

# The Bookman

"I am a Bookman."—James Russell Lowell.

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## CONTENTS.

<b>NEWS NOTES</b> .. 145	The Sunny Side of Speech. By PROFESSOR JOHN ADAMS .. 164	Barbellion and His Work. By WILFRID L. RANDELL .. 173
<b>THE BOOKMAN GALLERY—</b> Willoughby Weaving .. 149	Goethe. By ERIC ROBERTSON .. 165	
<b>THE READER—</b> The London of Rudyard Kipling. By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE .. 151	Right Royal. By FRANCIS BICKLEY .. 166	<b>NOVEL NOTES—</b>
E. T. Raymond. By R. ELLIS ROBERTS .. 155	Oliver Onions's New Novel .. 167	The Girl in Fancy Dress—Forward from Babylon—The Bartered Bride—Dead Man's Plack and an Old Thorn—A Reckless Puritan—Our Elizabeth—The Elephant God—The People of the Ruins—The Hand in the Dark .. 174-176
Prize Competitions .. 158	Dr. Denney's Letters. By JAMES MOFFATT .. 167	
English Literature. By GEORGE SAINTSBURY .. 160	Translators and Poets. By W. H. CHESSON .. 168	<b>THE BOOKMAN'S TABLE—</b>
Mrs. C. A. Dawson Scott. By EDWIN PUGH .. 162	Fiction and the Scientific Spirit. By KEIGHLEY SNOWDEN .. 169	Mysticism, Freudianism and Scientific Psychology—London Trees—Essays—Herbert Hoover .. 176-178
<b>NEW BOOKS—</b> Chesterton the Unchanged. By GEORGE SAMPTON .. 163	A Too-Candid Biographer. By S. BUTTERWORTH .. 169	
The End of the Romanovs. By S. M. ELLIS .. 164	The Assurance of Art. By FREDERICK WATSON .. 170	
	Recollections of the Empress Eugénie. By MEREDITH STARR .. 172	

## NOTICES.

All communications intended for the Editor must be addressed to the Editor of THE BOOKMAN, ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, WARWICK SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.4.

A preliminary letter of inquiry should be sent to the Editor before any manuscript is submitted for his consideration.

## News Notes.

No Christmas Number of THE BOOKMAN has met with a more enthusiastic reception than has been given to our last month's issue. The entire edition, which was considerably enlarged just before printing, was sold out before publication, and we wish to apologise to the large number of applicants for copies that could not be supplied and to thank very warmly the many readers whose letters of congratulation we greatly appreciate.

Just before her death Mrs. B. M. Croker had completed a new novel which she entitled "The House of Rest," and it will be published by Messrs. Cassell in the spring.

Messrs. George Philip and Son have published a new and revised edition of their admirable "Handy Volume Atlas of the World" (4s. 6d. net). It contains a full reference index, eighty pages of descriptive notes, which are in themselves a miniature geography, and the seventy-seven coloured maps have been brought thoroughly up to date in accordance with the readjustments that the war

has made all over the earth. The book is clearly printed, compactly bound, and the right convenient size for the pocket.

The death of Olive Schreiner in Cape Colony, removes one of the most distinguished women writers of the late Victorian period. It is nearly forty years since the publication of "The Story of an African Farm" made her famous. Issued as by "Ralph Iron" it aroused considerable sensation in the literary world of the day, and there was much speculation regarding the authorship. Then it came out that this novel, which was largely autobiography, was written by Olive Schreiner, the daughter of a missionary in Basutoland. It remains the author's only widely known book, and it provides an instance of the theory that every one can write one good book, but comparatively few can continue to write them. Although Olive Schreiner wrote several others, among them "Dreams" and "Trooper Peter Halkett of Mashonaland," they enjoyed neither the vogue nor the popularity of her first.

Mr. Sydney Pawling, who has been for many years sole partner with the late Mr. Heinemann, has been joined as partner by Mr. F. N. Doubleday, President of the distinguished American publishing house of Messrs. Doubleday, Page & Company. Mr. Pawling retains control of the London business, the title of which remains unchanged.

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As part of the conversion of the book to its new digital format, we have made certain minor adjustments in its layout.

# BOOKS IN THE WILDERNESS

BY FREDERICK NIVEN

Well do I recall visiting, some years ago, Frederic Chapman, that charming scholar, remembered with affection by many (worriedly aware of, and vexed by, and by all his kindly instincts aloof from, the heartless money-scramble round him), at his home in Twickenham, up the river from London. I remember how the building was braced from end to end, by reason of the load of books on his shelves, by these house-supporters known, because of the shape of the bolts holding in the brace-bars, as S's.

I thought of him as I was choosing the books to accompany me on a journey into the wilderness. I should have liked to have put the conundrum to Chapman: "If you had only room for a few books, which would they be?" Would "the Bible and Shakespeare", I wonder, have been his reply? I cannot ask him now. The classical allusion, to him at least, would not sound heartless: Charon has rowed him across Styx these years ago. Charon allows no dunnage, only our memories and hopes.

In a Peterboro canoe-boat, despite its blend of loadbearing capacity and buoyancy, one cannot carry a library. The selection of books on view upon the shelves at the "jumping-off place" (Nelson, British Columbia, to wit), that selection made by the booksellers, of course, had much to do with my own selection. Only one of the volumes that I carried along with me did I specially order. The rest (with the exception of one I made myself with cuttings, paste, and a note-book—of which "more anon") I merely culled from the shelves in the three bookstores of that pleasant Kootenay town. I have known booksellers who seemed much less to realize the awful responsibility attaching to their tastes.

I did not take a Bible with me and, frankly, I missed it. Often and often thoughts arise in the Silent Places, among the wild peace of lake and mountain, that bring Biblical quotations in their train; and I long to verify the quotation. Looking up at the million tamaracks and balsams, the splashes of yellow among the dark green, the white glacier peaks five, six, seven thousand feet above the jade lakes where, pigmy-wise, I row along, such phrases as "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain to it", drift into the mind. Milton also occurs in such odd lines, like gold flecks in quartz, as:

Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks  
In Vallombrosa...

when I come to some place where the trees that shed cones and needles give place to the aspens, and birches, and maples showering their late crimson and yellow to the ground. Walt Whitman comes very easily to the mind, unsought, in such lines as:

The night in silence under many a star,  
And the husky, whispering wave whose voice I know.

If writers of the sophisticated order occur they do so rather by way of contrast than because of their aptness. And ever and again they do occur. Thus I have tried to recapture the exact wording of a passage in Aldous Huxley's "Limbo" describing some exquisite, dainty figure such as the drawing-rooms and salons produce. All I can textually remember is that he described her feet as like tea-leaves under the hem of her skirt. I have only a vague impression of it, and it is like a fashion-plate from "Vogue"! I think of that because I am so far from it, in another world.

Selecting my books at the jumping-off place, I had to economize space. A pair of spare boots sued for a place, and it was "Don Quixote" (a bulky volume) that with a pang was ejected. It took up as much room as the boots. I might have sacrificed, perhaps, three other volumes that took up as much space together; but in the end "Don Quixote" went, alone, to accommodate the boots. A pair of waterproof pants, essential for damp days in the bush, if one would be comfortable, pushed out—I forget now what they pushed out.

The core of the interest, it just occurs to me, lies less in the books I took with me than in the books I continue to retain, or the books that, when I go to town for supplies, I carry back with me. On my last trip to town and store I bore away Gautier's "Voyage en Espagne" and Hudson's "Idle Days in Patagonia". I think I took Gautier because he was the man who described himself as "one for whom the visible world exists", and canoeing and camping in the wilderness, one inevitably longs for a voice to describe the visible world. It is a far cry from the lakes and rivers of British Columbia to Spain, but "Voyage en Espagne" is a masterpiece about the visible world; I suppose that is why I took it.

Once, in the "Mont Blanc" in Soho, that haunt of many interested in the written word, when a group of men talked on their favorite theme, I heard it said of W. H. Hudson that he contains no "fine writing"; and when I responded that to my mind from cover to cover of all his books there is naught but fine writing, I was met with the counter riposte that he had no consciously fine writing. This robbing of a great author of honor, making out that he is, what Johnson called Goldsmith, in the nature of an "inspired idiot", or a dead vessel wherein mysteriously nectar appears, seems to me, especially here, considering it all among these large manifestations of nature (among lakes and mountains and woods, cloud-bursts and rain-storm here, sunshine yonder, snowfall at another place, and all at once within view), too niggling for serious attention. It is not true. He who admires the work of W. H. Hudson is an admirer of fine writing. I dislike the wild superlative; I have not read all the books in the world; I am aware that often the best are not thrust under our noses. Hudson is a case in point; he had to wait a long time for recognition, and hear other men called "the greatest writer of the age". Yet I think it is safe to say, at least, that his is among the finest writing of our period. That is no merely wild superlative. And I must be honest with myself. I may dislike the phrase "fine writing", but I admire W. H. Hudson's prose; and to say that he does not know what he is doing is absurd. Obviously he does. He must. His art is no accident. Perhaps what those who object to "fine writing" mean by the words is what I call the "prunes and prisms" manner, such as that of—but let the name go.

Hudson is in the waterproof bag among the dunnage. He stands the test of the open. Here it may be interjected, although this is rather of those whom I can take with me on such a journey than of those I cannot, that I once tried to read Swinburne fronting the Atlantic on the Scottish coast, and

Out of the golden remote wild west where the sea without shore is,

that had delighted me in a little den at home, could only call forth some such comment as Hamlet's: "Words, words!" John Muir is here. His also is "fine writing", very marked to my mind in such passages as that one in which he tells of the wind running in the Sierras and how, climbing a tall pine the better to watch the wind-waves billowing over leagues, he clung to its swaying top "like a bobolink on a reed". Stevenson's "Silverado Squatters" (in a pocket edition because of the little space it takes up, though at home I abhor pocket editions, confusing them with hairpin boxes) is of the company. I believe he is a "fine writer". The same kind of man who gives Hudson the discredit of not knowing what he is doing, gives Stevenson the discredit of knowing what he did. Out west here they have an expression for that way of looking at life; they call it "narrow gauge".

Stevenson accompanies me in that volume because he could describe what I look at, gazing up at the high-altitudes, coasting the mountain bases, in a way that satisfies me. Those firs on the crests of the ranges five miles away from me, yet each individually clear are, as he said, "no bigger than an eyelash". Professor Pearsall Smith's selection of John Donne's "Sermons" will not light the campfire or be tossed overboard, but will remain till the snows come and the lakes freeze and I must turn home. His sonorous sentences are not made void and drowned out by the sonorous roll of the creeks in the gulches. I can read again and again that passage, with the toll of a bell sounding in the words, that he made for the death of King James I. And the lines in which he muses that "all this that is temporall, is but a caterpillar got into one corner of my garden, but a mill-dew fallen upon one acre of my Corne", do not seem a frail conceit, a bit of preciosity here.

Lafcadio Hearn is of the party, because he saw the color of the world. I do not read him much, for some reason, but I like to have him with me. His "Out of the East" won't help to light the fire even if a cloud-burst should drench all the woods. I shall find a bundle of dry red-willow twigs somewhere to start the flames. I often wonder how Hearn managed to pass through the foothills of the Rockies and the Kicking Horse Pass, and on down to Vancouver, and so westward to the east, without availing himself of the "stop-over" clause on travelers' tickets; often I wish he had left us some note of the sparkle of granite boulders and their blue shadows, of the azure skies behind the whiteness of glaciers, of the colors of the Indians' blankets, and the mysterious wild patience in their eyes.

Henry James, with his "Portraits of Places", is also here, another fine writer. All of those playwrights whom we call Shakespeare were fine writers; but it took Thomas Seccombe to object to Shakespeare's "purple patches". "Portraits of Places", "Partial Portraits", and "French Poets and Novelists" were written by Henry James before, he had succumbed to his determination to be Henry James at all costs, when he was just Henry James. I think "Portraits of Places" will live after every novel of his last phase is forgotten. The preface he wrote to Rupert Brooke's "Letters from America" I know is claimed by some critics to be wonderful prose; but it seems to me that the prose of the essays it introduces is more admirable. They have a simplicity of diction, though of a different kind, as definite (and almost as good) as that of Henry James's in the days when he was simple. That book of Rupert Brooke's should be with me, though it is not. Had it been on a shelf of the bookstores in town I would surely have culled it. The chapter in it on "Indians" has put on record (I regret to have to repeat the word), simply, what all of us feel toward the aborigine who do not believe that the only good Indian is a dead Indian. And Brooke's description of the quiet trees, the rocks, the deer stepping down to drink and the "grey-blue lakes for ever sliding sideways", makes it a book to love although it figured in no list of "Volumes in Great Demand" in the Four Quarters. Keats is here, though not for "The Eve of Saint Agnes"; its sweetness cloys among the robust scent of cedar and balsam; for almost all of "Endymion", except what came from Lemprière; for many passages in "Hyperion"; lines such as those telling how

There is a roaring in the bleak-grown pines  
When winter lifts his voice...

which gain rather than lose in value read among the "big timber". He who could write of the "sea-shouldering whales" fits in here.

Richard Jefferies is in the water-proof bag. His "Open Air", although it is of the open air of England, kindly Kent and blue Sussex, also fits in. I can read him by firelight when the resin sputters and the flames leap high, and there is no sound but the sleepy "peep-peep" of resting lake-gulls over the dark blue waters where the stars vaguely light a wind ripple. Then there is Edward Thomas. He has stood the test. He has not gone overboard. The sense of eternity that the Silent Places give to us is in his work; and so he remains, telling of how he heard the first cuckoo of an ancient spring before the war; or, tramping in England, came to a deserted house in the smear of rain, and saw its blank windows full of memories. I doubt if there is any edition of his work printed in America. He died in the war and so became known to more than those who find books without extraneous aid; but he did not die (and he had not lived) as luckily as did Brooke. I do not think his poems are the best of him. The best of him is, in my opinion, in the lost files of the daily and weekly London journals. My own volume of him is a self-made one, a note-book, with cuttings from these papers pasted in. They stand the test of the eternal mountains and the lonely woods. The spirit is in them that is of more than a day.

Conrad's "Typhoon" carries with me MacWhirr, Jukes, Solomon Rout, Mrs. Rout—and Conrad. I have also Hergesheimer's "The Three Black Pennys", with many annotations on its margins linking page with page throughout; linking up the flight of geese that the first Penny saw with the flight of geese the last saw with dimming eyes; connecting the raccoon hunt of Howat's day with the raccoon hunt of Jasper's time, that Susan saw; the description of the day when the stone was warm under Jasper's hand while he rested and a hawk hung in air, with the account of how the stone was warm where the last Howat Penny sat down to meditate and saw a hawk fly over, and was filled with reveries he could not wholly understand. Among all the sartorial rustle of the pages there is the rustle of something else. It is a rustle not out of key with that in the aspens, exquisitely fading for this season by these waterways, and what their rustling, in the quiet, strangely talks into the heart.

These books, while the billy boils and the flapjack is a-cooking, and a coyote maybe moans at length of imminent snow, with an eerie crescendo, up in the gulches, are veritable companions in the solitude. I might adapt here some words from a paper by Hugh Walpole, on a theme not alien, which came into my hands on the very day I pushed off: "It is of course a purely personal list; whatever one may pretend, no list is ever anything else." Every author writes for himself and his own. Not even the greatest (how many "greatest" there are, as Whitman said) are the favorites of all, to say nothing of the fact that few men are stationary. Not everything they admire today will satisfy tomorrow. Somewhere Stevenson said he had long believed there must be someone who did not care for Shakespeare, and he found the honest man with joy. On another trip there will be other books, and only some, perhaps even none, of these; but in a large fashion the volumes selected to bear me company where are only the seasons and the weather will always, I am sure (knowing the kind of books that alone can live far from cities, where the mind is ceaselessly thrown into a natural wonder regarding the origin and the destiny of all), however dissimilar they may be, yet be similar in this: they will always be books with the quality of art in them, a conscious quality,

whether it be art simple or adorned; books with a sense of eternity either ringing explicit in them or strangely awakened in the reader's heart because of their sense of the beauty of the transient.

[End of *Books in the Wilderness*, by Frederick Niven]