

LITERATURE
OF THE WORLD

Richardson and Owen

LITERATURE OF THE WORLD

AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY

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PREFACE

This volume attempts to give a general survey of literature. It is in a sense the outcome of work done continuously for over twenty years in classes in literature at Hull-House, at Lewis Institute, and elsewhere in Chicago.

It has not been our purpose to furnish an inclusive and detailed compendium of literature nor to enter any of the numerous by-paths of literary criticism. Our aim has been rather to present in straightforward language a brief study of the literature of each of the major nations. We give in general the accepted judgments. We indicate the main currents, devote some attention to all writers of real consequence, and offer relatively full studies of authors who are recognized as the great figures in literature. In short, the book contains what we deem to be the essential facts that everyone should know about the literature of the world. Our observation has been that a person who may be well informed regarding the chief writers of England and America, for instance, has all too frequently only a vague impression of the literature of—let us say—Italy and Spain, or of Russia and Scandinavia. He may specialize in one direction, but show astonishing ignorance of the field of letters as a whole. We hope, therefore, that this general outline of literature in one volume—the first of its kind, so far as we know—may serve a useful purpose.

Generally speaking, each chapter gives the historical background, some information about matters of language and racial connection, and an indication of the outstanding characteristics of the people. Then follows a chronological survey of the literature. Extracts from the works studied are occasionally included where these will serve to elucidate the text, but it is obvious that this element must be comparatively slight in a volume of such propor-

tions as this. At the close of each chapter is appended a reference list of easily obtainable works in history, literature, and criticism. Since the impulse of the book is to encourage the reader to investigate the literature itself, good editions and translations of the classics are cited. Topics for special study are suggested as well.

For the shortcomings of this book the authors must, of course, accept full responsibility. It is pleasant, however, to record in this place our appreciation of the helpful advice and criticism of a number of friends, especially the following: Dean Roy C. Flickinger and Professor William F. Bryan, of Northwestern University; Reverend P. F. O'Brien, Professor of Latin in the St. Paul Seminary; Miss Carolina Marcial Dorado, of Columbia University; Dr. Edwin H. Lewis and Mlle. Lea De Lagneau, of Lewis Institute, Chicago; Mlle. Bertha de C. Favard, of Hyde Park High School, Chicago; Dr. Philip S. Allen, of The University of Chicago; and Professor Frederick W. Roe, of the University of Wisconsin. In particular we are indebted to Brother Leo, Professor of Literature in St. Mary's College, Oakland, California, and to Mr. Walter Taylor Field for time most generously taken in reading the entire manuscript.

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- The John Lane Company (Paul Verlaine's "Chanson d'Automne," translation by Arthur Symons; extract from "When I was One-and-Twenty," from Housman's "A Shropshire Lad").

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- Messrs. D. Appleton and Company (extract from the Cary translation of Herodotus).
- Messrs. Little, Brown and Company (Emily Dickinson's "Autumn").
- The Thomas Y. Crowell Company (extract from Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina," English translation).
- Messrs. Longmans, Green & Company (three epigrams from Mackail's "Greek Anthology").
- Messrs. Dodd, Mead & Company (sonnet from Sewall's "Poems of Carducci").
- Messrs. Doubleday, Page & Company (two quotations from Dickinson's "Greek View of Life").
- The Houghton Mifflin Company (quotations from Williams's "Æneid"; from the Charles Eliot Norton translation of Dante; and from the Isabel Butler translation of "The Song of Roland"; and from the writings of Lowell, Longfellow, Emerson, Whittier, and Holmes).
- The David McKay Company (extracts from Walt Whitman).
- The Century Company (a passage from Gorky's "My Childhood").
- The Macmillan Company (two stanzas from George W. Russell's "Hermit"; Padraic Colum's "Cradle Song"; a portion of John Masefield's "Wanderer's Song," in "Saltwater Ballads"; one stanza of Christina Rossetti's "A Birthday"; D. G. Rossetti's "Beauty" and his translation of Villon's "Ballade of Dead Ladies").
- The Four Seas Company (a stanza of "The Silence of Unlabored Fields," from Joseph Campbell's "The Mountainy Singer").
- Messrs. Ginn and Company (extracts from Genung's "A Guidebook to the Biblical Literature").

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LITERATURE OF THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When the term "literature" is properly used it denotes writings or records that are of permanent value, that have human interest, and that have beauty of form.

Books, like plants and animals, must struggle for existence. Those that survive after perhaps hundreds of years have stood a supreme test, and back of them is the authority of generations. Such books are not often prosy or uninteresting. They are broad in their appeal, they touch us in a personal and intimate way, and they interpret to us the richest products of our civilization. We read them for their own sake, and when we go to them they do not turn us empty away.

LITERATURE FOR INFORMATION AND UNDERSTANDING

He who knows literature dwells in a large and beautiful world that has no limit in time or space. In actual life he may be unacquainted with his nearest neighbor, but in the world of books every door is opened by a magic more wonderful than that of Aladdin. With the much-enduring Ulysses he sails the seas, with Dante he explores the depths and mounts to highest heaven, with Don Quixote he rights wrongs, with Sigurd the Volsung he dares the wall of flame. Huxley teaches him nature; Gibbon, history; Ruskin, art. He listens to the sweet songs of Sappho and David and François Villon and Shelley. If it is philosophy that he craves, there are Socrates, Aristotle, and Carlyle. Everyday matters, such

as the face of the sky, the greenness of the grass, and the prattle of little children, take on a new meaning. Through a thousand avenues he has knowledge of the great passions that sway the heart of man—of hate and despair and jealousy, of love and truth and beauty, of the problems of life and destiny. A single volume, like Browning's "The Ring and the Book," may give him rich and varied study, associated perhaps with the landscape of Italy, the forms of English poetry, the singular ways of justice, the blackness of evil, or the exquisite beauty of a woman's soul.

Literature frees us from provinciality. No nation seems foreign or unfriendly when it is once disclosed to us in its literature. It is not knowledge but ignorance that makes us prejudiced. We laugh with Sancho Panza or Sam Weller or Tom Sawyer alike. Lear and Prometheus, Jean Valjean and Anna Karenina—do they belong to one nation or one time? All racial barriers disappear when we hear the agonizing cry, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Through literature we become citizens of the world.

LITERATURE FOR PLEASURE

But books are needful not only to push back horizons, to impart information, and to increase understanding; one of their chief offices is to give pleasure. There is no other such enthusiast as the book enthusiast: he is termed a bibliomaniac. He thinks of books as he would of friends and companions. His grandfather may not have been born before the gentle Elia finished his life, but Elia is an intimate friend who is closer than a brother. The Roman Horace and the Norwegian Björnson are his friends; so are George Borrow and Walt Whitman and Montaigne and Omar Khayyám and Robert Louis Stevenson. In the flesh Thomas Carlyle or Henrik Ibsen may have repulsed him, but in the spirit they reveal to him their profoundest secrets. Edmund Gosse speaks in one of his essays of the inaccessibility of the English poetess Christina Rossetti even in a London drawing-room, but her deepest self is disclosed to us in this exquisite stanza:

"My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me."

As the years pass, the friends of the reader of literature form a great company: the nonne, the prioress, is there, and Eugénie Grandet, and Andromache, and Beatrix Esmond; there are Joseph the dreamer, and Olaf Trygvesson, and Hamlet the Dane, and my Uncle Toby, and Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and Dr. Johnson and Boszy—and a host of others.

Wordsworth was right, then, when he spoke of books as "a substantial world":

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"Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness will grow."

LITERATURE FOR INSPIRATION

In the picture gallery, so the story goes, a woman was looking at some views of Turner's. "I am sure *I* don't see such things in nature," she complained to the man at her side, who proved to be the artist himself. "Ah, yes, madam," he replied, "but don't you wish to heaven you could?"

Literature makes us see more and further. Inspiration is its finest gift. "Books of power"—that is the expressive phrase attached to the world's choicest masterpieces. Great literature is animated by a great purpose. It is universal in quality: its roots go down deep, its branches spread wide. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe (to mention no others), form a glorious company, and association with them will leave its impress upon us. "It is not possible," said Longinus, the Greek critic, "that men who live their lives with mean and servile aims and ideas should produce what is admirable and worthy of immortality."

In the succeeding pages of this volume we are to explore the pleasant land of books, where countless pilgrims have gone before. Our guideposts are, after all, only guideposts. Those who enter the land will do well to linger on the way and to investigate for themselves its beauty, not overlooking the many trails and paths and winding roads that lead from the great highway.

Reference List

- CRAWSHAW. *The Interpretation of Literature*. The Macmillan Company.
HUDSON. *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*. Harrap and Company, London.
QUILLER-COUCH. *On the Art of Reading*. The University Press, Cambridge, England.
BURROUGHS. *Literary Values*. The Houghton Mifflin Company.
BATES. *Talks on the Study of Literature*. The Houghton Mifflin Company.
HARRISON. *The Choice of Books*. The Macmillan Company.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE OF THE ORIENT

The East conveys to our minds an impression of great antiquity. It is a region of vanished civilizations, and it carries with it an air of mystery and unreality. There is a remoteness also in its literature; the reader of English finds that only a portion of the vast literary stores of the Orient is open to him and that even that portion generally reveals modes of life and thought that can scarcely be recovered in our day. However, a glimpse of these Eastern peoples and of their literature will be informing. It will also furnish a useful background for the literature of Europe.¹

EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

For hundreds of thousands of years, as it now seems clear, man has lived on this earth, slowly becoming master of himself and of his surroundings, perfecting his weapons and domestic implements, evolving in time a system of agriculture, and patiently domesticating animals as companions and beasts of burden. By comparison the Egyptians and Babylonians, who have passed on to us the earliest written records, appear modern, their history being almost of our own day. At least five thousand years before Christ true and relatively advanced civilizations existed in the favored regions of the Nile and of Mesopotamia. The first king of united Egypt reigned approximately 3400 B.C. (by some authorities he is placed a thousand years earlier). After an interval of five hundred years

¹The literature of the Orient (apart from Hebrew literature, which calls for a separate treatment) does not bulk as large in our Western consciousness as the literature of a single country of Europe. It would be manifestly a mistake, therefore, to devote more than this one chapter to the study. The bibliography (page 32) may assist the reader in pursuing his studies in this interesting field.

the Great Pyramid of Gizeh was erected, and for another two thousand years the ancient Egyptians made their contributions to art, science, literature, and religion.

These ancient Egyptians, a dark-haired and slender people of uncertain racial connections, spoke a language allied to the Semitic and for a long period lived a life somewhat separated from that of their neighbors, developing a civilization highly individual and complex. They were not warlike, nor were they as a whole keenly intellectual; yet their contributions to life and thought were really extraordinary. To establish this fact we need but to recall their pioneer achievements in art, science, and religion. Their moral ideas and their conceptions of life after death deeply influenced other peoples.

Picture-writing, which we term hieroglyphics, was employed by the Egyptians very early, and also an abridged and more flowing form known as hieratic. A still further development, known as demotic, was the more popular type of writing employed later, largely for business purposes. After the second century of our era the Egyptian language came to be written in Greek letters, with the addition of eight signs taken over from demotic.

The literature of Egypt is very considerable in extent and embraces inscriptions, religious charms and extensive religious writings, hymns and lyrics, historical and legal material, proverbs and moral maxims, and many simple tales. We find this literature preserved on mummy cases and on the walls of tombs, passages, and chambers, but mostly on papyrus,—that is, strips of the papyrus reed skillfully put together,—wonderfully preserved in the dry climate of Egypt these many centuries.

The so-called Pyramid Texts, first discovered in 1880 in galleries and chambers in the pyramids, are probably the oldest written records that have come down to us of man's long intellectual history. Their hieroglyphic characters date from the twenty-seventh century B.C. and later. But they embody material belonging to a much earlier time, and taken as a whole they probably represent a period of a thousand years, closing about 2600 B.C. These texts, consisting of charms, hymns, myths, prayers, and ritualistic ma-

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PAGE FROM EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD (EIGHTEENTH DYNASTY)

terial, were designed to insure the happiness of the king in the hereafter, and they were intended for his exclusive use and benefit. Yet they cover a wide range, and they give many glimpses of life and thought in that bygone age.

Of great interest in the religious literature of Egypt is the Book of the Dead, portions of which, in the nature of religious formulas for the well-being of the dead in the future world, may date from a period three to four thousand years before Christ. Hundreds of copies have been preserved, some quite fragmentary and others on papyrus over one hundred feet in length. The Book of the Dead consists in all of one hundred and sixty-five chapters or more, though no one copy contains all this material. It is a body of mortuary literature intended for the use of the soul after death and giving the magical texts to be repeated for its protection. Some copies have been beautifully decorated with figures and symbols. But the Egyptian writers were careless in transcribing, and their manuscripts are hopelessly corrupt, one copy of a document differing greatly from another. Furthermore, the literature of Egypt, however fascinating it may be in the picture it gives of the life of a gifted people of early times, is not commonly artistic. Its creators were not ordinarily interested in beauty of form or perfection of detail.

Egyptian poetry had no rime or rhythm, though it possessed a parallelism like that used later by Hebrews (see Chapter III). There exist historical poems; for example, an epic¹ describing a victory over the Hittites. The poetry includes also love songs. Most interesting are the hymns, particularly the one addressed to King Sesostri (or Useratesen) III, preserved in a papyrus now thousands of years old. Four stanzas of this hymn have been translated by F. L. Griffith. The following lines are taken from the beginning of the second stanza (as translated by Griffith):

"Twice jubilant are the gods: thou hast established their offerings.
Twice jubilant are thy children: thou hast made their boundaries.

¹The epic as a form of literature will be discussed in the chapter on Greek literature.

Twice jubilant are thy forefathers : thou hast increased their portions.
Twice jubilant is Egypt in thy strong arm : thou hast guarded the
ancient order."

Of the remaining literature the most attractive portion consists of tales, the originals of which must have come from the Egyptian story-tellers of antiquity. They date from the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom (roughly 3000 to 700 B. C.), and are sometimes realistic, sometimes imaginative with miraculous elements. We have a curious tale of a shipwrecked sailor, strongly suggestive of Sindbad ; the story of the doomed prince whose violent death was prophesied at his birth ; the story of two brothers, written very simply and presenting a picture of agricultural life ; and a number of others.

The early literature of Egypt shows clearly that the Egyptian writers had developed a strong moral sense. They felt keenly for those who were afflicted unjustly. They frequently used the story as a form of social gospel, an aid in the crusade for social justice. The similar use of moral tales and parables by writers of the Old and New Testaments will at once recur to the mind of the reader.¹

BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN LITERATURE

The very ancient civilization in Mesopotamia, possibly antedating that of Egypt, has been partially made known to us through the work of oriental scholars and archæologists. The mastership of that region was for a long period in the hands of the non-Semitic Sumerians, but these peoples were gradually absorbed by the Semites. Sargon was the first of the Semitic leaders (about 2750 B. C.). The Babylonian-Assyrian-Chaldean empires that followed dominated Western Asia for many centuries, to be succeeded in turn by the Medo-Persian (Persian Empire founded 538 B. C.) and ultimately by the Græco-Roman civilization.

¹Over one hundred pages of Egyptian literature are given in the Warner Library, a very fine exhibit of a varied and representative character. The Breasted and Maspero volumes mentioned in the bibliography are of great value.

A good deal is now known regarding the Sumerians and their culture. They dwelt in cities; they drained the marshes; they were skilled in the arts; they wrote in a simplified hieroglyphic—the cuneiform, or wedge-shaped, style of writing; they possessed a highly developed religion. Their civilization, their laws, their literature, and their religion were taken over by the Semitic peoples who succeeded them. We do not know as yet the full extent to which Babylonians and Hebrews were indebted to the culture of these non-Semitic peoples of little-understood racial origin, who seem to have passed out of history at least two thousand years before Christ.

The Babylonian-Assyrian literature has come down to us in clay tablets. During the long history of these warlike and progressive peoples clay was utilized for writing of every description. Some of the poetry that has been preserved goes back to a very remote period; the earliest petty rulers were producing written records as early as 3800 B. C.; a great variety of chronological tables, legal codes, historical inscriptions, and personal and business letters date from the comparatively well-known historic period. Here is a portion of a letter from a traveler in a far country written to the lady Kadasu, presumably of his family: "Why hath news of thee to me been delayed, and why have I not seen a single answer to all the letters I wrote thee? For I wrote unto thee thus: 'From the day that I start, send unto me whatever taketh place in my house.' Why, then, have I heard no news of thee?" The clay tablet employed for such a letter would be one inch thick, two to three inches wide, and three to four inches long. It would be inclosed carefully in an envelope of clay for preservation and privacy, after having been powdered with dry clay to prevent sticking.

In the great library of Assurbanipal (seventh century B.C.) at Nineveh have been discovered twenty-two thousand clay tablets, an orderly collection of the scientific, religious, and literary material of these Mesopotamian peoples. This ancient library included some of the oldest poetry that has come down to us from any source.

Of the prose literature of the Babylonian-Assyrians perhaps the most interesting is the Code of Hammurapi (about 2100 B.C.). It

embraced, no doubt, many legal regulations that were ancient even at that distant time. The Mosaic legislation promulgated about a thousand years later presents many curious parallels. 传播、公布

It is, however, the old poetry that proves of the greatest value in this body of literature. There are prayers, magic formulas, and



PORTION OF OLD BABYLONIAN STORY OF THE FLOOD, FROM ASSURBANIPAL'S
LIBRARY AT NINEVEH

mythological narratives. One poem describes the beginnings of creation and gives accounts of male and female gods. Another poem, the hero of which is Marduk, the god of Babylon, tells of the creation of man, followed by that of animals. Another centers in the heroic fight between Marduk and the rebellious Tiamat, and in the creation of the heavenly bodies. There are cycles of stories dealing with the eagle, and another cycle dealing with the winds.