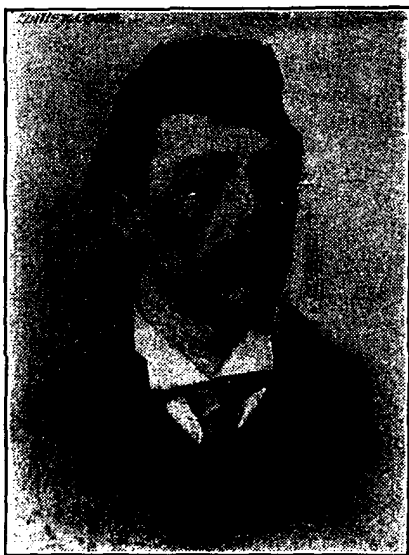


is practically indeterminable. It is not only natural but desirable that in a round score of stories, such as we have here, there should be considerable variety of subject. But whether the tale is frankly one of adventure, a sea-yarn, a ghost-story or a psychological study it's pretty certain to be the best of its kind, and to declare a preference for the more subjective stuff is by no means to disparage the rest. There is always this to be said



A. T. QUILLER-COUCH  
Author of *The White Wolf*

## The White Wolf

THE scale has yet to be devised that will accurately and finally determine an undeviating standard for criticism. In the meantime we are compelled to content ourselves with the poor makeshift of rough-guessing, as, for example, how far the substance of the actual material before us falls short of just balancing in gravity a preconceived ideal. In the case of such matter as one receives from the hand of Mr. Quiller-Couch the task of making out a *return* is rendered both the more simple and at the same time the more difficult, from the fact that precisely in proportion as the equipoise is astonishingly close the delicate difference is the harder to compute. It would be a tax upon the ability of the cleverest critic to discover, for instance, any lack in such a perfect prose-poem as the initial tale in this admirable collection.\* So simply and lucidly is the legend told, and so touchingly noble and subtly suggestive is it in motive that if the ideal has not been completely realized in its achievement it must be to a degree that

for our writer in the most obvious of his moods; so admirably interpretive is he that nowhere does he become commonplace, and his homeliest seadog telling the stiffest "fish-story" invariably has that touch of heart and human nature in him which raises him to distinction.

But it is in such tales as "The Miracle of the White Wolf," "Victor," "The Man Who Could Have Told" and "England" that the author's best art is employed. It is seldom one sees effects so large in compass so small, and one can only stand and wonder at the ungrudging hand with which such rich material has been bestowed. Material which would be withheld and hoarded for elaboration by a writer of less resource or different method is used here with the frankest

\* THE WHITE WOLF, AND OTHER FIRESIDE TALES.  
By A. T. Quiller-Couch. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$1.50.

unconcern as by one who, having an inexhaustible store, does not realize the need for economy. This is especially the case with "Victor," a rarely significant piece of work, vital and convincing, which takes hold of the imagination with compelling grip and leads one on and beyond into wide fields of speculation touching its own particular human and social problems and others which it connotes. In perfect proportion as it is, it nevertheless has sufficient substance to serve for a good 12mo. volume, and one cannot resist the thought that in the hands of Mr. Howells or Mr. Henry James it would have been made to do so—and to admirable effect. The sketch as Mr. Quiller-Couch presents it is that of an humbly-born serving-maid, Bassett, betrayed and then married against his will by her "gentleman" lover, who deserts her immediately after at the instigation of his aristocratic cousin, Miss Bracy, that the stigma of his misalliance may not publicly attach to their immaculate skirts. All this, and later the way in which the indomitable Bassett is avenged by Providence through her wonderful son, would make capital stuff for elaboration, for its psychological and social problems are genuine ones and would not only bear but reward close analysis.

"The Man Who Could Have Told" is as vivid and impressive as it is unique, while "England" is a bit of tragedy all the more human for being presented in the casual fashion in which life itself presents its tragedies, quite *en passant* and as part of the day's work. The book as a whole is unusually satisfactory, and one can only congratulate one's self after reading it that the objection publishers express to collections of short stories did not prevent the appearance of this one.

