

Everlasting Yea. He took from Schopenhauer what he needed, and left the old hermit his ill-nature. It was Schopenhauer's Absolute that appealed to Marks, and the philosopher found in the English Jew his ideal—a contemplative mind freed from the servitude of the "Will".

One of the curious men who frequented the studio of Marks was Simeon Solomon. A chapter is given over to the life of this unfortunate poet and painter. Both he and his remarkable sister Rebecca "went the pace". Rebecca was a painter of some ability and exhibited about forty works at the Royal Academy. High-spirited, with the soul of a gipsy, she preferred Omar Khayyam to Spinoza, lived her life to the lees of the cup, and had, no doubt, engraved over her tomb, *N'importe!*

Marks and his friends were frequently engaged in the task of fishing Simeon out of jail, the gutter, or the slums. This rare being, who was the close friend of Pater, who had been hailed by Swinburne and Lord Houghton, was found unconscious near Holborn after a spree and died in an infirmary. He loved thieves, sold matches like Francis Thompson in the streets of London, and preached the Talmud while he was drunk. He lies with Verlaine and Poe and Thompson. Some day, as Dr. Williamson says, his tragedy will get between covers, with his pictures, his poems, and his prose. Irony—thy name is genius!

The world never tires of reading about this famous group of men, who kept London in an uproar and made night hideous—with Swinburne's barrage of oaths directed at "cabbies" mostly. Over them all presides the calm mind of Spinoza-Marks, contemplative hedonist and a "regular feller".

Murray Marks and His Friends. By G. C. Williamson. John Lane Co.

## LIFE AND TIMES OF GRANT OVERTON

*By Harry Esty Dounce*

HOW to go about reviewing any book by Grant M. Overton on authors, would be more than I should know. I could never do it sympathetically, because I like so few of his ideas on this subject; neither could I do it unsympathetically, since he is a man whose friendship makes that impossible; and to review anything neutrally is a crime.

Grant M. thinks there must be something big and vital and momentous in an author of the Christian name of Harold, because Harold keeps making millions of readers feel deeply. Grant M. holds (like a pup to a root!) that a well-known woman novelist with a touch of nature-study needn't mind what critics write, because she has thousands of testimonials from people whose whole lives have been altered upon their taking the very first bottle of her works. Grant will even champion Pollyanna—without the hint of a blush on his large, pallid, intently earnest countenance.

Knowing that he could have no base motive, I used to assume he was joshing with method in it—trying to make people jump, and to get them reading his Sunday book section. I have since sadly concluded that he does believe these things. He has filled a whole box car with hobbies, and when he trots one out and mounts it (the latest is the contention that an author must auth to make money or else go wrong and fail), he cannot produce a paragraph which doesn't delight me with its spontaneous Overtonian cleverness—and outrage me into a dignity past all exasperation. For it sagely proounds that black is white, or else that white is white. He likes trying his

hand at the paradox game, and has a pretty flair for it, the trouble being that his paradoxes either invert the fractions and leave them topsy-turvy, thus doing a halfway job, or simply cancel out to zero.

All of which means that I rarely agree with Grant M. and his book, "Why Authors Go Wrong". Perhaps the safest plan will be to review Grant M. himself.

A newspaper commonly devotes a good deal of space to the new books. As a rule, they are lumped off and dealt with once a week. The usual thing, even on the important and prosperous daily papers of great cities, is to hire a frustrated old gentleman with a college education, and require him, single-handed, to read perhaps two thousand books a year, and to discuss all that seem to him to merit it. The result is dead wood—dead wood-pulp if you like—interesting to nobody but the advertising publishers, and of only a perfunctory interest even there.

The "Sun", New York, was in better case than most. It enjoyed a tradition of genuine authority in literary matters. Within the last two years, the powers on the "Sun" decided to make even more of that asset, and they cast about for a staff man to create a Sunday book supplement that should be a thing of life.

Their choice must have been inspired. His office associates knew that Grant M. had great capacity for work and much original ability; without the latter, he would not have been "writing brevier" for the "Sun's" editorial page. But I, for one, should have doubted that Grant M. knew his own qualifications. He seemed a gentle, dreamy person—good upholstery for a quiet corner, out of which he would move with diffidence now and then to

do brilliant work. "Diffidence" is not quite fair, but he was reclusive and unobtrusive. Also, the task now put up to him might have daunted the boldest spirit in the shop. Bricks without straw, in comparison, might have seemed Montessori work for defective infants.

It turned out, however, that this task was Grant M.'s meat. Fed meat, he developed the arbitrary independence of a Napoleon, the conviction of a Calvin masked by some of the easy cleverness of a Chesterton, the capacity for labor of a caterpillar tractor, the copious versatility of a Briareus, the iconoclasm of a Shaw—and (if you leave it to me) a certain amount of sheer wrongheadedness about books and authors and such. But that last did his new occupation no material harm. For weeks he virtually wrote his "twelve-page tabloid" all himself, and almost from the start he had wide-awake readers aplenty. Half of them must have grinned at him now and then, as I do myself—but all read him, as I do myself, because they could not help it.

More recently he has gathered a reviewing staff, and incidentally has induced (without much trouble) quite a coterie of distinguished authors to be occasional contributors, as well as some amusing intransigents who have not yet arrived. It is well that he has, since otherwise the dynamo must have broken down sooner or later.

His own editorials, batted out over the standard keyboard as he could make the time, have been diverting enough for collection in two volumes; of these "Why Authors Go Wrong", the excuse for these disrespects to him, is the second. Put together to form essays, they dovetail so well that I suspect him of having written them with book publication in mind. After

all, his wildest perversities boil down to the obvious. Like Swift, he can write well about a broomstick. I wish he wrote oftener about rods that blossom, but his broomstick impromptus are fun to reread. All he means in commanding authors to write for money or go to pot is, that artistic conscience and performance really are not incompatible with a knowledge of money's value. (As if anyone but a cracked near-genius or an art-struck gosling had ever supposed they were!) His common sense about reviewers who give themselves the airs of critics is uncommonly well put forward; he would rather call us "book reporters", and I for one would infinitely rather be so called. He can now talk publishers' shop as fluently and incisively as his own shop, and proves it in the essay called "What Every Publisher Knows". Personally, I would rather hear from a literary editor on the things many publishers don't know, and should—but that is a matter of taste.

As for the man behind the supplement, he looks like the waxing half-moon with a golden ring; murmurs all his conversation; takes a literary interest in gold and a Myopia golfer's interest in letters; talks, breathes, eats, and dreams his work; and writes picaresque yarns in vacations when he ought to be resting up.

Why Authors Go Wrong. Grant M. Overton. Moffat, Yard and Co.

## MR. ELLSWORTH'S AGE OF GOLD

*By William Lyon Phelps*

**T**HREE hundred pages of brilliant book-talk by a real bookman. Is it by reading thousands of rejected manuscripts that Mr. Ellsworth has become so thorough a master of the

divine art of omitting? Has the melancholy monotony of failure in others shown him one sure road to success? If so, we have to thank an army of writers whose names will never be known. For it would have been so easy to spoil this book. Most authors are like fond parents, and think that others must feel the same interest in their offspring as that felt at home. Out of the bales of material at Mr. Ellsworth's disposal, his all but infallible choice in selection is the most impressive thing after the last page of this work is turned. There is not one dull or one superfluous paragraph; and in the long list of humorous anecdotes, we find only two shop-worn after-dinner stories.

Mr. Ellsworth is in the real tradition. He is the old-fashioned publisher, and not the commercial manufacturer of books. With him the production of books is an art—an art used toward beneficent world-education—and he is worthy of the company he keeps. During page after page of this autobiography, we are conscious of a certain responsibility and a certain idealism, as though our author felt that he was a trustee for the public. If one needed it, one would feel an increased respect and regard for the whole race of publishers, even as our author's esteem for Mr. Gilder grew stronger with growing intimacy.

American authors come to life again—not as authors, but as men and women. One gets a vivid portrait of them all, between the two extremes represented by Lydia Sigourney and Mark Twain. Bret Harte, Walt Whitman, Edward Eggleston, Jack London, and many others who are gone, return to us again, while their living successors and contemporaries are by no means neglected. One good anecdote