

## AMONG OUR BOOKS



A FRIENDLY reader wrote me not long ago inquiring for a list of the books in my library.

"My library!" The term always amuses me a little, when applied in its restricted sense, since the little book-case holds something less than a hundred volumes. But it answers very well for the small snugger, warm and homey, yet always a litter of books, papers and scissors and paste, and rolling pencils that are never by chance at hand when

needed. "My library" reminds me always of Aunt Dinah's kitchen in the St. Clair mansion—where the table napkins served as towels, the china cups as receptacles for pomade to coax the woolly hair to straightness; while dishes and utensils were in every place and used for every purpose save the ones for which they were intended. But out of all the disorder, old Aunt Dinah managed to evolve the most appetizing breakfasts and generous dinners,—which was the chief thing.

Just something less than a hundred volumes, of all manner of sizes, bindings and contents; and there will never be many more, I think. The personnel—if you will allow the phrase—of my book-case may change, but will hardly increase, since I would rather know a few books by heart—make them really mine, weave their wise, or strong, or pretty sayings into my thought and life—than dip into many,—and forget them.

To live within walls lined with books would not be wholesome, it seems to me; it would give one a tendency to indigestion or liver complaint, or some other bodily blue.

And yet I know such libraries,—and they are ideal places of repose, with the firelight and the choice engravings and the thousands of silent monitors in their bindings somber and bright. But their owners are philosophers, professors, and other wise men, who take their browsing in equable doses, with my Lady Nicotine to share it,—and are not imaginative women.

To a woman such a library is a lovely place to rest in,—but it should not be her abiding place.

Why? Well, think it out, and see.

To return to my friend's inquiry. "What books compose your library? And what shall I buy for mine?" she writes.

I glance up at my little book-case, and smile again at the medley. Here are no rare editions, nor rich bindings; not even many standard authors, nor ancient classics.

Just a tossing together of odd volumes, grave and gay. Fiction, poetry, philosophy; even statistics. A collection too fragmentary to be worthy of note, since there are few book lovers who cannot show a better.

Top-shelf—Autograph books, sent or given by their writers; a treasured row, since each volume has some pleasant association connected with it.

Second shelf—The chief modern poets and Shakespeare; not more than ten or twelve volumes in all. But, if Browning and Lowell, Whittier and Tennyson, Longfellow and Jean Ingelow, weave their choicest lyrics into one's daily thought,—what need is there of more?

Shelf three—One of fiction, always changing; since stories, if worth anything, should be passed on to others to enjoy and read. The majority of novels are like plays: the action once witnessed, the dénouement reached, the dialogue uttered, they have served their purpose, that of an hour's amusement or instruction; we do not need them further. There are exceptions, of course. In the standard authors, for instance, one always likes to have Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, and George Eliot on hand. There is "Les Misérables" also, and those old familiars, "Don Quixote," "Monte Cristo," and others of like ilk. Such fiction is perennial in its interest.

Again, there are dear books,—stories tender or strong, or so filled with wise sayings, or quaint or pretty fancies, that we cherish them and hold them very precious. They are our book affinities.

But the ordinary fiction, the passing novels of the day, should not be retained to crowd our book-shelves; they are meant to pass on to others. So it is that my shelf of fiction is never crowded and rarely for a week the same.

Shelf four—A medley of philosophies and books of travel, varying from "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" to "The Seven Colonies of Australia," from "Hearn's Picturesque Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan" to the driest of Canadian histories.

Shelf five—Is devoted to magazines, *Arenas*, *Current Literature* and *Reviews of Reviews* a-plenty. These are to be packed up in that spare hour that never comes, and sent away to some of our splendid missionary ministers, or little pioneer women of the North-west prairies, who hunger so for literature, yet must content themselves with the occasional weekly paper. Only book lovers know or can sympathize with book hunger.

To my friend's second question—"What books shall I buy to stock my library shelves?"—there is only one answer: None, —at least none *en masse*.

A library, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be a growth,—the reflection, and outcome of its owner's literary tastes.

The very thought of buying volumes by the dozen or score, repels the true book lover. Never mind if it takes months or years to fill those shelf-spaces,—let the process be one book at a time. For, of a truth, a library of one worthy book, read, enjoyed, annotated and woven into our life thought, is greater than a burdened wall of volumes with uncut leaves.

And after all, the great men of the past—the strong men—the reformers who have lifted the world to a higher plane, have been one-book men, whom their Bible or their Shakespeare has made wondrous wise and deep.

One book at a time, be it history or travel, story or poem;—in choice binding if you can,

but always in clear print. And let each reflect faithfully your own literary taste. Leave out worthless books; refuse a place to the modern melancholy novel, whose unhealthy decadence is but a passing mood. Keep the tone of your literature bright, strong and wholesome. But, beyond this, let your library represent your own choice; else it is not yours, but anyone's or no one's.

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In selecting a library for a Canadian home, we should make a point of devoting at least one shelf to the literature of our own country. We do not appreciate our Canadian writers as we should. They certainly find little encouragement from us, since we rarely think of placing Canadian books first and foremost in our library. The best encouragement we can give to any writer, is to buy his or her book; it means more than kind words or flattering notices—although these are not by any means to be despised.

And we have such a strong young school of English-Canadian writers in poets and novelists.

No better book of short stories has been published for several years than E. W. Thomson's "Old Man Savarin." Miss Dougall ranks in the front of the Elsmerian school with her "Beggars All," "What Necessity Knows," and her recent "Zeit-Geist." There is Gilbert Parker also, with his "Hudson Bay Tales"; William Kirby and Macdonald Oxley, and bright Jean McIlwraith and Miss Machar. These are some of our novelists, whose names occur as I write.

And in poets we have men and women to be proud of,—Bliss Carman, Wilfred Campbell, Duncan Campbell Scott, Roberts, our clever Pauline Johnson, bright Jean Blewett, graceful Ethelwyn Wetherald, and many others.

None of these are feeble; they are strong; they rank well to the front among the writers of to-day; they command the praise of the best literary critics on either continent.

Let us know our own men and women of books. Let us be sure that they at least have a place in our library.

W. P. Mackenzie sends out yet another modest little volume of verse, entitled "Heartsease Hymns and Other Verse."

The hymns do not show originality, but are in fact rather stereotyped in sentiment and rhyme. Those entitled "Redemption" and "The Eternal" are the best.

Only a man or woman of deeply spiritual life can write a hymn which will "take hold" of the world's heart. A grand simpleness and not a triteness, is necessary.

The love songs are somewhat obscure, "Das Liebe Jesulein," and the poem "Child-like" being perhaps the best in this little collection.

REVIEWER.

HEARTSEASE HYMNS, by W. P. Mackenzie. Tyrell & Co., Toronto.

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