

## Literature, &amp;c.

From the Yale Literary Magazine.

## OLD READINGS.

Why are old books so dear to the scholar? Why is the very look of an ancient classic welcomed as it were the face of a friend? Why do we pore over the moth eaten pages of a black letter, iron clasped folio with so pious an earnestness, and deem one such heirloom of the Past worth all the ephemeral duodecimos that crowd the creaking shelves of To-day, hot pressed and new gilt?

I would that rare Charles Lamb, among those unmatched essays, had written somewhat on old books. Such a theme none may handle as he would have handled it. For those fruitful thoughts and queer fancies that flirt ever and anon athwart our sky, were fixed stars to him. Some snatches and cunning hints he has given us in his 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading,' and elsewhere.

A true scholar is by virtue of his calling a true antiquary. Chaucer drew his picture long ago.

For he hadde gotten him yet no benefice,  
He was naught worldly to have an office.  
For him was lever han at his beddes hed  
Twenty bokes clothed in blake or red,  
Of Aristotle, and his philosophie  
Than robes rich, or fidul or sautrie.  
But all be that he was a philosopre,  
Yet he had but little golds in cotre,  
But all that he might of his frendes hente,  
On bokes and on learning he it spente.

He is no lean and ghostly dweller among the tombs, no hunter of bones and mummies mouldering in catacombs, but a living traveller into the mind of the Past. He walks in all pathways, and sets up his way-marks at the meeting points of all.

The present is not the whole of time. Nay, to the scholar there is somewhat more sacred in the Past than in the Present. It is hallowed by the companionship of undying thoughts and feelings. Its footsteps are not printed on the wave washed sand, but worn into the rock. It cannot change, and by a charm of mind's own working, the unchanged is linked to the unchangeable. The word of the past is written and cannot be recalled. It is written on mound and pillar, on every arch and brazen gate of the temple of time. But specially in Books. These are the embalmed body, nay the embodied soul of the past. These are the faithful guides to that elysium of departed heroes, and lead where we may see and speak with them as fathers and brothers. We stand in the midst of an old library and gaze around with a mingled feeling of awe and gladness—a solemn and ghostly joy.

With the mind of old England—I speak as the son of the ancient mother—we are bound by another and a closer tie. The spirit that fills the page of our written literature had its beginning long ago: had once a voice and living utterance. Out from hidden caves and deep forests it came. The rivers and the rocks, the glens and glades were the abodes of its silent infancy. The record of its first speech is given us in the songs of the minstrels. These are the free and child-like breathings of old English poesy.

It needs not that we undervalue the wisdom of To-day. The true scholar, as we said, knows the place where the two ways meet. He will not bury himself in the caverns of the Past, nor will he be a mere sojourner in the market place of the Present. But to most it is in sooth a weary journey. The old literature is seen from the stand-point of the new and it dwindles away and away in a far stretching distance. Who, say the wise to us the foolish, who in the midst of our vast cities of learning would go back to the untrodden desert? Who will forsake the choir of the tuneful present, to gather the half notes and chance voices of yore into a song of harmony? To such we make answer in the quaint speech of an old writer—'Albeit our tyme doe rightfullie vaunt itself to have reacht the top and summite of Parnassus hille, and with steadfast eyes gazing on those clere waters of Eliconys, and beholding naught save its owne gyauct limmes, hath soe become as Narcysus enamoured of its own gretnesse, with vaine boastful bragging; naetheless there be many plants of delectable poesie; and sweetee flowers of fantasie withal which growe not on the summite of the muses mount, yet do surrounde and environne the lowlie pathways now scene by us with a scornfull regarde.'

The mighty march of mind in this age hath wearied us. Fain would we lag behind a little and let the host of philoscophers and sanvans pass on. Let us breathe a while another air, and see! the fields that were so foot trodden, grow green as we go backward. Farther and yet farther, beyond even

the stream of Avon; 'never stynt ne blane,' till we rest where the first footsteps of men are scarce seen on the tops of the wavy grass. 'Tis if we were bathing in that far sought and famous fountain of youth, and already a fresher life-stream courses through our renewed veins.

Old English Poesy! There is magic in the sound. What a huge folio of many pages, yet is it all one book! One long day and pleasant, from the sunrise gleam of Chaucer, ushered in by heralds 'in flaming liveries dight,' still brightening into the noontide glory of Spenser and Shakspeare, and, as it slowly sinks to its sitting, ever and anon dazzling us with all too gorgeous visions, woven of crimson and gold and dark masses of piled clouds. We count the age of old English poesy, in the largest sense of it, from the earliest point downward almost to the days of Dryden. About that time began another age of poesy, whose influence reaches almost to ourselves. Albeit there were in that long journey, changes enow and onward marches, yet are the prints of true English feet seen every where along the road. 'Tis an untravelled road now, though there be some like ourselves and you, oh! courteous reader, who love these quiet walks beyond the king's highway. Most men have heard of one Chaucer and eke of Spenser, sometime author of a huge poem, which nobody now can read for its tediousness; perchance of other few whose graves no man sheweth unto this day. It is but of late that the eyes of the learned have been opened to see the hidden treasures of these mines. It is as if all the dwellers of the old world should emigrate to the new, and in some coming century a venturesome Columbus should cross the deep, and discover the old hemisphere again. Thanks be to some of our pioneers that have opened the blocked up and overgrown paths, that we may walk therein! It may yet be our good hap to have unsealed for us all, the choked fountains, and to see the flow of the fresh English stream over our dried-up pleasure ground of poetry and art.

The student of English Poetry is the student of English History also. For what is this history, and where shall we find its sure undoubted record? It lives in tradition and song as well as in rolls of parchment and written codes, in the voices of unlettered bards as well as in folios of clerky lore, in the mind of the people as well as in the annals of kings and parliaments, of war, and commerce. It dwells in the huts of peasants as in the courts of monarchs, in the cells of ghostly anchorites, in old baronial castles, in mossgrown and haunted towers, in the lonely burial ground amid half decayed monuments, in the wizard's cave o'erhung with yew and nightshade, in gloomy groves once dedicated to the rights of the Druid, in the greenwood of the bold forester, on the hill top amid piping shepherds, in moonlit glens mid dancing elves, in the halls of wassail, in the student's half lit chamber, in knightly tournaments, in rustic sports, in crowded highways, in hostelry, in mass book, in song book, among thieves and honest men, under the crown of the king, the cap and bells of the jester. It resounds from the harp and merry pipe, from the shrill trumpet, and from the low chaunt of the cathedral. It is the living voice of living men, coming up from the corners and by-ways as well as from the highways of their thought and feeling, their action and their suffering.

And where shall we look for this varied and manifold expression. What of it can be recorded is given us in the fresh and life like literature, the poesy of the people. Poesy and history are always one in the early ages. Heard ye never of Homer, the historian and antiquary of Greece? Poesy is no lifeless thing, no bare jingling of words, no nice skill of metre and rhythm. Deep and rare is the insight of a bard of our age and our country in those words of his, which we quote for the nonce. 'There is nothing more serious than poetry. Many content themselves with admiring its more delicate branches—its leaves and blossoms, not heeding that this fair array is put forth through roots which run down deep into the soil of our humanity, and are watered by its nether springs. That state of society which is least congenial with poetry, is most unfavorable to human nature itself.' So it is with old English poesy. The history of religion, law, government, war and peace, is embodied there. Every age has added its few words to the sacred scroll. And I question not that this poesy, coming from the heart of the people, has in its turn shaped and moulded the rough hewn mass of mind, and more than aught else has given to it a proper English form. The ballads of war and love, the romances of

chivalry, the rhymed histories, the Mysteries and Moralities, the biting satire of Chaucer and Pierce Plowman, the tales of common life, are one unbroken chain of history. How we hurry over the Hep-tarchy, and the wars of Briton, Saxon, Norman, Dane!

'Tramp, tramp across the land we ride,  
Splash, splash across the sea.'

It is not till later times have severed prose and poetry, that the historian becomes the mere chronicler of facts and maker of year books, while the poet is driven out from the real into an ideal world of his own making. Yet even the chronicles of yore partook of this poetic spirit. Would you know chivalry as it was? Read Froissart and in Lord Berners' quaint version. Would you know the living history of Old England and English men. Read the old chroniclers, Geoffrey of Monmouth and the rest; but beyond these read the poetry of each several age.

From the Knickerbocker for February.

## A SONG OF THE SEA.

A BOLD, brave crew, and an ocean blue,  
And a ship that loves the blast,  
With a good wind piping merrily  
In the tall and gallant mast:  
Ha! ha! my boys,  
These are the joys  
Of the noble and the brave,  
Who love a life  
In the tempest's strife,  
And a home on the mountain-wave!

When the driving rain of the hurricane  
Pats the light of the light-house out,  
And the growling thunder sounds its gong  
On the whirlwind's battle-roul,  
Ha! ha! do you think  
That the valiant shrink?  
No! no!—we are bold and brave!  
And we love to fight  
In the wild midnight,  
With the storm on the mountain-wave!

Breezes that die where the green-woods sigh,  
To the landsman sweet may be,  
But give to the brave the broad backed wave,  
And the tempest's midnight glee!  
Ha! ha! the blast,  
And the rocking mast,  
And the sea wind brisk and cold,  
And the thunder's jur  
On the seas afar,  
Are the things that suit the bold!

The timbers creak and the sea birds shriek,  
There's lightning in you blast!  
Hard to the leeward! mariners,  
For the storm is gathering fast!  
Ha! ha! to night,  
Boys, we must fight:  
But the winds which o'er us yell  
Shall never scare  
The mariner  
In his winged citadel!

H. W. ROCKWELL.

From the Gentleman's Magazine.  
POVERTY OF THE SONS OF GENIUS.

## A SKETCH OF REAL LIFE.

It is a melancholy reflection, that the sons of genius generally seem predestined to encounter the rudest storms of adversity, to struggle unnoticed with poverty and misfortune. The annals of the world present us with many corroborations of this remark;—they prove that the profession of literature, by far the most laborious of any other, lead to no real benefit, and that the votaries of the Muses have seldom found the mazy paths leading to Parnassus strewn with the flowers of patronage, or shaded with the myrtles of emolument. And, alas! who can tell how many unhappy beings, who might have shone with distinguished lustre among the stars which illumine our hemisphere may have sunk unknown beneath the pressure of untoward circumstances—who knows how many may have shrunk, with all the exquisite sensibility of genius, from the rude and riotous discord of the world, into the peaceful slumbers of death? Among the number of those, whose talents might have elevated them to the first rank of eminence, but who have been overwhelmed with the accumulated calamities of poverty and misfortune, I do not hesitate to rank a young man whom I once accounted it my greatest happiness to be able to call my friend.

Matthew Morton was the only son of an humble merchant, who just lived to give a liberal education, and then left him, unprovided for and unprotected, to struggle through the world as well as he could. With a heart glowing with the enthusiasm of poetry and romance, with a sensibility the most exquisite, and with an indignant pride, which swelled in his veins, and told him he was a man, my friend found himself cast upon the wide world, at the age of nineteen, an adventurer, without fortune, and without connection.

As his independant spirit could not

brook the idea of being a burden to those whom his father had taught him to consider only as allied by blood, not by affection, he looked about him for a situation which would ensure to him, by his own exertions, an honorable competence. It was not long before such a situation offered, and Matthew precipitately artied himself to an attorney, without giving himself time to consult his own inclinations, or the disposition of his master.—The transition from the heroic and energetic tales of Homer, or the melting and pathetic strains of Euripides, Theocritus, and Sophocles, to Blackstone, Wood, and Coke, was striking and difficult; but he applied himself with his wonted ardor to his new study, as considering it not only his interest, but his duty to do so diligently. It was not long, however, before he discovered that he disliked the study of law—that he was not content with his situation—and that he despised his master. The fact was, Matthew had many mortifications to endure, which his proud spirit could not bear. The attorney was one of those narrow-minded beings, who consider wealth as alone entitled to respect. He had discovered that his clerk was very poor, and very destitute of friends, and thence he very naturally concluded that he might insult him with impunity. It appears, however, that he was mistaken in his calculations. When conversing one evening with my friend, I remarked that he was unusually thoughtful. I ventured to ask him whether he had met with anything particular to ruffle his spirit. He looked at me for some moments significantly, then, as if roused from a reverie, by the recollection—

'I have,' said he vehemently, 'I have—I have. He has insulted me grossly, and I will bear it no longer.'

He now walked up and down the room with visible emotion. Presently he sat down. He seemed more composed.

'My dear friend—oh how many endearing recollections are inseparably connected with that word. A faithful friend is doubly dear to me,' said he, 'for I have had positive proof that

The disappointments and the cares of time,  
Earth's blighting blasts and uncongenial  
clime,

could not break our ties of friendship. Well, I have suffered much from this man. I conceived it my duty to forbear, but I have forborne until forbearance is blamable; and I will never again endure what I have experienced this day. Not only this man, but every one, thinks he may treat me with contempt, because I am poor and almost friendless. But I am a man, and will no longer tamely submit to be the butt of burlesque and ridicule—the target for the arrows of malignant mendacity. In this spot of earth, though it gave me birth, I cannot enjoy consolation. The associations which are awakened at every step, are pleasantly sad; the innocent artless joys of the past, the few friends I have, the objects that interest a guiltless heart, the recollections of a thousand incidents, all rush on my mind—agitate my nerves; but if away, how sad, sorrowful, would I not feel? This is the seat of my infancy, those lordly mansions still stand, as they stood, when I was a child; this place witnessed the first follies of my boyhood; beneath those umbrageous boughs have I, many a time, thrown myself upon the grass, and reposed, and talked away the recreative hours with boys, who now are men. Little thought we then of the future, little recked we of the cares and troubles of a cold world—of the seas of adversity, with which it is the fate of most to struggle—of the vicissitudes and caprices of fortune. But alas, in the consecrated home of my childhood, I must be miserable. The principal end of man is to arrive at happiness. Here I can never attain it, and here, therefore, will I no longer remain. My obligations to the individual who calls himself my master, are cancelled by his abuse of the authority I rashly placed in his hands. I have no relatives to bind me to this particular place.' The tears started in his eyes as he spoke. He ceased his grief, saddened most by a flow of sympathetic tears.

'I have no tender ties to bid me stay, and why do I stay. The world is all before me. My inclination leads me to travel; I will pursue that inclination; and perhaps, in a strange land, I may find that repose which is denied to me in the place of my birth. My finances, it is true, are ill able to defray the expenses of travelling, but what then, Goldsmith, my countrymen,' he continued, with rising enthusiasm—'Goldsmith traversed Europe on foot, and I am as hardy as Goldsmith. Yes, I will go, and perhaps, before long, I may recline on some towering mountain, and exclaim with him, while an hundred realms lie in per-