

THE LIVING AGE

GOLDFISH

BY HAROLD MONRO

[Real Property]

THEY are the angels of that watery world,
 All innocent, they no more than aspire
 To move themselves about on golden fins.
 Or they can fill their paradise with fire
 By darting suddenly from end to end.

Their eyes stare out from far away behind,
 And cannot piece the barrier of mind.
 In the same house are they and we;
 Yet well might be
 Divided by a whole eternity.

When twilight moves across the evening gloom
 And air becomes like water, you can feel
 Their movements growing larger in the gloom,
 And merging with the room, and you are brought
 Back where they live, the other side of thought.

THE EREMITE ON HIMALAY

BY W. R. C.

[The New Witness]

THE mountains lean all round me, naked, lonely,
 With crystal tops embosoming mild skies,
 This turquoise avalanche of streaming dawn;
 My lodge upon the ledge of the precipice
 Trembles with sun-burst, as, when fire is brought,
 First twigs begin to sparkle and blaze and hiss.
 Down there beneath me stumbles the ravine,
 Aboil with smoking waters, giant palms
 O'erarching it with gross arcades of shade;
 And there the scarlet trumpet-blossoms creep,
 With snakes as green as emerald crawling round them;
 And there the ebony leopards lurk, and there
 Scream wild fantastic birds. — Life of the jungle,
 Blessèd be all your energies this day;
 I go not down to you. — For here is Silence,
 A holy lady, albeit smiles at times
 Caress her ivory cheeks, as winds that pass,
 And leave a silken ripple in standing water;
 And here with little silver and golden feet,
 Sounding with subtle bells that chime and pass,
 And weave an intertwining melody,
 Comes Joy, leading at noon the calm-eyed Goddess
 Herself, clad in impurpurate glorious raiment,
 Even Love, the nursing mother of the world.

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

MASTERPIECES THEN AND NOW

A FEW weeks ago one of those erudite but anonymous gentlemen who write leading articles of terrifying profundity for the *Times Literary Supplement* decided that it was time to leave Aristotle temporarily in peace and to cast a critical eye — of appropriate severity — upon the degenerate century in which we (and he) live and write and read our books. The result of this critical eyeing of the last twenty-three years was a wail of dismay — which, after all, is quite in the accustomed order of things among critics. The learned gentleman reiterated an opinion first given literary form some centuries ago by a distinguished Homeric chieftain, who at the time was already whitening about the brow and inclined even then to look with scant sympathy on the scandalous goings-on of Achilles, Chryseis, and the rest of the wild young people by the banks of the reedy Scamander.

Nestor, to be sure, was not a literary critic. He was merely a king. But, allowing for that trivial difference in despotic degrees, the opinions of the *Literary Supplement's* contributor and the sometime since defunct chieftain of sandy Pylos are in singular accord. Two literary critics would naturally have difficulty in agreeing with each other, but a critic and a king, having so many monarchical tastes and habits in common, find agreement the easiest thing in the world.

Nestor's opinion, expressed in Homeric Greek (an outlandish language of which some people still persist in thinking highly) was to the general effect that men in his degenerate days were n't what they used to be: —

Such men

I never saw, nor shall I see again.

And these are some of the opinions of the *Literary Supplement's* critic — expressed, it will be observed, in the strange dialect peculiar to literary critics: Ours is 'a barren and exhausted age.' 'We must look back with envy to the past.' 'The writer of the present day must renounce his hope of making that complete statement which we call a masterpiece. He must be content to be a taker of notes.' We moderns suffer from 'a desiccation of the living tissues of literature into a network of little bones. Nowhere shall we find the downright vigor of Dryden, or Keats with his fine and natural bearing, or Flaubert and his fanaticism, or Coleridge above all.'

Modern scribblers, in short, are a bad lot in a bad way, and more than likely to come to bad ends — which is a fair summary of what the *Quarterly Review* said about Keats. It will be observed that Nestor, being a mere king and not a critic, and living, moreover, in an age that wrote epics but lacked typewriters, adopted a conciseness of statement that would be scorned by a self-respecting modern critic — and all critics, as any author knows, always respect themselves, however difficult they may find it to respect their contemporaries.

Having let drive these broadsides — bang, bang, bang! — into the presumably dismayed midst of literary London, the critic rested from his labors and was well content. Not so, however, the literary gentlemen of the still youthful twentieth century, most of whom are still alive and — as is the wont of