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Albert Edwards's "Comrade Yetta"

There is no denying that Albert Edwards is a writer of freshness and power. His first novel showed marked tendencies which *Comrade Yetta* confirms. He is primarily sociological: he is concerned with the struggle of the individual at war with the social scheme. He is a propagandist who is clever enough to realise that two points of view on a similar question can be held with equal sincerity. And he understands the points of view which clash in the treatment of the strugglers in life by those of a different strata who would help. *A Man's World* was a continual challenge to our conventional attitudes; it was important aside from its vividness and photographic realism, because it escaped the sentimental view that vice always earns its traditional punishment, and that virtue always receives its stage reward. We had a prostitute through love make an ennobling marriage and free love achieve a subjective enhancement. But these effects were obtained through a certain inevitability of character which made them persuasive because they were not defiant generalisations. It was this strong note of sympathy for the outclassed which gave a certain eloquence to the entire book. His new novel is, as might be expected, of a similar sociological trend. Yetta might have been a friend of Nina; Longworth has a family resemblance to the lover of Suzanne. Yet *Comrade Yetta* lacks the quality of the former novel because it is not so sustained and degenerates at times into a conventional love story of familiar reactions questionably conceived by the author more for the plot than compelled by the characters. But this criticism cannot remove the power and force of the first half of the book, which is a graphic and unforgettable picture of a section of life only beginning to yield its material to the American novelist.

That this novel should make its appearance while the memory of the recent Garment strike is still fresh in the public's mind is opportune; for it deals with a similar strike, and it will, no doubt, help readers better to understand the forces at play in the present industrial struggle. To many it will seem an old story, but Mr. Edwards has had many opportunities to keep in touch with all the phases of the labour movement in this country, so that his pages are true transcripts of the present status of the various groups. Though there are several illuminating discussions of the aims of these groups, which verge upon mere essay writing, still they are done with such an incisiveness of phrase that one easily forgives the preachment. In fact, we are not sure that this popular treatment of the labour phenomena is not the most stimulating part of the novel. While there is, too, an absorbing interest in Yetta—from the time she bends over her machine as a "speeder" at Goldfogel's shop through her successive steps as strike leader and labour agitator, it is the background against which her vivid personality is projected which stays with us. And that is the author's best claim to artistry—a quality so noticeable in *A Man's World*.

There are several passages which re-

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veal Mr. Edwards's understanding of the point of view of the working girl gifted with an instinct of class consciousness. The little touch, for example, where Yetta goes from her own miserable home in the slums to the rich apartments of Mabel Train of the Trade's Union—not with envy, but to discover the wide gulf which separates her from the world of luxury, is typical; and her ultimate realisation that the classes cannot cross into perfect help and understanding of the other is merely another phase of the tragedy of labour and capital. Nor has the author put on gloves in handling the dramatic episodes of "picketing" and court justice; one who has had the slightest experience in the recent strike could attest to the verity of his pictures, where deception becomes the weapon of the oppressed. Here, for example, is a little bit of Yetta's reasoning, which all the girls seem to feel when they suffer from the "framed up" cases against them.

"No; I don't think it's never right to lie. But I guess sometimes you've just got to. If I'd told the truth they'd have sent me to prison instead of to the workhouse. I wouldn't have cared—but it would have been awful for the others. Just because I told the truth all the papers would have lied and said all the girls were murderers. It's like this, I think. If you make up your mind that something is good you got to fight for it; you can't be afraid of getting beat up, or arrested, or killed, and you can't be afraid of hurting your conscience either."

It would be manifestly unfair to give the impression that Mr. Edwards's novel is merely the device upon which a lot of theories are strung; there is a story full of interesting episodes which will please the casual reader. What is mainly important is that the author has taken a fresh new figure in fiction and traced her evolution through work and contact with a sad segment of our society into a dominating figure. It does no harm to say he has been happiest when she is still the young girl baffled by life yet having a desire to escape from the oppression into which she has been born. Here is where he phrases the true psychology of the worker driven by instinct for a proper share in the profits of labor—which overtops all social problems. Yetta is not entirely typical because she is more gifted: but what she expresses is felt with varying intensities by many—and in this expression Mr. Edwards strikes a universal note which compels attention to his thoughtful book.

Griffin Mace.

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The American reading public is comparatively familiar with the story of the great sales of novels of recent years. Such books as "When Knighthood Was in Flower," "Richard Carvel," "Janice Meredith," "Quo Vadis," "Beverly of Graustark," "David Harum," "The Right of Way," and, to go back a few years farther, "Trilby," "Ben Hur," and "Mr. Barnes of New York," have sold by the hundreds of thousands, and the sales of some of them have reached the million point. But the "best seller" is far from being essentially an American product. In France, in 1881, there was issued a novel, of which seven million copies have been sold. That book is George Ohnet's "Le Maitre de Forges," and of it and of other great successes in France, Mr. Alvan F. Sanborn will tell in the May issue in an article entitled "French Best Sellers of Yesterday and To-day."

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The third paper of the series on "The Grub Street Problem" will deal mainly with the age of Queen Anne, although it will begin with the problems of the cost of living in Dryden's time, and carry down to the days of Henry Fielding.