

Old Books in New Dress

By Hamilton W. Mabie



WHEN one looks through the list of new editions of standard works of literature, he begins to doubt the accuracy of observation of those critics of contemporary conditions who tell us, from time to time, that serious books are no longer read, and that the reading public has ceased to care for sound literary workmanship. That there is a great laxity in the matter of discriminating between the good and the bad in literary form and substance is beyond question; that too many of those who read show no evidence of intelligence of taste or aim is also beyond question; but there are also many evidences of the existence of a body of readers who care only for the best, and who discriminate between literature and the great mass of writing which is issued in book form, but which bears no more relation to literature than a block of unhewn stone bears to the Parthenon. There are, fortunately, a very considerable number of publishers who deal with book-making in a generous and honorable spirit, who care for books as literature as well as merchandise, and who are glad of an opportunity of forwarding the interests of an unknown man of promise. But the publishing of books is, of course, a business, and must be conducted on business principles; and while intelligent publishers are ready to make ventures for the sake of introducing a new writer of force and talent, they do not republish old books as a matter of entertainment. If old books are reprinted from time to time, it is because there are readers who want them and who buy them. The constant reappearance, therefore, of the standard writers in new and handsome issues furnishes good evidence of the survival of the habit of serious reading and of the renewal and extension of the circle of those who know and care for good books.

One can imagine the satisfaction with which Wordsworth would have studied the long row of sixteen attractive volumes in which the Macmillan Company (New York) are now issuing his complete poetical works; for this dignified and attractive Eversley edition, with its suggestion of library rather than of railroad use, is in itself a declaration that the verse it contains has classic quality and standing. Better still, this noble body of poetry receives its proper homage of thoroughly intelligent editing. Mr. William Knight has long been a student of Wordsworth; he edited a library edition of the poems ten years ago; published a life of the poet three years later; wrote a very pleasant book on "The English Lake District as Interpreted in the Poems of Wordsworth," and prepared the "Memorials of Coleorton," which every lover of the Lake poet has read. In this edition the poems are arranged in the order in which they were written; the changes of text made by the poet in successive editions are given in foot-notes; several pieces of verse are printed for the first time in a complete edition; a new bibliography is added; eight volumes are devoted to the poems and two volumes to the prose works; the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth and the letters of Dor-



William Wordsworth

othy and of the poet are given; with a new life of Wordsworth in one volume. Each volume contains an etching of a locality associated with the poet, and a new portrait of Wordsworth or of his wife or daughter or sister. The edition leaves nothing to be desired.

It is no very violent change of atmosphere and feeling to pass from Grasmere to Thrums; to exchange the old-time English dalesman for the sturdy Scotch weaver. Mr. Barrie, like Wordsworth, is a lover of nature and of man in his primitive estate. He cares supremely for those simple experiences in which the life of men finds a common consciousness and out of which the human drama is compounded. It is too early to assign Mr. Barrie his final or even his relative place, but there are many indications that he has come to stay. His popularity has waxed so much

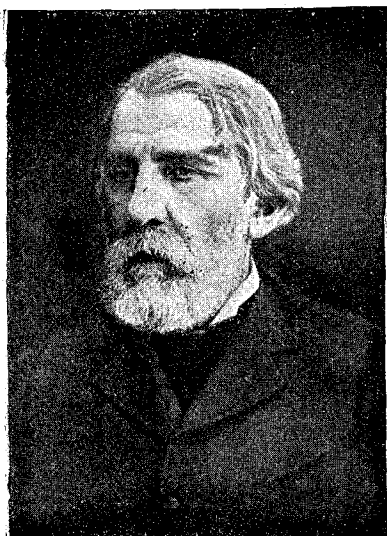


Harriet Beecher Stowe

of late that one trembles when he remembers that the writer of "Sentimental Tommy" is so young. There is that in his work, however, which allays such an anxiety. Mr. Barrie has a real insight into life, and such an insight is an immense safeguard against the corrupting tendency of popularity. He is, moreover, a true artist, and a true artist never wholly succumbs to the lower temptations of success. Those who care, therefore, for the sensitive genius of a

writer who puts his heart into his books, without any sacrifice of that reticence which is the guard of every fine nature, may take unalloyed satisfaction in the fact that the reading public has found Mr. Barrie out and has profited by the knowledge. The man who wrote "Sentimental Tommy" has the stuff of literature in him, and Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons have made no mistake in giving his work that dignity of form which was once reserved for writers who had passed all the barriers and taken their places among the classics. When the ten volumes of the Thistle Edition stand together, there will be few to withstand the charm of the fair page, the noble type, the judicious illustration, and the tasteful binding. Such books, by their happy combination of old-fashioned dignity and modern decoration, are a credit to American book-making.

The Riverside Press has so thoroughly defined its aims and so long illustrated its workmanship that its imprint has become a synonym for sound and beautiful work. One by one the older American classics have come in final forms from this press, and no one who cares for our literature can look through the long list from Hawthorne to Mrs. Stowe without recognizing the service which this press has rendered to American writers and readers. For it is no small matter that our classics are now in our hands in forms so harmonious and appropriate that the very shape and dress of the books are significant of the quality and value of the text. To this company of beautiful editions the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe, in sixteen volumes, are now being added. One reads the pages without being conscious of the type, and the volumes are so well dressed in color and stamping that one fails to note any single feature of binding or lettering; and this is saying that the edition is in perfect taste. The title-pages are worthy of special attention, and each volume is to contain an etched portrait or other illustration. This edition is the truest memorial of a writer who was not only the foremost woman who has yet appeared in this country, but who was also the most widely read of Amer-



Ivan Turgenev

novels which have become a part of our literature. Time has dealt gently with Thackeray, whose soundness of substance and whose beauty of workmanship become more clear as the years go by; it has searched Dickens with dispassionate scrutiny, and has rejected half a dozen stories which our elders once laughed or cried over; and it has not left George Eliot's work intact. It has discarded "Daniel Deronda,"

"Theophrastus Such," the great majority of the poems, and it has had misgivings about "Romola;" but it has put "Scenes from Clerical Life," "Silas Marner," "The Mill on the Floss," and "Adam Bede" with the books that endure; and it has postponed final judgment on "Middlemarch" and "Felix Holt." On the whole, therefore, George Eliot has fared extremely well, and is likely to go down to posterity in the company of a goodly array of works of noble quality. During those fortunate years when the artistic temper was

in the ascendant, and the philosophic temper was its servant, she was a really great writer; a master of some of the deeper elements of human experience, and of a style at once capacious, vigorous, and eloquent in a worthy sense of that much-abused word. Messrs. E. P. Dutton & Co. have put the work of this gifted woman in a Standard Edition which is both dignified and agreeable; the books

are admirably printed and bound, the page is harmonious, the coloring and stamping rich, and the general effect of the long row of books very taking.

This generation, which has seen so many literary artists attain the mastery of their craft through years of laborious training, has known no finer artist in the field of fiction than Ivan Turgenev. The deep-hearted Russian, who loved his country and his people so passionately that he could not do more nor less than speak the truth about both, paid the penalty which is

always exacted of the man who feels with the radicals the misery of existing conditions, but who sees how inadequate are the remedies which radicalism often brings forward. Feared, hated, and exiled by the Government, Turgenev was compelled also, by his sheer

veracity, to antagonize the popular movement in which so many of his friends were enlisted. Time always works for a writer of such insight and mastery of form, and the lonely novelist has already had his reward. The six novels which bear his name, with the volume of sketches which first made Russia completely aware of the conditions of serf life, are now recognized as masterpieces. They ought to be in the hands of every young novelist; for their restraint, condensation, balance, and deep-going energy of style are corrective of some of the worst faults of contemporary writing. No writer ever submitted himself more loyally to the discipline of art; none was ever more entirely free from carelessness, haste, crudity, and unbalanced emotion. It was a service to American readers to secure a fresh translation of this noble group of novels, and to give them so convenient a form as that which they have received at the hands of the Macmillan Company in nine small volumes.

A new generation of novelists has come upon the stage since the brave days when Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot were writing those great



Thomas Hardy

(By courtesy of Harper & Brothers)

Thomas Hardy brings to the writing of fiction the greatest natural force now at work among English novelists. Less intellectual than Meredith, he is far more dramatic. At his best he easily stands in the front rank, and in one field he has no superior in English literature. "Under the Greenwood Tree," "Far from the Madding Crowd," and "The Woodlanders" are stories of classic quality; in power of natural description, of vivid portraiture of rustic life, in humor and keen characterization, they are unsurpassed. They have a Shakespearean breadth and vitality of treatment; their roots are deep in the soil out of which they grow. In sheer dramatic power, "Tess," "The Mayor of Casterbridge," and "The Return of the Native" belong also in the front rank. Mr. Hardy is, however, a fatalist, with a tremendous grasp of the irony of life as it appears from his standpoint, and with a limitation of interest and vision which, in later years especially, have told heavily against the truth of his interpretation and the beauty of his art. He has had a great theme in his creed that the man should be punished as severely as the woman for sexual sins; but in some of his later stories his touch has not been sound nor his taste healthful. "Two on a Tower" and "A Group of Noble Dames" are distinctly repulsive. It is a misfortune that so great a writer should have gone so far astray. Aside from this small group of books, he is an artist of commanding force and interest, to whom the future, with dispassionate discrimination between his sound

and his unsound work,

will assign a greater place than that which he holds to-day. In the new edition which bears the imprint of the Messrs. Harper & Brothers his works are presented for the first time entire and in uniform style to American readers.

It is a satisfaction to come upon a new edition of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* in a single volume, well printed, tasteful in dress, and of such moderate cost that it is easily within the reach of all who desire to make the acquaintance of the



Thomas Carlyle



Charles Kingsley



J. Fenimore Cooper

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most perfect novel in the English language. A companion volume in form, although not in quality, is Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia*—a story of very uneven workmanship, but full of that vitality which characterized Kingsley, and disclosing a certain picturesque force and pictorial quality which have given the novel high rank among books of its kind. In this same group belongs also a single-volume edition of Carlyle's characteristic *Sartor Resartus*, in which one may find the key to Carlyle's thinking; in fact, whoever knows "Sartor Resartus" thoroughly as regards its contents and its form, knows Carlyle's view of life and art, and his manner of practicing the one and formulating the other. These three volumes bear the imprint of Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

There have been times in late years when it has seemed as if James Fenimore Cooper's day were over, but there is too much of the stuff of which real books are made in these stories to permit of their becoming merely monuments in our literary history. They remain, in their way, among the very best stories which have yet been written on our soil. They are distinctively American, characteristic in a peculiar sense of early American conditions and character; they are, in the second place, capital pieces of narrative. The workmanship is very uneven from the standpoint of the artistic thoroughness with which most writing of high quality is done to-day. Cooper's workmanship is often slovenly, and never, perhaps, discloses the very highest quality. The average of it is, nevertheless, for the purposes for which it is used, sound. Cooper was, in the third place, a capital story-teller. He knew how to dispose of his material, how to give it order and sequence, and he remains, in spite of many successors and competitors, a real figure among the group of American novelists. It was his good fortune that the writing of his life in these later times fell into the hands of Professor Lounsbury, who made out of the material which he found one of the best biographies yet written in America. There have been many editions of these novels, but none which, for popular purposes, has been more attractive than the Mohawk Edition, which is to be completed in thirty-two volumes, large 12mo, printed from very clear type, with numerous illustrations, and substantially and attractively bound. This edition resembles very closely the Hudson Edition of Irving, an excellent model. (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.)

Messrs. T. Y. Crowell & Co. have grouped in five well-made volumes the *Leatherstocking Tales*, the most popular of all the Cooper novels. These volumes contain twenty photogravure illustrations by Frank T. Merrill. They are bound in green ribbed cloth, they are well printed, and they leave little to be desired in the way of a library edition of this particular group of stories.

If there be a book in our language which fits the mood of a leisure hour, and which takes its fortunate reader out of the rush of contemporary life and the agitation of contemporary discussion, it is surely Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*; that old-fashioned, meditative, leisurely, out-of-door



Izaak Walton

classic, full of the repose of the English landscape, of the charm of the gentlest of the sports, and of the quality which makes literature. This is one of those books which the reader who knows what he wants and provides himself with it likes to have close at hand, not for consecutive reading, but for sipping now and then; and this classic has certainly never been put into more convenient shape than in the new edition which bears the imprint of the Macmillan Company, which is prefaced by a characteristic introduction from the hand of Mr. Andrew Lang, and which is admirably illustrated by Mr. E. J. Sullivan.

Never, surely, was an old poet more fortunate than Omar Khayyám on the day when his verse fell into the hands of Edward Fitzgerald. As a result of this happy contact between one of the most gifted of English translators and one of the most suggestive of old Persian poets, Omar Khayyám has become to all intents a modern writer, and for that matter an English writer. It is of small consequence, so far as the reader is concerned, how much Omar Khayyám owes to Edward Fitzgerald; the fact remains that the translation of the *Rubáiyát* has put into the hands of the English reader a body of verse entirely unlike anything which he has read in his own tongue before; at once stimulating, suggestive, irritating, and pathetic. This translation comes from the press of Messrs. T. Y. Crowell & Co., in a single volume, compact and clearly printed.

Other Holiday Books

One of the most important of holiday books is *Modern French Masters*, edited by Professor John C. Van Dyke (The Century Company, New York). It is a sumptuous volume, and is one of the best contributions to contemporary art. Like the "Old Italian Masters" and the "Old Dutch and Flemish Masters," this book is made up of twenty biographical and critical monographs on the best-known modern French masters, written by their American pupils and admirers. To those who know anything about contemporary American artists and their pictures, it is easy to see that in each case the writer has been chosen because of his knowledge of the painter of whom he writes, and because of his sympathy with his works. Mr. Will H. Low contributes the articles on MM. Gérôme and Boutet de Monvel; Mr. Kenyon Cox, those on MM. Puvis de Chavannes and Baudry; Mr. Carroll Beckwith writes of

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"THE FAIR DUTCHWOMAN," BY COURBET.

From "Modern French Masters." (The Century Co.)