

THE BOOK TABLE

HORACE ONCE MORE

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

ALTHOUGH the American contribution to classical scholarship in the nineteenth century was honorable, what there was of it, there was not as much as there ought to have been. For that reason, if for no other, it is pleasant to note that in the twentieth century two of the most honorable enterprises in this field are American. The first of these is the "Loeb Library,"¹ which is to extend to three hundred volumes, each of which presents the Greek or Latin text on the left-hand page, facing an English translation on the right-hand page. The second is the more recent series entitled "Our Debt to Greece and Rome," edited by Professor Hadzsits, of the University of Pennsylvania, and Professor Moore, of Johns Hopkins. In this there are to be fifty volumes or a few more, each of them prepared by a scholar specially qualified to deal with the author confided to him. While both the "Loeb Library" and "Our Debt to Greece and Rome" were undertaken in America, their editors have welcomed the co-operation of European scholars, thus testifying to the essential unity of the classical tradition throughout the civilized world.

To prepare the volume on "Horace and His Influence"² the editors of "Our Debt to Greece and Rome" selected Professor Grant Showerman, of the University of Wisconsin; and no better choice could have been made. Professor Showerman has not a little of the caressing delicacy of Andrew Lang and of the mellow urbanity of Gaston Boisier. Like the Scotsman and the Frenchman, he has the broad and deep learning demanded by his task, but there is none of the dry dust of pedantry in his loving appreciation of the Roman poet, who is the most modern of them all. Professor Showerman is a humanist who is also human, and who is therefore equipped to make his readers perceive and feel and enjoy the abiding humanity of the friendly man of the world who lived nineteen hundred years ago and who talks to us now almost as if he were our own contemporary. Horace was a man of the world who was also a man of letters and who could have played a part in politics had he so chosen. He was intimate with Vergil and with Mæcenas, Prime Minister of Augustus, and, although he was the son of a freedman, he moved in the "best society" of Rome. Augustus wanted him for private secretary, but the poet preferred to be free from the shackles of office and to be at liberty to withdraw at will to his Sabine farm. It is testimony to Horace's tact and to his

force of character that the all-powerful Emperor did not resent this refusal and continued his friendship. I wonder whether Goumy was right when he suggested (in his posthumous volume of essays, "Les Latins") that the peace of Rome was so new and so sudden that it was almost unbelievable, and that there was a general doubt whether it would endure—a suggestion which might very well account for certain



From an old Engraving

HORACE

reticences of Horace and for the fact that he does not "speak out" (as Matthew Arnold said of Gray).

There is an irreverent impertinence in Eugene Field's slangy stanzas which he was daring enough to call the "Truth about Horace:"

He was a very owl, sir,
And starting out to prowl, sir,
You bet he made Rome howl, sir,
Until he filled his date;
With a massic-laden ditty,
And a classic maiden pretty.
He painted up the city,
And Mæcenas paid the freight.

This may be the truth, but it is not the whole truth; and in so far as it is true, it is true only to the youthful years of the poet, when he was rather a "man about town" than a man of the world. Austin Dobson, the most devoted of Horatians, is nearer to the truth in his "To Q. H. F."—

Ours is so far-advanced an age!
Sensation tales, a classic stage,
Commodious villas:
We boast high art, an Albert Hall,
Australian meats, and men who call
Their sires gorillas!
We have a thousand things, you see,
Not dreamt in your philosophy.

And yet, how strange! 'Our "world"
to-day,
Tried in the scale, would scarce outweigh
Your Roman cronies;

Walk in the Park—you'll seldom fail
To find a Sybaris on the rail
By Lydia's ponies,
Or hap on Burrus, wigged and stayed,
Ogling some unsuspecting' maid.

So with the rest. Who will may trace
Behind the new each older face
Defined as clearly;
Science proceeds and men stand still;
Our "world" to-day's as good or ill,—
As cultured (nearly),
As yours was, Horace. You alone,
Unmâcht, unmet, we have not known.

No doubt Professor Showerman was within his rights when he quoted the whole of Dobson's delightful lyric and when he failed to mention Field's rolicking and frolicsome verses. Yet it is Field's example which has inspired half a dozen of our columnists to bring Horace down to date; and perhaps Field found his inspiration in Thackeray's modernization of "Persicos Odi"—

Dear Lucy, you know what my wish
is;
I hate all your Frenchified fuss;
Your silly entrées and made dishes
Were never intended for us.

Paraphrases like this of Thackeray's and like Dobson's lovely rondel "You shun me, Chloe, wild and shy" are more felicitous and really truer to the original than the barren effort to translate strictly Horace's untranslatable lyrics, which have tempted so many English poets to their undoing. Horace's Latin is so perfect, so concise, so clear, so charming, that the task of turning his lines into English, one after another, seems to be easy enough. But it is not even difficult; it is impossible. I was surprised to observe that Professor Showerman has eulogized the renderings of Sir Theodore Martin, which have always seemed to me hard and mannered; and I was confirmed in this opinion forty years ago—

(Eheu, eheu Posthume,
The years glide away and are lost to me.)

—when Austin Dobson quoted a line or two from one of Sir Theodore's versions with the swift comment, "How un-Horatian that is!" Perhaps, on the whole, the most satisfactory, or the most nearly satisfactory, or the least unsatisfactory, translation of the "Odes" is the eclectic selection made by the late Benjamin E. Smith, editor of the Century Dictionary. This was published in 1901 in a dainty little volume of the "Thumb-Nail Series," and I suppose it to be the book which Professor Showerman lists as the "Century Horace." Certainly it is a delectable tome, containing "infinite riches in a little room." The list of English poets from whom Dr. Smith drew upon for his translations is a testimony "more enduring than brass" to the perennial appeal of

¹ A tribute to the "Loeb Library" from the authoritative pen of Professor G. M. Whicher will appear in a subsequent issue.

² Horace and His Influence. By Grant Showerman. The Marshall Jones Company, Boston. \$1.50.

Horace. The catalogue includes Ben Jonson, Milton, Dryden, Herrick, Congreve, Swift, Sir Charles Sedley, Addison, Cowley, Samuel Johnson, Mahony ("Father Prout"), Merivale, Conington, Goldwin Smith, Procter, and Austin Dobson.

Professor Showerman begins by telling us that Horace is set apart from other men of letters, ancient and modern, by a special quality:

This distinctive quality lies neither in the originality nor the novelty of the Horatian message, which, as a matter of fact, is surprisingly familiar, and perhaps even commonplace. It lies rather in the appealing manner and mood of its communication. It is a message living and vibrant.

The reason for this is that in Horace we have, above all, a person. No poet speaks from the page with greater directness, no poet establishes so easily and so completely the personal relation with the reader, no poet is remembered so much as if he were a friend in the flesh. In this respect, Horace among poets is a parallel to Thackeray in the field of the novel. What the letters of Cicero are to the intrigue and turmoil of politics, war and the minor joys and sorrows of private and social life in the last days of the Republic, the lyrics and the "Conversations" of Horace are to the mood of the philosophic mind of the early Empire. . . . We reconstruct the times of Cæsar and Augustus from fortunate acquaintance with two of the most representative men who ever possessed the gift of literary genius. (Pages 3, 4.)

Professor Showerman discusses in turn Horace the person, Horace the poet, Horace the interpreter of his time, Horace the philosopher of life. Thus is the friendly lyrist sketched from different angles; and thus are we enabled to form our own composite portrait. No one of these sections is a cleaner piece of work than that which sets before us clearly and sharply what Horace asked from life:

Horace's prayer is rather to be freed from the care of empty ambition, from the fear of death and the passion of anger, to laugh at superstition, to enjoy the happy return of his birthday, to be forgiving of his friends, to grow more gentle and better as old age draws on, to recognize the proper limit in all things:

Health to enjoy the blessings sent
From heaven; a mind unclouded, strong;
A cheerful heart; a wise content,
An honored age; and song.

Then Professor Showerman, after telling us what Horace was when alive, traces the influence through the ages; and this is a survey as interesting as it is scholarly. It is pleasant to be told (page 109) that "no author from the classics has been so frequently translated as Horace." In the history of every modern literature we find a succession of translators, paraphrasers, imitators, and disciples of Horace. For example, Professor Showerman notes his influence on that most un-Horatian improviser of genius, Lope de Vega; but he fails to record that the Spanish

poet's "Arte Nuevo de Nacer Comedias" is modeled on the "Ars Poetica."

Professor Showerman lists Molière among those inspired by Horace, but he omits to tell us that one Horatian ode is the basis of a lovers' quarrel and reconciliation in three of Molière's comedies. There is an interesting kinship of spirit between Horace and Molière; both are men of the world, who do not ask too much from life and who look on at the human comedy with tolerant sympathy. They are akin also in this, that their themes are local and immediate, or seem so, and yet their appeal to latter-day observers of life is cosmopolitan and perennial. It may be suggested also that the fertilizing influence exerted by Molière's comedies and by Horace's familiar epistles upon the eighteenth-century essay of Steele and Addison is both wider and deeper than has been noted by the historians of English literature.

With one more quotation I must leave this illuminating little book:

But the most pronounced effect of Horace's dynamic power is its inspiration to sane and truthful living. Life seems a simple thing, yet there are many who miss the paths of hap-

piness and wander in wretched discontent because they are not bred to distinguish between the false and the real. We have seen the lesson of Horace: that happiness is not from without but from within; that it is not abundance that makes riches, but attitude; that the acceptance of worldly standards of getting and having means the life of the slave; that the fraction is better increased by division of the denominator than by multiplying the numerator; that unbought riches are better possessions than those the world displays as the prizes most worthy of striving for. No poet is so full of inspiration as Horace for those who have glimpsed these simple and easy yet little known secrets of living. Men of twenty centuries have been less dependent on the hard-won goods of this world because of him, and lived fuller and richer lives. (Page 167.)

As I copied out this statement of the philosophy of a Roman who was a man of the world I remarked for the first time its likeness to the philosophy of an American who shunned the world and sought solitude as Horace sought society. After all, David Henry Thoreau was a stoic in his way, as Quintus Horatius Flaccus had been in his.

THE NEW BOOKS

FICTION

LOVE AND OTHER STORIES. By Anton Chekhov. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.

This concludes the collected edition of Chekhov's novels and tales excellently edited by Mrs. Garnett. There are thirteen volumes in all, and when one remembers that Chekhov's bent and vein was toward the very short story which made its picture and its point with lightning-like incisiveness, one is astonished at the amount of his production. Despite the remarkable work done by the newest school of Russians, the fiction of Chekhov and Turgenyev has not been distanced.

MOSTLY SALLY. By P. G. Wodehouse. The George H. Doran Company, New York. \$2.

No one among the younger English writers gets more fun into his characters than Mr. Wodehouse. We will not say that the present story is quite as good as his "Damsel in Distress," which we like better than even his more popular "Little Warrior," but it has much the same liveliness, with perhaps a little more sincere touch of feeling. The Wodehouse stories are not literature in the distinguished sense of the word, but they certainly are jolly.

TRAVEL AND DESCRIPTION

BEACHCOMBER IN THE ORIENT (A). By Harry L. Foster. Illustrated. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. \$3.

Mr. Foster will be remembered by his "Adventures of a Tropical Tramp." The picture he gives of the Orient in his new book is a series of snap-shots, bits of personal adventure, and close-by views of people and things. He was stranded in French Indo-China when a supposed friend ran away with his money and his clothes, and thereafter hiked through

Siamese jungles, rode on freight cars in the Malay States, and in other ways lived a hand-to-mouth life which in no way dismayed, but amused him. The book is a queer jumble in some ways, but it is assuredly readable, and abundant illustration adds to the pleasure.

FROM THE DEEP OF THE SEA. By Charles Edward Smith. Illustrated. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.50.

This is decidedly an addition to the literature of sea adventure. The author was surgeon on an English whaling ship. The voyage described lasted fourteen months; the captain and twelve of the crew of fifty died; when the ship broke into the open sea all the survivors were in a terrible condition from starvation, scurvy, and lack of fuel. The author of the diary was a Quaker, the captain was religious, prayer-meetings were held whenever there was trouble, and the captain refused to hunt whales on Sunday. The narrative (edited by Surgeon Smith's son) is queer as well as adventurous and thrilling.

STUDIES IN NORTH AFRICA. By Cyril Fletcher Grant. Illustrated. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. \$3.

This is a moderate-priced reprint of part of a larger work published a few years ago. It presents in an agreeable narrative the history of the Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine, and Turkish occupation of North Africa, together with personal observations made during a tour of the regions described by the author. The photographs of the remains of Roman civilization are especially impressive, including as they do a picture of an amphitheater in the ancient city of Thysdrus that approaches the Roman Colosseum in size and magnificence.