

## WITTY WORDS TO ENGLISH BOOKSELLERS

LONDON BANQUET WITH SPEECHES  
FROM EMINENT AUTHORS.

MR. JAMES BRYCE ON THE ART OF BOOK-  
SELLING AND THE READING HABITS OF THE  
PEOPLE—ANDREW LANG ON READERS—  
MR. ZANGWILL MAKES FUN OF BIG STORES.

THE London booksellers gave their annual dinner at the Holborn Restaurant, London, Eng., in aid of the provident fund, last month. The Right Hon. James Bryce, M. P., presided. Among authors, publishers, and other well-known men present, were: Andrew Lang, F. Macmillan, C. J. Longman, J. E. C. Bodley, G. W. E. Russell, John Murray, Lord Roland Gower, H. Sotheran, Capt. M. S. Wellby, H. C. Sotheran, T. Fisher Unwin, Major A. S. Hume, Joseph Pennell, G. E. Lock, Norman Warne, Clement H. Shorter, H. E. Warne, E. Marston, Scott Keltie, R. B. Marston, W. Heinemann, H. W. Wilson, I. Zangwill, Elliot Stock, W. W. Archer.

## THE ART OF BOOKSELLING.

In giving the toast to "Literature," Mr. Bryce said literature must be considered in reference to three classes of persons—the producer, the distributor, and the consumer. He would confine himself to saying something about the second class. A great many tests had been proposed for determining the degree which the civilization of a country had reached. One was the number of yards of calico used per head of the population, another the quantity of spirits per head which a country did not consume (laughter), another was the position which women held in a country; but he had come to the conclusion that the best test of the intellectual level of a country was to be found in the number and extent of the bookshops in its towns. (Cheers.) It would be invidious to say how our own country stood in that respect, although he might remark that nothing ever gave one so striking an idea of the extent to which Ireland had remained behind, not altogether from her own fault, as the difference between the bookshops in Ireland and the bookshops in the other parts of the kingdom. The United States was the country which contained the greatest variety of literature, and Germany that in which the greatest number of books treating of difficult subjects could be found. He had often had most interesting and instructive conversations with booksellers in foreign countries, and, indeed, in our country too—men who were able to give one a very likely and correct idea of what books were and what the people thought about them. He had found that there were often no people who were better critics of books themselves than those who sold them.

## NEWSPAPER ENCROACHMENT.

Proceeding to speak on the reading habits of the people, Mr. Bryce said that newspapers were encroaching on literature with increasing vehemence. It might be true that there are as many books read now as formerly, and of our newspapers it was true that, taking them all round, they were the best in the world. The level of our magazine writing was extremely high. But, in spite of all, he could not help believing that the fact that by far the largest part of everybody's reading now consisted in reading newspapers and magazines, marked a real danger to the intellectual level of this country, because people read newspapers and magazines in a totally different spirit to that in which they read books. They read a newspaper to pick a thing up, to use it for a day, and then threw it away. When they read a book they did it with a view to assimilating it, and making it part of their own minds. The circulating library was their enemy; let them attack it. He believed it was the enemy of the publishers, and he was sure it was the enemy of the authors.

## THE USE OF BOOKS.

The cheapening of good books would do a great deal to develop, cherish, polish, and refine the literary taste of the people. We lived in times when attention was being called more than ever to what was called material greatness, and when the pursuit of material greatness was calling people's minds away from the intellectual triumphs of the past. We were proud in England of our commerce, of our wealth, of our military and naval strength, of the extension of our Empire over the world. We were so confident in our resources that we bore without murmuring our immensely-increased taxation; but, proud as we might be of all these things, there was nothing, after all, that we had so much reason to be proud of as the literature of the English tongue, and he believed that in the long run, and judged by the verdict of history, the literature of the nation would be found to be the best criterion of its greatness, because it was only a strong nation, an energetic and a high-toned nation, that could produce a rich and splendid literature. (Cheers.)

## ANDREW LANG'S WITTICISMS.

Mr. Andrew Lang, in responding, said that the chairman had said most of what he had intended to say. He was going to talk about the consumers of literature, for whom he had the most supreme contempt (laughter), because they did not consume enough of it, and they did not consume the right sort. (Hear, hear.) They all suffered

from the confounded consumer. (Laughter.) He did not buy what he ought to buy, and what he ought not to buy that he bought. The great curses of their profession were education, bicycling, novels, and golf. (Laughter.) These were the things that prevented them from getting on. There was one who had said, since printing was invented there had been very little chance of getting sound literature. When literature was very difficult to read—in the palmy days of hieroglyphics, for instance, (laughter)—it reached its proper company. Very, very few men and no women could have given 30 or 40 years to acquire the art of reading hieroglyphics. (Laughter.) As time went on the alphabet was discovered. After that literature became vulgar and demoralized. Then came in printing; then fiction came in like a raging lion. (Laughter.) He hardly knew who had time now to read a book. We were all occupied in reading about Dewey and the Suburban Cup. (Laughter and cheers.)

## CLEVER HIT AT DEPARTMENTAL STORES.

In proposing the toast to "The Trade," Mr. I. Zangwill said he did not welcome the revival of the works of the old writers, because there was enough competition amongst the living writers, especially in those days when drapers were selling the classics at 2½d. each. (Laughter.) When he proposed the health of the bookselling trade, he did not include the drapery department. (Laughter.) Their methods and their placards jarred upon him when he read of "Four hundred titles at 2½d., one as good as another," or "The best British poets at 5s. 11½d. a dozen," or what he saw placarded on the high road in a draper's shop: "We beg to call special attention to these books, which are of superior quality, and finish, and which are twice as thick as any similar series." (Laughter.) If they were allowed to go on like that, they would soon be selling novels by the yard—as some authors wrote them—(laughter)—and they would be announcing new spring shades in poetry or prose in shades warranted to wash. (Laughter.) After all, they could carry the war into the drapers' country and have a drapery annex—(laughter)—and sell gloves and stockings in two volumes, and have new editions of parasols and pyjamas. (Laughter.) But since there was a good in all things evil, let them hope that the drapery business might be of value to them all, and that the drapery shop would be a half-way house to the bookseller's, because at present the British public did not regard books as a necessity at all, but as soon as the British housewife learned to look on them as on ribbons and chemises, she would consider that no household was complete without them. (Laughter.)