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TALES, ESSAYS, AND REVIEWS.

"BOOKS AND READING."*

A REVIEW.

Any one who takes up this volume with the idea that Professor Porter would write instructively and well on such a subject will not when he has finished it, lay it down disappointed. It gives abundant evidence not only of wide and careful reading, but of independent thought, and of views that are, in the best sense of the word, broad and liberal. The criticisms,—which are among the best things in the volume,—are given in fresh, unworn language. Some of them are marvels of condensation. And they commend themselves, almost without exception, as incisive, discriminating, and remarkably just.

The book would be better, we are inclined to think, if there were less of it. It appeared as a series of articles in the *Hours at Home*, and grew, as its author tells us, out of a lecture which had been often repeated. In accomplishing the perilous task of expanding a lecture to a book, there were difficulties enough without adding to them those which are peculiar to a serial publication of the chapters.

The book is full of life. It is crowded with information. One is amazed at the enormous list of books of all kinds which the author has devoured and digested, or has tasted enough to discern the flavor of them, and rejected. We have somewhat of the wonder one might experience when looking at a well-filled honey-comb if he knew every flower that the bees had visited. It is a wise, genial, and most instructive talk about all sorts of books, admirably classified, by a cultivated, scholarly man whose mind has been kept wide-awake while reading. But it begins heavily. There is a tedious knocking out of wedges, and a slow greasing of the ways before the good ship moves, and you get the pleasure of the launch. Too many things are proved which might rest on assertion. The approaches are made so formally and carefully, and with such evident anxiety to guard against attacks, that the learned author seems to be acting under the conviction that instead of writing for a host of friendly minds glad to be instructed by him, he is entering a land of enemies who are ready to fall upon him the moment he is guilty of any carelessness. The truth is, just such a thoughtful and wise counsellor in regard to this matter of "Books and Readings" is

* Books and Reading, a series of Papers by Professor Porter.