

THE BOOK TABLE

BOOKS I HAVE LOVED AND LOST

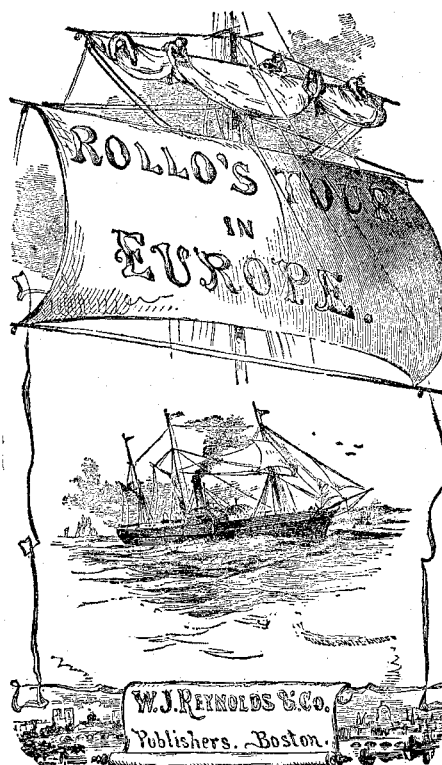
BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

IT is best to be off with the old love before we are on with the new; and this is as true of books as it is of girls. Until modern science can supply a book-lover with an elastic house adorned with an extensible library as easily adjusted to an unexpected company of guests as is a dining-table, until this devoutly-to-be-desired guerdon is granted to us, we have to clear out our shelves now and again to make room for newcomers. We have perforce to get rid of the volumes which have ceased to please and to provide shelf-room for the volumes which have more recently attracted us. Yet as soon as the discarded tomes have been irrevocably dispersed—sold or given away—we begin to doubt our own judgment and to yearn over the dear departed. But it is in vain that we wish them back and that we wonder why it was we were foolish enough to let them go. Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It ought not to have been.

Although I was not born in a library, as Lord Beaconsfield boasted he had been, I grew up in a home where books were made welcome and where I was encouraged to read them and to own them. I can recall that I was not yet proficient in the art of reading when I became the owner of the ten volumes narrating the adventures and misadventures of Rollo in Europe; and as soon as I was able I read them again and again. Before I was seven I had crossed the ocean four times, twice over to Europe and twice back; and I retained vivid visual recollections of the places to which Rollo and his sister traveled. (What was the name of that sister? I remember that she took her canary with her—but, although this fact is adhesive in my memory, her name I cannot now replevin after more than threescore years.) What most delighted me then was the unsuspecting visit of the boy and girl to the Hippodrome in Paris one Sunday afternoon when they had followed the crowd and made their way fortuitously into the huge circus tent—which (in their American innocence of Parisian manners and customs) they mistook for a camp-meeting. They discovered where they were only when the splendidly adorned horses pranced into the arena; and then they decorously withdrew. Or did they remain? Really my septuagenarian memory plays me strange tricks. I can see the pair of them slipping in, merged in a flock of French children; but I cannot now follow them out.

Where are those ten volumes now? I wish I had them. They were cased in wine-colored cloth, with an embossed side-stamp of a fashion now no longer seen. And where are the entrancing

tomes of Mayne Reid—"Osceola" and the "Scalp-Hunters"? They are lost, strayed or stolen, long years ago, and my five-foot shelf of boy's books knows them no more. Do the boys of to-day know them, I wonder? If not, my grandson is not now as fortunate as I was. Only a decade after I had become acquainted with these masterpieces I had the joy of meeting the author at a round-up of men of letters (at Mr. Hamersley's, I



TITLE PAGE OF ONE OF THE ROLLO BOOKS,
BY JACOB ABBOTT

think)—a gathering to which I had then no claim to be admitted, for I was only a college boy. I saw Mayne Reid face to face, and I noted that one of his shirt studs had fallen out. I did not have speech with him; but my eyes paid him the tribute of boyish admiration. He had recently returned from England on the same boat with a friend of mine, who told me later that when the ship ran into a storm, so severe that the passengers were ordered below, he had heard Mayne Reid say almost under his breath, "I led the forlorn hope at Chapultepec, and am I now to be drowned here like a rat in a box?"

It was a Christmas before or a Christmas after I had "Osceola" and the "Scalp-Hunters" given to me that I received the "Gorilla-Hunters" and the "Coral Island" of Robert Michael Ballantyne—the "Ballantyne the brave" whom Stevenson companions with "Cooper of the Wood and Wave." I fear that the years have dealt hardly with his fame

and that the younger generation does not now share the pleasure I had in his pages threescore years ago. When my friend Clayton Hamilton was editing and annotating "Treasure Island" as a school text-book for supplementary reading (painful words, indeed), he came to inquire if I knew who this Ballantyne might be that R. L. S. held in honorable memory. But when I read the "Knights of the Joyous Venture," one of the best of the tales of "Puck of Pook's Hill"—if it is possible to make a choice where all are transcendent—I rejoiced to observe that Puck's young friends, Una and Dan, had enjoyed the blessed privilege of reading the "Gorilla-Hunters." But I have not seen this book these many years, nor the "Coral Island" either. All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I drop a silent tear; and then I ask why it is that no American publisher has seen fit to reprint these cherished classics of my boyhood—the best of Mayne Reid and Ballantyne, the "Green Mountain Boys" of Judge Thompson, and the thrilling "Nick of the Woods" of Richard Montgomery Bird, that fearsome tale of the mysterious and appalling Jibbenainosay. Of a truth such a publisher would reap a rich reward.

How it was that these books of my boyhood deserted me I cannot guess. All I am sure of is that they are no longer mine. Like Hans Breitmann's party, they have gone "away in the ewigkeit." I do know what happened to some other books that were mine a little later in my youth, treasured tomes dealing with the art and mystery of conjuring. Before I was fourteen I was the happy possessor of the "Magician's Own Book," published by Dick & Fitzgerald, generous benefactors of boyhood; and a year later in Paris I found the French treatise on prestidigitation which had been the font and origin of this American manual of magic. Soon I also acquired the memoirs of Robert-Houdin, master of the art. In the decades that followed I kept on adding to my collection, delighting in the succession of clever dissertations by "Professor Hoffmann" and enjoying hugely "Our Magic" by Maskelyne and Devant. I gathered volume after volume year after year, and I guarded them jealously, grateful for the pleasure I had had in their perusal; and I am glad to know that they are now safe on the shelves of the library of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University.

There are other collections, begun in the early years of my manhood, when I was allured into rambling along the byways of the curiosities of literature. In time I had got together nearly a dozen volumes devoted to macaronic poetry, and a dozen or more devoted to the art of the fan-maker and a score devoted to the art of the bookbinder. I must have picked up here and there in Europe

more than a score of volumes setting forth the history of playing cards, catalogues of collections of them, and discussions of their use and abuse in games of chance. These several accumulations I sold, pitilessly ousting them, one after another, as my affection waned and as I moved along to worship at new shrines. I cannot deny that I have more than once had occasion to regret my cruel treatment of these lost loves, maidens all forlorn, dispersed at random, and deprived of the congenial companionship to which they had perhaps become accustomed. My deeds be on my head; and I can blame no one but myself.

There are, however, a host of other books for which my shelves now yawn and which I did not part with voluntarily. They have unaccountably vanished. Like Catiline, they have gone, departed, escaped, broken out. Even to my best friend I have never been rash enough to say, "Come and take a choice of all my library"—as Shakespeare makes a feeble-minded creature say in "Titus Andronicus." I may have lent one or another in a trusting moment and after dinner; but I can never have consented to the abstraction of all of the disparate volumes for which I now yearn. Where are the two little paper-covered sixteenmos (or *infra*) in which I first read "Daisy Miller" and "An International Episode"? I have recently re-read with renewed approbation these first fruits of Henry James's cosmopolitan investigations; they are now to be had in a single seemly tome in the "Modern Library" with an appreciation by Howells as cordially enthusiastic as it is keenly critical. But I cannot help wishing I had them again in their original form, as members of "Harper's Half Hour Series"—a series which contained a heterogeny of lively tales, including, if my memory does not play me false (as perhaps it does), the "Tender Recollections of Irene Macgillicuddy," which Laurence Oliphant wrote in the hospitable home of S. L. M. Barlow at Glen Cove.

There was then—forty years ago, alas!—another paper-covered series, the so-called "Standard Library." I find I still have the "Essays of George Eliot" collected by Nathan Sheppard and containing several articles not included in her "complete" works. But I have lost another volume of that series that I once possessed, the "Archibald Malmaison" of Julian Hawthorne, the story which witnessed that he was the son of his father. Nor have I been able to find what I once owned, the "Fables" of George T. Lanigan—"anywhere, anywhere, out of the World." Who was bold enough to borrow that little volume? Or did a false friend steal it? It was small enough and thin enough to hide itself in a felonious pocket. It had illustrations by F. S. Church—illustrations worthy of the delectable text. Also missing and unaccounted for is my copy of Stockton's "Rudder Grange," with its illustrations by Arthur B. Frost, little masterpieces of pictorial humor, at once

firm and delicate. Is it because these favorite authors were makers of light literature that their volumes have been so volatile? Or am I the victim of deliberate and indefensible villainy? He who steals my purse, steals trash, but he who robs me of my books is—well, I do not dare to print my opinion of him.

My sentiments were voiced nearly half a century ago by Laman Blanchard in his quatrains on the "Art of Book-Keeping:"

How hard, when those who do not wish

To lend (that's lose) their books,
Are snared by anglers—folks that fish
With literary hooks. . . .

For pamphlets lent I look around,
For tracts my tears are spilt;
But when they take a book that's bound,

'Tis surely extra-guilt. . . .

If once a book you let them lift,
Another they conceal;
For though I caught them stealing
Swift,

As swiftly went my Steele. . . .

I Prior sought, but could not see
The Hood so late in front;
And when I turned to hunt for Lee,
Oh! where was my Leigh Hunt? . . .

But all I think I shall not say,
Nor let my anger burn;
For as they never found in Gay,
They have not left me Sterne.

THE NEW BOOKS

FICTION

BREATH OF SCANDAL (THE). By Edwin Balmer. Little, Brown & Co., Boston. \$1.90.

A novel of contemporary American family life, sometimes uncomfortable in its realism, but in its happenings a strong argument against conventional ignorance. In this case it is the father of the family against whom the breath of scandal stirs, and the volcanic results teach his daughter that innocence is not safety from injury.

INSTRUMENT OF THE GODS (AN). By Lincoln Colcord. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.

Tales of the sea and its ships and sailors, enlivened by "chanteys" and ballads of the sea. The volume has variety of scene and incident.

NORTHWEST. By Harold Bindloss. The Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York. \$1.75.

"A tale of endeavor, of mystery, and of love, in the wilds of the Canadian Rockies. A weakling, idling away his life and fortune in drinking and gambling, easy prey to the professional crooks into whose clutches he falls, is given his chance to become a man"—thus the publishers correctly describe this volume.

HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

LARNED HISTORY. By J. N. Larned. Vol. I. The C. A. Nichols Publishing Company, Springfield, Massachusetts.

This is the first volume of a twelve-volume compendium of history put together on an original plan. It is based on a five-volume reference work prepared about thirty years ago by Professor Larned, called "History for Ready Reference," and now very much enlarged in

It is not the standard authors that I mourn, for them I can find in the club library. It is for books of less outstanding fame, which are not so easy to get at. When I had finished the "Age of Innocence," I looked in vain for three other novels of New York with stories set in the same innocuous epoch; Orpheus C. Kerr's "Avery Glibun," Dr. Mayo's "Never Again," and William H. Bishop's "House of a Merchant Prince."

In like manner, after I had feasted on the hinted but untold horrors of Henry James's "Turn of the Screw," I looked high and low for the "Green Tea" of Sheridan Le Fanu, for the tales of FitzJames O'Brien, and for Jean Richepin's "Morts Bizarres." Nor could I find Mrs. Oliphant's "Little Pilgrim" or her "Beleaguered City." Once I had a rich collection of tales such as the Fat Boy in the "Pickwick Papers" would have reveled in, tales that "would make your flesh creep." As it is, I must go to bed shiverless, with no hope of a nightmare, despite my former ownership of a nest of them. It is small consolation that I have at last laid hands on Bayard Taylor's delightful "Diversions of the Echo Club" and on Frederick Beecher Perkins's "Devil-Puzzlers." What do these trovers profit me, if all their lovely companions are faded and gone? Unlike the Cheshire cat, they have faded away and not left even the grin behind them.

scope and contents. It is arranged in encyclopædia form and the articles appear in alphabetical order. They are chiefly composed of extracts from histories, newspapers, magazines, and textbooks, and in this way are chosen to represent "the better and newer literature of history." It is evident at a glance that a great deal of pains and hard work have been put on the preparation of this work, and the first volume indicates that it will be valuable. It is fully illustrated with reproductions of photographs and with maps.

TRAVEL AND DESCRIPTION

CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS (THE). By Le Roy Jeffers, A.C., F.R.G.S. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$5.

Exceptionally well printed photographs of some of America's most beautiful scenic attractions accompany the interesting textual descriptions of this volume. The author, who is Librarian of the American Alpine Club, is thoroughly conversant with this theme and has made a valuable addition to the works descriptive of the continent's wonderlands.

TALES OF LONELY TRAILS. By Zane Grey. Harper & Brothers, New York. \$3.

One scarcely expects the accounts of real adventure by a writer of "thrillers" in fiction to be as absorbing as his efforts in imaginary description, but Zane Grey in these pages keeps his readers' pulse-beats going fast. Bear-fights, lion-hunts, and exploring and hunting trips in little-known regions of the West are described with a zest that imparts its spirit to the reader.