historian of the Virginia Society of Colonial Wars and of the Virginia Sons of the American Revolution to tell her readers about one assignment that he "covered" for *The Herald*, to give us some hint of how he has filled his days since he settled down at Dumbarton Grange, eight years ago, or to let us know what he did while traveling in France. Here is one of the greatest of America's literary artists, and Mr. and Mrs. General Reader must apparently be content with the mere chronological skeleton of his life.