

WE AND OUR NEIGHBORS

Postmaster Hesing of Chicago has adopted Postmaster Harley's plan of stamping the weather reports on the letters. The papers of the country refer to Postmaster Hesing as the originator of a very clever idea—such is justice. Mr. Harley can sympathize with Shakspeare, bullied out of his own place by Bacon. The former has the advantage of Shakspeare in being alive, also in possessing strategical powers of unusual adaptability to the situation. If the people who read the newspapers throw them aside with the idea that Mr. Hesing of Chicago first applied weather reports to the outside of envelopes it will be because Mr. Harley cares not for fame. The idea that is slowly spreading all over the United States is Mr. Harley's own, and altho' the affection of the few is better than the gaping admiration of the many, this is a case where "The Postmaster of Lincoln" can confer honor upon almost—his—native place by intercepting Postmaster Hesing's undeserved reputation for originality.

Senator Cullom advocates stirring some flavoring extract into the gum on the stamp that, like humanity, must be licked before it is of any service. The stamp as it is today is smoothed over on the envelope side by a sickly, eggy paste that cannot be as bad as it tastes or we would all have the plague. If the flavored stamp motion or bill is approved and stamps taste of checkerberry, lemon, orange, or pineapple the typewriter will no longer need to chew tutti-frutti all the time to get rid of the taste of her employer's correspondence. The association of ideas caused by flavors and odors is subtle and elusive. In the good time a coming when the lover seals his letter and lays the stamp on his lips he will see himself and his sweetheart wandering in orange groves or lime avenues and he will conclude that he has a tropical, poetic imagination. When "he gets down to the store" he will measure off calico as though it were feet in the ode to the eyes, lips and hair of his mistress that he is composing. Nobody knows what flights the most sodden imagination is capable of when influenced by the mysterious force of association of ideas. A dry goods clerk, whose only aspiration is to be a merchant prince can do a sonnet without half trying—under certain conditions. The merits of the man who makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before have perhaps been too exclusively celebrated. That man who attaches a syphon to the unused poetry around us so that it is absorbed into the systems of everyday people deserves the gratitude of the whole people. Bread and frequently butter are within everybody's reach. Poetry must have assistance to get over the walls that money—love has intrenched us in. Of course the system must be in the right condition to receive the suggestion. Typhoid fever germs are innocuous when the system is active. Senator Cullom ought to have a reward bestowed on literary merit. Is there anything except a college degree or a wreath of bay for him? Neither are quite satisfying rewards. The one suggests political pull, the other, soup.

The enthusiasm, unrestrained, that the English are showing to Stephen Crane's "Red Badge of Courage" is explained by General A. C. McClurg in the current issue of "The Dial." He calls it "The Red Badge of Hysteria." THE COURIER'S opinion of the book has been reiterated. It is gratifying, at last to find a gallant soldier taking the same ground, albeit with more strength and elegance

Editor of the Dial: Must we come to

judge of books only by what the newspapers have said of them, and must we abandon all the old standards of criticism? Can a book and an author, utterly without merit, be puffed into success by entirely undeserved praise, even if that praise come from English periodicals?

One must ask these questions after he has been seduced into reading a book recently reprinted in this country entitled "The Red Badge of Courage, an Episode of the American Civil War." The chorus of praise in the English papers has been very extravagant, but it is noticeable that so far, at least, the American papers have said very little about the merits or demerits of the book itself. They simply allude to the noise made over it abroad, and therefore treat its author as a coming factor in our literature. Even the Dial's very acute and usually very discerning critic of contemporary fiction (Mr. Payne) treats the book and the author (in your issue of Feb. 1) in very much this way—that is, as a book and an author to be reckoned with, not because of any good which he himself finds in them, but because they have been so much talked about.

The book has been very recently reprinted in America, and would seem to be an American book, on an American theme, and by an American author, yet originally issued in England. If it is really an American production one must suppose it to have been promptly and properly rejected by any American publishers to whom it may have been submitted, and afterward more naturally taken up by an English publisher.

It is only too well known that English writers have had a very low opinion of American soldiers and have always, as a rule, assumed to ridicule them.

We all know with what bitterness and spitefulness the Saturday Review always treats Americans; and with what special vindictiveness it reviews any book upon our late struggle written from the northern standpoint. And so it is with all British periodicals and all British writers. They are so puffed up with vain glory over their own soldiers who seldom meet men of their own strength, but are used in every part of the world for attacking and butchering defenseless savages, who happen to possess some property that Englishmen covet, that they cannot believe that there can be among any people well-disciplined soldiers as gallant and courteous as their own.

Under such circumstances we cannot doubt that "The Red Badge of Courage" would be just such a book as the English would grow enthusiastic over, and we cannot wonder that the redoubtable Saturday Review greeted it with the highest encomiums, and declared it the actual experiences of a veteran of our war, when it was really the vain imaginings of a young man born long since that war, a piece of intended realism based entirely on unreality. The book is a vicious satire upon American soldiers and American armies. The hero of the book (if such he can be called—"the youth" the author styles him) is an ignorant and stupid country lad, who, without a spark of patriotic feeling or even of soldierly ambition, has enlisted in the army from no definite motive that the reader can discover, unless it be because other boys are doing so; and the whole book, in which there is absolutely no story, is occupied with giving what are supposed to be his emotions and his actions in the first two days of battle. His poor weak intellect, if indeed he has any, seems to be at once and entirely overthrown by the din and movement of the field, and he acts throughout like a madman. Under the influence of mere excitement, for he does not appear to

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