into the dark water, holding her skirts up out of the wet. It was evident that she was looking at something in there which she had seen there before. . . . He knew the pool well, and that it was at least twenty feet deep in leaf-mould. Either the lilies would pull her down, or she would go down by nature. The water would be deadly cold—but she couldn't possibly be so foolhardy as that!

She had picked up her skirt again and put one foot forward till it was up to the instep in water. He had seen her start at the unexpected cold, but not withdraw her foot. . . . Presently she deliberately pulled her clothes up above her knees and took a step into the pond. The quick bubbles foamed round her leg and broke in yellow foam on the water. At that step only she was immersed nearly to the knee.

V

Mr. Hewlett's "Open Country"*

Incorrigible romancer that he is, Mr. Hewlett has never had a more congenial theme and setting, once he gets to them, than in his latest story. It begins in chapter three, the preceding pages being mere prologue. Enter John Senhouse, the gypsy philosopher of *Halfway House*. Not, however, by way of sequel. From a note of advertisement you have already learned, somewhat disconcertingly, that this book is to set forth an episode in the earlier life of the vagabond, done and closed long before he met Miss Mary Middleham. Unquestionably it is a bit perplexing; some pages must be passed before one is adjusted to this unprovoked resurrection. Nothing could prove more conclusively that Mr. Hewlett writes for posterity. Our children have only to read the books in their proper chronological order.

But back to Mr. Senhouse and romance. He sits in his tilt-cart by the roadside, "slobbing" water-colours on a board in a vain effort to arrest the magic of a shaded forest. Then suddenly the effort itself is arrested—and no wonder.

A young lady belted in a white frock had come through the trees to the edge of the pool. She had no hat on, and was barefooted. Intent upon her thoughts, she gazed deeply

*Open Country. By Maurice Hewlett. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

And then Senhouse, saviour of maidens in danger, intervened. It is all as innocent and natural and charming as a page from one of Mr. Hewlett's mediæval romances. Is this, then, a mediæval maiden? No, it is Sanchia Josepha Percival, daughter of Tom Percival, respectable London city man; the date is late April of 1894. Hence a new bewilderment. Read a dozen pages of *The Forest Lovers* and you expect to come on lovely maidens by the brink of pools, adventuring the water with slim feet. But the daughter of a city merchant—! Mr. Hewlett has made the long leap from the past to the present, but he has not abandoned the free practices of his ancient craft. He attempts to play the modern game in the old style. As a finale to the adventure of the pool, Senhouse fetches from the tilt-cart his portable bed, floats it as a raft, and he and Sanchia in turn navigate the pool from end to end. In *The Forest Lovers* that would be charming. But what sort of a portable bed, in these days of portable beds, is of sufficient weight and buoyancy to serve as raft to float a grown man? One is inevitably sceptical; the thing has not been truly observed. I do not believe Mr. Hewlett has ever seen the feat attempted, much less performed it himself. Alas, for the spirit of romance in our realistic days!

Mr. Hewlett thus imperfectly modernised, become realist rather by profession

than by conviction, is wearing with more or less conscious intention the mantle of Meredith, which has not yet settled to a snug fit over his shoulders. In manner he is less openly and imitatively Meredithian than he was in *The Stooping Lady* and *Halfway House;* but he has performed a more significant act of homage in making the present book a novel of ideas. Senhouse is a philosopher, so labelled; his view of life, his gloss on the human comedy, are put forward as a main justification for the book. Chapters are given to the letters in which he instructs his lady-love. He is the author's spokesman to voice his own convictions—and he is an anarchist. He preaches the return to nature, the freedom of Open Country, the cult of poverty. It is sad to relate that he is often superficial and sometimes dull. One has only to compare him with Meredith's wise men—with Gower Woodseer, or Dr. Shrapnel, or Vernon Whitford, or even Adrian Harley—to know that the mantle is far too large for a perfect fit.

On the whole, the book is a disappointment to those who, admiring Mr. Hewlett's unquestionable cleverness, have looked for the great comedy which he has sometimes seemed capable of writing. It has no great intellectual distinction. Yet it has signal merits, and in parts it does not suffer by comparison with Mr. Hewlett at his best. The latter half has the movement of real drama. There is fine irony in the situation: the girl in love with an unworthy suitor, heedful of the teachings of her philosopher-guide, and prepared to defy the world in order to follow the leading of her heart. For a moment Mr. Hewlett seems to see through his hero's eyes the flaw in his philosophy, though it is too late to justify his having taken it earlier with too apparent seriousness. In the crucial situation the characters become real persons, moved by real motives, exposed to real temptations, swayed by real emotions—above all, the last. Even the philosopher has, when it comes to the test, more heart than brains. His reasoning is not convincing, but he has the lineaments of a man. In this fact lies the secret of Mr. Hewlett's *métier*. It is to be feared that he will never write a great comedy, for he has not seen deeply into the thoughts of men. At heart he is still, in spite of the recent shifting of his base, the born romancer, and he is at his best, not in the expression of ideas, but in the telling of a swift, dramatic story.

Edward Clark Marsh.