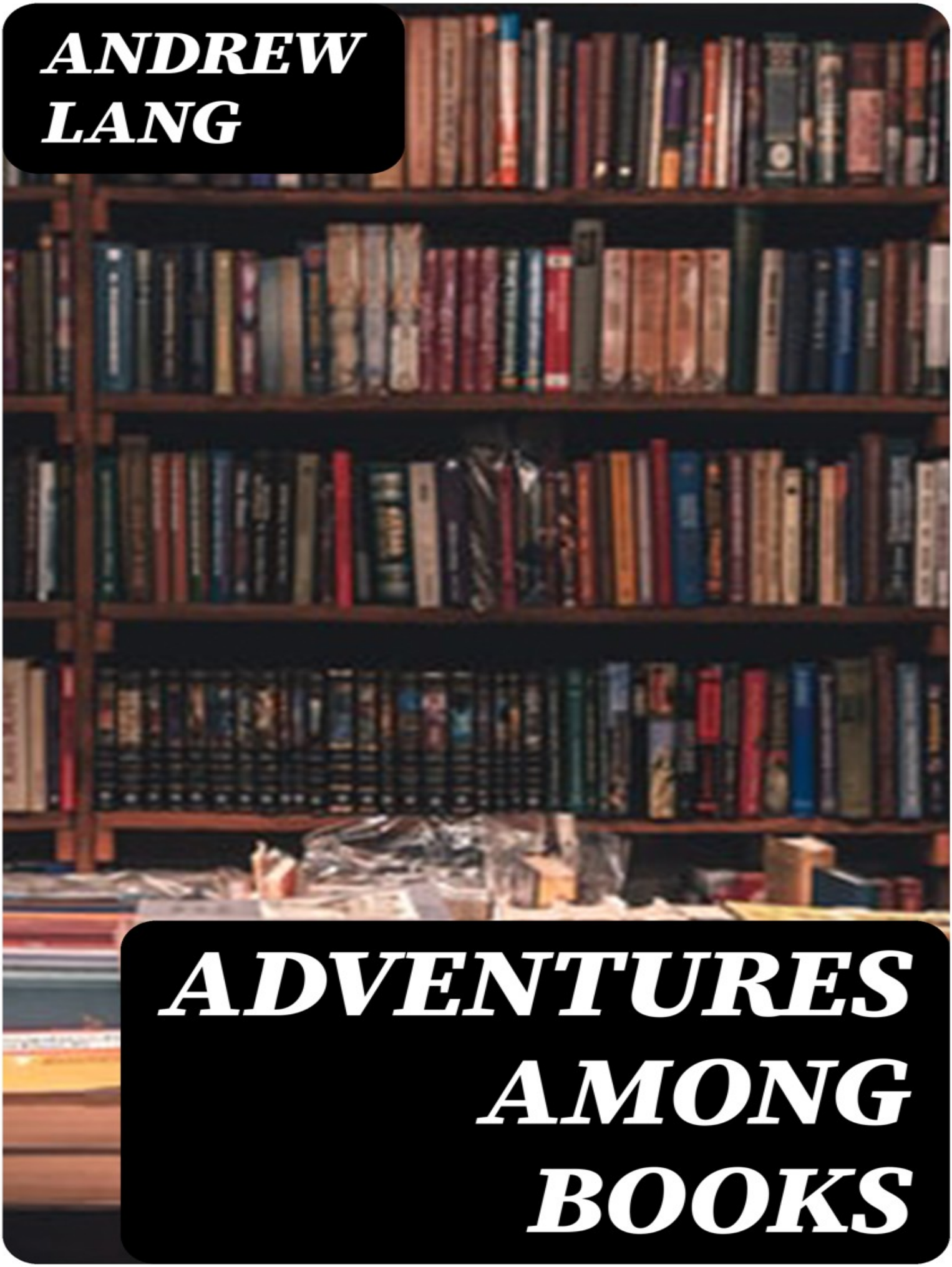
ANDREW LANG



ADVENTURES AMONG BOOKS

Andrew Lang

Adventures Among Books

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Table of Contents

PREFACE

Table of Contents

Of the Essays in this volume “Adventures among Books,” and “Rab’s Friend,” appeared in *Scribner’s Magazine*; and “Recollections of Robert Louis Stevenson” (to the best of the author’s memory) in *The North American Review*. The Essay on “Smollett” was in the *Anglo-Saxon*, which has ceased to appear; and the shorter papers, such as “The Confessions of Saint Augustine,” in a periodical styled *Wit and Wisdom*. For “The Poems of William Morris” the author has to thank the Editor of *Longman’s Magazine*; for “The Boy,” and “Mrs. Radcliffe’s Novels,” the Proprietors of *The Cornhill Magazine*; for “Enchanted Cigarettes,” and possibly for “The Supernatural in Fiction,” the Proprietors of *The Idler*. The portrait, after Sir William Richmond, R.A., was done about the time when most of the Essays were written—and that was not yesterday.

CHAPTER I: ADVENTURES AMONG BOOKS

Table of Contents

I

Table of Contents

In an age of reminiscences, is there room for the confessions of a veteran, who remembers a great deal about books and very little about people? I have often wondered that a *Biographia Literaria* has so seldom been attempted—a biography or autobiography of a man in his relations with other minds. Coleridge, to be sure, gave this name to a work of his, but he wandered from his apparent purpose into a world of alien disquisitions. The following pages are frankly bookish, and to the bookish only do they appeal. The habit of reading has been praised as a virtue, and has been denounced as a vice. In no case, if we except the perpetual study of newspapers (which cannot fairly be called reading), is the vice, or the virtue, common. It is more innocent than opium-eating, though, like opium-eating, it unlocks to us artificial paradises. I try to say what I have found in books, what distractions from the world, what teaching (not much), and what consolations.

In beginning an *autobiographia literaria*, an account of how, and in what order, books have appealed to a mind, which books have ever above all things delighted, the author must pray to be pardoned for the sin of egotism. There is no other mind, naturally, of which the author knows so much as of his own. *On n'a que soi*, as the poor girl says

in one of M. Paul Bourget’s novels. In literature, as in love, one can only speak for himself. This author did not, like Fulke Greville, retire into the convent of literature from the strife of the world, rather he was born to be, from the first, a dweller in the cloister of a library. Among the poems which I remember best out of early boyhood is Lucy Ashton’s song, in the “Bride of Lammermoor”:—

“Look not thou on beauty’s charming,
Sit thou still when kings are arming,
Taste not when the wine-cup glistens,
Speak not when the people listens,
Stop thine ear against the singer,
From the red gold keep thy finger,
Vacant heart, and hand, and eye,
Easy live and quiet die.”

The rhymes, unlearned, clung to my memory; they would sing themselves to me on the way to school, or cricket-field, and, about the age of ten, probably without quite understanding them, I had chosen them for a kind of motto in life, a tune to murmur along the *fallentis semita vitæ*. This seems a queer idea for a small boy, but it must be confessed.

“It takes all sorts to make a world,” some are soldiers from the cradle, some merchants, some orators; nothing but a love of books was the gift given to me by the fairies. It was probably derived from forebears on both sides of my family, one a great reader, the other a considerable collector of books which remained with us and were all tried,

persevered with, or abandoned in turn, by a student who has not blanched before the *Epigoniad*.

About the age of four I learned to read by a simple process. I had heard the elegy of Cock Robin till I knew it by rote, and I picked out the letters and words which compose that classic till I could read it for myself. Earlier than that, “Robinson Crusoe” had been read aloud to me, in an abbreviated form, no doubt. I remember the pictures of Robinson finding the footstep in the sand, and a dance of cannibals, and the parrot. But, somehow, I have never read “Robinson” since: it is a pleasure to come.

The first books which vividly impressed me were, naturally, fairy tales, and chap-books about Robert Bruce, William Wallace, and Rob Roy. At that time these little tracts could be bought for a penny apiece. I can still see Bruce in full armour, and Wallace in a kilt, discoursing across a burn, and Rob Roy slipping from the soldier’s horse into the stream. They did not then awaken a precocious patriotism; a boy of five is more at home in Fairyland than in his own country. The sudden appearance of the White Cat as a queen after her head was cut off, the fiendish malice of the Yellow Dwarf, the strange cake of crocodile eggs and millet seed which the mother of the Princess Frutilla made for the Fairy of the Desert—these things, all fresh and astonishing, but certainly to be credited, are my first memories of romance. One story of a White Serpent, with a woodcut of that mysterious reptile, I neglected to secure, probably for want of a penny, and I have regretted it ever since. One never sees those chap books now. “The White Serpent,” in spite of all research, remains *introuvable*. It was a lost

chance, and Fortune does not forgive. Nobody ever interfered with these, or indeed with any other studies of ours at that time, as long as they were not prosecuted on Sundays. “The fightingest parts of the Bible,” and the Apocrypha, and stories like that of the Witch of Endor, were sabbatical literature, read in a huge old illustrated Bible. How I advanced from the fairy tales to Shakespeare, what stages there were on the way—for there must have been stages—is a thing that memory cannot recover. A nursery legend tells that I was wont to arrange six open books on six chairs, and go from one to the others, perusing them by turns. No doubt this was what people call “desultory reading,” but I did not hear the criticism till later, and then too often for my comfort. Memory holds a picture, more vivid than most, of a small boy reading the “Midsummer Night’s Dream” by firelight, in a room where candles were lit, and some one touched the piano, and a young man and a girl were playing chess. The Shakespeare was a volume of Kenny Meadows’ edition; there are fairies in it, and the fairies seemed to come out of Shakespeare’s dream into the music and the firelight. At that moment I think that I was happy; it seemed an enchanted glimpse of eternity in Paradise; nothing resembling it remains with me, out of all the years.

We went from the border to the south of England, when the number of my years was six, and in England we found another paradise, a circulating library with brown, greasy, ill-printed, odd volumes of Shakespeare and of the “Arabian Nights.” How their stained pages come before the eyes again—the pleasure and the puzzle of them! What did the

lady in the Geni’s glass box want with the Merchants? what meant all these conversations between the Fat Knight and *Ford*, in the “Merry Wives”? It was delightful, but in parts it was difficult. Fragments of “The Tempest,” and of other plays, remain stranded in my memory from these readings: *Ferdinand* and *Miranda* at chess, *Cleopatra* cuffing the messenger, the asp in the basket of figs, the *Friar* and the *Apothecary*, *Troilus* on the Ilian walls, a vision of *Cassandra* in white muslin with her hair down. People forbid children to read this or that. I am sure they need not, and that even in our infancy the magician, Shakespeare, brings us nothing worse than a world of beautiful visions, half realised. In the Egyptian wizard’s little pool of ink, only the pure can see the visions, and in Shakespeare’s magic mirror children see only what is pure. Among other books of that time I only recall a kind of Sunday novel, “Naomi; or, The Last Days of Jerusalem.” Who, indeed, could forget the battering-rams, and the man who cried on the battlements, “Woe, woe to myself and to Jerusalem!” I seem to hear him again when boys break the hum of London with yells of the latest “disaster.”

We left England in a year, went back to Scotland, and awoke, as it were, to know the glories of our birth. We lived in Scott’s country, within four miles of Abbotsford, and, so far, we had heard nothing of it. I remember going with one of the maids into the cottage of a kinsman of hers, a carpenter; a delightful place, where there was sawdust, where our first fishing-rods were fashioned. Rummaging among the books, of course, I found some cheap periodical with verses in it. The lines began—

“The Baron of Smaylhome rose with day,
He spurred his courser on,
Without stop or stay, down the rocky way
That leads to Brotherstone.”

A rustic tea-table was spread for us, with scones and honey, not to be neglected. But they *were* neglected till we had learned how—

“The sable score of fingers four
Remains on that board impressed,
And for evermore that lady wore
A covering on her wrist.”

We did not know nor ask the poet’s name. Children, probably, say very little about what is in their minds; but that unhappy knight, Sir Richard of Coldinghame, and the Priest, with his chamber in the east, and the moody Baron, and the Lady, have dwelt in our mind ever since, and hardly need to be revived by looking at “The Eve of St. John.”

Soon after that we were told about Sir Walter, how great he was, how good, how, like Napoleon, his evil destiny found him at last, and he wore his heart away for honour’s sake. And we were given the “Lay,” and “The Lady of the Lake.” It was my father who first read “Tam o’ Shanter” to me, for which I confess I did not care at that time, preferring to take witches and bogies with great seriousness. It seemed as if Burns were trifling with a noble subject. But it was in a summer sunset, beside a window looking out on Ettrick and the hill of the Three Brethren’s Cairn, that I first read, with the dearest of all friends, how—

“The stag at eve had drunk his fill
Where danced the moon on Monan’s rill,
And deep his midnight lair had made
In lone Glenartney’s hazel shade.”

Then opened the gates of romance, and with Fitz-James we drove the chase, till—

“Few were the stragglers, following far,
That reached the lake of Vennachar,
And when the Brig of Turk was won,
The foremost horseman rode alone.”

From that time, for months, there was usually a little volume of Scott in one’s pocket, in company with the miscellaneous collection of a boy’s treasures. Scott certainly took his fairy folk seriously, and the Mauth Dog was rather a disagreeable companion to a small boy in wakeful hours. {1} After this kind of introduction to Sir Walter, after learning one’s first lessons in history from the “Tales of a Grandfather,” nobody, one hopes, can criticise him in cold blood, or after the manner of Mr. Leslie Stephen, who is not sentimental. Scott is not an author like another, but our earliest known friend in letters; for, of course, we did not ask who Shakespeare was, nor inquire about the private history of Madame d’Aulnoy. Scott peopled for us the rivers and burnsides with his reivers; the Fairy Queen came out of Eildon Hill and haunted Carterhaugh; at Newark Tower we saw “the embattled portal arch”—

“Whose ponderous grate and massy bar
Had oft rolled back the tide of war,”—

just as, at Foulshiels, on Yarrow, we beheld the very roofless cottage whence Mungo Park went forth to trace the waters of the Niger, and at Oakwood the tower of the Wizard Michael Scott.

Probably the first novel I ever read was read at Elgin, and the story was “Jane Eyre.” This tale was a creepy one for a boy of nine, and Rochester was a mystery, St. John a bore. But the lonely little girl in her despair, when something came into the room, and her days of starvation at school, and the terrible first Mrs. Rochester, were not to be forgotten. They abide in one’s recollection with a Red Indian’s ghost, who carried a rusty ruined gun, and whose acquaintance was made at the same time.

I fancy I was rather an industrious little boy, and that I had minded my lessons, and satisfied my teachers—I know I was reading Pinnock’s “History of Rome” for pleasure—till “the wicked day of destiny” came, and I felt a “call,” and underwent a process which may be described as the opposite of “conversion.” The “call” came from Dickens. “Pickwick” was brought into the house. From that hour it was all over, for five or six years, with anything like industry and lesson-books. I read “Pickwick” in convulsions of mirth. I dropped Pinnock’s “Rome” for good. I neglected everything printed in Latin, in fact everything that one was understood to prepare for one’s classes in the school whither I was now sent, in Edinburgh. For there, living a rather lonely small boy in the house of an aged relation, I found the Waverley Novels. The rest is transport. A conscientious tutor dragged me through the Latin grammar, and a constitutional dislike to being beaten on the hands with a leather strap urged me

to acquire a certain amount of elementary erudition. But, for a year, I was a young hermit, living with Scott in the “Waverleys” and the “Border Minstrelsy,” with Pope, and Prior, and a translation of Ariosto, with Lever and Dickens, David Copperfield and Charles O’Malley, Longfellow and Mayne Reid, Dumas, and in brief, with every kind of light literature that I could lay my hands upon. Carlyle did not escape me; I vividly remember the helpless rage with which I read of the Flight to Varennes. In his work on French novelists, Mr. Saintsbury speaks of a disagreeable little boy, in a French romance, who found Scott *assommant*, stunningly stupid. This was a very odious little boy, it seems (I have not read his adventures), and he came, as he deserved, to a bad end. Other and better boys, I learn, find Scott “slow.” Extraordinary boys! Perhaps “Ivanhoe” was first favourite of yore; you cannot beat Front de Boeuf, the assault on his castle, the tournament. No other tournament need apply. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, greatly daring, has attempted to enter the lists, but he is a mere Ralph the Hospitaller. Next, I think, in order of delight, came “Quentin Durward,” especially the hero of the scar, whose name Thackeray could not remember, Quentin’s uncle. Then “The Black Dwarf,” and Dugald, our dear Rittmeister. I could not read “Rob Roy” then, nor later; nay, not till I was forty. Now Di Vernon is the lady for me; the queen of fiction, the peerless, the brave, the tender, and true.

The wisdom of the authorities decided that I was to read no more novels, but, as an observer remarked, “I don’t see what is the use of preventing the boy from reading novels, for he’s just reading ‘Don Juan’ instead.” This was so

manifestly no improvement, that the ban on novels was tacitly withdrawn, or was permitted to become a dead letter. They were far more enjoyable than Byron. The worst that came of this was the suggestion of a young friend, whose life had been adventurous—indeed he had served in the Crimea with the Bashi Bazouks—that I should master the writings of Edgar Poe. I do not think that the “Black Cat,” and the “Fall of the House of Usher,” and the “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” are very good reading for a boy who is not peculiarly intrepid. Many a bad hour they gave me, haunting me, especially, with a fear of being prematurely buried, and of waking up before breakfast to find myself in a coffin. Of all the books I devoured in that year, Poe is the only author whom I wish I had reserved for later consideration, and whom I cannot conscientiously recommend to children.

I had already enjoyed a sip of Thackeray, reading at a venture, in “Vanity Fair,” about the Battle of Waterloo. It was not like Lever’s accounts of battles, but it was enchanting. However, “Vanity Fair” was under a taboo. It is not easy to say why; but Mr. Thackeray himself informed a small boy, whom he found reading “Vanity Fair” under the table, that he had better read something else. What harm can the story do to a child? He reads about Waterloo, about fat Jos, about little George and the pony, about little Rawdon and the rat-hunt, and is happy and unharmed.

Leaving my hermitage, and going into the very different and very disagreeable world of a master’s house, I was lucky enough to find a charming library there. Most of Thackeray was on the shelves, and Thackeray became the chief enchanter. As Henry Kingsley says, a boy reads him

and thinks he knows all about life. I do not think that the mundane parts, about Lady Kew and her wiles, about Ethel and the Marquis of Farintosh, appealed to one or enlightened one. Ethel was a mystery, and not an interesting mystery, though one used to copy Doyle's pictures of her, with the straight nose, the impossible eyes, the impossible waist. It was not Ethel who captivated us; it was Clive's youth and art, it was J. J., the painter, it was jolly F. B. and his address to the maid about the lobster. "A finer fish, Mary, my dear, I have never seen. Does not this solve the vexed question whether lobsters are fish, in the French sense?" Then "The Rose and the Ring" came out. It was worth while to be twelve years old, when the Christmas books were written by Dickens and Thackeray. I got hold of "The Rose and the Ring," I know, and of the "Christmas Carol," when they were damp from the press. King Valoroso, and Bulbo, and Angelica were even more delightful than Scrooge, and Tiny Tim, and Trotty Veck. One remembers the fairy monarch more vividly, and the wondrous array of egg-cups from which he sipped brandy—or was it right Nantes? —still "going on sipping, I am sorry to say," even after "Valoroso was himself again."

But, of all Thackeray's books, I suppose "Pendennis" was the favourite. The delightful Marryat had entertained us with Peter Simple and O'Brien (how good their flight through France is!) with Mesty and Mr. Midshipman Easy, with Jacob Faithful (Mr. Thackeray's favourite), and with Snarleyyow; but Marryat never made us wish to run away to sea. That did not seem to be one's vocation. But the story of Pen made one wish to run away to literature, to the Temple, to

streets where Brown, the famous reviewer, might be seen walking with his wife and umbrella. The writing of poems “up to” pictures, the beer with Warrington in the mornings, the suppers in the back-kitchen, these were the alluring things, not society, and Lady Rockminster, and Lord Steyne. Well, one has run away to literature since, but where is the matutinal beer? Where is the back-kitchen? Where are Warrington, and Foker, and F. B.? I have never met them in this living world, though Brown, the celebrated reviewer, is familiar to me, and also Mr. Sydney Scraper, of the Oxford and Cambridge Club. Perhaps back-kitchens exist, perhaps there are cakes and ale in the life literary, and F. B. may take his walks by the Round Pond. But one never encounters these rarities, and Bungay and Bacon are no longer the innocent and ignorant rivals whom Thackeray drew. They do not give those wonderful parties; Miss Bunnion has become quite conventional; Percy Popjoy has abandoned letters; Mr. Wenham does not toady; Mr. Wagg does not joke any more. The literary life is very like any other, in London, or is it that we do not see it aright, not having the eyes of genius? Well, a life on the ocean wave, too, may not be so desirable as it seems in Marryat’s novels: so many a lad whom he tempted into the navy has discovered. The best part of the existence of a man of letters is his looking forward to it through the spectacles of Titmarsh.

One can never say how much one owes to a school-master who was a friend of literature, who kept a houseful of books, and who was himself a graceful scholar, and an author, while he chose to write, of poetic and humorous genius. Such was the master who wrote the “Day Dreams of

a Schoolmaster," Mr. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, to whom, in this place, I am glad to confess my gratitude after all these many years. While we were deep in the history of Pendennis we were also being dragged through the Commentaries of Caius Julius Cæsar, through the Latin and Greek grammars, through Xenophon, and the Eclogues of Virgil, and a depressing play of Euripides, the "Phœnissæ." I can never say how much I detested these authors, who, taken in small doses, are far, indeed, from being attractive. Horace, to a lazy boy, appears in his Odes to have nothing to say, and to say it in the most frivolous and vexatious manner. Then Cowper's "Task," or "Paradise Lost," as school-books, with notes, seems arid enough to a school-boy. I remember reading ahead, in Cowper, instead of attending to the lesson and the class-work. His observations on public schools were not uninteresting, but the whole English school-work of those days was repugnant. One's English education was all got out of school.

As to Greek, for years it seemed a mere vacuous terror; one invented for one's self all the current arguments against "compulsory Greek." What was the use of it, who ever spoke in it, who could find any sense in it, or any interest? A language with such cruel superfluities as a middle voice and a dual; a language whose verbs were so fantastically irregular, looked like a barbaric survival, a mere plague and torment. So one thought till Homer was opened before us. Elsewhere I have tried to describe the vivid delight of first reading Homer, delight, by the way, which St. Augustine failed to appreciate. Most boys not wholly immersed in dulness felt it, I think; to myself, for one, Homer was the real

beginning of study. One had tried him, when one was very young, in Pope, and had been baffled by Pope, and his artificial manner, his “fairs,” and “swains.” Homer seemed better reading in the absurd “crib” which Mr. Buckley wrote for Bohn’s series. Hector and Ajax, in that disguise, were as great favourites as Horatius on the Bridge, or the younger Tarquin. Scott, by the way, must have made one a furious and consistent Legitimist. In reading the “Lays of Ancient Rome,” my sympathies were with the expelled kings, at least with him who fought so well at Lake Regillus:—

“Titus, the youngest Tarquin,
Too good for such a breed.”

Where—

“Valerius struck at Titus,
And lopped off half his crest;
But Titus stabbed Valerius
A span deep in the breast,”—

I find, on the margin of my old copy, in a schoolboy’s hand, the words “Well done, the Jacobites!” Perhaps my politics have never gone much beyond this sentiment. But this is a digression from Homer. The very sound of the hexameter, that long, inimitable roll of the most various music, was enough to win the heart, even if the words were not understood. But the words proved unexpectedly easy to understand, full as they are of all nobility, all tenderness, all courage, courtesy, and romance. The “Morte d’Arthur” itself, which about this time fell into our hands, was not so dear as the “Odyssey,” though for a boy to read Sir Thomas

Malory is to ride at adventure in enchanted forests, to enter haunted chapels where a light shines from the Graal, to find by lonely mountain meres the magic boat of Sir Galahad.

After once being initiated into the mysteries of Greece by Homer, the work at Greek was no longer tedious. Herodotus was a charming and humorous story-teller, and, as for Thucydides, his account of the Sicilian Expedition and its ending was one of the very rare things in literature which almost, if not quite, brought tears into one's eyes. Few passages, indeed, have done that, and they are curiously discrepant. The first book that ever made me cry, of which feat I was horribly ashamed, was "Uncle Tom's Cabin," with the death of Eva, Topsy's friend. Then it was trying when Colonel Newcome said *Adsum*, and the end of Socrates in the *Phaedo* moved one more than seemed becoming—these, and a passage in the history of Skalagrim Lamb's Tail, and, as I said, the ruin of the Athenians in the Syracusan Bay. I have read these chapters in an old French version derived through the Italian from a Latin translation of Thucydides. Even in this far-descended form, the tale keeps its pathos; the calm, grave stamp of that tragic telling cannot be worn away by much handling, by long time, by the many changes of human speech. "Others too," says Nicias, in that fatal speech, when—

"*All was done that men may do*,
And all was done in vain,"—

"having achieved what men may, have borne what men must." This is the very burden of life, and the last word of tragedy. For now all is vain: courage, wisdom, piety, the

bravery of Lamachus, the goodness of Nicias, the brilliance of Alcibiades, all are expended, all wasted, nothing of that brave venture abides, except torture, defeat, and death. No play not poem of individual fortunes is so moving as this ruin of a people; no modern story can stir us, with all its eloquence, like the brief gravity of this ancient history. Nor can we find, at the last, any wisdom more wise than that which bids us do what men may, and bear what men must. Such are the lessons of the Greek, of the people who tried all things, in the morning of the world, and who still speak to us of what they tried in words which are the sum of human gaiety and gloom, of grief and triumph, hope and despair. The world, since their day, has but followed in the same round, which only seems new: has only made the same experiments, and failed with the same failure, but less gallantly and less gloriously.

One's school-boy adventures among books ended not long after winning the friendship of Homer and Thucydides, of Lucretius and Catullus. One's application was far too desultory to make a serious and accurate scholar.

I confess to having learned the classical languages, as it were by accident, for the sake of what is in them, and with a provokingly imperfect accuracy. Cricket and trout occupied far too much of my mind and my time: Christopher North, and Walton, and Thomas Tod Stoddart, and "The Moor and the Loch," were my holiday reading, and I do not regret it. Philologists and Ireland scholars are not made so, but you can, in no way, fashion a scholar out of a casual and inaccurate intelligence. The true scholar is one whom I envy, almost as much as I respect him; but there is a kind of

mental short-sightedness, where accents and verbal niceties are concerned, which cannot be sharpened into true scholarship. Yet, even for those afflicted in this way, and with the malady of being “idle, careless little boys,” the ancient classics have a value for which there is no substitute. There is a charm in finding ourselves—our common humanity, our puzzles, our cares, our joys, in the writings of men severed from us by race, religion, speech, and half the gulf of historical time—which no other literary pleasure can equal. Then there is to be added, as the university preacher observed, “the pleasure of despising our fellow-creatures who do not know Greek.” Doubtless in that there is great consolation.

It would be interesting, were it possible, to know what proportion of people really care for poetry, and how the love of poetry came to them, and grew in them, and where and when it stopped. Modern poets whom one meets are apt to say that poetry is not read at all. Byron’s Murray ceased to publish poetry in 1830, just when Tennyson and Browning were striking their preludes. Probably Mr. Murray was wise in his generation. But it is also likely that many persons, even now, are attached to poetry, though they certainly do not buy contemporary verse. How did the passion come to them? How long did it stay? When did the Muse say good-bye? To myself, as I have remarked, poetry came with Sir Walter Scott, for one read Shakespeare as a child, rather in a kind of dream of fairyland and enchanted isles, than with any distinct consciousness that one was occupied with poetry. Next to Scott, with me, came Longfellow, who pleased one as more reflective and tenderly sentimental,

while the reflections were not so deep as to be puzzling. I remember how “Hiawatha” came out, when one was a boy, and how delightful was the free forest life, and Minnehaha, and Paupukkeewis, and Nokomis. One did not then know that the same charm, with a yet fresher dew upon it, was to meet one later, in the “Kalewala.” But, at that time, one had no conscious pleasure in poetic style, except in such ringing verse as Scott’s, and Campbell’s in his patriotic pieces. The pleasure and enchantment of style first appealed to me, at about the age of fifteen, when one read for the first time—

> “So all day long the noise of battle rolled
> Among the mountains by the winter sea;
> Until King Arthur’s Table, man by man,
> Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their Lord.”

Previously one had only heard of Mr. Tennyson as a name. When a child I was told that a poet was coming to a house in the Highlands where we chanced to be, a poet named Tennyson. “Is he a poet like Sir Walter Scott?” I remember asking, and was told, “No, he was not like Sir Walter Scott.” Hearing no more of him, I was prowling among the books in an ancient house, a rambling old place with a ghost-room, where I found Tupper, and could not get on with “Proverbial Philosophy.” Next I tried Tennyson, and instantly a new light of poetry dawned, a new music was audible, a new god came into my medley of a Pantheon, a god never to be dethroned. “Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is,” Shelley says. I am convinced that we scarcely know how great a poet Lord Tennyson is; use has made him too familiar. The same hand has “raised the Table

Round again,” that has written the sacred book of friendship, that has lulled us with the magic of the “Lotus Eaters,” and the melody of “Tithonus.” He has made us move, like his own Prince—

“Among a world of ghosts,
And feel ourselves the shadows of a dream.”

He has enriched our world with conquests of romance; he has recut and reset a thousand ancient gems of Greece and Rome; he has roused our patriotism; he has stirred our pity; there is hardly a human passion but he has purged it and ennobled it, including “this of love.” Truly, the Laureate remains the most various, the sweetest, the most exquisite, the most learned, the most Virgilian of all English poets, and we may pity the lovers of poetry who died before Tennyson came.

Here may end the desultory tale of a desultory bookish boyhood. It was not in nature that one should not begin to rhyme for one’s self. But those exercises were seldom even written down; they lived a little while in a memory which has lost them long ago. I do remember me that I tried some of my attempts on my dear mother, who said much what Dryden said to “Cousin Swift,” “You will never be a poet,” a decision in which I straightway acquiesced. For to rhyme is one thing, to be a poet quite another. A good deal of mortification would be avoided if young men and maidens only kept this obvious fact well posed in front of their vanity and their ambition.

In these bookish memories I have said nothing about religion and religious books, for various reasons. But, unlike

other Scots of the pen, I got no harm from “The Shorter Catechism,” of which I remember little, and neither then nor now was or am able to understand a single sentence. Some precocious metaphysicians comprehended and stood aghast at justification, sanctification, adoption, and effectual calling. These, apparently, were necessary processes in the Scottish spiritual life. But we were not told what they meant, nor were we distressed by a sense that we had not passed through them. From most children, one trusts, Calvinism ran like water off a duck’s back; unlucky were they who first absorbed, and later were compelled to get rid of, “The Shorter Catechism!”

One good thing, if no more, these memories may accomplish. Young men, especially in America, write to me and ask me to recommend “a course of reading.” Distrust a course of reading! People who really care for books *read all of them*. There is no other course. Let this be a reply. No other answer shall they get from me, the inquiring young men.

II

Table of Contents

People talk, in novels, about the delights of a first love. One may venture to doubt whether everybody exactly knows which was his, or her, first love, of men or women, but about our first loves in books there can be no mistake. They were, and remain, the dearest of all; after boyhood the bloom is off the literary rye. The first parcel of these garrulities ended when the author left school, at about the age of seventeen. One’s literary equipment seems to have

been then almost as complete as it ever will be, one's tastes definitely formed, one's favourites already chosen. As long as we live we hope to read, but we never can "recapture the first fine careless rapture." Besides, one begins to write, and that is fatal. My own first essays were composed at school—for other boys. Not long ago the gentleman who was then our English master wrote to me, informing me he was my earliest public, and that he had never credited my younger brother with the essays which that unscrupulous lad ("I speak of him but brotherly") was accustomed to present for his consideration.

On leaving school at seventeen I went to St. Leonard's Hall, in the University of St. Andrews. That is the oldest of Scotch universities, and was founded by a papal bull. St. Leonard's Hall, after having been a *hospitium* for pilgrims, a home for old ladies (about 1500), and a college in the University, was now a kind of cross between a master's house at school, and, as before 1750, a college. We had more liberty than schoolboys, less than English undergraduates. In the Scotch universities the men live scattered, in lodgings, and only recently, at St. Andrews, have they begun to dine together in hall. We had a common roof, common dinners, wore scarlet gowns, possessed football and cricket clubs, and started, of course, a kind of weekly magazine. It was only a manuscript affair, and was profusely illustrated. For the only time in my life, I was now an editor, under a sub-editor, who kept me up to my work, and cut out my fine passages. The editor's duty was to write most of the magazine—to write essays, reviews (of books by the professors, very severe), novels, short stories, poems,

translations, also to illustrate these, and to “fag” his friends for “copy” and drawings. A deplorable flippancy seems, as far as one remembers, to have been the chief characteristic of the periodical—flippancy and an abundant use of the supernatural. These were the days of Lord’ Lytton’s “Strange Story,” which I continue to think a most satisfactory romance. Inspired by Lord Lytton, and aided by the University library, I read Cornelius Agrippa, Trithemius, Petrus de Abano, Michael Scott, and struggled with Iamblichus and Plotinus.

These are really but disappointing writers. It soon became evident enough that the devil was not to be raised by their prescriptions, that the philosopher’s stone was beyond the reach of the amateur. Iamblichus is particularly obscure and tedious. To any young beginner I would recommend Petrus de Abano, as the most adequate and gruesome of the school, for “real deevilry and pleesure,” while in the wilderness of Plotinus there are many beautiful passages and lofty speculations. Two winters in the Northern University, with the seamy side of school life left behind, among the kindest of professors—Mr. Sellar, Mr. Ferrier, Mr. Shairp—in the society of the warden, Mr. Rhoades, and of many dear old friends, are the happiest time in my life. This was true literary leisure, even if it was not too well employed, and the *religio loci* should be a liberal education in itself. We had debating societies—I hope I am now forgiven for an attack on the character of Sir William Wallace, *latro quidam*, as the chronicler calls him, “a certain brigand.” But I am for ever writing about St. Andrews—writing inaccurately, too, the Scotch critics declare.

“Farewell,” we cried, “dear city of youth and dream,” eternally dear and sacred.

Here we first made acquaintance with Mr. Browning, guided to his works by a parody which a lady wrote in our little magazine. Mr. Browning was not a popular poet in 1861. His admirers were few, a little people, but they were not then in the later mood of reverence, they did not awfully question the oracles, as in after years. They read, they admired, they applauded, on occasion they mocked, good-humouredly. The book by which Mr. Browning was best known was the two green volumes of “Men and Women.” In these, I still think, is the heart of his genius beating most strenuously and with an immortal vitality. Perhaps this, for its compass, is the collection of poetry the most various and rich of modern English times, almost of any English times. But just as Mr. Fitzgerald cared little for what Lord Tennyson wrote after 1842, so I have never been able to feel quite the same enthusiasm for Mr. Browning’s work after “Men and Women.” He seems to have more influence, though that influence is vague, on persons who chiefly care for thought, than on those who chiefly care for poetry. I have met a lady who had read “The Ring and the Book” often, the “Lotus Eaters” not once. Among such students are Mr. Browning’s disciples of the Inner Court: I dwell but in the Court of the Gentiles. While we all—all who attempt rhyme—have more or less consciously imitated the manner of Lord Tennyson, Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Rossetti, such imitations of Mr. Browning are uncommonly scarce. He is lucky enough not to have had the seed of his flower stolen and sown everywhere till—