

## Favourite Books of Childhood.

BY FRANCES H. LOW.



THE following paper is mainly concerned with a sketch of children's books from early days, and a comparison of the stories in favour with children of to-day with those of preceding generations. The difficulty of finding out what boys read thirty, forty, and fifty years ago has been solved in the happiest manner by the graceful courtesy and co-operation of a group of distinguished living men, whose personal reminiscences will give a great fund of innocent pleasure and delight to all those who admire greatness, whether in statesmanship, literature, or science.

Story-books written especially for children are of comparatively modern growth, the first systematic attempt at supplying juvenile literature having been made in 1765 by Newberry, the publisher in St. Paul's Church-yard, of whom Leigh Hunt speaks with affection as being "the most illustrious bookseller of our boyish days, his little penny books being radiant with gold and rich with bad pictures."

But if children's books were unknown in the earlier days of English national life, it is not to be concluded that the little people were without rhyme and romance about which to delight and dream. Legends, the common inheritance of every race and nation, ballads, fables—there was the ever ingenious "Æsop," as well as others—were told and retold, and handed down by tradition until they were eventually printed; and in the chap-books of the 17th century most of the old-time nursery rhymes and legends are to be found. These entered every farm-house and cottage, and naturally came into the hands of the children.

Steele, in the *Tatler*, speaks of a little boy of eight years, who frankly declared he did not care much for "Æsop's Fables," because he did not believe they were true, but who was much better pleased with the lives and adventures of "Don Belliani of Greece," "Guy of Warwick," "The Seven Champions of Christendom," and other historians of that age. "Guy of Warwick" was a popular hero with boyhood, and no wonder. His adventures and prowess out-hero Baron Munchausen's, and on one occasion he is set

upon by sixteen assassins, whom he overcomes, slaying *en passant* bears, monsters, dragons, and the like.

The valiant "Jack the Giant-Killer," the complacent, boastful little "Jack Horner," "Tom Thumb," and many another nursery hero, were familiar and beloved personages to 17th century children through these odd little chap-books. Some of these chap-books—written with an eye to edify, or, as it would seem to us, to terrify, the small folk—are very curious reading.

By way of compensation, the 17th century child had one book that has ever had a perennial charm for generations of children, as well as for their elders; and the allegory, imagery, and poetry of which have imprinted spiritual truths upon immature minds with an ineffaceable stamp. I mean, of course, the "Pilgrim's Progress." It is in no way necessary here to point out the qualities of this beautiful tale that strike a child's fancy and captivate his imagination, whilst at the same time interesting, satisfying, and delighting the sage and philosopher.

About this book, and the masterpiece of Defoe, which appeared a little later, in the early part of the 18th century, there is a remark to be made. The head masters of some of the London and country public schools have kindly aided me in discovering what books are most popular with modern school-boys, by having an inquiry made upon this point. The boys examined for the most part belong to the middle and upper middle rank, and their sincere, undraped confessions are instructive as well as (to me, at least) astonishing. Three hundred of these lists lie before me, and in only five of their number does the name of Bunyan's wondrous legend occur at all. It is the same with the girls. The head mistress of a large school for girls in the north of London kindly permitted a similar inquisition, with the result that only two little girls out of one hundred and fifty gave in their allegiance to the "Pilgrim's Progress."

But if I turn to the roll-call of stirring names contributed by the older men, I find that the "Pilgrim's Progress" has frequently, if not invariably, a place of glory. Mr. Gladstone, Mr. W. E. Lecky, Mr. Walter Besant, Prof. Dowden (who says, "I had a



good deal of the 'Pilgrim's Progress' by heart before I was eight"), Mr. Leslie Stephen, all read the book closely, and loved it dearly in "the bright, untroubled days of boyhood."

The second point is still more curious.

Should we not expect the immortal "Robinson Crusoe" to figure in every literary calendar drawn up by schoolboys? But that there is a vast proportion of modern schoolboys completely indifferent to "Robinson" must certainly be admitted; for in nearly one half of the papers the book does not figure at all.

Yet what a crowd of illustrious names have repaid their childish debt to Defoe by the praise with which they have done him homage! "Was there ever anything written by mere man," asked Dr. Johnson, "that was wished longer by its reader?" Coleridge philosophizes learnedly about it. John Stuart Mill says: "Amongst the few children's books I had, 'Robinson Crusoe' was pre-eminent, and continued to delight me all through my boyhood."

Listen to what M. Daudet, the creator of Tartarin, the inimitable, says in his letter, which is so gay and graceful that I must transcribe it here as it stands, it is too light and airy to be translatable.

"Alphonse Daudet, auteur des trois Tartarins, de Jack l'Immortel, Le Nabab, Sappho, Lettres de mon Moulin, etc., a fait sa pâture enfantine d'un seul livre: Le Robinson Crusoe. Aujourd'hui encore il retrouve dans le livre de Daniel de Foë ses sensations les plus intenses de terreur (le pied nu sur le sable avec son double fantastique du pied fourchu de Satan et la trace du cannibale,

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MR. JOHN STUART MILL.  
Photo. by London Stereoscopic Co.

les yeux luisants du vieux bonc, au fond de la caverne, la surprise du perroquet clamant: 'Robinson, mon pauvre Robinson!') et aussi le charme, comme nulle autre part, du home, de la cabine, du renfermé entouré d'horizons infinis de houles voyageuses. Avec le Robinson, mais bien au dessous, un livre que je n'ai pas relu, M. Le Midshipman Aisé a passionné mon enfance en même temps que Gulliver. Chose singulière, ce sont tous des livres anglais, il y a là le mirage du méridionals grandi au soleil dans une ville sans eau et rêvant de voyages, d'îles lointaines. Je compte, du reste, avant peu, consigner dans un joyeux petit livre les premières aventures navales d'un petit méridional qui n'avait jamais vu la mer. Mon livre sera dédié à Robinson."

Legion is the name of the admirers of Defoe, who has had the happiness of writing a story that not only pleased boy critics of the next few centuries, but that also established, and always establishes, a kindly tie between the reader and the author. It is one of the rare books, too, that delight boys of the most diverse temperaments, characters, tastes, and activities, and that appeal equally to the boy Prince and the child of the streets.

The Prince of Wales writes through Sir Francis Knollys that "Robinson Crusoe" was the favourite book of his childhood. It won the early affection of Mr. John Burns, whose tastes in early days seem to have been democratic and catholic, for he writes: "I was an omnivorous reader when a boy, and in the oddest manner varied the 'Penny Dreadful' with Combe's 'Constitution of Man,' an old tattered copy of which I still have and highly prize." Mr. William Rossetti, who has given me a mass of exceedingly interesting details about the favourite books read by Dante

*qui n'avait jamais vu la mer  
Mon livre sera dédié à Robinson*

*" Respectueusement "*

*" Alf. Daudet "*

*" Et Rue de Bellechasse "*



Gabriel Rossetti in his boyhood, says his brother "liked 'Robinson Crusoe,' but it was not a special favourite." Lord Wolseley read it with "intense delight," as did Professor Huxley and Sir Henry Thompson. This proves — what, indeed, needs no proof — that its fascinating power is not only strong over boys with adventurous longings, or with a scientific turn of mind — not the least enchanting portion of "Robinson Crusoe" is that concerned with the manipulating of tools — but equally also over boys in whom the artistic faculty predominates.

Mr. Santley heads his list of favourite books with "Robinson Crusoe," whilst it proved no less seductive to Mr. Walter Besant, the novelist, Mr. Lecky, the historian, and to "Mark Rutherford," one of the great living prose writers.

To set against the majority, however, Professor Dowden makes no mention of "Crusoe," but refers to "Masterman Ready" and "The Children of the New Forest," which "were a great delight."

Neither Mr. Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, nor Mr. Ruskin give it any place of favour. Mr. Alfred Austin, after remarking that books with some literary value from an early age aroused in him most emotion, adds, "though, as a matter of course, one had one's share of traditional delight in 'Robinson Crusoe.'"

It will be seen, then, that though in the early part of the 18th century no story-books had been written especially for youthful comprehension, children had no lack of precious and enchanting volumes, mainly of allegory, fable, and adventure, amongst which "Gulliver's Travels" must not be forgotten.

About the middle of the century, however, it occurred to a "philanthropic" publisher (so he is strangely called by Goldsmith in the "Vicar of Wakefield"), one Newberry, of St. Paul's Churchyard, to bring out a series of juvenile books at an inexpensive price, many of them costing but one penny. This was in 1765, and from that time onward children's literature has formed a regular branch of the publishers' and authors' trade. Many of these little books, illustrated by Bewick and other well-known artists, contained abridged stories of famous novels; and "Tom Jones," "Don Quixote," and "Gil

Blas" (one supposes very much abridged) appeared in the series. But most of the stories are very different in thought and sentiment to the above, and are indeed unbearably didactic in intention and treatment. The chief aim of the writers appears to be the humiliation of the child hero or heroine who figures in the books, and of children in general; this being brought about by the exhibition on every conceivable occasion of the superior wisdom and virtues of the mammas and governesses. Perhaps even this standpoint is preferable to that of some of the modern books, where it is the little boy in a velveteen suit whose wit, repartee, and the rest, soften the heart of his brutal grandfather; or a little girl whose disagreeable practice of saying grace at dinner parties, and of singing hymns at odd occasions, vanquishes the scepticism of her worldly papa.

One delightful little book that came out in the Newberry series related the "Adventures of Goody Two Shoes," and has been generally attributed to Goldsmith. It is full of humour and sly little touches. But what boundless patience these liliputian readers must have had, and what a prodigious gulf there stretches between children who tolerate such a story as Mrs. Pinchard's "Blind Child" and the exacting little persons of to-day!

Another tiresome book — at least, we have only heard of one little boy, and fortunately a little boy of genius, who confesses he was fond of it — was Miss Edgeworth's "Harry and Lucy." Mr. Ruskin (writes Mrs. Severn from Brantwood) says his favourite book when he was ten years old was the "Arabian Nights"; up to then, and indeed always as a child, his chief favourite was Miss Edgeworth's "Harry and Lucy." The children in Miss Edgeworth's stories are, however, simpler and healthier than some of the creations of her predecessors; and "Simple Susan," which Scott declared brought tears into his eyes, is really a charming story, but not, I should fancy, appreciated by grown-up readers.

Her other well-known story, "Rosamond," has received high praise in various quarters, and Miss Charlotte Yonge tells me it was a great favourite of hers; but whether it be wise to endow your small heroine with such disagreeable model



PROFESSOR JOHN RUSKIN.  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.



parents as Rosamond possessed is doubtful.

It is impossible even to make a passing reference to the numerous books that have come fast and thick since the days of Miss Edgeworth, but a word of notice must fall upon that volume in whose pages many of us spent our most enchanted hours. "There is one book," says Mr. Stevenson in "Memories and Portraits," "more generally loved than 'Shakespeare,' that captivates in childhood and still delights in age—I mean the 'Arabian Nights.'" But what will Mr. Stevenson—who has himself had the rare fortune of turning out a boy's classic—say to this: that out of my three hundred schoolboys, only fourteen have read the Arabian romances? I say read, but to be completely precise I should say named, only it is hard to conceive of a boy reading, and having no passion for, the "Arabian Nights."

Can there be anything more melancholy than that a generation of boys and girls (as for the girls, their tastes are hopeless, and in their lists there is no record of the precious volume at all) should be growing up whose imagination has never been stirred and taken captive by that seductive crowd of geniis, caliphs, and sorcerers, and to whom the sorely-tried Sindbad and Morgiana, and the rest of that captivating gallery, are not familiar and beloved friends? One would like to know, is the volume not placed in school libraries? If not, what is the reason? If so, how comes it that the most vivid, magic, rich, and glowing stories that ever took captive a child's spirit should be uncared for to-day?

Let us see how it is with their elders; and I shall here take the opportunity of presenting the records that they have given me. One may wager with certainty that the Arabian tales will be found in Mr. Gladstone's treasure box; for although the theory that we are essentially the same through life may want modifying, there are few persons with high gifts of imaginativeness

and receptivity who have not shown something of the same qualities in their earlier days.

Mrs. Drew writes on behalf of her illustrious father (Mr. Gladstone): "His favourite books at the age of nine and ten were 'Scott's Novels,' 'Froissart's Chronicles,' the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and the 'Arabian Nights.' My own," adds Mrs. Drew, "at the same age were, first and foremost, the 'Arabian Nights,' also 'Stories from Froissart,' 'Hans Andersen,' and the 'Daisy Chain.'"

The only omission that produces a little surprise is Shakespeare's plays, but the age limit of ten explains this; and as I afterwards raised the limit to thirteen, it must be borne in mind when contrasting with the lists of others.

"Froissart's Lives" were much in favour with boys at the beginning of this century. The history is said not to be especially accurate, and perhaps statesmen and historians, and a certain order of matter-of-fact people to whom precision is necessary, might suffer injury from the perusal; but right-minded boys should delight in them, for there is killing and fighting on every page.

Lord Salisbury writes with characteristic modesty that he "has very little information to give upon the subject, except what may seem of a very commonplace kind. His favourite books, as near as he can recollect, were Walter Scott's novels, the earlier novels of Dickens, Marryat, Fenimore Cooper, and Shakespeare's plays."

Romance, adventure, and poetry: here is a varied feast, and what a host of honourable and heroic figures are seated round the board!

Those who love to trace something of the look and ways and bearing of maturity in the child will examine the next three lists with interest. One little point—though one advances with caution, for it would not be wise to build any elaborate theory upon it or make any deductions therefrom without far wider evidence than I have been able to collect here—that strikes me here



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.  
From a Photo. by Falk, Sydney.



LORD SALISBURY.  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.



is this. The majority of robust lads, however greatly they distinguish themselves in after life in science, statesmanship, surgery, or other fields of action, have much the same tastes in reading, and it is the clatter of horse-shoes, the rattle of musketry, and all the stir of adventure and battle-field, that enchain their fancy.

Exceptions there may be, as Lord Wolseley's letter shows, but on the whole this applies. Now, it may be mere chance, but it would appear as if with men of letters it is not so. There would seem to be some fine literary instinct implanted in their breasts which makes itself felt in the beginning of life.

Scott, whilst he was still a child, sleeping in his mother's dressing-room, speaks of the rapture with which he sat up in his shirt reading "Shakespeare" by the light of the fire in her apartment; and Pope speaks of the ecstasy with which, as a little fellow, he pored over the "Faërie Queene."

Mr. William Rossetti—who shared the literary tastes of his famous brother, the childhood of the two being passed together—writes: "My brother read with more zest and personal preference than I did; I perhaps showed more perseverance. He had very little liking for books in the nature of history or biography; and my sister Christina, to whom I was chatting the other day about this matter of books, was very little of a reader in early years, and has never been exactly 'bookish.' She tells me that at the age of nine or so she was particularly fond of Hone's 'Every-Day Book,' which was also a great favourite of my brother's. My sister adds it was in 'Hone' that she for the first time saw the name of Keats, and some extracts from his 'Eve of St. Agnes,' which impressed her as singularly beautiful. All three of us were from an early age familiar with 'John Gilpin,' and relished it much.

"My brother, at the age of five or six years, was attracted to 'Hamlet.' It was illustrated by Retzoch, and there were similar copies of 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'The Tempest,' 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and 'Macbeth.' Only extracts were given, and these he read with great delight. A little later on, his favourite reading was 'Marmion' and other of Scott's poems, as well as one or two of the novels. Byron's 'Siege of

Corinth,' 'Mazeppa,' and the 'Corsair' were favourites. We had a book called 'Martin and Westall's Illustrations of the Bible,' at which he was constantly looking, as well as at the Bible, notably some historical parts of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse.

"At the age of eleven or twelve he made a series of pen-and-ink sketches for Pope's 'Iliad.' Our elder sister Maria was immensely enthusiastic about it, and he, also, in a minor degree. He knew at that age in a cursory way and enjoyed Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso,' of which our grandfather had an illustrated edition; but what delighted him perhaps more constantly than anything else was a series of stories, which came out in cheap numbers with coloured prints, called 'Brigand Tales.' He also read and liked 'Gil Blas,' Goethe's 'Faust,' 'Robinson Crusoe' (which was not a special favourite), some of the more entertaining parts of 'Gulliver's Travels,' and the 'Arabian Nights.'

"He had an edition of Burns, and was familiar with it in a sort of way, but didn't take to the poetry as such. Lamb's 'Tales from Shakespeare' was a good deal in his hands, but not, I think, at all relished. He was very fond of 'Nicholas Nickleby,' and knew something of 'Pickwick,' but I don't think he took much to the last named."

The rest of the list is, unfortunately, too long to enumerate here, but I notice the "Newgate Calendar," which was much read about ten and eleven, and as early as nine; "Rienzi," which was a *great* favourite; "Gay's Fables," the prints of which were possibly the greatest attraction to him; and "Ada," which was a great favourite, and was about a mysterious murder.

Miss Rossetti's favourite volumes also were "Scott's Poems" and the "Arabian Nights." Her brother adds:—

"Our mother was a very religious woman and most careful parent; but she never dosed us much with goody-goody books. The 'History of the Fairchild Family' was not with any of us at all a favourite. Among short poems we all three cherished were 'Casabianca' and 'Chevy Chase.' This, along with the 'Englishman' and the 'Spanish Lady,' seems to have been the only old ballad we knew in those childish years."



ROSSETTI.

From a Photo. by W. & D. Downey.



Probably, as Mr. Rossetti points out, inherited tendencies had no little influence on the taste of these gifted children, for their father had written a great deal of poetry on Italian patriotic subjects, with which they were familiar.

But what a wonderful list it is! What a rich array of the greatest names, what high and rare atmosphere for boyhood to grow up in! Keep that scroll, admit it into your memory, and then glance at a few lists sent in by the boys of to-day. Here are three taken at random from the pile that lies before me:—

“The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” by Mark Twain; “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” by Mark Twain; “Tom Brown’s School Days”; “Dropped from the Clouds,” by Jules Verne; “Three Men in a Boat”; “A Robbery Under Arms.”

“The Boys’ Own Paper”; “Strand Magazine”; “The Amusing Journal”; “Eric, or Little by Little,” editor, Rev. Farrar; “Dick Cheveley”; “The Ludgate Monthly”; “Three Midshipmen”; “Three Lieutenants”; “Three Commanders”; “Three Admirals.”

“Chums” (Cassell’s); “Boys”; “Boys’ Own Paper”; “A Bad Boy’s Diary”; “A Good Boy’s Diary”; “Strand Magazine” (“Sherlock Holmes’ Adventures” and “The Diary of a Doctor”); “Dombey and Son,” “David Copperfield,” “Old Curiosity Shop” (Dickens); “Three Men in a Boat” (not to say anything about the dog); “Boy’s Annual”; “Ludgate Monthly.”

Another poet in whom a feeling for literature showed itself at an early age is Mr. Alfred Austin.

“I do not remember,” he says, “that any story-books, merely as story-books, excited in me the childish emotion that was aroused by works more directly allied to literature; though, as a matter of course, if at a somewhat earlier age, one had one’s share of traditional delight in ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ in ‘Gulliver’s Travels,’ no doubt specially edited *virginibus puerisque*, and in Mungo Park’s ‘Travels.’ But my first real experience of enthusiasm in connection with books was when my father read to me the First Canto of ‘The Lady of the Lake,’ and with the sound of the four verses:—

The stag at eve had drunk his fill  
Where danced the moon on Monar’s rill,  
And deep his midnight lair had made  
In lone Glenartney’s hazel shade—

I had a sensation never again experienced till I caught my first sight of Italy. No

doubt that opening out of a new world and of a real life occurred somewhat before the period named by you; but I think it awoke, or perhaps only discovered, the preferences that manifested themselves later on. A love of form and sound, in other words, I suppose, of style—however elementary and deficient—henceforward seemed to decide one’s tastes. Hence, Pope’s translation of the ‘Iliad,’ Cowper’s ‘Lines on My Mother’s Picture,’ copious extracts from Byron, Pope’s ‘Eloisa to Abelard,’ the more martial passages from Shakespeare, were associated in one’s reading with Livy, in whom I delighted, especially where that writer—greater, it seems to me, as an orator even than an historian—records the speeches of Roman worthies; with Fénelon’s ‘Télémaque’ and with Bossuet’s ‘Oraisons Funèbres.’

“I was, however, anything but a voracious reader, and I must confess that I then preferred, as I do still, all forms of open-air exercise, and even a certain receptive vacancy of mind, to all the books in the world.”

In the same strain and in strengthening of my theory is the record of one of the living masters of prose, Professor Dowden. After recalling with pleasure “Masterman Ready,” “The Children of the New Forest,” and “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” he says, “with the latter my imagination was caught; and I think I was a little in love with Eva as shown in a picture. Before I was eight I was much impressed by ‘Macbeth,’ and I longed for the complete ‘Shakespeare’ which was locked up in my father’s bookcase. Before I was thirteen I had earned this ‘Shakespeare’ by writing thirty-six short essays, three for each volume, and I still possess the book. It does not contain Shakespeare’s poems, and (as I began to collect early) I remember buying a little copy of the poems, which became a great treasure. When about thirteen I was lucky in coming across Henry Reed’s ‘Lectures on English Literature,’ and this led me on to Wordsworth, in whom I lost myself for years (or, perhaps, found myself for the first time). I read nearly all the ‘Waverley Novels’ in bed during my frequent illnesses as a little boy. I remember that I cared much for Horace’s ‘Odes,’ and got a vivid feeling of the power of style from Tacitus. Among my early favourites were the ‘Vicar of Wakefield’ and Goldsmith’s ‘Plays and Poems.’ That excellent book, ‘Télémaque,’ gave me great pleasure, and I believe that it would do so if I read it now. It was, however, quali-



fied by 'Gil Blas.' The only histories I cared to read were of the French Revolution and Napoleonic time."

As characteristic as this of the man of letters is the brief, concise record of a distinguished man of action, Lord Wolseley. The scholarly and (one surmises) peaceful little boy-student reads historical description very likely with a single eye to vividness and picturesqueness of writing; but the miniature warrior, already inspired with the martial spirit, cares for none of these things—he is already the true soldier, and his country is the animating centre of his thoughts.

"When a child of the age you mention," writes Lord



LORD WOLSELEY.  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.

*It was love of country <sup>more than</sup> ~~love~~ <sup>love</sup>  
of heroes which filled my mind  
& excited my interest & enthusiasm.  
Very truly yours  
Wolseley*

FACSIMILE OF CONCLUSION OF LORD WOLSELEY'S LETTER.

Wolseley, "I read with intense interest 'Æsop's Fables,' 'Robinson Crusoe,' 'Captain Cook,' and 'Commodore Anson's Voyages,' and all the stories of naval and military adventure with which the pages of old 'Peter Parley' were then filled. But I didn't care for the heroes of other nations. Nelson and King Alfred, who were the great heroes of my boyhood, would have had no particular interest for me had they not been Englishmen. It was love of country more than love of heroes which filled my mind and excited my interest and enthusiasm."

What a delightful picture this brings before one's mind of little Master Wolseley meeting, we will say, a French schoolboy, twice his size, at some foreign watering-place, and vindicating the national honour of which he is already jealous, and the brightness of which he has helped to sustain.

Science in this little essay of mine is honourably represented by Sir Henry Thompson and Professor Huxley, and by a curious coincidence the three first-named books in

each list are the same: The "Pilgrim's Progress," "Robinson Crusoe," "Gulliver's Travels."

To this Sir Henry Thompson adds: "The Wars of the Jews and the Destruction of Jerusalem' was an enormous favourite, and made a great impression on me, as did also" (and here, at any rate, we suspect the modern schoolboy will be in sympathy with him) "the Eton Latin Grammar, the most hateful production in the form of a school book that I ever encountered in

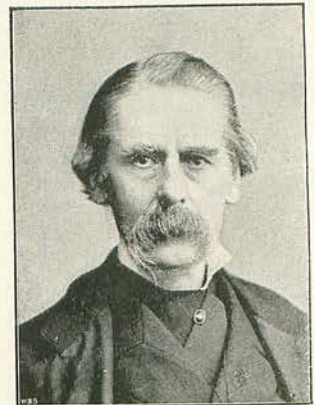
my life, seeing that it was forced upon me as a daily companion before I was six years old!"

Professor Huxley says: "I am not sure that my memory of sixty years ago is very trustworthy; but in addition to the books named, 'Mungo Park's Travels' (I was long set on emulating that worthy) and the stories in

the Bible, particularly the Apocrypha, are visible in the mist. Our repertory was very

limited in comparison with that of the modern child."

One is tempted to wonder whether any of the books that schoolboys are reading to-day will so deeply have stamped themselves upon their minds and imaginations that sixty years



SIR H. THOMPSON.  
From a Photo. by Watery.



hence the familiar names and scenes will also come out of "the mist." Is it possible that any enduring impression can be made on a child's plastic mind if the volume

"Byron's Poems," "The Lady of the Lake," and Homer's "Iliad." Scott's novels and Fenimore Cooper's were the chief delight of Mr. G. F. Watts at the age of nine.

*Our recollections were  
very limited in comparison  
with that of the modern  
child -*



PROFESSOR HUXLEY.  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.

*I am  
proudly  
Yours truly  
W. E. Lecky*

FACSIMILE OF CONCLUSION OF PROFESSOR HUXLEY'S LETTER.

be read but once and then replaced by something more exciting—or, to use the more exact word, by something more sensational?

There is one book—I should not have to chronicle its absence had it been possible to reach Samoa within reasonable time—which to my astonishment appears neither in the reading of the boys of to-day nor in those of a bygone past: and it would be left out in the cold altogether were it not for the homage of one woman—fortunately of sufficient rare distinction to make the homage of worth; for it is Madame Patti, whose favourite book as a child was "Monte Christo."

Miss Ada Rehan, who has won distinction in another field of art, was fondest of "fairy tales and Tennyson."

Mr. Santley's boyish favourites include "Robinson Crusoe," numberless books of adventure, Shakespeare's plays, and many old plays. Mr. W. E. Lecky's catalogue includes

The "old plays" seem hardly appropriate pasturage for little boys to browse upon, and the same objection may have risen in the minds of many older persons as they have



MR. LECKY.  
From a Photo. by Barraud.

perused some of the records given here. I once put a question bearing upon this matter to Mr. Walter Besant, whose own boyish library included most of the classics I have named.

"I read all the Restoration plays as a



boy, and I don't think they did me any harm. The fact is, I didn't understand the improprieties; most boys don't until they have been to a public school. When I was a small boy there used to call upon our family a very important relative, a prim, decorous old lady, who looked with great suspicion on our reading anything except books written especially for children about children, mostly of the priggish kind that die early. I remember once when she came, I was sitting in a corner reading one of Scott's. I don't remember which" (it was "Peveril of the Peak"), "but I came to that passage about Charles II. being the father of many subjects, where Buckingham says: 'the father of many,' and though I didn't in the least understand the significance, something in the sentence diverted me, and I burst out laughing. The solemn relative and some other decorous people asked what the mirth was about, whereupon I delightedly read out the passage. My humour, or rather Scott's, was received in complete silence, which, though it didn't damp my spirits, considerably puzzled me."

Perhaps the moral that is most driven home to one, or, at any rate, to the humble writer of this, is that bad books so-called—meaning books dealing openly with the relations of men and women and with matters of the world—do not much harm a clean-minded little boy.

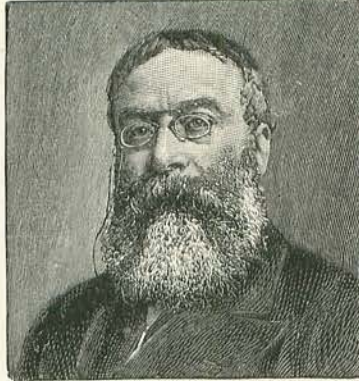
Of much greater import, so it seems to me, is the vulgarity of style and sentiment of many of the books favoured by modern boys. There are books—I will not advertise them more than I can help—recurring again and again, whose distinguishing characteristics are certain cheap qualities that should recommend them to the servants' hall, but nowhere else. The strain of commonness in humour, the

vulgarity of the style, the complete absence of anything imaginative, or high, or heroic, that can inspire and animate and unconsciously educate a boy, are so marked, that it is a marvel that parents should permit such literature in the school-room; and their popularity is the severest commentary on the national demoralization of literary feeling.

Again, although several of the books of adventure and historical romance seem written with a wholesome breeziness (Henty's are a notable instance), is it not a pity that a race of children should grow up completely unfamiliar with the masterpieces of English romance?

If these preferences are typical and representative, as I believe they are, we can no longer cherish the belief that Scott retains his hold over youth. Here and there a boy reads "Ivanhoe," and more rarely still "The Talisman"; but of all that long gallery of beloved figures enshrined in our memories—of Guy Mannering, of the Dominie, of Cleveland, Locksley, Quentin Durward, Major Dalgetty, Claverhouse, and the rest—these boys and girls know nothing. If stories of high purposes and brave passions have any meaning and influence, one would almost feel disposed to say, "To have read and loved Scott is a liberal education"; and Sir Henry Thompson will agree that it is to be gained in a pleasanter school than that of the Latin grammar.

In a few years hence these chubby-faced, bright-eyed little lads will be playing their parts, ill or well, in the theatre of life, and the play, the troubles, the delights of boyhood, will have passed for ever. But more enduring are the influences, the memories, and the associations of life's morning, and they cannot be set in too high and heroic a measure.



WALTER BESANT.  
From a Photo. by Elliott & Fry.