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ANDREW LANG.

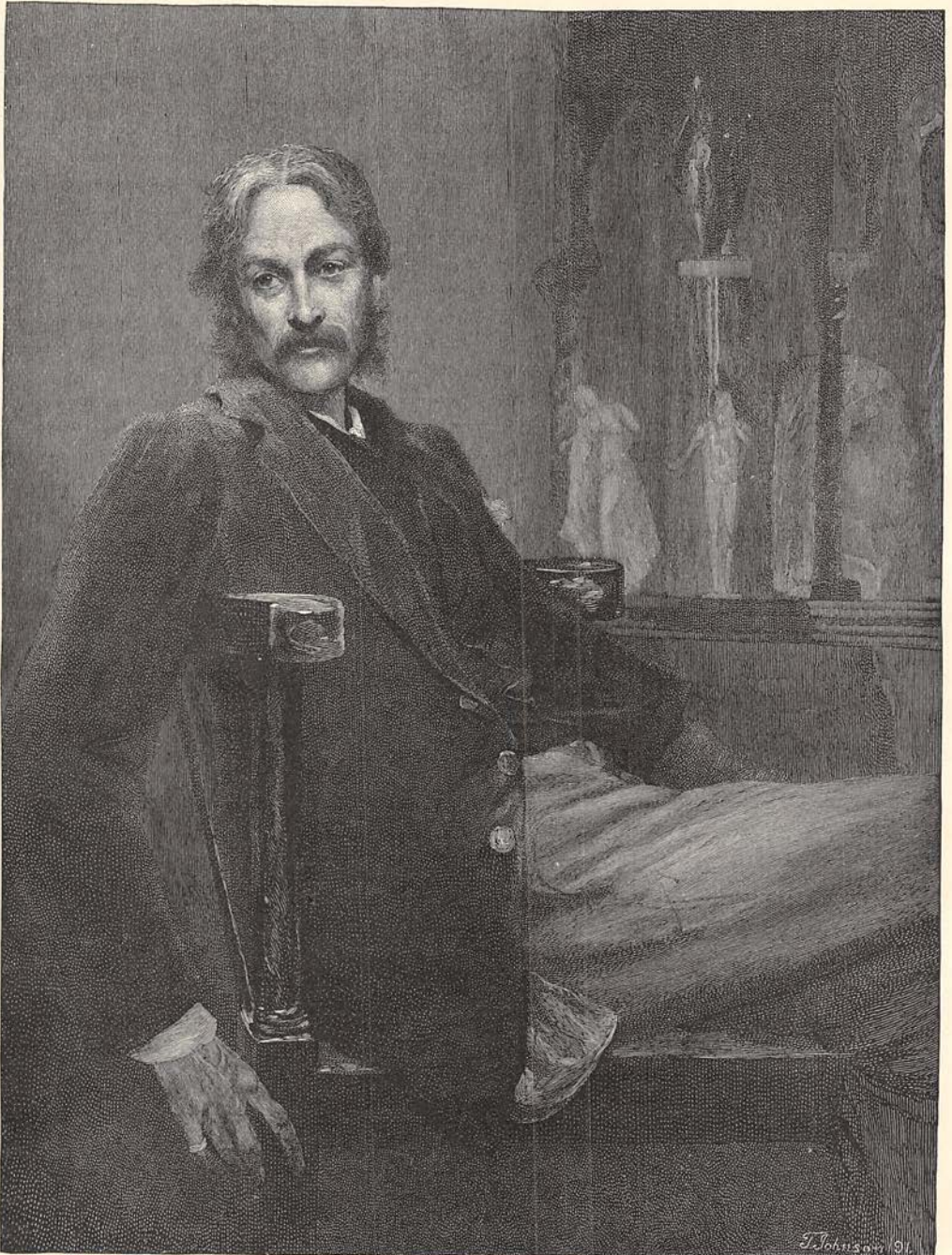
THE most lifelike photograph of a friend is no more than a reminder of what we have seen for ourselves, since the camera has neither insight nor imagination; a portrait by a true artist may bring out qualities but doubtfully glimpsed before, or it may even reveal depths of character hitherto unsuspected. In one of the London exhibitions during the season of 1885, amid many a "portrait of a gentleman," there was at least one portrait of a man—nervous, significant, vital. At a glance it was obvious that the man here depicted was a gentleman and a scholar, although the picture had none of the prim propriety of the ordinary academic portrait. There was an air of distinction about the sitter, twisted around in his chair, with his frankly humorous gaze. The casual stranger whose eye might fall on the painting could not but feel that the restless attitude was inevitably characteristic, and he could not but confess the charm of a most interesting personality. And, indeed, Mr. Richmond's picture of Mr. Andrew Lang seems to me one of the most successful of modern portraits.

Perhaps the first effect it made on the beholder was to suggest the extreme cleverness of its subject—an effect which does but scant justice to Mr. Lang, for cleverness is best as an extra, as the superfluity of him who has some quality other and better. Molière was not clever, and M. Sardou is clever beyond belief. When cleverness is all a man's having, though he make a brave show for a while, he is poor indeed. Cleverness Mr. Lang has, and a plethora of it; but he has also a richer endowment. He may be called the Admirable Crichton of modern letters; and he is a graduate of St. Andrew's, that ancient Scottish university where the original Crichton was once a student, three centuries earlier. Thence he went to Oxford, where there lingered memo-

ries of Landor and Shelley, where he took the Newdigate prize for poetry, and where in due season he was elected a Fellow of Merton, the college of Anthony Wood. Herein, I think, we may grasp the clue to Mr. Lang's character, and to his career: he is a Scotsman who has been tinctured by Oxford, but who still grips his stony native land with many a clinging radicle.

Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson are the two Scottish chiefs of literature to-day. Both live out of Scotland, yet both are loyal to the land of their birth, and love it with all the ardor of a good son's love. Neither is in robust health, but there is no taint of invalidism in the writings of either, no hint of morbid complaint or of unwholesome self-compassion. Both are resolutely optimistic, as becomes Scotchmen. Both are critics, with sharp eyes for valuing, and with a faculty of enthusiastic and appetizing enjoyment of what is best. They have both attempted fiction, and both belong to the romantic school. In differing degrees each is a poet, and each is master of a prose than which no better is written in our language nowadays. Mr. Lang's style has not the tortured felicity of Mr. Stevenson's; its happiness is easier and less wilful. The author of "Letters to Dead Authors" is not an artificer of cunning phrase like the author of "Memories and Portraits"; his style is not hand-made nor the result of taking thought; it grows more of its own accord. The style of each is transparent, but while Mr. Stevenson's is as hard as crystal, Mr. Lang's is fluid like water; it flows, and sometimes it sings as it flows, like the beautiful brooks he longs to linger beside, changing with the sky and the rocks and the trees, but always pure, and limpid, and delightful.

American readers, annoyed at the slovenli-



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ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

ANDREW LANG.

ness of most modern British essayists, are struck by the transparent clearness of Mr. Lang's style; for though he was born north of the Tweed his pages are spoilt by no Scotticisms, and though he dwells by the banks of the Thames they are disfigured by no Briticisms. They are free from the doubtful English which has "the largest circulation in the world." A constant perusal of the fine prose of the great Frenchmen whom Mr. Lang admires may have tended to keep his own paragraphs free from blemish; and a devoted study of the great Greeks whom he loves may have helped to give his pages their dignified ease.

In his pellucid prose, as in his intellectual alertness and in his lightness of touch, Mr. Lang is rather French than English. He is a nephew of Voltaire, and a cousin of M. Jules Lemaître. As we read his graceful and nervous sentences sometimes our ear catches an echo of Thackeray's cadences: and it was in France that Thackeray served his apprenticeship to the trade of author. Sometimes our eye rejoices in the play of a humor always lambent and often Lamb-like; and it is perhaps from Charles Lamb that Mr. Lang has got the knack of the quotation held in solution. Like Dryden and Burke and Bagehot, three masters of English prose, Mr. Lang quotes abundantly and from a full memory, and not always exactly. "Verify your quotations" is not a warning that he has taken to heart. The books from which he can draw illustrations at will are numberless, and they are to be found in every department of the library. In Greek literature, and in French as well as in English, he has the minute thoroughness of the scholar; but his main reading seems to have been afield, as happens to every man who loves books, and who likes to browse among them without let or hindrance.

The equipment of a critic Mr. Lang has, and the insight, and also the sympathy, without which the two other needful qualities lose half their value. There are limits to his sympathy, and he tells us that he does "not care for Mr. Gibbon except in his autobiography, nor for the elegant plays of M. Racine, nor very much for Mr. William Wordsworth, though his genius is undeniable"; but the range of his knowledge and of his understanding seems to me wider than that of any other contemporary British critic. He is unailing in affection for Homer, Herodotus, Theocritus, and Lucian, for Virgil and Horace, for Rabelais, Molière, and Dumas, for Shakspeare, Fielding, Miss Austen, and Thackeray, for Scott and Burns. He delights in the skittish writings of the lively lady who calls herself "Gyp," while for the psychologic subtleties of M. Paul Bourget he cares as little as does "Gyp" herself. He was

prompt in praise of the author of "King Solomon's Mines"; in fact, Mr. Haggard's tales of battle, murder, and sudden death have found no warmer eulogist than the author of "Ballades in Blue China."

Longfellow declared that "many readers judge of the power of a book by the shock it gives their feelings, as some savage tribes determine the power of muskets by their recoil; that being considered the best which fairly prostrates the purchaser." Mr. Lang's taste is too refined for this saying to be justly applicable to him; but he does not think the worse of a book because it tells a tale of daring-do. He is eager for a story of

. . . battles, sieges, fortunes,

Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly
breach.

He is quick to give a cordial greeting to a traveler's history of "antres vast and deserts idle," of "Anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders." In other words, Mr. Lang is a romanticist to the bitter end. Broad as his sympathy is, it is not broad enough to comprehend realism. He is restive when realism is lauded. Unconsciously, no doubt, he resents it a little, and he does not quite understand it. Mr. Lang can enjoy Rabelais, and praise him for the qualities which make him great in spite of his wilful foulness; but in M. Zola Mr. Lang sees little to commend. Quite the most perfunctory essay of Mr. Lang's that I ever read was one on the author of "L'Assommoir," which did but scant justice to the puissant laborer who is toiling unceasingly on the massive edifice of the "Rougon-Macquart" series, as mightily planned and solid in structure as a medieval cathedral, and, like it, disfigured and defiled by needless and frequent indecencies. Tolerant toward most literary developments, Mr. Lang is a little intolerant toward the analysts. Amiel delights him not, nor Marie Bashkirtseff either; and it irks him to hear Ibsen praised, or Tolstoi, though the pitiful figure of Anna Karénina lingers in his memory. And as for Mr. Howells, it is hard to say whether it is as novelist or critic that he irritates Mr. Lang more. Mr. Howells once spoke of the critical essaylets which issued monthly from the "Editor's Study" as "arrows shot into the air in the hope that they will come down somewhere and hurt somebody." Enough of them have hit Mr. Lang to make him look like St. Sebastian, if only he had not plucked them out swiftly, one by one, and sent them hurtling back across the Atlantic. Fortunately, the injuries were not fatal on either side of the water, and there was no poison on the

tips of the weapons to rankle in the wounds. Sensitive as most British writers are to the darts of transatlantic criticism, it has seemed to me sometimes that Mr. Lang is even tenderer of skin than are most of his fellow-sufferers.

The ocean that surges between Mr. Howells and Mr. Lang is unfordable, and there is no hope of a bridge. There is no common standing-ground anywhere for those who hold fiction to be primarily an amusement and those who believe that it ought to be chiefly a criticism of life, as Matthew Arnold said all literature should be. The romanticist considers fiction as an art, and as an art only; whilst the extreme realist is inclined to look on it almost as a branch of science. Kindly as Mr. Lang may be in his reception of a realistic book, now and then, he stands firmly on the platform of the extreme romanticists. "Find forgetfulness of trouble, and taste the anodyne of dreams—that is what we desire" of a novel, he declares in his cordial essay on Dumas. And in another paper he calls again for a potion against insomnia:

Pour out the nepenthe, in short, and I shall not ask if the cup be gold-chased by Mr. Stevenson, or a buffalo-horn beaker brought by Mr. Haggard from Kakuana-land—the Baron of Bradwardine's Bear, or "The Cup of Hercules" of Théophile Gautier, or merely a common café wine-glass of M. Fortuné du Boisgobey's or M. Xavier de Montépin's. If only the nepenthe be foaming there,—the delightful draught of dear forgetfulness,—the outside of the cup may take care of itself; or, to drop metaphor, I shall not look too closely at an author's manner and style, while he entertains me in the dominion of dreams.

Here Mr. Lang is in accord with Mérimée, who wrote in 1865 that "there is at present but one man of genius: it is Ponson du Terrail . . . No one handles crime as he does, nor assassination. *J'en fais mes délices.*" But Mérimée's humorous exaggeration is not in accord with his own practice; however abundant in imaginative vigor his stories might be, nothing could be more rigorously realistic in treatment. Mr. Lang seems to me happiest as a story-teller when his practice departs from his theory. His longest story, "The Mark of Cain," is as who should say a tale by M. Xavier de Montépin, but by a Montépin who was a Scotsman, and had been to Oxford, and did not take himself quite seriously. Now, for a romanticist not to take himself seriously is to give up the fight before the battle is joined. Mr. Lang has balladed the praises of "Miss Braddon and Gaboriau," and he may be sure that these masters of sensation believed in themselves, else would they never have held thousands breathless. If an author once lets his readers suspect that he is only "making be-

lieve," instantly he loses his grip on their attention, and may as well put away the puppets, since few spectators will care to wait till the fall of the curtain.

The one fault that Mr. James found with Trollope—that "he took a suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, a make-believe"—Mr. Lang never commits of malice prepense; but though he does not confess this unpardonable sin in so many words, yet his tone, his manner, his confidential approach, make the confession for him, and readers find themselves glancing up from the printed page to see if the author has not his tongue in his cheek or is not laughing in his sleeve. And the crime is the more heinous in story-telling according to the romantic tradition than in fiction of the realistic school. Mr. James reminds us that "there are two kinds of taste in the appreciation of imaginative literature; the taste for emotions of surprise, and the taste for emotions of recognition." It is the latter that "Barchester Towers" gratifies, and it is to the former that the "Mark of Cain" appeals, and the taste for the emotion of surprise is not satisfied if it suspects the writer of treating tragic moments with levity, or even of being capable of such treatment. But perhaps the real reason why a public that accepted the tawdry "Called Back" did not take kindly to the "Mark of Cain" is that Mr. Lang's story was too clever by half—a thing resented by most of those who have a taste for the emotion of surprise.

Perhaps the same criticism applies to some of the stories in the collection called "In the Wrong Paradise"—to the Poe-like tale of "A Cheap Negro," for example. But others of the stories in this volume, especially the uncanny tales of spooks and of medicine-men, are most delicious fooling—and fooling founded on the impregnable rock of modern science. What could be better in its way than the "Great Gladstone Myth"?—wherein the grand old man is resolved into his elements in the fashion familiar to students of sun-myths. Equally amusing, and quite as pregnant in suggestion, is the description of the poor souls who found themselves each "In the Wrong Paradise"—the scalped Scotchman dwelling with the Apaches in their happy hunting-grounds, and the wretched cockney esthete desperately out of place in the Fortunate Islands of the Greeks. And in the volume of pleasant papers on "Books and Bookmen" there is an eery tale of painful and humorous misadventure in "A Bookman's Purgatory." Akin to these in method, and even superior to them in charm, is the story of "Prince Prigio," which of all Mr. Lang's

fictions I like best, unhesitatingly proclaiming it the most delightful of modern fairy-tales since the "Rose and the Ring"; and if any one should tell me that he found no fun in the awful combat between the Firedrake and the Remora, I should make answer that such an one, waking or sleeping, does not deserve ever to receive as a gift, or even as a loan, the seven-leagued boots, the cap of darkness, or the purse of Fortunatus—all properties of fairy-lore with which Prince Prigio was duly accoutered.

From fairy-land to the doubtful region of folklore is no seven-leagued stride, and Mr. Lang is master in both territories. He stands ready to trace the kinship of Barbarossa and Barbe-bleue, and to insist that neither is a child of the sun. In defense of his theories Mr. Lang is armed to give battle to Professor Max Müller and his men; and they find him a redoubtable opponent, in no danger of putting off the heavy armor of scholarship because he has not proved it, and never without a smooth stone in his scrip to cast full at the forehead of his adversary. Lowell has protested against that zeal which seeks to explain away every myth as a personification of the dawn and the day. "There's not a sliver left of Odin," he declared:

Or else the core his name enveloped
Was from a solar myth developed
Which, hunted to its primal shoot,
Takes refuge in a Sanskrit root,
Thereby to instant death explaining
The little poetry remaining.
Try it with Zeus, 't is just the same;
The thing evades, we hug a name;
Nay, scarcely that—perhaps a vapor
Born of some atmospheric caper.

Against the philologic school of mythologists of whom Professor Max Müller is the chief, Mr. Lang has led a revolt in behalf of an anthropological explanation of those habits, customs, beliefs, and legends for which the upholders of the sun-myth theory provided an etymological interpretation. Mr. Lecky tells us that invariably with increased education the belief in fairies passes away, and "from the uniformity of this decline, we infer that fairy-tales are the normal product of a certain condition of the imagination; and this position is raised to a moral certainty when we find that the decline of fairy-tales is but one of a long series of similar transformations." Inspired by McLellan and Professor Tylor, and following Fontenelle, Mr. Lang has given battle to those who maintain that the descriptions of the elemental processes of nature developed into myths, and who accept a personification of fire, storm, cloud, or lightning as the origin of Apollo and his chariot, Thor and his hammer, Cinderella and her slipper, and Brer Rabbit and the tar-baby.

In the stead of the arbitrary interpretations of the philologists, wherein scarcely any two of them are agreed, Mr. Lang proffers an explanation derived from a study of the history of man and founded on the methods of comparative anthropology. He turns to account the evolution of humanity from savagery to civilization, and he examines the irrational beliefs and absurd customs which survived in Greece even in the days of Pericles by the aid of a study of the beliefs and customs of savage tribes still in the condition in which the ancient Greeks had once been. Thus he is ready to see in the snake-dance of the Moquis of Arizona a possible help to the right understanding of a similar ceremony described by Homer. He seeks to show that in savagery we have "an historical condition of the human intellect to which the element in myths, regarded by us as irrational," seems rational enough. Further, he urges that as savagery is a stage through which all civilized races have passed, the universality of the mythopoeic mental condition will explain not only the origin, but also the diffusion throughout the world, of myths strangely alike one to another.

That this ethnological hypothesis has gained general acceptance, and placed the philologic theory on the defensive, is due almost altogether to the untiring advocacy of Mr. Lang. His views have been presented modestly but firmly and incessantly. He has prepared the case himself, examined the witnesses, and summed up for the plaintiff. And he is an awkward antagonist, quick-witted and keen-sighted, and heavy-laden with the results of original anthropological investigation. He has scholarship in the old sense of the word; and to this he adds the advantage of a memory which retains every pertinent fact accumulated during omnivorous reading over a marvelously wide range of subjects. Most disinterested scholars have now accepted either as a whole or in part the theory Mr. Lang has set forth.

Of the scholarship which forms the solid basis for Mr. Lang's scientific inquiry he has given abundant evidence in his nervous prose translations of the "Odyssey" and the "Iliad" done in partnership with friends, in his refined rendering of the "Idyls" of Theocritus, and in his fresh and fragrant version of that other idyl, "Aucassin and Nicolette." The transfusion of a work of art from one language to another is a feat of the utmost difficulty, which Mr. Lang has accomplished with triumphant success, not only once or twice, but thrice at least. His translations reveal a most unusual union of scholarly exactness with idiomatic vigor; they are graceful,—almost the rarest quality of a translation,—and they are unfailingly poetic. Perhaps an enforced quaintness, and an occa-

sional insistence on an archaic word, seem almost like affectation, but this may be forgiven and forgotten in the charm and the felicity of the rendering as a whole. The secret of this charm is to be found, I think, in Mr. Lang's attitude toward the authors he translates. To him Homer, and Theocritus, and the old man who sang of "Aucassin and Nicolette," are still living, and their works are alive. Scholar as he is, his interest is never grammatical or philological, but always literary and human. He never regards these writings as verse to scan, or as prose to parse, but poetry to be enjoyed.

As it happens, Mr. Lang has attempted no long translations in verse, but some of his briefer metrical attempts are almost as happy as Longfellow's, than which there can hardly be higher praise. No doubt the carrying over of a lyric from one language to another is an easier task than the transferring of an epic, but nevertheless it is a feat many a minor poet has failed to accomplish. The difficulty lies in the double duty of the translator—to present the thought of his original and to preserve the form, not sacrificing the spirit, and at least suggesting the atmosphere. Mr. Lang has given us the most satisfactory version of Villon's "Ballade of Dead Ladies" (although Rossetti attempted it earlier), and of Clément Marot's "Brother Lubin" (although both Longfellow and Bryant severally essayed it, neglecting to retain the ballade form).

In his brightsome "Ballades in Blue China," and in his brilliant "Rhymes à la Mode," Mr. Lang shows his mastery of the accomplishment of verse, and his skill in that department of poetry which seems easy and is beset with danger. Voltaire tells us that difficulty conquered in whatsoever form of art is a large share of the merit; and neither in sonnet, nor ballade, nor other fixed form of verse, has Mr. Lang shirked any difficulty. If the game is worth the candle, Mrs. Battle is right in insisting on the rigor of the game. In his freer stanzas Mr. Lang has sometimes something of the singing simplicity of Longfellow and Heine, where the music of the verse sustains the emotion. In "Twilight on Tweed,"

A mist of memory broods and floats,
The Border waters flow:
The air is full of ballad notes,
Borne out of long ago,

and in "The Last Cast," the angler's thoughts wander to the rivers he has never fished, and then go back to the streams of Scotland again:

Unseen, Eurotas, southward steal,
Unknown, Alpheus, westward glide,
You never heard the ringing reel,
The music of the water-side!

Though gods have walked your woods among,
Though nymphs have fled your banks along,
You speak not that familiar tongue
Tweed murmurs like my cradle song.

My cradle song—nor other hymn
I'd choose, nor gentler requiem dear
Than Tweed's, that through death's twilight dim
Mourned in the last Minstrel's ear.

Mr. Lang has taken for an epigraph Molière's "Ce ne sont point de grands vers pompeux, mais de petits vers," yet he has at times the gift of lofty lines. It is only fair to judge a poet by his highest effort. In the case of the present poet these seem to me to be two sonnets on Homer, of a sustained and noble elevation. For love of Homer's heroine Mr. Lang has written his longest poem, "Helen of Troy," a brevet-epic.

The face that launch'd a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium

holds its fascination still across the centuries. Nor is "Sweet Helen," as Faustus calls her, the only lady of Mr. Lang's affections. He has a wealth of platonic love for many a fair dame (in poetry), and for many a damsel in distress (in prose). I doubt if he would deny his devotion to Beatrix Esmond, for whose sake the author of "The Faithful Fool," a comedy once performed by Her Majesty's Servants, broke his sword before his king. I question whether he would not admit an affection for Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, *née* Sharp, a green-eyed lady who once acted Clytemnestra at the Gaunt House theatricals. I know that he confesses a fondness for Manon Lescaut, a young person of reprehensible morals, who lightly sinned in France and then died happily in Louisiana. And I think that he is ready to boast of his liking for Miss Annie P. Miller of Schenectady, New York, an American girl who was known to her intimates as "Daisy," and who died in Rome after an imprudent visit to the Colosseum by moonlight.

Mr. Lang has the same frank and sturdy love for literature that he has for some of its captivating female figures. No reader of his could be in doubt as to his ceaseless and loyal study of Homer and Theocritus, of Rabelais and Molière, of Shakspeare and Thackeray. And in sports, too, his tastes are as wholesome and as abundant as his predilections in letters. He cherishes the cricket of Oxford and the golf of St. Andrews; he follows with equal zest trout-fishing and book-hunting. Than this last there is indeed no better sport; and the poetic author of "Books and Bookmen" has proved his interest in the bees of De Thou as well as in those that made the honey of Hy-

mettus. The original Crichton, we may remember, sent an epistle in verse to Aldus Manutius, the great printer-publisher of Venice.

Mr. Lang is at his best when he writes about the Scots and about the Greeks of old, for these he knows and loves; and perhaps he appears to least advantage when he is writing about the American writers of to-day, since these he neither likes nor cares to know—and unsympathetic criticism is foredoomed to sterility. The native Americans Mr. Lang is most familiar with are the red men, and he is fonder of them, I fancy, than he is of the pale faces who have built towns by the banks of the streams over which Uncas and Hard-Heart skilfully propelled their birch-bark canoes. It might have been better, therefore, had he not laid himself open to Mr. Fiske's rebuke for the "impatient contempt" with which he chose to speak of a man of Lewis H. Morgan's caliber; and if he had not permitted himself his recent and doubtfully courteous attack on Mr. Boyesen. And a more careful understanding of American literary history would have saved Mr. Lang from that farewell to Poe, in the "Letters to Dead Authors," in which the author of "The Raven" is hailed as "a gentleman among *canaille*"!—surely as strange an opinion as one can find in all the long annals of criticism.

"Letters to Dead Authors" is one of the minor masterpieces of letters, the keenest and cleverest volume of playful criticism since the "Fable for Critics" was published two-score years ago, as that in its turn was the brightest book of the kind since "Rejected Addresses." But I am afraid to linger over this delightful tome for fear I may laud it extravagantly. The "Epistle to Mr. Alexander Pope," a marvel of parody with many lines as good as the one which tells the poet that "Dunces edit him whom dunces feared!"—the letter to "Monsieur de Molière, Valet-de-Chambre du Roi," with its delicious suggestion that if the great and sad French humorist were alive to-day, he might write a new comedy on *les Moliéristes*; the communication to Herodotus, with its learned fooling; the missive to Alexantre Dumas, with its full current of hearty admiration and enjoyment—these and many another I dare not dwell on, because, as I read in the letter to W. M. Thackeray, "there are many things that stand in the way of the critic when he has a mind to praise the living." Quite as welcome as these are some of the essays in epistolary parody to be found in "Old Friends."

Of necessity every man has the defects of his qualities, and the very success of Mr. Lang's briefer essays tends to prevent his attempting longer labors. He gets most out of a subject which may be treated on the instalment plan, when every portion is complete in itself, and yet unites with the others to form a complete whole. A book like "Letters to Dead Authors," which is avowedly a collection of separable essays, has not only a broader outlook but also a stronger unity than the pleasantly discursive volume on Oxford, for example. A collection of Tanagra figurines, however, is in no wise inferior in interest to a colossal statue; art has nothing to do with mere bulk, nor has literature. Mr. Lang cultivates to best advantage ground which can most easily be cut into allotments.

It is to be noted also that despite his extreme multifariousness there are certain segments of life and of literature in which Mr. Lang takes little interest or none. Though he once wrote a poem on General Gordon, and though he is ever chaffing Mr. Gladstone, it is obvious that he cares not for the contentions of politics; and apparently he cares as little for the disputes of theology, although he did write a chance article on "Robert Elsmere." For art, music, and the drama he reveals no natural inclination. We may guess that it has been his fate to serve as art-critic, toiling in the galleries yearly; but we can discover no signs of any real understanding of art, either pictorial or plastic, nor of any aptitude for it. Of music he says almost nothing, and he seems to know as little about it as we know about the song the Syrens sang. And as for the acted drama, I am afraid that he is a heretic, even as Lamb was heretical in regard to the performance of Shakspeare's plays. I hesitate to assert, though I am inclined to believe, that to him "As You Like It" and "Much Ado About Nothing" are comedies to be read in the fields or by the fire-side, rather than stage-plays to be acted before the footlights.

Nor has he busied himself with any science other than anthropology. But what of it? His interests are wider than those of almost any other man of letters in our time; and in these days, when the pressure of civilization forces men into an extreme and cramping specialization, Mr. Lang has circumvented this tendency by cultivating not one specialty or two, but a dozen at least. And perhaps there could be no better proof of his surpassing cleverness.

Brander Matthews.