

ENGLISH STUDIES
AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS
1919
(pages 65-66)

A CROWDED COMPANY.

Modern English Writers: Being a Study of Imaginative Literature, 1890-1914; by Harold Williams. (Sidgwick & Jackson).

Not genius, but a considerable amount of talent, good taste and extensive reading. A conscientious crossing of deserts in search of problematic oasis. A booklover telling you of his experiences—not only among masterpieces, but also among pseudo-masterpieces. No lack of discrimination, but often a half-hearted catholicity as well.

It requires positive genius to weigh and balance contemporary claims to recognition. Failing genius, a combination of presumption and dogmatic assertiveness will sometimes do duty for it. But all the while Father Time, the great reverser of values, is laughing in his sleeve. Fifty years, a hundred, two hundred years hence he will help the critic. Time will help him when Time's services are no longer required. For the real *arbiter elegantiarum* is concerned with contemporary merit, not with statues and memorial stones. From him the dead are welcome to bury their dead. *He* wants to give honour unto him whom honour is due. *He* wants to pay his allegiance to living kings in exile whom *his* eagle eyes have distinguished among the crowd. And now and then, when he lights upon an undoubted masterpiece, there will be great joy in his heart, and he will proclaim his find to the world.

Harold Williams is no Professor Saintsbury, no pugnacious pronouncer of infallible and unchallengeable verdicts. I have a notion that he is a frequenter of studies and studios and workshops, picking up bits of information wherever he goes, and pricking up his ears whenever an artist, letting himself go, points out the weak spots in a fellow-artist's work, in conscious or unconscious rivalry. This would account for the saneness of his views, and for the fact that his judgements, as a whole, reflect pretty faithfully the *communis opinio* of the English literary world.

It does *not* account for the absence of several names, and the presence of some. Elizabeth Gibson is not mentioned, per-

haps rightly. But Ethel Clifford is. Among poets Aleister Crowley, Gilbert Frankau, R. C. Trevelyan, Ralph Hodgson, Ford Madox Hueffer, are unnoticed. Richard Whiteing, author of *The Island*, and of *Number Five John Street*, does not come in for a line. No mention is made of Leonard Merrick, the novelist, of whom . . .