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A Bookman's Guide to the Classics

F. SEYMOUR SMITH

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THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOOK SOCIETY
AND
ANDRE DEUTSCH

FIRST PUBLISHED 1943
by
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK LEAGUE
FOURTH EDITION 1950

REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION
FIRST PUBLISHED AUGUST 1963 BY
ANDRE DEUTSCH LIMITED
105 GREAT RUSSELL STREET
LONDON WCI
COPYRIGHT © 1963 BY F. SEYMOUR SMITH
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E.L.B.S. EDITION FIRST PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 1964

*Dedicated to the new generations
of Bookmen of the Commonwealth—
and especially to Miranda and Charly*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
C. TINLING AND CO. LTD.
LIVERPOOL, LONDON AND PRESCOT

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INTRODUCTION

A Backward Glance

An English Library, like wartime willow-herb, grew on a bomb site. Maurice Marston, then Secretary of the National Book Council, invited the compiler to a conference held in the spring of 1941, at which he told his council and members that something should be done to help book buyers who were at that time responsible for an unprecedented demand for the English classics and in particular for the great books of the nineteenth century.

Publishers observed ironically that the dangers of a world war had stimulated interest in the traditional glories of English Literature at the very time when the destruction of a million books by bombing, paper and other shortages, made it difficult, almost impossible, to keep books in print.

But it was agreed that something should and could be done. It was. Conference asked the compiler to produce quickly a guide to the classics for servicemen and the general public, some of whom were perhaps buying books, or borrowing and reading them, for the first time in adult life.

The result was a forty-page quarto booklet about all the volumes then available in the four great series of *Everyman's Library*; *Collins's Classics*; *Nelson Classics*; and *Worlds Classics*. It was distributed by the N.B.C. for the British Council. With little or no dissension the war broke down trade conventions and barriers, for this example of co-operative publicity in the book trade was thus officially approved; it quickly justified itself; and *The English Classics* at sixpence a copy became a best-seller. A brief appreciation in Peterborough's column in the *Daily Telegraph* resulted in sackloads of postal orders for Maurice Marston's staff to handle. Many thousands of copies found their way to readers all over the world. Again, ironically, English classics became even more difficult to keep in print.

In 1943 the National Book Council decided to publish something substantial and comprehensive, a handbook not limited to books in the four standard series, but a reference work for librarians; booksellers; book trade students, for whom classes in bookselling were then being organised under the encouraging eyes of John Wilson of Bumpus's; and book-buyers, especially those experiencing for the first time the pleasure of collecting a personal library.

An English Library was the result, the first edition being published in 1943 with a preface by Edmund Blunden, then, as now, always helpful in the cause of books. Wartime difficulties, shortages and perils made it impossible to offer a book worthy of the subject and purpose, but with each edition up to the fourth of 1950 improvements were introduced. That edition has now been out of print for nearly a decade, and encouraging requests for a new one have come, not only from librarians and readers in Great Britain, but also from India and Africa, where new libraries are rapidly developing, and a vast public is eager for English classics and creative literature as well as technical books. Happily, English seems to be a *lingua franca* for this new world of readers. Hence the constant need for a popular reference handbook providing the information and guidance *An English Library* is intended to give.

The Principles of Selection

Using previous editions as a foundation for this fully revised and enlarged edition, the compiler has tried to present within the conventional subject and formal groups of creative literature, bibliographical details of (a) all the books from *The Canterbury Tales*, up to those by writers now dead, of the present century, that by common consent have become classics; (b) a liberal selection of standard books likely to interest general readers; and (c) minor classics of the past that are reprinted, or in the opinion of the compiler deserve to be. It should be emphasised that with the exception of reference books nothing by living writers is included, even though this has meant the omission of books that will probably take their place as twentieth-century classics. The bibliography of living authors is best dealt with separately, and the compiler's own *What Shall I Read Next?* (1953, Cambridge University Press for the National Book League) does offer 'a personal selection of twentieth-century books' as a complementary guide. Some books by authors who have died since 1953 have, however, been transferred from *What Shall I Read Next?* to *An English Library*. This limitation prevents the book from becoming too bulky for a quick-reference guide and restricts entries to those concerning contemporary authors whose place in literature has already been determined by critical and public opinion as likely to be permanent and assured, even though fluctuating taste may from time to time result in wavering popularity.

As before, it has seemed sensible to include nineteenth-century classics in the literature of the United States of America. From

Mark Twain onwards, American literature revealed a characteristic national genius owing little or nothing to the writings of British authors. Only an American author could have written *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, and thereafter, American literature, like American language, developed its own idiom, style and unique nature. But the essays of Washington Irving, even the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the poetry of Longfellow, are all part of the main traditional stream of English writing. Hence it appears not improper to include American books up to the turn of the century as a convenient compromise.

Children's books find a place in *An English Library* only if they belong to that small but precious class that has given us books we cherish and continue to read throughout life. This has enabled the compiler to include such perennial favourites as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Happy Prince* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

The Arrangement of Entries

The bibliographical information in *An English Library* has been classified in the ten groups (with sub-groups) listed on the contents page. It will be observed that close subject classification has not been attempted. Such an application of a standard scheme was considered quite unnecessary. Hence the broad subject and formal groups adopted will serve the general public and book-sellers equally well, and should not prove inconvenient to librarians.

Critical monographs on authors, together with literary histories, will be found in the group headed *Essays, Belles Lettres and Literary Criticism*. Here too have been included omnibus volumes and collected works of a miscellaneous nature, with cross-references in other sections when this has been considered necessary. A few translations from Greek and Latin classics, and from such foreign classics as the *Essays of Montaigne*, are arranged under the names of the translators, because these books find a place in *An English Library*, and are discussed in standard histories of English literature, owing to the classic stature of the English translator's work. Thus North's *Plutarch*, being recognised beyond question as a classic of Tudor prose in its own right, is included in *Biography* under North, but with an index reference from Plutarch.

Political philosophy has been grouped under the main heading of *Philosophy and Religion*; and the *History* section embraces social and political histories, as well as rhetoric and speeches.

Arnold Bennett would have approved of the separation of *Poetry and Poetic Drama* from *Prose Drama*, and it is hoped that users of *An English Library* will also find this to their liking. Books by scientists have been brought within the scope of this bibliography only when they have the sort of literary distinction that gives them a right to discussion in a history of English literature. Their classification has presented difficulties because they were too few to justify a separate group. Some, therefore, will be found under *Essays and Belles Lettres*; others, less inappropriately, under *Philosophy and Religion*. Thus Draper's book on the conflict between religion and science attracted such epoch-making books as Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *The Universe Around Us* to *Philosophy*, but Faraday's pioneer little work of popular science and T. H. Huxley's books are with *Essays and Belles Lettres*.

Within each section or sub-group all entries are arranged under the surnames of authors, or for anthologies, under editors. This arrangement is adhered to even in the section dealing with *Biographies*. George Cavendish's life of Cardinal Wolsey is there, not because it is an important biography, but because Wolsey's contemporary Cavendish wrote it. Many modern biographies have superseded older books, but these continue to be worth reading.

Each section is preceded by a short introductory essay which should be useful to those requiring a summary, together with some information on books about the specific subjects or forms of literature. To assist those who may be perplexed by too many choices and the exhilarating wealth of genius in English books, the compiler's personal first choice is indicated by the use of asterisks. These are placed against books one would recommend as of prime importance to those starting a library—public, personal or school; they are books that for many readers have become lifetime companions. Individual tastes differ widely, but it is thought there may be general acceptance of the practical advantages in adopting this indication of *primus inter pares* in each group.

Style of Entry

With few exceptions all entries are annotated, the notes emphasising historical and literary importance, and conveying as much as possible the compiler's own appreciation of those books that have meant much to him during his reading life. Dates of first editions in book form and important revisions, if any, have been given within parentheses (); followed by the date of a

recent, or often the latest, edition or reprint up to 1962, together with the 1962 price. Books with no current price are thought to be out of print in 1962, or as far as can be traced, not available in any British edition. Public librarians, who have been so helpful to publishers and bookmen since 1945 in this respect, may perhaps remember these when they are compiling from time to time their lists of books they would like to see reprinted, with the support of Members of the Library Association behind their recommendations. The public book supply is now an important factor in every publisher's office, and the knowledge that librarians would support the republication of certain out-of-print books by buying copies is sometimes a deciding factor in the maintenance of a back list.

Editions in the standard hard-cover series have been included as a matter of course. Many others are noted, including some paperbacks, especially when these are the only ones available. But this paperback coverage is not complete, because it fluctuates so much. The current position can be checked by reference to *Paperbacks In Print*, published twice-yearly by Whitaker, price 3s 6d, and available for consultation at all booksellers and libraries. Here and there an American reprint or paperback is noted because it happens to be the only edition available. Briefly, the compiler's aim throughout has been to include all good editions and most minor ones, in order to provide information within a fairly extensive range of prices. At the time of going to press certain price increases were announced by series publishers. These were approximately about ten per cent. on the prices given in the imprint details: e.g., the 11s 6d *Everyman* volumes have been increased to 12s 6d; *Worlds Classics* now cost from 6s 6d to 12s 6d, the majority being 8s 6d instead of 7s 6d as stated.

The collation of each book is for the most part limited to the above details, but the number of pages is stated when 500 or over, illustrations being added only when they are a notable feature.

There remains the indexes to explain. The author index includes editors of anthologies, collections and reference works, but not of specific authors, and, like the main entries, is concerned with the best-known names of authors using pen-names, with cross-references added. Thus S. L. Clemens, Eric Blair and C. L. Dodgson are entered respectively under Twain, Mark, Orwell, George, and Carroll, Lewis. Other surnames follow the conventional usage of indexers, double-barrelled names under the first part; prefixes according to codified rules: de la Mare under 'de'; De Morgan

under 'De'; both preceding Defoe. This word-by-word order is followed throughout.

It should be noted that the title index does not include formal titles such as 'Essays', 'Collected Poems', 'Plays', by . . . and so on. Such books are self-indexing, and the reader should refer direct to the appropriate group or section under the author. From a count of the indexes it appears that 1170 authors are within the scope of *An English Library* and that the total number of books included is approximately 2630, which will be considered, one hopes, a fair and comprehensive coverage.

Acknowledgements

The compiler gratefully acknowledges the advice and useful suggestions he has received from time to time from former colleagues in libraries, and from many unknown correspondents all over the world who have taken the trouble to write about former editions. Apart from kindly expressed appreciation, these letters nearly all contained useful suggestions regarding omissions. Even the solitary letter of downright abuse for venturing to offer guidance in the formation of a library and in reading was encouraging, since it was evidence that *An English Library* was not being used only by the converted.

Every volume listed in the last section, *A Bookman's Reference Library*, has been useful for checking, evaluating, factual details and bibliographical information. These reference books will be found in every public reference library, and are indispensable.

A few years after the end of the last war, the compiler received a letter from a town clerk who wrote to say that his corporation's public library was pleasant, well-built and nearly worthy of the historically-interesting town for which he worked; but to his dismay, on checking the stock with *An English Library*, he found that he had in his personal library a greater selection of the books than was available to the public using the library. 'What,' he asked in despair, 'can I do?' The compiler, having confirmed from a reference book that the corporation had the usual pension scheme for retired officials, made an appropriate suggestion, reminding the town clerk that the celebrated Rev. William Spooner had once employed with effect on some undergraduate guests who had stayed long after tea-time, his well-known nervous habit of transposition in speech; by asking 'Oh! Must you stay? Can't you go?'

But those days are over; almost every town now has a public

book supply worthy of the great literature in English produced from Chaucer to G. M. Trevelyan, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Dylan Thomas, in all its rich variety of genius, form and talent. It is the compiler's hope that this revised and enlarged edition of *An English Library* will continue to do its work as a sort of superior bookman's shopping-list at its most modest level, and at its highest, as a working bibliographical tool supplementing critical histories of English literature.

F. SEYMOUR SMITH

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND MEMOIRS (including *Diaries, Journals and Letters*)

JOHN BYNG, fifth Viscount Torrington, hit the nail on the head: 'All diaries are greedily sought for, let them be ever so ill and foolish written; as coming warm from the heart.' His own journal, known to us as the *Torrington Diaries*, happens to be a good example of a form of literature characteristically mingling historical record of social life, topography, and those spontaneous thoughts or observations which, 'coming warm from the heart', retain the interest of posterity, as Byng hoped his own work would do.

Diaries, journals and letters, conveniently classed with autobiographies, are strictly in a class of their own. They attract the amateur writer as much as the professional, and depend less on literary skill than any other literary form. A single thread links them with autobiography proper: egotism.

Cowper's 'divine chit-chat' enchanted Coleridge and Lamb. He elevated gossip letters to the eminence of a world classic; the suffering of 'Barbellion' gave us a self-portrait of a man of talent of our own time; the shrewd sanity and common sense of Arnold Bennett raised the trivia of daily life to the level of literature: and as readers, we are delighted that the vanity of such diverse human beings impelled them to keep these informal records, whether they were written deliberately for general publication, or for private solace.

The diary kept by Samuel Pepys is probably the most widely-read book of its kind in European literature, although we still lack a complete, definitive transcription. Valuable as this document is as an historical record, most of us read it for its indiscretions and amusing self-portraiture. Pepys created himself in his shorthand jottings with such fidelity that he lives in the minds of his readers with the vitality of a masterpiece of fictional characterisation. But his contemporary, John Evelyn, left a diary read more for its historical value than for its interest as a human document. Thus some diaries would be as much at home in the *History* section as here, but it may be agreed that form is paramount and so we include historical works, such as *The Creevey Papers*; travel diaries, such as the *Torrington Diaries*; and writings of spiritual profundity such as George Fox's *Journal*, as well as simpler works like Francis Kilvert's charming diary, so recently published, yet so quickly established as a classic. All of these books abound in entertainment, and like so many in this section were not the work of professional writers.

Even when we consider the full-scale autobiography, written for publication, we observe the same diversity, and the same attractive egotism producing classics and minor classics from amateurs as well as established men of letters. The Chartist, William Lovett, depicts his 'Life and Struggles', and the record becomes part of social history; G. K.

Chesterton gave us one of his best books because we needed his 'Autobiography' to complete the portrait he left us in his hundreds of essays, poems, and political works. Everything he wrote put in a touch or two; the 'Autobiography' gave us the background; it is an extended essay by G.K.C. written by himself as a character already partly portrayed in his other books.

Trollope's book has survived as a classic, not because it offers a profound insight into the novelist's character, nor for any unusual experiences recorded, but because of its absolute honesty as a narrative recording the development of a public servant into a novelist of enduring qualities.

If we except that strange religious document known as *The Book of Margery Kempe*, set down for posterity in the far-off years of the Lancastrian kings, then the earliest autobiography that has come to light so far is that of Thomas Whythorne, discovered by accident even more recently than Margery Kempe's manuscript. Between these two early examples of autobiographical writing and Flora Thompson's delightful evocation of country life in the last decades of the nineteenth century, we have a diversity of interest as fascinating as human nature itself; enabling us to skip in one page from amusing trivia to profound personal statements revealing piercing insight into the human soul.

Autobiography has attracted few monographs, but the research of Margaret Bottrall has produced two books of outstanding interest: *Every Man A Phoenix*, John Murray, 1958, 18s, and the complementary volume of *Personal Records*, Hart-Davis, 1961, 25s.

Every Man A Phoenix is a series of studies in seventeenth-century autobiographical writings, aptly termed 'strange hybrids', thus emphasising the many strands that go to the making of personal documents and statements 'coming warm from the heart' as confessions of faith or self-interpretation. Specifically, the writer selects Browne's *Religio Medici*, Lord Herbert of Cherbury's *Autobiography*, and Richard Baxter's *Reliquiae* to illustrate her theme.

Personal Records, being the perfect introduction to this section of *An English Library*, because it offers well-chosen extracts from many of the books included here, is entered and described below. These two books are indispensable to students but are also recommended with confidence to general readers. Seldom has the theme been so well discussed and exemplified. An older book, now out of print, was well entitled *Inside Out*: an introduction to autobiography, by E. Stuart Bates, Blackwell, 1936; and the latest analysis was *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, by Roy Pascal, Routledge, 1960, 25s.

Asquith, Margot (Countess of Oxford and Asquith) (1864-1945)
 AUTOBIOGRAPHY 2 vols. (Butterworth, 1920-2) ed. with an
 introduction by Mark Bonham Carter Eyre and Spottiswoode
 1962 30s Illus.