

## Literature and Science.

### SUNBEAMS.

OUT of the quiet spaces of heaven,  
Out of the deep blue air,  
Burnished, riven and slanted, fall  
The sunbeams everywhere.

Into the dusty city streets  
And quiet country lanes,  
Lighting up with a golden fretting,  
Church spires, turrets and panes.

Over the lofty peaks of mountains  
Into the sea below,  
Weaving out of its unseen texture  
A web of mist and snow.

They are the spirits that toil for nature,  
With a golden shuttle and loom,  
Ever working without cessation,  
The season's being and doom.

They weave a web of light and shade  
In leafy nooks at noon,  
And in the caverns of night, they spin  
The white locks of the moon.

They woo with kisses the violets,  
Each out of its earthy bed;  
Till each one steals up, filled with a love  
Of the genii overhead.

They build the walls of nature's house;  
Each smites with a golden bar:  
They climb down at night on silver strands,  
And each is tied to a star.

And then at dawn they softly steal  
In the east through their golden door,  
And spread a woof of rosiest hues  
On the ocean's gleaming floor.

And every shell of lustrous tint,  
And every gem divine,  
That borrows its light from the ocean's night,  
Is the child of their airy mine.

They weave the dew-drops on the rose,  
In a glorious diadem;  
And every life that nature knows  
Grows up with a love of them.

Then over all, in a dome so blue,  
They build up a roof of the air;  
And fasten it down all closely around,  
With the strands of their shimmering hair.

They are the spirits of the air,  
Mysterious and unseen,  
Ever weaving a web of white,  
And ever a web of green.

And whether by night, or whether by day,  
They loosen their shining skein,  
It falls down out of the heaven's deep,  
In a silver or golden rain.

WILLIAM WILFRED CAMPBELL.

West Claremont,  
New Hampshire, U. S.

### THE CHOICE OF BOOKS.

[THE following is Mr. Ruskin's letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* anent the questions published in regard to his criticism of Sir John Lubbock's list of a hundred books.]

SIR:—Several points have been left out of consideration both by you and Sir John Lubbock, in your recent inquiries and advices concerning books. Especially Sir John, in his charming description of the pleasures of reading for the nineteenth century, leaves curiously out of mention its miseries; and among the various answers sent to the *Pall Mall* I find nobody laying down, to begin with, any one canon or test by which a good book is to be known from a bad one.

Neither does it seem to enter into the respondent minds to ask, in any case, whom, or what the book is to be good *for*—young people or old, sick or strong, innocent or worldly—to make the giddy sober, or the grave gay. Above all, they do not distinguish between books for the laborer and the schoolmaster; and the idea that any well-conducted mortal life could find leisure enough to read a hundred books would have kept me wholly silent on the matter, but that I was fain, when you sent me Sir John's list, to strike out for my own pupils' sake, the books I would forbid them to be plagued with.

For, of all the plagues that afflict mortality, the venom of a bad book to weak people, and the charms of a foolish one to simple people, are without question the deadliest; and they are so far from being redeemed by the too imperfect work of the best writers, that I never would wish to see a child taught to read at all, unless the other conditions of its education were alike gentle and judicious.

And to put the matter into anything like tractable order at all, you must first separate the scholar from the public. A well-trained gentleman should, of course, know the literature of his own country, and half-a dozen classics thoroughly, glancing at what else he likes; but, unless he wishes to travel, or to receive strangers, there is no need for his troubling himself with the languages or literature of modern Europe. I know French pretty well myself. I never recollect the gender of anything, and don't know more than the present indicative of any verb; but with a dictionary I can read a novel—and the result is my wasting a great deal of time over Scribe, Dumas, and Gaboriau, and becoming a weaker and more foolish person in all manner of ways therefore. French scientific books are, however, out and out the best in the world; and, of course, if a man is to be scientific, he should know both French and Italian. The best German books should at once be translated into French, for the world's sake, by the French Academy;—Mr. Lowell is altogether right in pointing out that nobody with respect for his eyesight can read them in the original.

I have no doubt there is a great deal of literature in the East, in which people who live in the East, or travel there, may be rightly interested. I have read three or four pages of the translation of the Koran, and never want to read any more; the Arabian Nights many times over, and much wish, now, I had been better employed.

As for advice to scholars in general, I do not see how any modest scholar could venture to advise another. Every man has his own field, and can only by his own sense discover what is good for him in it. I will venture, however, to protest, somewhat sharply, against Sir John's permission to read any book fast. To do anything fast—that is to say at a greater rate than that at which it can be done well—is a folly; but of all follies reading fast is the least excusable. You miss the points of a book by doing so, and misunderstand the rest.

Leaving the scholar to his discretion, and turning to the public, they fall at first into the broad classes of workers and idlers. The whole body of modern circulating library literature is produced for the amusement of the families so daintily pictured in *Punch*—mama lying on a sofa showing her pretty feet—and the children delightfully teasing the governess, and nurse, and maid, and footman—the close of the day consisting of state-dinner and reception. And Sir John recommends these kind of people to read Homer, Dante, and Epictetus! Surely the most beneficent and innocent of all books yet produced for them is the Book of Nonsense, with its corollary carols?—inimitable and refreshing, and perfect in rhythm. I really don't know any author to whom I am half so grateful, for my idle self, as Edward Lear. I shall put him first of my hundred authors.

Then there used to be Andersen, but he has been minced up and washed up, and squeezed up, and rolled out, till one knows him no more. Nobody names him, of the omnilegent judges; but a pure edition of him, gaily illustrated, would be a treasure anywhere—perhaps even to the workers, whom it is hard to please.

But I did not begin this talk to recommend anything, but to ask you to give me room to answer questions, of which I receive many by letter, why I effaced such and such books from Sir John's list.

1. *Grote's History of Greece*.—Because there is probably no commercial establishment, between Charing-cross and the Bank, whose head clerk could not write a better one, if he had the vanity to waste his time on it.

2. *Confessions of St. Augustine*.—Because religious people nearly always think too much about themselves; and there are many saints whom it is much more desirable to know the history of. St. Patrick to begin with—especially in present times.