

this morning before the world was aired. Good-night, Brown."

And off the two went, leaving Tom to sport his oak this time and retire in wonder to bed.

Drysdale was asleep with Jack curled

up on the foot of the bed in ten minutes. Blake, by the help of wet towels and a knotted piece of whipecord round his forehead, read Pindar till the chapel bell began to ring.

To be continued.

BOOKS AND THEIR USES.

BY DOUBLEDAY.

CHARLES LAMB'S friend who left off reading to the great increase of his originality, assuredly erred on the right side. The danger in this much written-for age is of reading too much. Placed amongst the countless shelves of modern libraries, we are like men with many acquaintances but few friends. We may be on comparatively intimate terms with the novelists; we may occasionally ask a new poet into the house; we are perhaps on bowing terms with the scientific writers; we may just know the historians to speak to; but where are the old, old books which our forefathers loved because they were true and tried, when there were not so many new comers that a reader felt himself called upon to give up his best friend, to step across and chat with the smartly dressed crowd of strangers at the door? Why do we not know *our* Shakspeare as good Sir Thomas Lee, in "Woodstock," knew *his*? Has the reader of these pages ever read the "Paradise Lost" through? Will he ever achieve it, unless he be one day cast upon a desert island, and save a Milton from the wreck, as well as the salt beef and biscuit? Did he ever read the "Faery Queene"? The only chance for most of us would be to be shut up with a Spenser, as we once were with the "Children of the Abbey," for three wet days in a Welsh inn, with no consolation in sight but a Bradshaw's Guide and a cruet-stand. "Young men now-a-days," says one, the late record of whose earnest and loving life has impressed the true stamp on all he has written, "read

neither their Bible nor their Shakspeare enough."

Thus, there are books—and books. We read too much, and too little. The former of the two excesses is, I think, the more new and remarkable. In days such as our own, when the circulating libraries, with their million mouths, are speaking to the public, it would be strange to say that there is little thirst for information of some sort. But there still remains a question whether the craving for books may not be a disease, and whether we may not live too little in ourselves, and too much in others. The professor, whose young friend boasted that he read ten hours a day, inquired with amazement, "Indeed, then when do you think?" The old man was right. The master who sees a pupil with idle hands, and fears that, being without a book, he is losing his time, might not unreasonably hope that his other pupil, who is never without a book, is not losing his thoughts. "It is hard," Orlando says, "to see happiness through another man's eyes." It is also unprofitable always to see things reflected in another man's mind. There are other books besides those printed on paper, which are not without their value. Perhaps, even, it was intended that we should sometimes strive to see nature at first-hand.

How refreshing it is to meet now and then with those who never read at all. What a relief it is from that clever technical conversation which is acquired among readers. I envy those persons, unspotted from Mudie's, who listen to

the sentiments of books with as much astonishment as a savage in a state of primeval nature gazes on crinoline. They have advantages over us, proud as we feel ourselves. Their thoughts and feelings are their own. They can trace them home to their objects, and know that they are genuine, unplagued by the thought that the same things have often been thought before, and are as old as the first man who ever gazed on a sunset. Their aspirations and wants are more awful to them than that they do not know a quotation to fit them with. This is high ground, perhaps, and the ingenuous reader at this point will exclaim, "Pooh, pooh!" I am content, if he demur, to take a lower ground. The non-reader, if he lose much by not reading at all, consider well from how much he is saved. Truly, the illiterate man has much to be thankful for.

This last sentiment has inconsiderately escaped me. Much as may be found to criticise, perhaps to condemn, in yonder last week's volume, on the whole we treat books worse than they treat us. They do not meet with the right welcome at our hands. Unrecognised for their just claims, we grumble because they do not present some others. Often are they read so quickly that their eccentricities strike the attention before their worth is discovered. The much-reader hastens from volume to volume, and learns the colour of each, but not its properties. Thus, that delight of moralists, the bee, might look into many more blossoms in a day, if it only did not care to carry away any of the honey. To make the right use of a book is not so easy a matter as it appears.

Various as are the kinds of books, so various are the uses to which we put them. There are those who read to kill time, as a refuge—oh, shame! shame!—from themselves. There are those who read because some work is in fashion, and it were bad taste not to be able to talk of it. There are those who read, in order to give the public the benefit of their judgment—those mysterious men, the critics. There are those who read indiscriminately with morbid

wideness of taste, as the savage devours earth. Lastly, there are those who read little, but with discernment; whose books are their honoured friends—"the souls who have made their souls wiser."

Of those who do think—and the practice has rather gone out of late—there are a few who think for themselves, and a great many who think for the benefit of others. These last are sometimes called, for convenience, critics. All works must first pass through their furnace before they are fit for the general reader, who pays his fivepence cheerfully for the *Weekly Rasper*, and gets a vast variety of opinions for his money. In a spare ten minutes he has the opportunity of reading what another has written in ten days concerning a work which has occupied a third party perhaps as much as ten years. How admirably is labour shortened now-a-days! As we pay an architect to build, so we pay a critic to think for us; and so considerate it is of the critics always to extract the faults of a book, and leave the general reader to find the beauties. Sometimes there is a notice in the shop-windows—"A few improvers wanted." It must certainly come from an author who is wanting critics.

It was a beautiful morning in July when we were introduced to a new poem. In a spirit of the purest symbolism, it was bound in a suit of green, that it might shine upon our bookshelves as a pleasant oasis in a desert of law calf or theological cloth. It was given us in the summer months that we might read it, where it should be read, under the laburnum shade or by the brook side. Thousands of hands were held out for it; thousands of hearts were content to watch and to receive. But by-and-by there arose murmurs. One said that it ought not to be called an Idyll; a second that the blank verse was not what it should be; a third that this simile would never do, and that illustration was not correct. Meanwhile those who were not gifted with such subtlety of vision were reading quite unsuspectingly, finding only a delight in the company of Arthur and his knights

—winning a glow from the bracing air of the old rude time—weeping with the fallen Guinevere—reverently gathering those great lessons, which the poet has drawn out of the fabled world, and wondering how the doings of an age should have such a value for all time. Ah me! who would be a critic by choice, if he had but the chance of being only a common reader. And yet there was a tenderness in the critics in handling this poem, which it was curious to compare with the abuse they felt it necessary to bestow on the Laureate's preceding poem. They were almost betrayed into smiling when the *Idylls* appeared. They seemed to say, "Well, perhaps we were a little too hard on him when he wrote last; but it was not without a good effect, for here is a work written in a metre which every one agrees to call respectable. We have great hopes now that our author will never return to such errors as he was guilty of in '*Maud*.'" And then the critics seemed to smile again, and to feel that love towards the Laureate which the late L.E.L. tells us we feel to the bird we taught to sing.

Amid so much deprivation, it is consoling to think that the critic usually contrives to retain his spirits. It has even been noticed that, by some beautiful provision, the more faults he has to find, the merrier he is. Like Ophelia—

"Thought and affliction, passion, hell
itself,

He turns to favour and to prettiness."

Thus is there compensation in everything.

My friend W. with whom I was the other day looking over a review of a friend's book, which the reviewer was mangling with the highest enjoyment, said he was in hopes now that we were returning to the good old Aristophanic school of criticism. He said he would see all reviews abolished and have farces substituted instead; and how excellent it would be to see Carlyle held up between heaven and earth in a clothes-basket, and Bulwer Lytton and Sheridan Knowles weighed against each other in

scales. W. went on to say that criticism was not nearly so successful as witticism, and that if Shakspeare had lived in our time he would have seen that levity, not brevity, was the soul of wit. He is a sad wag, W., and always will have his joke.

Almost all criticism is too minute and too partial. Hence it fails to exhibit any but a most imperfect view of its subject. It takes a full-blown rose, and after examination presents to the reader a heap of petals without form or perfume. The critic has used his eye-glass, and sometimes to the injury of his eyes. For this reason it were well if we never read the review of a book till we had read the book itself. Then let us compare our impressions, if it may be, with the large and reverent judgment of a fuller knowledge than our own. If you would know where to find such, read Robertson's *Lectures*, or Bucknill on the *Psychology of Shakspeare*.

But still now, as in the time of the ingenious Mr. Puff, the number of those who take the trouble of judging for themselves is very small indeed, and we have seen that the critics are always at hand to do it for us. There yet remains the disagreeable necessity of forming a taste of one's own; but schemes may possibly be devised for relieving the reader of this trouble as well.

Yet there are some left who feel that it is only by being true to their own nature, imperfect as it is, that they will rise above it. They feel that from some books they can rise better men, and that from others, which are circulated by the thousand, they take no profit. They feel that there are some books whose essence is eternal, because it belongs to a nature common to all. The world does not outgrow Shakspeare. But they have found that there are other books whose work is only for some times or for some minds. They have found a book speak to them that is dumb to others. It may be dumb to them now and speak to them at a future time. It may have spoken once and now have ceased to speak, like the Oracles in the presence of a deeper voice. They

will not lightly speak of such, but look back with love and reverence to the steps worn by their feet, and those of hundred others, by which they rose "to something greater than before."

To understand a great writer, as to understand Nature, we must yield our prepossessions. When we read we lose much by not standing side by side with the writer. That in which persons differ essentially, is not in the amount of knowledge they possess, but in the point of view from which they look at things. With different centres we have different circumferences. When the centres of reader and writer are very far apart, they live in separate worlds. To understand some writers we must change our planet and wait patiently till we are acclimatized.

Writers may be divided into two large classes—those who write to reveal something new, and lead the reader out of and beyond his present knowledge; and those who write only to present the old under some new form or application. The former is the nobler class—the pioneers of knowledge; the latter we must not, however, depreciate. All that we are at liberty to demand of a writer is, that he give us something of his own. When a fresh view of anything in heaven or earth is opened to us, we are bound to open our eyes with eagerness; but when the book-writer has no part of himself for us, but only the warmed-up remains, the *crambe repetita* of others, show him no mercy. If he write on the cover of his offering, "In the name of the prophet," and we find inside only "figs," we will judge him as Bacon would have judged him—by his fruits. Show him the door. Critic, show this gentleman out!

It behoves, therefore, the inspectors of the literary market to keep a keen watch for these dealers in second-hand truths. Under our very eyes large fortunes are being made by the trade in platitudes, the secret of which success is perhaps this: There is a class of readers—and a large one too—who like to find in books rather what they know already than what they have yet to learn.

No. 2.

Unlike the Athenians of old, they do not seem to care for any "new thing," and are more than satisfied to meet again and again with the oldest truisms. For instance; they know that it is very nice to have a friend, or an entertaining book, or that it is very proper to be industrious and provident. An ingenious poet accordingly writes a book, wherein, under a metrical garb, he tells these facts to the world. The world, pleased to recognise old acquaintances under a new form, proceeds to buy thirty editions. Here, indeed, seems reason for keeping to the beaten track. Fortunately, however, we still have writers among us who look to something besides editions.

One generation cannot decide upon the real worth of a book; only the lapse of time can prove whether it has elements that are imperishable. But every man who in his writings addresses himself successfully not to time, party, or fashion, but to that which underlies all these, may look forward to immortality as his reward;—poet, philosopher, historian, novelist; it matters little what he is called. A thinker of our day has advanced the theory of "the conservation of force"—how that force, once applied, may change its form indeed, but never ceases to exist. So we will preach the "conservation of truth." The writer may not count on the preservation of his name, but he may look, as a higher consolation, to this, that no true thought, no beautiful conception he may give to the world, will be lost; that if it be only received from him by a few, it will be reproduced by them in other forms of good, and so live for ever.

"Thank God for books," said Sydney Smith; and who that has known what it is to depend on them for companionship but will say from his heart, "Amen"? In lone country houses, where friends are few; in crowded city streets, amid greetings where no kindness is, thank God for books! Dearest, best of friends—soothing, comforting, teaching, carrying us far away from the "briars of this working-day world;" never importunate, never impatient, may we learn to use you as you use us!

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