

Mainly About Books.

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FIRST PAPER.

IN beginning a new series of notes on books and reading it may not be deemed out of place for me to state, that their general tone will be similar to that of the series begun and finished in the last volume of this publication. Each note will briefly concern itself with some literary topic, a book, or an author, or both, as the case may be. In the present series, however, more space than formerly will be devoted to the great books of the past, the classics of the language. "In science read by preference the newest works," says Bulwer-Lytton, "in literature the oldest." The classical literature is always modern." Consideration of works of science need not occupy us often in this department, since even if I had the, ability to deal with them, which I have not, they are very generally of too technical a nature to awaken more than a limited interest. But the great masterpieces of literary art find Nature's grand achievements expressed and consecrated in them. In dealing with the classics of a language, therefore, one can glow with enthusiasm and grant oneself in full measure the noble joy of praising.

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To say that the student of literature may derive as much benefit from the pages of Shakespeare, or Scott, or Milton, or Newman, as the student of painting may imbibe from an examination of the canvases of a Raphael, a Murillo, or a Reynolds, sounds like bald truism, yet the fact is too frequently forgotten. It is almost with a sigh of relief a disinterested reader observes that, save in publishers' lists, which are necessarily attuned to a note of exaggeration that detracts alike from their praise and censure, no work of fiction has for many moons succeeded in lifting its unconsequential head above the lowest fence of mediocrity. Little poetry is now written, worthy of the name, although mere newspaper rhyme is as plentiful and cloying as maple sap in early spring. We are fallen upon barren days, and the moment seems