ANDREW LANG

ADVENTURES AMONG BOOKS

EXTENDED EDITION

Adventures Among Books

Andrew Lang

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admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was full -of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that

in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weather-cock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his powers, and I think there were certain influences which

were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was pre-eminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of prose-form largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's " Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honey-dew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published " Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in " Helen of Troy " Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis, and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time.

Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had " never heard " of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had " never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with " What do you think Lang says now? That he has never heard of Pascal! " This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, " Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled by fighting many things. Lang was never " spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by

the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: " Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to " repose on the bosom " of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends,

who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that " don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas pêre, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricksy fay of letters, who paid

for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will,
And, ken'd I ony fairy hill
I#d lay me down there, snod and still,
Their land to win;
For, man, I maistly had my fill
O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy movement, Lang was like one of Milton's " yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called " Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls,
Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled,
They know not, poor misguided souls,

They, too, shall perish unconsoled.
I am the batsman and the bat,
I am the bowler and the ball,
The umpire, the pavilion cat,
The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would wit be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of " Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," " Old Friends," and " Essays in Little " will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral. genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and

perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

ADVENTURES AMONG BOOKS

PREFACE

Of the Essays in this volume “Adventures among Books,” and “Rab’s Friend,” appeared in *Scribner’s Magazine*; and “Recollections of Robert Louis Stevenson” (to the best of the author’s memory) in *The North American Review*. The Essay on “Smollett” was in the *Anglo-Saxon*, which has ceased to appear; and the shorter papers, such as “The Confessions of Saint Augustine,” in a periodical styled *Wit and Wisdom*. For “The Poems of William Morris” the author has to thank the Editor of *Longman’s Magazine*; for “The Boy,” and “Mrs. Radcliffe’s Novels,” the Proprietors of *The Cornhill Magazine*; for “Enchanted Cigarettes,” and possibly for “The Supernatural in Fiction,” the Proprietors of *The Idler*. The portrait, after Sir William Richmond, R.A., was done about the time when most of the Essays were written—and that was not yesterday.

CHAPTER I: ADVENTURES AMONG BOOKS

I

In an age of reminiscences, is there room for the confessions of a veteran, who remembers a great deal

about books and very little about people? I have often wondered that a *Biographia Literaria* has so seldom been attempted—a biography or autobiography of a man in his relations with other minds. Coleridge, to be sure, gave this name to a work of his, but he wandered from his apparent purpose into a world of alien disquisitions. The following pages are frankly bookish, and to the bookish only do they appeal. The habit of reading has been praised as a virtue, and has been denounced as a vice. In no case, if we except the perpetual study of newspapers (which cannot fairly be called reading), is the vice, or the virtue, common. It is more innocent than opium-eating, though, like opium-eating, it unlocks to us artificial paradises. I try to say what I have found in books, what distractions from the world, what teaching (not much), and what consolations.

In beginning an *autobiographia literaria*, an account of how, and in what order, books have appealed to a mind, which books have ever above all things delighted, the author must pray to be pardoned for the sin of egotism. There is no other mind, naturally, of which the author knows so much as of his own. *On n'a que soi*, as the poor girl says in one of M. Paul Bourget's novels. In literature, as in love, one can only speak for himself. This author did not, like Fulke Greville, retire into the convent of literature from the strife of the world, rather he was born to be, from the first, a dweller in the cloister of a library. Among the poems which I remember best out of early boyhood is Lucy Ashton's song, in the "Bride of Lammermoor":—

"Look not thou on beauty's charming,
Sit thou still when kings are arming,
Taste not when the wine-cup glistens,
Speak not when the people listens,
Stop thine ear against the singer,
From the red gold keep thy finger,

Vacant heart, and hand, and eye,
Easy live and quiet die.”

The rhymes, unlearned, clung to my memory; they would sing themselves to me on the way to school, or cricket-field, and, about the age of ten, probably without quite understanding them, I had chosen them for a kind of motto in life, a tune to murmur along the *fallentis semita vitæ*. This seems a queer idea for a small boy, but it must be confessed.

“It takes all sorts to make a world,” some are soldiers from the cradle, some merchants, some orators; nothing but a love of books was the gift given to me by the fairies. It was probably derived from forebears on both sides of my family, one a great reader, the other a considerable collector of books which remained with us and were all tried, persevered with, or abandoned in turn, by a student who has not blanched before the *Epigoniad*.

About the age of four I learned to read by a simple process. I had heard the elegy of Cock Robin till I knew it by rote, and I picked out the letters and words which compose that classic till I could read it for myself. Earlier than that, “Robinson Crusoe” had been read aloud to me, in an abbreviated form, no doubt. I remember the pictures of Robinson finding the footstep in the sand, and a dance of cannibals, and the parrot. But, somehow, I have never read “Robinson” since: it is a pleasure to come.

The first books which vividly impressed me were, naturally, fairy tales, and chap-books about Robert Bruce, William Wallace, and Rob Roy. At that time these little tracts could be bought for a penny apiece. I can still see Bruce in full armour, and Wallace in a kilt, discoursing across a burn, and Rob Roy slipping from the soldier’s horse into the

stream. They did not then awaken a precocious patriotism; a boy of five is more at home in Fairyland than in his own country. The sudden appearance of the White Cat as a queen after her head was cut off, the fiendish malice of the Yellow Dwarf, the strange cake of crocodile eggs and millet seed which the mother of the Princess Frutilla made for the Fairy of the Desert—these things, all fresh and astonishing, but certainly to be credited, are my first memories of romance. One story of a White Serpent, with a woodcut of that mysterious reptile, I neglected to secure, probably for want of a penny, and I have regretted it ever since. One never sees those chap books now. "The White Serpent," in spite of all research, remains *introuvable*. It was a lost chance, and Fortune does not forgive. Nobody ever interfered with these, or indeed with any other studies of ours at that time, as long as they were not prosecuted on Sundays. "The fightingest parts of the Bible," and the Apocrypha, and stories like that of the Witch of Endor, were sabbatical literature, read in a huge old illustrated Bible. How I advanced from the fairy tales to Shakespeare, what stages there were on the way—for there must have been stages—is a thing that memory cannot recover. A nursery legend tells that I was wont to arrange six open books on six chairs, and go from one to the others, perusing them by turns. No doubt this was what people call "desultory reading," but I did not hear the criticism till later, and then too often for my comfort. Memory holds a picture, more vivid than most, of a small boy reading the "Midsummer Night's Dream" by firelight, in a room where candles were lit, and some one touched the piano, and a young man and a girl were playing chess. The Shakespeare was a volume of Kenny Meadows' edition; there are fairies in it, and the fairies seemed to come out of Shakespeare's dream into the music and the firelight. At that moment I think that I was happy; it seemed an enchanted glimpse of eternity in

Paradise; nothing resembling it remains with me, out of all the years.

We went from the border to the south of England, when the number of my years was six, and in England we found another paradise, a circulating library with brown, greasy, ill-printed, odd volumes of Shakespeare and of the "Arabian Nights." How their stained pages come before the eyes again—the pleasure and the puzzle of them! What did the lady in the Geni's glass box want with the Merchants? what meant all these conversations between the Fat Knight and *Ford*, in the "Merry Wives"? It was delightful, but in parts it was difficult. Fragments of "The Tempest," and of other plays, remain stranded in my memory from these readings: *Ferdinand* and *Miranda* at chess, *Cleopatra* cuffing the messenger, the asp in the basket of figs, the *Friar* and the *Apothecary*, *Troilus* on the Ilian walls, a vision of *Cassandra* in white muslin with her hair down. People forbid children to read this or that. I am sure they need not, and that even in our infancy the magician, Shakespeare, brings us nothing worse than a world of beautiful visions, half realised. In the Egyptian wizard's little pool of ink, only the pure can see the visions, and in Shakespeare's magic mirror children see only what is pure. Among other books of that time I only recall a kind of Sunday novel, "Naomi; or, The Last Days of Jerusalem." Who, indeed, could forget the battering-rams, and the man who cried on the battlements, "Woe, woe to myself and to Jerusalem!" I seem to hear him again when boys break the hum of London with yells of the latest "disaster."

We left England in a year, went back to Scotland, and awoke, as it were, to know the glories of our birth. We lived in Scott's country, within four miles of Abbotsford, and, so far, we had heard nothing of it. I remember going with one of the maids into the cottage of a kinsman of hers,

a carpenter; a delightful place, where there was sawdust, where our first fishing-rods were fashioned. Rummaging among the books, of course, I found some cheap periodical with verses in it. The lines began—

"The Baron of Smaylhome rose with day,
  He spurred his courser on,
Without stop or stay, down the rocky way
  That leads to Brotherstone."

A rustic tea-table was spread for us, with scones and honey, not to be neglected. But they *were* neglected till we had learned how—

"The sable score of fingers four
  Remains on that board impressed,
And for evermore that lady wore
  A covering on her wrist."

We did not know nor ask the poet's name. Children, probably, say very little about what is in their minds; but that unhappy knight, Sir Richard of Coldinghame, and the Priest, with his chamber in the east, and the moody Baron, and the Lady, have dwelt in our mind ever since, and hardly need to be revived by looking at "The Eve of St. John."

Soon after that we were told about Sir Walter, how great he was, how good, how, like Napoleon, his evil destiny found him at last, and he wore his heart away for honour's sake. And we were given the "Lay," and "The Lady of the Lake." It was my father who first read "Tam o' Shanter" to me, for which I confess I did not care at that time, preferring to take witches and bogies with great seriousness. It seemed as if Burns were trifling with a noble subject. But it was in a summer sunset, beside a window looking out on Ettrick

and the hill of the Three Brethren's Cairn, that I first read, with the dearest of all friends, how—

"The stag at eve had drunk his fill
Where danced the moon on Monan's rill,
And deep his midnight lair had made
In lone Glenartney's hazel shade."

Then opened the gates of romance, and with Fitz-James we drove the chase, till—

"Few were the stragglers, following far,
That reached the lake of Vennachar,
And when the Brig of Turk was won,
The foremost horseman rode alone."

From that time, for months, there was usually a little volume of Scott in one's pocket, in company with the miscellaneous collection of a boy's treasures. Scott certainly took his fairy folk seriously, and the Mauth Dog was rather a disagreeable companion to a small boy in wakeful hours. -1- After this kind of introduction to Sir Walter, after learning one's first lessons in history from the "Tales of a Grandfather," nobody, one hopes, can criticise him in cold blood, or after the manner of Mr. Leslie Stephen, who is not sentimental. Scott is not an author like another, but our earliest known friend in letters; for, of course, we did not ask who Shakespeare was, nor inquire about the private history of Madame d'Aulnoy. Scott peopled for us the rivers and burnsides with his reivers; the Fairy Queen came out of Eildon Hill and haunted Carterhaugh; at Newark Tower we saw "the embattled portal arch"—

“Whose ponderous grate and massy bar
Had oft rolled back the tide of war,”—

just as, at Foulshiels, on Yarrow, we beheld the very roofless cottage whence Mungo Park went forth to trace the waters of the Niger, and at Oakwood the tower of the Wizard Michael Scott.

Probably the first novel I ever read was read at Elgin, and the story was “Jane Eyre.” This tale was a creepy one for a boy of nine, and Rochester was a mystery, St. John a bore. But the lonely little girl in her despair, when something came into the room, and her days of starvation at school, and the terrible first Mrs. Rochester, were not to be forgotten. They abide in one’s recollection with a Red Indian’s ghost, who carried a rusty ruined gun, and whose acquaintance was made at the same time.

I fancy I was rather an industrious little boy, and that I had minded my lessons, and satisfied my teachers—I know I was reading Pinnock’s “History of Rome” for pleasure—till “the wicked day of destiny” came, and I felt a “call,” and underwent a process which may be described as the opposite of “conversion.” The “call” came from Dickens. “Pickwick” was brought into the house. From that hour it was all over, for five or six years, with anything like industry and lesson-books. I read “Pickwick” in convulsions of mirth. I dropped Pinnock’s “Rome” for good. I neglected everything printed in Latin, in fact everything that one was understood to prepare for one’s classes in the school whither I was now sent, in Edinburgh. For there, living a rather lonely small boy in the house of an aged relation, I found the Waverley Novels. The rest is transport. A conscientious tutor dragged me through the Latin grammar, and a constitutional dislike to being beaten on the hands with a leather strap urged me to acquire a

certain amount of elementary erudition. But, for a year, I was a young hermit, living with Scott in the "Waverleys" and the "Border Minstrelsy," with Pope, and Prior, and a translation of Ariosto, with Lever and Dickens, David Copperfield and Charles O'Malley, Longfellow and Mayne Reid, Dumas, and in brief, with every kind of light literature that I could lay my hands upon. Carlyle did not escape me; I vividly remember the helpless rage with which I read of the Flight to Varennes. In his work on French novelists, Mr. Saintsbury speaks of a disagreeable little boy, in a French romance, who found Scott *assommant*, stunningly stupid. This was a very odious little boy, it seems (I have not read his adventures), and he came, as he deserved, to a bad end. Other and better boys, I learn, find Scott "slow." Extraordinary boys! Perhaps "Ivanhoe" was first favourite of yore; you cannot beat Front de Boeuf, the assault on his castle, the tournament. No other tournament need apply. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, greatly daring, has attempted to enter the lists, but he is a mere Ralph the Hospitaller. Next, I think, in order of delight, came "Quentin Durward," especially the hero of the scar, whose name Thackeray could not remember, Quentin's uncle. Then "The Black Dwarf," and Dugald, our dear Rittmeister. I could not read "Rob Roy" then, nor later; nay, not till I was forty. Now Di Vernon is the lady for me; the queen of fiction, the peerless, the brave, the tender, and true.

The wisdom of the authorities decided that I was to read no more novels, but, as an observer remarked, "I don't see what is the use of preventing the boy from reading novels, for he's just reading 'Don Juan' instead." This was so manifestly no improvement, that the ban on novels was tacitly withdrawn, or was permitted to become a dead letter. They were far more enjoyable than Byron. The worst that came of this was the suggestion of a young friend, whose life had been adventurous—indeed he had

served in the Crimea with the Bashi Bazouks—that I should master the writings of Edgar Poe. I do not think that the "Black Cat," and the "Fall of the House of Usher," and the "Murders in the Rue Morgue," are very good reading for a boy who is not peculiarly intrepid. Many a bad hour they gave me, haunting me, especially, with a fear of being prematurely buried, and of waking up before breakfast to find myself in a coffin. Of all the books I devoured in that year, Poe is the only author whom I wish I had reserved for later consideration, and whom I cannot conscientiously recommend to children.

I had already enjoyed a sip of Thackeray, reading at a venture, in "Vanity Fair," about the Battle of Waterloo. It was not like Lever's accounts of battles, but it was enchanting. However, "Vanity Fair" was under a taboo. It is not easy to say why; but Mr. Thackeray himself informed a small boy, whom he found reading "Vanity Fair" under the table, that he had better read something else. What harm can the story do to a child? He reads about Waterloo, about fat Jos, about little George and the pony, about little Rawdon and the rat-hunt, and is happy and unharmed.

Leaving my hermitage, and going into the very different and very disagreeable world of a master's house, I was lucky enough to find a charming library there. Most of Thackeray was on the shelves, and Thackeray became the chief enchanter. As Henry Kingsley says, a boy reads him and thinks he knows all about life. I do not think that the mundane parts, about Lady Kew and her wiles, about Ethel and the Marquis of Farintosh, appealed to one or enlightened one. Ethel was a mystery, and not an interesting mystery, though one used to copy Doyle's pictures of her, with the straight nose, the impossible eyes, the impossible waist. It was not Ethel who captivated us; it was Clive's youth and art, it was J. J., the painter, it was

jolly F. B. and his address to the maid about the lobster. "A finer fish, Mary, my dear, I have never seen. Does not this solve the vexed question whether lobsters are fish, in the French sense?" Then "The Rose and the Ring" came out. It was worth while to be twelve years old, when the Christmas books were written by Dickens and Thackeray. I got hold of "The Rose and the Ring," I know, and of the "Christmas Carol," when they were damp from the press. King Valoroso, and Bulbo, and Angelica were even more delightful than Scrooge, and Tiny Tim, and Trotty Veck. One remembers the fairy monarch more vividly, and the wondrous array of egg-cups from which he sipped brandy—or was it right Nantes?—still "going on sipping, I am sorry to say," even after "Valoroso was himself again."

But, of all Thackeray's books, I suppose "Pendennis" was the favourite. The delightful Marryat had entertained us with Peter Simple and O'Brien (how good their flight through France is!) with Mesty and Mr. Midshipman Easy, with Jacob Faithful (Mr. Thackeray's favourite), and with Snarleyyow; but Marryat never made us wish to run away to sea. That did not seem to be one's vocation. But the story of Pen made one wish to run away to literature, to the Temple, to streets where Brown, the famous reviewer, might be seen walking with his wife and umbrella. The writing of poems "up to" pictures, the beer with Warrington in the mornings, the suppers in the back-kitchen, these were the alluring things, not society, and Lady Rockminster, and Lord Steyne. Well, one has run away to literature since, but where is the matutinal beer? Where is the back-kitchen? Where are Warrington, and Foker, and F. B.? I have never met them in this living world, though Brown, the celebrated reviewer, is familiar to me, and also Mr. Sydney Scraper, of the Oxford and Cambridge Club. Perhaps back-kitchens exist, perhaps there are cakes and ale in the life literary, and F. B. may take his walks by the

Round Pond. But one never encounters these rarities, and Bungay and Bacon are no longer the innocent and ignorant rivals whom Thackeray drew. They do not give those wonderful parties; Miss Bunnion has become quite conventional; Percy Popjoy has abandoned letters; Mr. Wenham does not toady; Mr. Wagg does not joke any more. The literary life is very like any other, in London, or is it that we do not see it aright, not having the eyes of genius? Well, a life on the ocean wave, too, may not be so desirable as it seems in Marryat's novels: so many a lad whom he tempted into the navy has discovered. The best part of the existence of a man of letters is his looking forward to it through the spectacles of Titmarsh.

One can never say how much one owes to a school-master who was a friend of literature, who kept a houseful of books, and who was himself a graceful scholar, and an author, while he chose to write, of poetic and humorous genius. Such was the master who wrote the "Day Dreams of a Schoolmaster," Mr. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, to whom, in this place, I am glad to confess my gratitude after all these many years. While we were deep in the history of Pendennis we were also being dragged through the Commentaries of Caius Julius Cæsar, through the Latin and Greek grammars, through Xenophon, and the Eclogues of Virgil, and a depressing play of Euripides, the "Phœnissæ." I can never say how much I detested these authors, who, taken in small doses, are far, indeed, from being attractive. Horace, to a lazy boy, appears in his Odes to have nothing to say, and to say it in the most frivolous and vexatious manner. Then Cowper's "Task," or "Paradise Lost," as school-books, with notes, seems arid enough to a school-boy. I remember reading ahead, in Cowper, instead of attending to the lesson and the class-work. His observations on public schools were not uninteresting, but the whole English school-work of those days was

repugnant. One's English education was all got out of school.

As to Greek, for years it seemed a mere vacuous terror; one invented for one's self all the current arguments against "compulsory Greek." What was the use of it, who ever spoke in it, who could find any sense in it, or any interest? A language with such cruel superfluities as a middle voice and a dual; a language whose verbs were so fantastically irregular, looked like a barbaric survival, a mere plague and torment. So one thought till Homer was opened before us. Elsewhere I have tried to describe the vivid delight of first reading Homer, delight, by the way, which St. Augustine failed to appreciate. Most boys not wholly immersed in dulness felt it, I think; to myself, for one, Homer was the real beginning of study. One had tried him, when one was very young, in Pope, and had been baffled by Pope, and his artificial manner, his "fairs," and "swains." Homer seemed better reading in the absurd "crib" which Mr. Buckley wrote for Bohn's series. Hector and Ajax, in that disguise, were as great favourites as Horatius on the Bridge, or the younger Tarquin. Scott, by the way, must have made one a furious and consistent Legitimist. In reading the "Lays of Ancient Rome," my sympathies were with the expelled kings, at least with him who fought so well at Lake Regillus:—

"Titus, the youngest Tarquin,
  Too good for such a breed."

Where—

"Valerius struck at Titus,
  And lopped off half his crest;
But Titus stabbed Valerius
  A span deep in the breast,"—