

AMONG OUR BOOKS.



THE sun was shining hot—so hot upon the pavement; the trolleys clanged with loud incessance in their passing; the great drays rumbled; the carts rattled, and all the clamour of city life seemed to vibrate with doubled intensity, as I stood within the cool interior of the big book store, glancing distastefully over paper-covered fiction laid out for summer reading. From Hardy to Haggard, Meredith, Crawford, Corelli, Crockett, my eye wandered restless and half distasteful. "Give me something worth while," I said, "yet suited to the season.

Something dainty and full of pretty fancies."

The bookseller, who is also a book-lover, smiled and laid before me a little volume in yellow and gold,—itself seeming a bit of August sunshine. "This will suit you," he said. "It is delightful. You will enjoy every page of it."

He was a wise bookseller and knew his customer; for, lo, with the first turned page, all the restlessness and weariness vanished, the days of my years counted as naught, and I was away in the child-land, living over again the wonderful 'golden age.'

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"The Golden Age," by Kenneth Graham, is one of the daintiest little volumes it has been my pleasure to come across in many months; and the daintiness extends from thought and expression to outer form and appearance. This small book of 'sketches,' as the writer modestly terms his work, is a series of beautiful little etchings of childhood and that wonderful world of imagination,—or is it the truest reality?—in which we have all a one-time dwelling, but from whose shores we sail far, far too soon.

The author adopts the reflective attitude of the child, and it is from this standpoint that we view life. We are out for 'A Holiday,' we are searching for 'A Princess,' we are the 'Argonauts'; while the 'Olympians' in the inimitable prologue, are those we knew and remember so well in the long ago. Yet it is the attitude of the child grown up, who, looking back, perceives that the world which he once dwelt in was all blue and gold.

There is no childishness nor undue simplicity of speech; indeed, the literary style is perfect; and to this fact, together with the insight and sympathy displayed, the charm of the book is due.

Children will enjoy it much, since it tells of the 'Age' which is their to-day. But older folk will enjoy it more; since to them it is truly a 'Golden Age,' all agleam with the enchantment of distance.

In the prologue, which is devoted to a child view of 'grown-ups',—is it in sad satire, I wonder, that the author terms them 'Olympians'?—the utter lack of understanding and sympathy between the world of child and adult is aptly and amusingly set forth from the standpoint of the former.

"These elders,—our betters by trick of chance,—having absolute licence to indulge in the pleasure of life,

yet get no good of it. They might dabble in the pond all day, hunt the chickens, climb trees in Sunday clothes; they were free to issue forth and buy gun-powder, free to fire cannons and explode mines on the lawn; yet they never did any of these things. No irresistible energy hauled them to church on Sundays; yet they went there of their own accord, though they betrayed no greater delight in the experience than ourselves.

It was incessant matter for amazement how these Olympians would talk over our heads,—during meals, for instance, of this or the other social or political inanity, under the delusion that these pale phantasms of reality were among the importances of life. We *illuminati*, eating silently, could have told them what real life was. We had just left it outside, and were all on fire to get back to it.

How could reasonable people spend their precious time so? That was ever our wonder, as we bounded forth at last—to the old clay pits to make pots, or to hunt bears among the hazels.

The book contains a score of bright little essays, each rich with the thoughts and imaginations of the dear 'Golden Age;' and because the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and the imaginations wondrous pure, because also the author is one of those few who, passing from the 'Golden Age,' yet lives within the light of its shining,—we read them with delight.

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In 'Heather From Brae,' a series of character sketches of Scotch country life, the author, David Lyall, becomes a student in the school of fiction of which Maclaren and Barrie are masters. Only a student, since these sketches, lacking the vivid characterisation and pungent humour of the dwellers in Drumtochty and Thrums, are but indistinct portraits, which soon fade from our memory. Yet they are very charming in their pretty tenderness, and will give a pleasant hour of reading to the men and women who yet love gentle thoughts.

The first sketch, 'At the Door,' is somewhat suggestive of 'The Doctor's Story' in "Bonnie Brier Bush," while *Lisbeth Gray*, of Stanerigg, is a character essentially formed upon *Margel Howe*. It is almost a pity that this pretty little volume of tales should appear so closely imitative, since it is thus brought in disadvantageous comparison. Viewed apart, and from basis of merit alone, it may be most pleasantly commended.

'Robin' and 'A Lost Lamb' are two touching and effective tales of the influence of a little child. In the latter a baby girl wanders away in a snowstorm and is lost all night; her distracted parents and friends believe her 'buried feet deep in the drift,' but with early morning she is found in the sheep 'bucht.'

Betty saw a sight in the eve-bucht, which made her heart leap within her. She thought it was full of sheep with their lambs, and that in a far corner, crouching close to the dike, in the bieldest bit of all was an old, gentle, grey-faced ewe with her own little lamb beside her; but there was something else—a bit of bright colour, and a gleam of white above it, and the sheen of a child's golden head. . . . Betty stooped down with a great soul and gathered the child close to her warm breast, scarcely waking her, though she crooned over her in a fashion which made a strange stir in her husband's heart.

'A Wastrel Redeemed' is perhaps, and, alas, one of the most realistic portraiture is the book, while the little closing sketch, 'Worthy of his Hire,' is not only fraught with ethical truth, but is in literary value indicative of a certain strength and genre which shows the writer to be capable of creating greater works if he but comes out from the shadow of imitation into the light of individuality.

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As we turn from these gentler literatures to Hardy's "A Laodicean," we are impressed afresh with the wide divergence of fiction, which, indeed, is varied as the mold and trend of human thought.

As readers, we each have our preferences, our individual inclinations. We have each our favourite authors, with whose thought our own

is in close touch. Meredith for one, Corelli for another, Crockett for a third, Kipling for—well, possibly, for all, or nearly all. There are readers who do not appreciate this master of tropical virility, but they are few in number.

So it is that we may say we like or do not like this or that author, without necessarily suffering the stigma of stupidity, since we merely mean that he does or does not appeal to us, and we find or fail to find response within us to his call.

Personally, I do not care for Thomas Hardy. But what of that. This writer who has made the Wessex of his novels known and beloved, staging every mile of it with his strong scenes, peopling it with his characters,—shall he lack a great clientele of readers? For this author appeals largely to a certain grave—I had almost written pessimistic class—"into whose souls the iron has entered, and whose years have less pleasure in them now than heretofore." And the class unfortunately is an extensive one.

But in "A Laodicean" Mr. Hardy lays aside, as best he can, his customary sombre gowning of thought, and writes a lighter tone story for "comfortable ones whose lines have fallen to them in pleasant places." The plot,—if so slight and placid a construction may thus be termed,—is sufficiently original to command and retain the interest. A young Philistine, *Paula Power*, becomes the possessor through her father's demise of an old castle, which he, a wealthy railway constructor, purchased from the last member of an almost extinct line—the De Stancys.

The mediæval influence of castle and lands upon her, and the struggle between her inherited puritanism and acquired royalism, which continues under various guises and incidents throughout the book, is cleverly told. It begins when upon the very brink of the baptistry she refuses to be immersed, it continues in her indecisions concerning the renovation of the castle; whether it shall be modernised or repaired in keeping with the original mediæval architecture. It enters into her love affairs, causing her to hesitate between the young architect without ancestry, and the last of the castle line—a De Stancey. Because this modern maid is thus between two impelling influences, within and without, because she is neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, she wins the title apelative, "A Laodicean."

That the term befits her even to the last is shown, when having married the young architect, and being perfectly content with her choice, she watches the burning of her castle,—which has been set on fire by a graceless illegitimate scion of the De Stancey house,—with the following comment:

What I really am, as far as I know, is one of that body to whom lukewarmth is not an accident, but a provisional necessity, till they seem more clearly. . . .

'Never mind' said her husband, 'We will build a new house from the ground, eclectic in style. You, Paula, will be yourself again, and recover the warp given to your mind by the mediævalism of the place.'

'Very well. We'll build a new house beside the ruin and show the modern spirit for evermore. But, George, I wish ———' and Paula expressed a sigh.

'Well?'

'I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancey.'

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A book of charming tales for children and child-lovers, entitled "Twilight Hours," comes to us this month from the pen of Mary S. Claude.

No child will read or listen to these delightful stories without loving Nature and Nature's children the more.

REVIEWER.

"The Golden Age," by Kenneth Graham, Stone & Kimball, Chicago.

"Heather From Brae," by David Lyall, Fleming H. Revell Co.

"A Laodicean," by Thomas Hardy, McMillan & Co., New York, Copp Clark, Toronto.

"Twilight Hours," by Mary Claude, Copp Clark, Toronto.