A book that not only serves to illustrate the main points raised in the foregoing discussion, but as a matter of fact largely suggested them, is *The Gentleman*, by Alfred Ollivant. Among the few noteworthy cases of versatility in

"The Gentleman"

writers of the present generation, we must turn to *Soldiers Three, The Just-So Stories,* and *Puck of Pook's Hill* in order to find a fitting parallel to three such volumes as *Bob, Son of Battle, Redcoat Captain* and *The Gentleman.* It is fully a decade since Mr. Ollivant first came into fame for his strong and tender prose epic of a Scotch collie; and when some years later his second attempt in the same line, *Danny,* was voluntarily withdrawn, it seemed likely that the writer would remain among the number of authors of one book. Accordingly, last season, when *Redcoat Captain* appeared, the discerning few who appreciated the astounding cleverness of that unique bit of literary shorthand were quite excusable for hailing it with jubilant acclaim. Of course, it was not a child's story and therefore not literally a parallel to Mr. Kipling's *Just-so Stories.* It was, rather, a sort of concentrated recipe for the joy of living, put up in the simplified form of an Æsop's fable, and therefore quite likely to be misunderstood and unappreciated by those of us who have outgrown the clear-eyed simplicity of childhood. Now, once more this year, Mr. Ollivant furnished us with a genuine and very welcome surprise. It is always unjust to assign relative values to works so utterly dissimilar as *The Gentleman* and the volumes that preceded it. And yet, although each of the three bears the stamp of that indefinable quality which for lack of a better term we are content to call genius there is small likelihood of meeting with contradiction in proclaiming the new volume a work of bigger magnitude than either of the others. It is a historical novel which the present reviewer, hoping against hope, sincerely wishes might be the starting point of a new school, the origin of a stronger and saner form of fiction. The epoch is the Napoleonic wars. The theme is told in a sort of foreword written in the author's characteristic verbal shorthand:

"Succeed, and you command the Irish Expedition," said the squat fellow.

"My Emperor!" replied the tall Cavalryman, saluted and clanked away in the gloom.

In other words, the story concerns itself with an attempted invasion of England that almost succeeded. Whether the narrative or any part of it is true to history no reader competent of judging the best sort of narrative fiction will care to inquire. What actually did or did not happen according to the dry-as-dust records of authentic history is made to seem quite as trivial as Dumas made it with *Les Trois Mousquetaires,* and Mr. Hewlett with his *Richard Yea and Nay.* There is no purpose in giving a detailed summary of the plot of *The Gentleman;* it is enough to say that it is essentially a man's book,—although, curiously enough, it may be said parenthetically from actual observation that many a woman having once begun it is unable to lay it down,—and yet it contains not a single female character from beginning to end. A shadow of a woman falls across the pages; there is a feminine influence at work behind the plot for England's ruin. But the book itself is essentially a chronicle of good fighting, in strict accordance with the best traditions of English fiction. Smollett, Captain Marriott, Charles Reade, Stevenson,—one can see and trace in turn the influence of these and many others so clearly as to disarm any foolish charge of borrowing. Unquestionably, Mr. Ollivant is in direct line of descent from the best style of English novelists. What is more, his mastery of technique is admirable, yet almost too apparent. As one discerning critic remarked in private conversation, *The Gentleman* serves to illustrate almost every known trick of emphasis by position, and other more or less artificial devices for enhancing values, and rivetting the attention.

And yet, admirable as *The Gentleman* must be conceded to be, it will not, by itself, exert any obvious influence on the history of fiction. Like many another sporadic work of genuine power, in technique it is merely an echo of the past. If Mr. Ollivant should find himself prompted to write several more volumes in the same vein, he would undoubtedly evolve certain new principles that would take a permanent place in the history of fiction. As it is, one fears that his fatal versatility will be more apt to expend itself next in a sonnet sequence, a volume

of sermons or a treatise on differential calculus.