

ligion *per se* that Mr. Eliot is at his best. The failure of the so-called Humanists to get rid of it plainly delights him, as his exposure of that failure must delight the more malicious sort of reader. The moment they begin to lay down their cock-sure rules as to what is virtuous and what is not, they find themselves, willy nilly, toying with a concept of the will of God, and the moment they admit that concept to their exhortations and objurgations "then some doctrine of Grace must be admitted too." The rest is a primrose path, and at the end lies a state church—maybe not the political Methodism which now afflicts the United States, but nevertheless a church. Some of the Humanists peer longingly through the area windows of Rome; others, like Mr. Eliot himself, succumb to the imperial pomps of the Anglican communion; yet others, such as Dr. Millikan, bring all their compromises to a head by embracing the arch-compromise of Unitarianism. As for Professor Babbitt, "his Humanism is, . . . to my mind, alarmingly like the very Liberal Protestant theology of the Nineteenth Century; it is, in fact, a product—a by-product—of Protestant theology in its last agonies." I can imagine no definition of the movement which would define it more precisely.

The Ambrose Bierce Mystery

LIFE OF AMBROSE BIERCE, by Walter Neale. \$5.
9¼ x 5⅞; 489 pp. New York: *Walter Neale*.

MR. NEALE, who was Bierce's publisher during his last years and brought out his *Collected Works*, first met him in Washington in 1901, and was in constant association with him until his mysterious disappearance in 1913. The common story is that Bierce, who was then seventy-one years old, made his way to Mexico, joined Villa's rebel army, and was presently done to death, either fighting for Villa or at his hands. This story is supported by the testimony of various alleged eye-witnesses and by a mass of evidence at second-hand, but its absurdities are manifest, and Mr. Neale

exposes them mercilessly. Is it reasonable to believe that a man of seventy-one, racked by asthma, should have been able to make his way to Villa's army in the field? And is it any more reasonable to believe that a man who was the perfect model of a military grandee, and viewed the ragged Mexican rebels with contempt and abomination, should have sought to join them? Nay, the Mexican romance is only too plainly of nonsense all compact. Even in Los Angeles, where everybody has seen angels and heard the tramp of the Twelve Apostles, no one believes it. The theory there, doubtless bred of the fact that Bierce's daughter lives in the town, is that the old man died in a hospital somewhere nearby—some say of his asthma and some say of simple senility. But Mr. Neale has a better theory, and he presents it with great plausibility.

It is that Bierce committed suicide. In the Summer of 1912, rather more than a year before he disappeared, he took a trip into the West and visited both the Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. He came back full of enthusiasm for the canyon, and hinted broadly to Neale that it would be a magnificent place to die. More, he hinted broadly that his own course was almost run, and that he thought it would be cleaner and decenter to remove himself anon, instead of waiting for a messy death in bed. He had an automatic pistol ready; he defended suicide publicly; he believed, and often said, that seventy years was long enough to live. What could be more likely than that he finally made good his talk? A dozen corroborative circumstances support the notion. He was at great pains to put his affairs in order before he left for the West. He transferred all his copyrights to a woman with whom he had been living for years, and to whom, according to Mr. Neale, it is possible that he was secretly married. He formally presented \$500 to a little girl, the daughter of a friend. He made a tour of the battlefields whereon he had fought in the Civil War. And then he headed for the Grand Canyon,

travelling by way of New Orleans, Galveston, San Antonio and Laredo. He also planned to stop, he let it be known, at Eagle Pass and El Paso. After that, silence. Did he plunge into Mexico, as the current fairy-tale hath it, and make his way to Villa's camp across a thousand miles of mountain and desert—him an elderly asthmatic, and a stranger to the back of a horse for thirty years? Or did he proceed to the Grand Canyon and blow out his brains, as Mr. Neale believes? It seems to me that the Neale theory is overwhelmingly more rational than the other.

I wish I could add that the rest of the Neale book is as sound as the chapter on Bierce's exit from this world, but the plain fact is that large parts of it are very shaky, and that not a few portions reek with unconscious humor. The author starts off with a long and irrelevant treatise on his own genealogy, showing that he is on the one hand "of the seventh generation from Isaac Smith I" and on the other hand a descendant of "Neale Vicount (*sic*) of Coutances, son of Roger, who in 996 defeated Ethelred (the Unready) at sea when the latter, flushed with his exploits in Cumberland, endeavored to invade the shores of Brittany in opposing Robert of Normandy, father of Duke William." All this is astonishing enough, but what has it to do with Bierce, who was the offspring of simple Ohio peasants? Nor is Mr. Neale happy when he essays to pronounce critical judgments. Here, for example, is his main thesis, solemnly announced on page 28:

He [Bierce] is the father of critical American literature. He put forward American literature by centuries.

This is surely excessive. Bierce's critical judgments, in point of fact, were often silly, as when he put Longfellow above Whitman, and not infrequently they were strongly colored by personal considerations, as when he vastly over-praised George Sterling's poem, "The Wine of Wizardry." He was too little read to be a sound critic of letters, and he lacked the capacity to separate the artist from the

man. Even his treatise on the art of writing, "Write it Right," is full of puerilities, for it never seems to have occurred to him that language, like literature, is a living thing, and not a mere set of rules. Writing of the trade he practiced all his life, he wrote like a somewhat saucy schoolma'm, and when another schoolma'm lifted his stuff the theft went almost undetected. His own style was extraordinarily tight and unresilient, and his fear of rhetoric often took all the life out of his ideas. His stories, despite their melodramatic effectiveness, begin to seem old-fashioned; they belong to the era before the short story ceased to be a formal intellectual exercise and became a transcript of life. The people in them simply do not live and breathe: Ring Lardner, whose manner Bierce would have detested, has done a hundred times better in that direction. They are probably read today, not as literature, but as shockers. Their appalling gruesomeness—a shining mark of Bierce himself—is what keeps them in print. Some of them deserve a better kind of immortality.

If Bierce is remembered, it will probably be for his epigrams, especially those in prose. They include some of the noblest specimens ever put into English. The wit in them is extraordinarily pungent, impudent and devastating, and in form they are helped rather than damaged by the author's highly artificial and self-conscious style. I suspect that these epigrams will be relished and quarried long after such transparent stories as "A Horseman in the Sky" and "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" descend into the schoolbooks. Certainly they will long outlast the satirical bludgeonings of nobodies that Bierce himself was so proud of. His social criticism, like his literary criticism, was often amusing but seldom profound. It had, however, the virtue of being novel in its day, and so it left its mark. Bierce was the first American to lay about him with complete gusto, charging and battering the frauds who ranged the country. The timorousness of Mark Twain was not in him; no head was

lofty enough to escape his furious thwack. Such Berserk men have been rare in our history; the normal Americano, even when he runs amuck, shows a considerable discretion. But there was no more discretion in Bierce that you will find in a runaway locomotive. Had he been a more cautious man, the professors of literature would be politer to him today.

The Fruits of Emancipation

UNDERSTANDING WOMEN, by K. A. Wieth-Knudsen. \$3. 8 x 5 $\frac{3}{8}$; 324 pp. New York: *Elliot Holt*.

WOMEN AND SOCIETY, by Meyrick Booth. 8s.6d. 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{8}$; 256 pp. London: *George Allen & Unwin*.

THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO MARRIAGE AND CELIBACY, by Juanita Tanner. \$3.50. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$; 312 pp. Indianapolis: *The Bobbs-Merrill Company*.

WHY WE ARE MEN AND WOMEN, by A. L. Benedict. \$2.50. 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{8}$; 270 pp. New York: *Allen Ross & Company*.

Two of these authors, Dr. Booth and Dr. Wieth-Knudsen, devote themselves to proving that the triumph of feminism in the Western World has brought little of solid value to the emancipated gals, and next to nothing to the rest of us. The proof is easy—almost as easy, indeed, as proving that twice two is four, or that a Prohibition agent is a scoundrel. Nevertheless, it needed to be set forth formally, for only too many persons, including a number of gifted publicists, continue to overlook it. They are still drunk upon the dreams of the long and melodramatic campaign for the suffrage. Human-like, they unconsciously assume that what was then promised has come to pass, in substance if not in totality. The truth, of course, runs in the opposite direction. The dear creatures have accomplished none of the things that they hoped for. They have not purified politics, they have not achieved any liberty that they did not have before, they have not reformed any social institution of the slightest importance, and they have not increased their own happiness. My belief is, indeed, that women in general are decidedly less happy than they were before they broke their

chains, if only because they are less secure. In the old days they were swathed in protection: some man had to die fighting before a woman could be seriously menaced. But now they face the slings and arrows of fate, so to speak, in the altogether, and multitudes of them begin to realize how sharp those weapons may be. More women are self-supporting and independent than ever before, and more women, I suspect, wish they were dead.

Dr. Booth, who is a psychologist and a highly intelligent man, gives most of his space to discussing the condition of affairs in his own country, England. There the emancipation of the dear creatures began early and has gone to great lengths. They roar in politics and practically all of the trades and professions are open to them. They have every substantial right that men have, and a lot more besides. But to what end? Are they contented, serene, secure, happy? It must be plain enough that they are not. Increasing multitudes of them lead drab, lonely and forlorn lives, unwed, childless, unregarded, and barely able to make their livings. They are free only in the sense that a man wandering alone in the Sahara is free; in every other sense they are the slaves of their new liberties. Among the lower classes little more than half of them have any hope of getting husbands and homes of their own; among the educated minority, not more than a third. The whole race of Englishwomen, once so rosy and joyous, becomes a race of neurotic drudges, preyed upon by mountebanks both male and female.

It is commonly believed that the marriage-rate has declined in England because there is an excess of females in the population, due to the late war and the emigration of men to the colonies, and various reformers propose that shiploads of superfluous girls be sent after the men. But Dr. Booth shows that this excess is largely imaginary; under the age of twenty-five it scarcely exists. The trouble is that most girls under twenty-five, the time of their maximum attractiveness, go to work in-