

MY FAVORITE NOVELIST AND HIS BEST BOOK.*

BY MRS. BURTON HARRISON.

The author of "The Anglomaniacs" tells the story of her literary passions, from "Evelina" and "Quentin Durward" to the American, English, and foreign fiction of today—The books she ranks as the best novels of past and present.

OUT of the mist of memory arises a pleasant oblong room in an old Virginia country house. There were many windows hung with crimson woollen stuff, and many doors, generally flying open to admit boys with dogs at their heels—or else dogs alone, who stalked in, picked out the best places on the rug for siesta, and plumped down in them, deliberately. On either side of the fireplace stood two high backed chairs, occupied for years (so it seems to my retrospective mind) by two old maiden great aunts reading novels.

When, in the course of human events, these ladies came to the end of their novels owned, novels subscribed for, and novels borrowed, they would begin over again, and repeat the list. Although a few newspapers—such as the *Washington National Intelligencer*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Alexandria Gazette*, the *Southern Churchman*, the *Illustrated London News*, and some missionary sheets—were included in their literary pabulum, the novels were of first interest. The plots were followed out breathlessly, the people became real people, their crises of life and love and death were attended with intense conviction.

At twilight, before lamps were brought in, when the wind sighed in the branches of the oaks shadowing the roof, when the fire gleam danced over the crimson curtains and brought out the sheen of mahogany and brass—when the older dogs snored through excess of fat and comfort,

on the hearth—the two readers would talk together about their dream world of romance.

To a little person who occupied sometimes a chair, sometimes the rug between the dogs, the stage upon which strutted the characters of these dramatic scenes became of absorbing interest. It was here, first, that she made acquaintance with "Evelina"—"written by a young lady, my dear—a great surprise to her family—much admired by the great Dr. Johnson—securing for its author, Miss Fanny Burney, the reward of a place at court, as a bedchamber woman of her majesty, Queen Charlotte!"

The story of *Evelina's* endless perplexities, and the happy issue out of all her afflictions at the hand of *Lord Orville*, was, for a time, my supreme favorite. Our copy was in little brown calf bound volumes with the long S—volumes out of which, when you opened them, issued small creatures without color or substance, traveling across the pages and away. As I recall this novel, I think vivacity was its charm, with a certain naturalness that must have been refreshing as a dew fall, in that stilted age when Burney dipped her quill in the parental inkpot. But poor Fanny lived to repent her cleverness, when immured for it in the strict and dreary service of Queen Charlotte's court!

Although my sponsors in romance talked a great deal about "Clarissa Harlowe"—at the same time informing me

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that when I should be older, I might read it, but "not now"—when the time came that I did read it, the charm I expected was not to be discovered. I wondered at the joy the great brained Macaulay took in this tedious story.

"Not read 'Clarissa'!" he said once to Thackeray. "If you have once thoroughly entered on 'Clarissa,' and are infected by it, you can't leave it. When I was in India, I passed one hot season in the hills, and there were the governor general, and the secretary of government, and the commander in chief, and their wives. I had 'Clarissa' with me; and as soon as they began to read, the whole station was in a passion of excitement about *Miss Harlowe* and her misfortunes, and her scoundrelly *Lovelace*! The governor's wife seized the book; the secretary waited for it; and the chief justice could not read it for tears."

At the earlier epoch, and in the same way, I conceived an attachment for "Rob Roy"—*Di Vernon* then so far affecting the family imagination that one of the young ladies in the house had named a riding horse for her. When I attempted "Waverley" on my own account, I dragged wearily through the first thirty or forty pages, yawning repeatedly, and only settling down to real work when, at the beginning of Chapter IX, *Waverley* "applied himself to the massive knocker of the hall door" of Tully-Veolan. Then "Ivanhoe" took me in its toils—afterwards "The Bride of Lammermoor"—the latter, chiefly on account of *Caleb Balderstone's* delicious efforts to get a meal that would keep up the credit of his master's family. "The Heart of Midlothian" had its turn; and all of them were in time superseded by "Quentin Durward," which, to this day, remains my favorite among the Wizard's galaxy. When one puts it down, to pick up Théodore de Banville's lovely "Gringoire," a softer light is cast upon the character of Louis XI, that Mephistopheles of the fifteenth century in France. The strong, sane influence of Scott's works in childhood is one to be grateful for in after life; and as twice, in recent years, it has been my good fortune to be a guest of a country house on the banks of rippled Tweed, near Abbotsford, and, with the children of Sir Walter's old

friends and neighbors, to visit, leisurely, the spots endeared to him—a thing very unlike tearing through Abbotsford House at the tail of a string of tourists—my life-long reverence and affection for him and for his writings has been refreshed and deepened.

I have here to confess a divagation in the literary taste of early youth, which can be explained only upon the ground of the exotic nature of the favorite adopted.

We lived in the country, and went very little to a staid old town seven miles away. Once, in a little visited cupboard, I came upon a paper volume with a yellow cover; I think the title was "The Jilt"; and as, in those days, I never thought of looking for the name of a mere author, I am quite unaware who wrote it. What pleased me was dashing into the vortex of a London season, with fine ladies on every page, and lords and courtiers scattered throughout the paragraphs. I have an idea that, in it, a damsel leaned from a balcony, to speak to her lover caracoling on a splendid steed in the street below. There were no balconies in the town houses I knew, and the idea seemed to me exhilarating. Just at this point, authority walked into the empty room where "The Jilt" was being devoured, and, in cold blood, took it away from the reader, who was told on no account to open that book again. What were its principles, what its danger to youthful morals, I have never known. From that day to this, "The Jilt" has dwelt in memory as a bright, elusive vision of fashionable life, the loss of which was ill compensated by the distribution of a noon lunch, consisting of two cookies and a Bergamot pear, thrust into my hand as the censor disappeared with my cherished yellow covered novel!

Next, I recall "Pride and Prejudice," by Jane Austen, presented to me as a birthday gift by a distant relative, and extolled by home readers with an enthusiasm that had the immediate effect of making me loath to take it up. When, finally, I opened it, unobserved, it was to enjoy, without preamble, the droll and clever conversation of *Mr. Bennet* and his wife (the parents of five grown up daughters) over the letting of Netherfield Park, in their neighborhood, to a single

young man with four thousand pounds a year! From thence, to the end, this novel made an impression never since removed. It is inimitably fine, and pure, and witty. The author, an English gentlewoman born in 1775, and dying in 1817, is buried in Winchester Cathedral. Of her list of published works, now adopted among the classics of English literature, "Pride and Prejudice" remains my favorite.

Side by side with this gem among books of women writers who possess both imagination and humor, I should place "Cranford," by Mrs. Gaskell; a bit of exquisite miniature painting as far as workmanship goes, having the tenderness of womanly sympathy with her creations that lends such value to woman's literary compositions. But then, I believe "Cranford" is everybody's favorite.

While in this category of talent, I wonder who will recall with me the two charming and lively novels of Miss Sinclair (who has a fountain erected in her honor in a street of Edinburgh, and was a great aunt of Mrs. L. B. Walford, the English novelist of today)—"Modern Accomplishments," and "Modern Society." I tried to purchase these volumes (which, with her "Holiday House," were a delight of my youth) in Edinburgh, in 1894. But the chief book-sellers of Prince's Street could not supply them, although making a special effort to do so in my behalf. Miss Ferrier, whom Sir Walter Scott and other authorities ranked high among the novelists of their time, held me captive for many years by "Marriage," and "The Inheritance." I think they would still do so, but that my volume containing the two stories is in double columns, and the most horrid little print! If we could only possess her in dainty modern guise!

There are two stories, not strictly novels, of which one can hardly think without an emotion of grateful tenderness toward the author—"Jackanapes," and "The Story of a Short Life," by the late Mrs. Ewing.

A quaint old time heroine with whom it was my fortune to become early acquainted (the story of her adventures was, in fact, intended to be a satire upon her predecessors in the away romance) was *Cherubina de Willoughby*. Of this

little book, the rare copies are still struggled for by collectors; it is long out of print. And what exceedingly good fun it is! *Cherubina's* vagaries, after her head had been turned by reading novels, are the theme of the tale; and better *hors d'œuvres* for a reading club do not occur to me.

During many years, "The Scottish Chiefs," "Thaddeus of Warsaw," and "The Children of the New Forest," were varied in my favor by Miss Edgeworth's Irish novels, and the "Vicar of Wakefield." Then a red letter day arrived. Somebody, going away to the outer world after a visit to our secluded country home, having observed the rather antique pattern of the books upon our shelves, sent me, as a present, "The Mill on the Floss." That has continued to be my favorite of all of George Eliot's productions, although hard run for first place by the "Scenes from Clerical Life." The last named were her first ventures in fiction—following which she wrote to John Blackwood in 1857: "If George Eliot turns out a dull dog and ineffective writer—a mere flash in the pan—I, for one, am determined to cut him on the first intimation of that disagreeable fact."

The period of our war threw Virginians back upon the ancients in literature for entertainment. During the four years, spent by us chiefly in Richmond, few new publications came to us through the blockade, and the novels published in the South were not such as especially enchained my fancy. But the romances of Miss Augusta J. Evans, of Louise Mühlbach, of the author of "Guy Livingstone," and of Victor Hugo—notably a translation of "Les Misérables" (a title to which the army of Northern Virginia gave a local rendering, calling it "Lee's Misérables"—some of the soldiers expecting to find it a story of their own hard life in the service)—effected their good work of solace to the beleaguered, and fighting, and waiting people of the Confederacy. These books, printed on a poor, thin, yellow paper, were bound in wall paper, and lay around in people's drawing rooms cheek by jowl with the publications of "before the war."

As the nature of this paper calls for autobiographical candor, I may mention

that, in the last days of the war, my favorite novel was one absorbing much time and reflection, a tale deemed by one person, at least, a chronicle of lasting value. It was finished, copied, tied with, I dare say, one of the last remnants of blue ribbon to be found in the Confederate States, and was consigned to the publishers, Messrs. West & Johnson, of Main Street, Richmond, in whose establishment it was consumed by the envious ravages of the fire that destroyed the lower quarter of the town on the day of Federal occupation. Messrs. West & Johnson have since assured me, with apparent sincerity of statement, that they had intended to bring it out; and I have been reminded by the gifted Bishop of Kentucky that in a consultation with the author, it was he who suggested the name adopted for it—"Skirmishing." But a painful doubt has gained ground in the author's mind that this novel was destined to illumine the world only in the primitive fashion allotted to it by what seemed to be chance.

The librarian of the Virginia State Library in the Capitol was, in those days, the poet John R. Thompson, of whom Mr. R. H. Stoddard has written with charming sympathy in recent days. Mr. Thompson had been editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and a confrère and lifelong friend of Poe. During his visits to England, he became a warm friend and ever welcome visitor of Thackeray and the Carlyles. It was in Mr. Thompson's office in the State Library that Thackeray, dropping in one day to find the owner absent, and a volume of the "Sorrows of Werther" open upon his desk, sat down and playfully penned the lines:

Werther had a love for Charlotte
Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
She was cutting bread and butter.

Charlotte was a married lady,
And a moral man was Werther,
And for all the wealth of Indies
Would do nothing for to hurt her.

So he sighed and pined and ogled,
And his passion boiled and bubbled,
Till he blew his silly brains out,
And no more by it was troubled.

Charlotte—having seen his body
Borne before her on a shutter—
Like a well conducted person,
Went on cutting bread and butter.

Thackeray was at this time occupied in overhauling the library for material for "The Virginians"; and to Thompson he owed many suggestions of value for that delightful book, which, without the stimulus of an exciting plot, has charmed thousands of readers who think it a perfect and impartial picture of its times.

Thompson was a man of gentlest nature, high accomplishment, a master of pure English; he was possessed of the nicest literary acumen. To his selections of books, lent to me in relays during the formative period of my taste in literature, I owe thanks, gratefully recorded here. Of the novels so acquired, I hailed Thackeray's, some of Dickens', Hawthorne's, some of Trollope's, "The Caxtons" of Lord Bulwer, and "Quits," by Baroness Tautphœus, with peculiar satisfaction. Thackeray's were, however, always first and best. "Vanity Fair," "The Newcomes," "The Virginians," held me successively; but in time all the others have yielded place to my admiration for "Henry Esmond." If there is in dramatic fiction any picture to surpass the scene where *Esmond* and *Frank Castlewood* hold the false yet princely young Pretender to account for the wrong he intended to do their house, I am not aware of it. Only to think of the rescue of *Beatrice*, the burning of *Esmond's* patent of nobility in the old brazier, the grand ring of *Esmond's* speech to the prince, stirs the blood now, as always!

The war between the States ended, many Southern families were scattered into foreign parts; ours went to France, where we lived for some time. Our quarters in Paris were in a quaint old domicile called "La Ville au Bois" on the outskirts of the Bois de Boulogne, at the Porte Maillot. No trace of it remains, the cannon of the Franco Prussian war having obliterated the place completely—the second house I have lived in that has fallen a victim to war's rude touch. There I chanced to meet Mme. Letellier, a sister of Alexandre Dumas, *père*, who, taking an interest in the American birds of passage, lent us books, and especially those of her "big brother," as she indulgently styled the famous novelist. Under the ivy shrouded walls of the Ville

au Bois, where sparrows twittered in the sunshine, I made first acquaintance with *Monte Cristo*, and his dashing fraternity. "Oh, Dumas! Oh, thou brave, kind, gallant old Alexandre!" says the creator of my beloved *Esmond*, "I hereby offer thee homage and give thee thanks for many pleasant hours. I have read thee (being sick in bed) for thirteen hours of a happy day, and had the ladies of the house fighting for the volumes!"

I have also to thank the shade of good Mme. Letellier for introducing me to Dumas' "*La Tulipe Noire*"—an exquisite tale that, no doubt, everybody reads when about to visit the *Gevangenpoort*—the prison at the Hague where I stood, last summer, and dreamed about the unhappy hero of this pathetic story. Georges Sand's "*Mare au Diable*" was one of my French loves in the days of the *Ville au Bois*, also her "*Lavinia*," from which Owen Meredith took the idea of his "*Lucile*." And then the real "*Notre Dame*" was forever peopled with *Quasimodo* and *Esmeralda*, and the rest of the characters in Hugo's novel, which readers now call "artificial." In later days, I have transferred my allegiance, in French of the imagination, to Daudet and *Pierre Loti*.

As far as my knowledge of Spanish fiction goes, some of Valdés' books have interested me greatly. But I take my stand by "*Don Quixote*," and am thankful to have known him (in a very battered old copy) ever since I knew anything. But when one comes to be in the *Alhambra*, the very heart of Moorish Spain, it is not of Spanish romancers one thinks, at all, but of the witching stories of our own Washington Irving, that are like the echo to the music of former days.

A German novel I like exceedingly is "*Debit and Credit*," of Gustav Freytag, which has been well translated. Russia, with her people, her history, her romancers, has long held me in the thrall of interest. The works of Tourguénief, Poushkin, and Gogol seem so tremendously human. Then, too, life in the country among Russian families of position and cultivation appears to have been like the life of our South as it used to be. But "*Anna Karénina*," with its intense message to modernity, had no such asso-

ciation. To know Tolstoy's writings is simply to feel one's self passing under the bright lined cloud of genius. A Russian author I had the pleasure of meeting last year in St. Petersburg was spoken of, to me, by Russians, as a great popular favorite with them, "second to Tolstoy," said an admirer of this Mr. Vladimir Korolenko. The story he himself modestly recommended to me was the "*Blind Musician*," which "has been translated into English by a lady of Boston." I remembered at once having read and admired this charming and poetic tale.

The heroic novels of Henryk Sienkiewicz, the Pole, must interest any one trained to war's alarms. "*With Fire and Sword*" has had the advantage of a capital translation by Jeremiah Curtin; and, apart from the light it throws upon Slav history, is a book of absorbing interest to the last page.

When we come to the English novelists of today, I rejoice in Stevenson; though the "*Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*" pleases me, perhaps, more than "*Kidnapped*." I love Blackmore's "*Lorna Doone*," and Barrie's "*Little Minister*." Hardy's "*Under the Greenwood Tree*" gives me the pleasure of some of Shakspeare's outdoor scenes. Mr. Hardy said to me, by the way, that he thought the American novelist of the present time had, in his own country, the richest possible field for fiction, and that he himself could not imagine the said novelist stepping out of his home land for a scene or a character. Which plainly shows that Mr. Hardy has never lived in the confusion of electrified New York, so close to innumerable scenes and characters and nationalities, as not to know what to pick out of them. The sweet repose of an embowered English village, where an English novelist may (if he will) retire to write, must have a good influence upon his work; and even an attic in London is better for that purpose than a similar perch in New York.

A separate paragraph must be given to, but cannot be made to contain, this writer's estimate of Rudyard Kipling's part in the English literature of our end of the century. His successive achievements are a continual surprise, as if an airship were

safely cutting the blue of ether, overhead, and the rest of the world stood looking on agape. And yet, as a novelist——?

I purchased, the other day, in a large emporium, on a book counter adjoining one devoted to a sale of tablecloths and napkins, "Diana of the Crossways" for the sum of fifteen cents. This investment was attended by a sense of shame on the buyer's part. But even in that guise Mr. Meredith's *Diana* was her own buoyant, enchanting, and disappointing self!

At home, I must own to more loves than a few in our modern literary garden. I delight in "The Portrait of a Lady," and "A Tragic Muse," by Henry James, and in Mr. Howells' "Indian Summer." Miss Jewett's stories are, apart from their literary merit, a pride to American womanhood. Miss Wilkins' novels do not seem to me to equal her inimitable short stories. Mr. Stimson's "King Noanett" has revived my old liking for that author's lovely "Mrs. Knollys." Dr. Weir Mit-

chell's colonial novel, "Hugh Wynne," is, so far as we have read it in serial form, of admirable flavor. Mr. Crawford's "Cigarette Maker's Romance" I still like best of that writer's popular productions. Mr. Cable's exquisite "Old Creole Days" is, or ought to be, an American classic—though it, to be sure, is a collection of short stories!

When one begins to wander from the point, it is a sign that one should stop!

I am conscious that I have left out of this imperfect summing up many favorites that will come back to haunt me reproachfully. I suddenly recall "Leatherstocking," "The Tale of Two Cities," the superb *Amyas Leigh*, "Christie Johnstone," "Peg Woffington," and that almost flawless story of its kind, "The Cloister and the Hearth."

But I am inclined to think I would give them all, today, to sit where I once did, poring and thrilling over the forbidden and confiscated pages of "The Jilt"!

Constance Cary Harrison.



A WOODLAND SERENADE.

WITHIN a laurel grove, at eventide,
I hear a pleading voice, now faint, now strong;
The tender light of stars my only guide,
The starlight and the throbbing of the song.

I roam through mazy greenwoods, fragrant flowered,
And suddenly, from shade of friendly tree,
I gaze upon two figures, leaf embowered,
And listen to a lover's minstrelsy!

It is a faun who sings of passion blest;
A nymph upon a low bough swings and sways;
At one full note she floats upon his breast;
Moonrise—the vision melts in silver haze!

The moon has set, thy curtains close are drawn;
And yet I still recall that trembling bough,
And fancy thee the nymph and me the faun—
My song floats to thy casement, hearest thou?

Clarence Urmy.

FAMOUS PORTRAIT PAINTERS.

IV—LELY AND KNELLER.

The Dutch and German artists who became the most famous English court painters of the latter half of the seventeenth century—Lely's "wanton and magnificent nymphs," and Kneller's gallery of the great men and beautiful women of four reigns.

THE seventeenth century in England was not particularly rich in artists, and the two men who were conspicuous as court painters, and who have left names that send the price of their canvases to great figures, were both Teutons.

Sir Peter Lely, who was, as Horace Walpole tells us, "the most capital painter" of the reign of Charles II, was born in Westphalia. His father was a captain, whose family name was originally Van der Vaas; but because he was born in a perfumer's shop at the Hague, and because the shop had a lily for its sign, he carried the name of Captain du Lys, or Lely, and his son never knew any other.

There appears to have been some difficulty about the son's choice of a profession, and he was finally turned over to a painter named De Grebber, who gave him some instruction in drawing and painting stiff, wooden Dutch landscapes. When he went to England, in 1641, and saw the work of Vandyke, he made up his mind that portrait painting was easy and profitable. With a clever understanding of human nature, he began to imitate the Flemish master, with a difference. Where Vandyke was natural, Lely idealized, or, we might say, sentimentalized. Vandyke showed likenesses, and painted his sitters in the dress they wore. Walpole says that Lely's nymphs trail their fringes through meadows and streams, and that their costumes remind one of "fantastic night gowns fastened by a single pin."

But without any doubt, Lely caught the spirit of the age in which he lived. His women were the women of that age and time, and when he painted them, it was as they wished to look. His portraits never were uncharacteristic. He gave a peculiar, half sleepy expression to the eyes of his court ladies which Pope said "spoke the melting soul," but which

makes the latter part of the nineteenth century a little impatient.

Lely painted Charles I and also Oliver Cromwell. It is told that Cromwell said, while sitting to him: "Mr. Lely, I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me; otherwise I will not pay a farthing for it."

But Lely never reached the height of his fame until after the Restoration, when the gay court of Charles II came to make England merry. The cavaliers and belles of Charles' reign were of the sort he loved to paint—the sort who could look out of his canvases with sleepy eyes, and hold daintily their pointed fingers. The men and woman of the Commonwealth did not appeal to him.

The first Duchess of York, Anne Hyde, was not a pretty woman, but she was a most generous one. She knew the taste of her king and his brother, her husband, and in forming her court she surrounded herself with the prettiest women in the country, and began the collection known as "The Beauties of Windsor" by commanding Sir Peter Lely to paint portraits of the loveliest of her maids of honor. Every woman in England was immediately insane to be painted by Lely.

It has been wondered, sometimes, if Lely caught his mannerisms from these women, or whether he assisted history in estimating their characters by what he painted. Walpole says that "Lely's nymphs are far too wanton and magnificent to be taken for anything but maids of honor." It is likely that he painted what he saw in the matter of dress oftener than Walpole will allow. As modesty went out in the reign of Charles II, loose dressing became more prevalent.