

LAST WORDS

THE PERILS and profitlessness of looking forward into the supersonic H-Bomb future being what they are, it becomes an increasing pleasure to look back into past ages of innocence. It was with some such thoughts that I browsed recently in a volume of *The Bookman*, an American monthly "illustrated magazine of literature and life" which was thriving at the turn of the century, before "total war" had threatened the reasonable expectation of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and contributed to the increment of ulcers among civilized men. The volume I perused included the numbers from March to August, 1904. What were Americans reading just fifty years ago?

Some of the best sellers during the period were *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*, by James Fox; *The Deliverance*, by Ellen Glasgow; *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, by Kate Douglas Wiggin; *The Call of the Wild*, by Jack London; *The Crossing*, by Winston Churchill (not the British Prime Minister); and *The Silent Places*, by Stewart Edward White. All the best sellers were then novels; the era of "positive thinking," "how to cure your ulcers and influence people," "peace of mind," "mountain climbing" non-fiction had not begun. And the best sellers of 1904 sold for \$1.25 to \$1.50 (hard covers).

Bernard Shaw was then a lively firebrand to be reckoned with, and Willa Cather, not yet known as a novelist, had just published a volume of verse called *April Twilights*. George Meredith and Mark Twain were among the older writers still living who had to be taken seriously, and the recently dead Victorians were very much in the thoughts of bookmen.

Among miscellaneous facts to be gleaned from the volume are some interesting statistics included in a review of *Who's Who* for 1904: "We learn that though 12,054,335 of us Americans are without education, and only 325,613 have had a college training, not one of the former have got into *Who's Who*, while the college-bred biographies number 7,709. . . . That four-fifths of the *Who's Who* names are those of college men is proof only of the restriction of its scope."

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