

# OPINIONS ABOUT BOOKS



They swayed upon a rocking-horse, and thought it Pegasus.—Keats

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## Literary Passports

"What books are you taking to read on the steamer?" I asked a friend who was sailing the next day for Cherbourg.

"The new Edna Ferber, Ring Lardner's latest, and a few magazines and plenty of cross-word puzzles," was the reply.

"But," I continued, "I mean travel books, the sort . . ."

"Oh, yes," he answered, "my wife has Baedeker, Muirhead, and a new edition of *The Satchel Guide*, and I have here" — he took it out of his pocket — "*Mr. and Mrs. Haddock Abroad*. It's a present from my partner. That ought to do us."

Why should anyone on the way to Paris prepare for the ordeal by doing cross-word puzzles? Why not a little Victor Hugo, Balzac, or Romain Rolland, interspersed with George Moore and some French history? But in my mind's eye I saw my friend, driving in the Bois, buying diamonds for his wife along the rue de la Paix, and otherwise "going the rounds", — and understood.

Even so I thought I would try an experiment. I made up a package of books and sent them to him at the steamer, — just

a few carefully chosen volumes which I hoped would work their charm upon him during the voyage and lead him on to a France which is more than shops and cabarets and watering-places and long, straight roads for motoring.

With all due respect to Miss Ferber, my first selection was Anne Douglas Sedgwick's *Little French Girl*, — which I purposely gave directions to have put on top, — for I know of no book in which the delicate nuances of the French character are more skilfully drawn. Miss Sedgwick tells a good story and her work is a just tribute to a people whose temperament is not readily comprehensible to English or American minds. Next came *French Traits* by a man who has shown that criticism can be made a fine art, — W. C. Brownell. Although his study does not have the advantage of the fictional method which Miss Sedgwick employs, it is none the less readable.

Then I selected an old favorite of mine, *The Arm-Chair at the Inn*, which, if there were any chance of its fading from memory, would immortalize the quaint old hostelry of William the Conqueror upon the Norman coast at Dives. Here in the

flower-choked courtyard surrounded by a chain of moss-encrusted, red-tiled, seesaw roofs, is spun a yarn which will hold the reader to the last page. It could have been written by no one but F. Hopkinson Smith.

Miltoun's *Rambles in Normandy* I put in too, and Medill's *Little Book of Brittany*, although Clive Holland's *Things Seen in Normandy and Brittany* is also good. Then Anne Wharton's *In Chateau Land*. There seemed to be no end, nor was the clerk at my elbow lacking in suggestions. Next came Frances Elliott's *Old Court Life in France*, with its fine historical background. I hesitated over Clara Laughlin's *So You're Going to Paris* because it seemed so obviously written for the "tourist", and chose instead Ernest Dimnet's *From a Paris Balcony and About Paris*, by that inimitable pair, Richard Harding Davis and Charles Dana Gibson, both of whom possessed faculty for discovering the unusual. Lucas's *A Wanderer in Paris* is always indispensable. It really should have come first.

Archibald Marshall, having strayed from Exton Manor, recently found himself in France with nothing to do but have a good time. Just see the result: *A Spring Walk in Provence*, as finished a piece of work as one could wish. That is what comes of being born an author; even one's holidays can be made to count. Of course I included it. Then my eye fell on a book which I had not known before — *The Lost Kingdom of Burgundy*. I read at random from the jacket: "It marshals the ghosts of tatterdemalion kings and emperor dukes, lute-playing princes and tarnished princesses, — all of whom still wander among the ruins of a hundred Burgundian castles . . . Hotel rates and architectural specifications have been culled out to make room for more interesting mediaeval gossip . . . It speaks without candor of sundry folk who are still discussed about the firesides in the Rhone Valley." What could be better?

From Burgundy, with thoughts of Dijon, Clugny, the old glory of Avignon, and the trim, tender vineyards about Besançon, my mind drifted South again, to Gascogne and Languedoc. Surely he knows not France who knows not the Pyrenees! Amy Oakley has caught the spell of this country in her *Hill Towns of*

*the Pyrenees*, and Paul Wilstach is no less successful in *Along the Pyrenees*.

My friend, I knew, would tour the battlefields. Everybody does. So I concluded my purchases with Miss Laughlin's very significant *Martyred Towns of France*, and, having far exceeded my intentions, hurried away from my bookseller's lest he should bethink himself of something I had unwittingly omitted.

England . . . yes, there are good books on England too. If one must be strictly up to the moment, there is Osborne's *As It Is In England*, surely to be placed at the head of the list, both in point of information and literary style. What is more, Mr. Osborne writes of the hoary Thames, of Hawthorne hedgerows, and the mystery of Oxford spires, in such a way that you feel impelled to jump aboard the next steamer. The book will be welcomed by those who read the chapter on England in his *Finding the Worth While in Europe* and, like Oliver Twist, wanted more. I also like Charles S. Brooks's *A Thread of English Road* but confess that the facetiousness of this genial Yale professor becomes tiring as the book progresses. Yet you feel that he would be the best of companions on a bicycle trip down through Surrey and Hants.

One cannot give much thought to preparation for a trip without coming to the conclusion that a background of good fiction and history will do more than the most comprehensive of meticulous "travel" books. For instance, why should one read a new book on *The Kipling Country* by R. Thurston Hopkins, excellent though it may be, when the author's own books are available? Olcott's *Country of Sir Walter Scott* is likewise valuable, but not as a substitute for *Kenilworth* or *Marmion*. Similarly, unless one is fairly familiar with authors, I would not recommend E. Beresford Chancellor's two volumes, *The London of Thackeray* and *The London of Charles Dickens*. Nothing is more helpful than a book of this sort when one has something to build on. Who can think of Edinburgh without R. L. S., or of the Lake Country except in terms of Wordsworth?

The traveler with a predilection towards a literary pilgrimage should find room in his satchel for Gordon S. Maxwell's *The Author's Thames*, and take the same trip up as far as Windsor for he will find no other region richer in association with

English literature. For sound reading one sooner or later comes back to Henry James's *English Hours*; and W. H. Hudson's *Afoot in England*, which is in a class by itself, should accompany every pedestrian.

When it comes to books about London, and they are legion, Lucas's *A Wanderer in London*, now in something like its twenty-fifth edition, is the standard. Mr. Lucas's books abound with facts, yet they possess charm as well. Helen W. Henderson, author of *A Loiterer in London*, new this season, writes with a zest for her subject, for she believes that to reach London is to "achieve the grand destination". Her book should be read after Mr. Osborne's, for her method is much the same, and Mr. Osborne has omitted London because, he says, it is "too vast and too varied a subject to be combined with any other."

While Oxford has a secure place in all guide-books and has never been in danger of slight by weavers of romance, I wonder how many readers have happened upon Chapter Nine in Stark Young's *Three Fountains*. Mr. Young is thinking of two walks, Addison's Walk, by Magdalen, "with the gentle morning on it, the soft gray perhaps, the English thing", and, the other, that grandiose line of cypresses, of hidden water-courses, and ilex trees, which is the garden of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli. He writes of the external differences of these scenes, but something deeper is implied in their unlikeness. Is it the subtle contrast between the English and the Italian temperament, between the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin?

*The Three Fountains* is a group of vignettes, sketches, essays, mostly Italian in setting, which reveal the author's power as critic, stylist, and artist in prose. I can think of no book which I can recommend more highly. *The Enchanted April*, however, elicits the same order of praise for it attains the same level of excellence, although written in a different key. It concerns the unprecedented exploits of a group of English people transported for a month to a square yard of Italian sunshine. It should not be missed by anyone who is going to Italy, nor by anyone who would like to go.

Henry James Forman's new book, *Greecian Italy*, is an informal account of his trip with the artist, Frederick R. Gruger,

through Sicily, Calabria, and the toe of the boot that is Italy. Mr. Forman will be remembered as the author of *The Ideal Italian Tour* which has delighted thousands of wayfarers. Luigi Villari's *Awakening of Italy*, also new, is a study of the Fascist movement and gives a general survey of modern political conditions throughout Italy. Much of it will be better understood if the reader has first looked into Bagot's *Italians of To-day*.

Books born of Italy are thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa. Have not poets of all ages fled out of the North and basked beneath its skies? Byron, Keats, the Brownings, Shelley, all knew what lay beyond the Alps. M. Maurois has told in *Ariel* of the sense of peace and creative power that came to Shelley at Casa Magni, and Anna McMahan develops this thought in her volume, *With Shelley in Italy*. George Eliot captured the spirit of Florence and put it into *Romola*, Ruskin loved the stones of Venice, and it was in Rome that Hawthorne wrote *The Marble Faun*. William Dean Howells forgot American authors long enough to write *Venetian Life*, Hopkinson Smith left all else for *Gondola Days*, and John Addington Symonds did nothing greater than his *Rennaisance in Italy*. Marion Crawford lived near Sorrento and wrote of love and intrigue at Rome.

Of a more descriptive nature, Max Vernon's *In and Out of Florence*, Maurel's *Little Cities of Italy*, and Williams's *Hill Towns of Italy* are excellent. One can well afford also to look over the innumerable titles that bear the names of Forman, Bagot, Grant Allen, Mrs. Oliphant, Olive Potter, and Ernest Peixotto, before sailing.

Someone once said that every man has two countries, his own and Italy. He would be guilty, I think, of no greater exaggeration if he had added that every man who has ever written a book has written another about Italy. And I for one am not sorry.

DALE WARREN.

Plainfield, New Jersey.

## A Cheerful Church

A genial ecclesiastic, or a large-hearted saint like Santa Claus, appeals to the human heart. It may be on account of the element of the unexpected, but we will