



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FAMOUS WORLD LITERATURE



EDITED BY:

RICHARD D GARNETT

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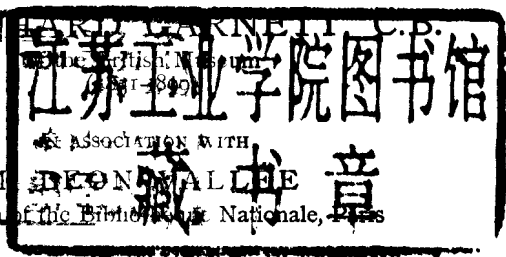
SELECTIONS FROM THE WORLD'S GREAT WRITERS
ANCIENT, MEDIAEVAL, AND MODERN, WITH BIO-
GRAPHICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

AND
CRITICAL ESSAYS

BY
MANY EMINENT WRITERS.

EDITED BY

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NOVELS WHICH HAVE MADE HISTORY

BY SIR WALTER BESANT

HISTORY is "made" by the novelist in two ways. The first is by the presentation of the ideas, laws, manners, customs, religion, prejudices, and fashions of the time so faithfully that the historian of the future can by his help understand the period, and reconstruct the life of that generation. I would instance, as the leading representatives of this kind of novelist, Defoe, Fielding, and Dickens. It would be quite possible, I doubt not, to reconstruct a great part of the early eighteenth century without the help of Defoe: but not the whole. The essayists give us the manners and the humours of the coffee-house; they also give us an insight into the mind of scholar, critic, and divine of the period. Swift's Letters disclose the current talk of politicians. That mine of contemporary manners, *The Athenian Oracle*, introduces us to the governing ideas on religion and morality among the bourgeois class. The two worthies, Tom Brown and Ned Ward, leave nothing, apparently, untold as regards the taverns, night-houses, bagnios, and the coarse profligacy of their time. To go no farther, here is a great mass of information out of which the historian can make a catalogue if not a picture—it is too often the catalogue that appears. But it is by a picture and not by a catalogue that the world is enabled to understand and to realise events and modes of thought, past or present, of which it has itself formed no part. To make a picture one must select, and arrange, and find characters, and group them, either for one situation or for many. In other words, the picture may be a painting—which is one way

of presenting the past, subject to the disadvantage of being no more than one set scene: or it may be a novel, that is to say, a succession of "animated photographs."

We are saved the trouble of constructing this succession of animated photographs in the case of Defoe. In that wonderful series of novels which he began at an age when most men are thinking of rest, he has photographed and fixed for ever the city life which rolled on around him. We are led through the streets of London; we see the poor little waifs and strays, the pick-pockets, the motherless girls, the wretched women, the soldiers; the apprentices, the tradesmen, the merchants,—all that the city of London contained at that time. Especially, he enables us to understand, as no other writer of the time can do—certainly not Addison or Swift, neither of whom knew the city—that strange revival of enterprise and adventure which possessed our people at that time. We are so much accustomed to think of the scholarly calm of Addison and his friends; of the slow and dignified carriage which would not admit of haste; of the round smooth face on which leisure seems stamped; of the full wig which must not be disarranged by eager gesture;—that we do not realise the animation of change; the busy crowds of the port; the merchants preparing their next venture into unknown seas to unknown nations; the arrival of the weather-beaten captain after a brush with the Moorish pirates. These things we find in Defoe and in Defoe alone.

So also with Fielding. The life which he drew is not that of the City; it is that of the country and the West-End. The country gentleman, the adventurer, the debtor's prison, the fine Court lady, the bully, the valet, the broken captain, the coffee-house, the tavern, the gaming table—are they not all in Fielding?

Or, to take Dickens. Is he not the chief exponent, the chief authority, for the very life of that vast section of the people called sometimes the "lower middle class"—the class which stands between the professional and the working man? How the people talked fifty years ago; what were their manners, their amusements

their follies, their absurdities, their virtues, their conventions?—who has ever done this for the people of his time so well as Dickens? The manners which he drew are changing fast; the young people do not recognise them; part of the old delight—that of one's own knowledge and recognition of the type—is gone. Yet Dickens will remain as the chief and leading exponent of contemporary manners—not of the Court of the Aristocracy; not of clergy and lawyers and scholars, but the folk around. Like Francois Villon, like Piers Plowman, he draws what he sees.

I should like, if I had time, to reconstruct the social history of any one period by the work of one novelist. I would take Defoe and the city of London. I would present that life, which is not the life found in the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, as it is depicted in his pages. The result would be, if I were equal to the task, a reconstruction of the trading side of England at that time which has never yet been done.

Let us pass to the second kind of "history making" novel. If the first is the treasure-house for the future, the second is the treasure-house for the present. The novelist who "makes history" in this sense inspires the ideas, the convictions, the enthusiasms, which causes great events and underlie great social movements.

In every age there may always be found, among the people, a floating mass of perceptions only half understood; of uneasy discoveries only half unearthed; of recognitions only dimly seen; of an accusing conscience heard as from afar; of approaching figures seen as through a mist. This is only saying that humanity is never satisfied, never at rest; there is always, even in the most crystallised ages, a feeling that the existing conditions are not perfect. When the Church had laid her iron hand on everything—apparently for ever—then John Wyclyf arises and with him Piers Plowman. Then questions begin to fly around, and rhymes are made and songs are sung, and the uneasy inarticulate murmurs of doubt are for the first time clothed in words. Without words there can be no action: without definition the vague aspirations, the twilight perceptions, the nascent hopes rise before the brain

and pass away and vanish like the mist in the morning, leaving not a trace behind.

But the Interpreter arrives. One thing is essential, that he comes at the right moment—to use the common phrase, the psychical moment. It must be when the time is ripe for him; when the people have thus been whispering and murmuring; when dreams of doubt have thus arisen to vex the sleeper; when the soul asks for words to interpret its own uneasiness. At such a moment came Peter the Hermit, when Western Europe was filled with a blind and unquestioning faith; when the stories brought home by pilgrims stirred all hearts in every village to their depths, and when there wanted but a match to fill all the land with flames. So, too, Francis of Assisi came at the moment when he was most desired, yet unconsciously desired.

There has been the Interpreter as Preacher: there has been the Interpreter as Poet there has been the Interpreter as Dramatist. Let us be careful not to confuse the Interpreter with the teacher. The former brings new light into the world: the latter spreads the knowledge of the old. Or, we may say that the Interpreter gives utterances in words to feelings, passions, and protests which lie unspoken in men's minds: and that the Teacher takes them over. Without an Interpreter doubt may become rage, and rage may become revolt and madness. For want of an Interpreter the French people—the people, not their scholars—went mad a hundred years ago.

As Preacher, we have had no Interpreter since John Wesley. As Dramatist, we have had none for nearly three hundred years, since the last of the Elizabethans died. The Dramatic Interpreter, will return, and that, I believe, soon. For the Interpreter, as Poet, we have been blessed above all other nations with Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning for the nobler minds, and with such a body of lyric verse, stirring, inspiring, strengthening, ennobling, as no other language can show.

I have, however, to speak of the Interpreter in Fiction; in that kind of Fiction which inspires the soul and becomes the 'main-spring of action.

Every novel which is a true picture of any part, however humble, of humanity, should be suggestive and inspiring. "Tell me a story," says the child, and listens rapt in attention, unconscious that while the story-teller carries on the tale, his own mind is being widened by new thoughts and charged with new ideas. We are all children when we sit with the open novel and go off into the Land of the Other Folk. We come back, when we close the book, with a wider experience of humanity, with new friends, new loves, and new enemies. I think that the strongest defence of fiction should be the fact that the true presentation of humanity from any point of view must tend to the increase of certain virtues,—sympathy, pity, and an ardour inextinguishable, when once it has seized the soul, for justice. This is a great claim for fiction: yet I advance it in favour not only of the great works which move a whole nation, but of the humble stories whose only merit is their plain unvarnished truth. What made *The Vicar of Wakefield* popular? What preserves it? It is not a great work; it deals not with ambitions and great passions; it treats simply of a single family, undistinguished, one of the crowd, yet so truthfully and naturally that we cannot suffer it to be forgotten.

In these days the most important teacher—the most widespread, the most eagerly heard—whether for good or evil, is the novelist. Between Russia in the East, and California in the West, it is the novelist who teaches. He is the fount of inspiration; he gives the world ideas; he makes them intelligible; sometimes, in rare cases, he so touches the very depths of a people that his words reverberate and echo as from rock to rock and from valley to valley far beyond the ear of him who listens. In these cases he makes history, because he causes history to be made.

Let me illustrate my meaning by one or two cases. I might, for instance, adduce Rabelais, who put into living figures and action the revolt of the populace against the Church. He did not speak for the scholars—Étienne Dolet did that—yet he loaded his page with allusions not intelligible except to scholars: he spoke the language of the people and presented them, as at a puppet show,

with figures which embodied their beliefs and their hatreds. It was Rabelais who made the attempt at a French Reformation possible; it was Calvin who turned away the heart of the people by his austerities and his narrowness and made it impossible. This illustration is not, I fear, intelligible to many readers, because Rabelais is only read by scholars. Take, however, the work of Voltaire and especially his tales. There was plenty of a coarse kind of atheism, before these tales were passed from hand to hand, among the aristocracy of France. There was plenty of epigram against the *régime*; Voltaire gave to all, noble and bourgeois alike, new weapons of ridicule, scorn, and contempt; he offered all upon the altar of doubt; he it was who stripped the French Revolution of religion, of any belief in anything except the one great virtue of the French people—their patriotism. And he spoke at the critical moment; at the moment when all minds were prepared for him, as the fields in spring are prepared for the showers of April.

In Charles Reade, the language possesses a writer whose whole soul was filled with a yearning for justice and a pity for the helpless. I think that the world has not yet done justice to the great heart of Charles Reade. He wrote many books. Among them there were two which are still widely read and deservedly popular. One of them is written with a purpose: I do not know if the result satisfied him at the time; one thing is certain that the position of the man who has fallen into crime has at least gained enormously by this book. There is sympathy for the poor man; light is thrown upon the prison where he sits; he is followed when he comes out. One can never wipe away the prison taint, but one can treat him as one who has expiated his crime and may be received again, albeit in a lower place.

Again, can one ever forget the effect of Harriet Beecher Stowe's great work? I am old enough to remember when that book ran through the length and breadth of this country in editions numberless—I believe they were mostly pirated. The long and wearisome agitation against slavery had died out with the emancipation of the West Indian slaves. The younger people remembered nothing about it; then suddenly appeared this book, and we were

reminded once more what slavery might be, if not what slavery was. No book was ever more widely read; no book ever produced such response of sympathy with the Abolitionists. When the Civil War broke out it seemed to many—it still seems to many—in America that the sympathies of all the English people were with the South. Not all—and remember, if you please, that the sympathies of England were never with the “Institution.”

Perhaps I may be permitted one illustration of the power of a novel in the case of a living writer. I mean the case of Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere*. This book has been, I believe, read as widely in America as in England.

It is too early to judge of the lasting effect of the book on the religious thought of either country. It is, however, certain that it was read and pondered by many thousands on account of its faithful presentation of the religious difficulties and anxieties which perplex the minds of men and women in these days. Of course, I express no opinion as to these difficulties. The explanation of that book's success, to my mind, is chiefly in the fact that it appeared, like *Candide* or *Pantagruel*, at a moment especially fitted to receive its ideas and its teaching.

It is not every novel, I repeat, that has the chance of such a success, that can hope for the honour of expressing the thought of the day, or of advancing any cause of the future; but every novel that is true, every scene that is really natural, every character who is a true man or a true woman, should secure for that work the greatest prize that can be offered to a poet or a novelist—first, the advance of human sympathy, and next, the conversion of dreams into realities.

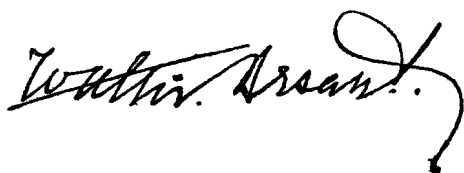
A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Walter Besant." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail that curves upwards and to the right.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

VOLUME IX.

| | PAGE |
|---|--|
| Novels that have made History | <i>Sir Walter Besant</i> (Introduction) |
| Letters | <i>Horace Walpole</i> 3897 |
| Hours in a Library | <i>Leslie Stephen</i> 3918 |
| Elegy in a Country Churchyard | <i>Thomas Gray</i> 3941 |
| Exequy | <i>Henry King</i> 3945 |
| A Sisterly Visit | <i>Samuel Richardson</i> 3948 |
| The Genial Jokes of the Eighteenth Century | <i>Henry Fielding</i> 3971 |
| The Conspiracy against Clinker | <i>Tobias Smollett</i> 3984 |
| The Wild Huntsman | <i>Sir Walter Scott</i> 4007 |
| Experiences of Candide | <i>Voltaire</i> 4013 |
| The Self-analysis of a Parasite | <i>Denis Diderot</i> 4027 |
| Confessions | <i>Jean Jacques Rousseau</i> 4046 |
| The Various Delights and Pleasures of the Bodily Senses, Useful for Mental Recreation | <i>Emanuel Swedenborg</i> 4067 |
| A Letter to a Friend concerning Tea | <i>John Wesley</i> 4071 |
| Account of all that Passed on the Night of February 27, 1757 | <i>Robert Louis Stevenson</i> 4082 |
| From "Frederick the Great and his Court" | <i>Louise Mühlbach</i> 4099 |
| Adventures of Tom Jones | <i>Henry Fielding</i> 4119 |
| Marlow takes Mr. Hardcastle's House for an Inn | <i>Oliver Goldsmith</i> 4136 |
| Essays | <i>Samuel Johnson</i> 4145 |
| The Happy Valley | <i>Samuel Johnson</i> 4154 |
| A Poem of Ossian | <i>James Macpherson</i> 4162 |
| The Limitations of Pictorial Art | <i>Gotthold E. Lessing</i> 4170 |
| Sultan Saladin and Nathan the Wise | <i>Gotthold E. Lessing</i> 4178 |
| The Vicar of Wakefield and his Family | <i>Oliver Goldsmith</i> 4188 |
| The Deserted Village | <i>Oliver Goldsmith</i> 4209 |
| Passages from a Sentimental Journey | <i>Laurence Sterne</i> 4218 |
| Jests | <i>Samuel Foote</i> 4223 |
| Reminiscences of Dr. Johnson | <i>James Boswell</i> 4227 |
| Dr. Johnson | <i>Augustine Birrell</i> 4251 |
| Poems and Will of Chatterton | <i>Thomas Chatterton</i> 4269 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Letters of Junius' | 4280 |
| The Man of Feeling <i>Henry Mackenzie</i> | 4296 |
| Lenore <i>Gottfried A. Bürger</i> | 4309 |
| The Duel <i>Richard Brinsley Sheridan</i> | 4316 |
| A Tour in Ireland <i>Arthur Young</i> | 4330 |
| The Wealth of Nations <i>Adam Smith</i> | 4340 |
| A Review of Schools <i>William Cowper</i> | 4357 |
| Captain Cook's Death <i>A. Kippis</i> | 4359 |
| The Murder of Abel <i>Vittorio Alfieri</i> | 4372 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOLUME IX.

| | PAGE |
|--|---------------------|
| Ancient French Manuscript (Fourteenth Century) | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| Sir Walter Besant | <i>face p. xi</i> |
| Horace Walpole | 3901 |
| Madame de Sévigné | 3909 |
| "Each in his narrow cell forever laid" | 3942 |
| Henry Fielding | 3971 |
| Tobias Smollett, M.D. | 3984 |
| Abbotsford, from the Lake | 4007 |
| Voltaire | 4013 |
| Carnival at Venice | 4015 |
| Jean Jacques Rousseau | 4046 |
| John Wesley Preaching to the Indians | 4071 |
| Oliver Goldsmith | 4136 |
| Dr. Samuel Johnson | 4145 |
| Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey | 4147 |
| Dr. Johnson's Home | 4155 |
| The Laocoon | 4170 |
| The Vicar and his Wife | 4188 |
| The Deserted Village | 4209 |
| A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds' | 4251 |
| Death of Thomas Chatterton | 4269 |
| Joseph Jefferson and William J. Florence | 4316 |
| Old Weir Bridge, Lakes of Killarney | 4331 |
| Innisfallen | 4336 |
| Captain James Cook | 4359 |
| Cain and his Family | 4372 |

LETTERS OF HORACE WALPOLE.

[HORACE WALPOLE: An English author; born in London, October 5, 1717; died there March 2, 1797. He was the son of Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister, and was educated at Eton and Cambridge. After traveling about the Continent, he purchased an estate at Twickenham, his house afterward becoming famous as Strawberry Hill. There he set up a printing press and published his own and other works. His most noteworthy writings are his "Letters," published in nine volumes, 1857-1859. His other works include: "A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England" (1758), "Anecdotes of Painting in England" (1761-1771), "The Castle of Otranto," (1764), "The Mysterious Mother" (1768), and "Memoirs of the Last Ten Years of the Reign of George II." (1822).]

PLEASURES OF YOUTH, AND YOUTHFUL RECOLLECTIONS.

TO GEORGE MONTAGU, ESQ.

KING'S COLLEGE, *May 6, 1736.*

DEAR GEORGE, — I agree with you entirely in the pleasure you take in talking over old stories, but can't say but I meet every day with new circumstances, which will be still more pleasure to me to recollect. I think at our age 'tis excess of joy to think, while we are running over past happinesses, that it is still in our power to enjoy as great. Narrations of the greatest actions of other people are tedious in comparison of the serious trifles that every man can call to mind of himself while he was learning those histories. Youthful passages of life are the chippings of Pitt's diamond set into little heart rings with mottoes,—the stone itself more worth, the filings more gentle and agreeable.

Alexander, at the head of the world, never tasted the true pleasure that boys of his own age have enjoyed at the head of a school. Little intrigues, little schemes and policies, engage their thoughts; and at the same time that they are laying the foundation for their middle age of life, the mimic republic they live in furnishes materials of conversation for their latter age; and old men cannot be said to be children a second time with greater truth from any one cause, than their living over again their childhood in imagination. To reflect on the season when first they felt the titillation of love, the budding passions, and the first dear object of their wishes! How, unexperienced, they gave credit to all the tales of romantic loves! Dear George, were not the playing fields at Eton food for all manner of flights? No old maid's gown, though it had been tormented into all the fashions from King James to King George, ever underwent so many transformations as those poor plains have in my idea. At first I was contented with tending a visionary flock, and sighing some pastoral name to the echo of the cascade under the bridge. How happy should I have been to have had a kingdom, only for the pleasure of being driven from it and living disguised in an humble vale! As I got further into Virgil and Clelia, I found myself transported from Arcadia to the garden of Italy, and saw Windsor Castle in no other view than the *Capitoli immobile saxum*. I wish a committee of the House of Commons may ever seem to be the senate; or a bill appear half so agreeable as a billet-doux. You see how deep you have carried me into old stories; I write of them with pleasure, but shall talk of them with more to you. I can't say I am sorry I was never quite a schoolboy: an expedition against bargemen, or a match at cricket, may be very pretty things to recollect; but, thank my stars, I can remember things that are very near as pretty. The beginning of my Roman history was spent in the asylum, or conversing in Egeria's hallowed grove, —not in thumping and pommeling King Amulius' herdsmen. I was sometimes troubled with a rough creature or two from the plow,—one that one should have thought had worked with his head as well as his hands; they were both so callous. One of the most agreeable circumstances I can recollect is the Triumvirate, composed of yourself, Charles, and

Your sincere friend.

GEORGE III., THE NEW KING. — FUNERAL OF GEORGE II.

TO GEORGE MONTAGU, ESQ.

ARLINGTON STREET, Nov. 13, 1760.

Even the honeymoon of a new reign don't produce events every day. There is nothing but the common saying of addresses and kissing hands. The chief difficulty is settled; Lord Gower yields the Mastership of the Horse to Lord Huntingdon, and removes to the Great Wardrobe, from whence Sir Thomas Robinson was to have gone into Ellis' place, but he is saved. The City, however, have a mind to be out of humor; a paper has been fixed on the Royal Exchange, with these words, "No petticoat Government, no Scotch Minister, no Lord George Sackville," — two hints totally unfounded, and the other scarce true. No petticoat ever governed less, it is left at Leicester House; Lord George's breeches are as little concerned; and except Lady Susan Stuart and Sir Harry Erksine, nothing has yet been done for any Scots. For the King himself, he seems all good nature, and wishing to satisfy everybody; all his speeches are obliging. I saw him again yesterday, and was surprised to find the levee room had lost so entirely the air of the lion's den. This Sovereign don't stand in one spot with his eyes fixed royally on the ground, and dropping bits of German news; he walks about, and speaks to everybody. I saw him afterwards on the throne, where he is graceful and genteel, sits with dignity, and reads his answers to addresses well; it was the Cambridge address carried by the Duke of Newcastle in his Doctor's gown, and looking like the *Médecin malgré lui*. He had been vehemently solicitous for attendance, for fear my Lord Westmoreland, who vouchsafes himself to bring the address from Oxford, should outnumber him. Lord Lichfield and several other Jacobites have kissed hands; George Selwyn says, "They go to St. James's because now there are so many *Stuarts* there."

Do you know, I had the curiosity to go to the burying t'other night; I had never seen a royal funeral, — nay, I walked as a rag of quality, which I found would be, and so it was, the easiest way of seeing it. It is absolutely a noble sight. The Prince's chamber, hung with purple, and a quantity of silver lamps, the coffin under a canopy of purple velvet, and six vast chandeliers of silver on high stands, had a very good effect. The Ambassador from Tripoli and his son were carried to see

that chamber. The procession, through a line of foot guards, every seventh man bearing a torch, the horse guards lining the outside, their officers with drawn sabers and crape sashes on horseback, the drums muffled, the fifes, bells tolling, and minute guns,—all this was very solemn. But the charm was the entrance of the Abbey, where we were received by the Dean and Chapter in rich robes, the choir and almsmen bearing torches; the whole Abbey so illuminated that one saw it to greater advantage than by day,—the tombs, long aisles, and fretted roof, all appearing distinctly, and with the happiest *chiaroscuro*. There wanted nothing but incense, and little chapels here and there, with priests saying mass for the repose of the defunct; yet one could not complain of its not being catholic enough. I had been in dread of being coupled with some boy of ten years old; but the heralds were not very accurate, and I walked with George Grenville, taller and older, to keep me in countenance. When we came to the chapel of Henry the Seventh, all solemnity and decorum ceased; no order was observed, people sat or stood where they could or would; the yeomen of the guard were crying out for help, oppressed by the immense weight of the coffin; the Bishop read sadly, and blundered in the prayers; the fine chapter, “Man that is born of a woman,” was chanted, not read; and the anthem, besides being immeasurably tedious, would have served as well for a nuptial. The real serious part was the figure of the Duke of Cumberland, heightened by a thousand melancholy circumstances. He had a dark brown adonis, and a cloak of black cloth, with a train of five yards. Attending the funeral of a father could not be pleasant,—his leg extremely bad, yet forced to stand upon it near two hours; his face bloated and distorted with his late paralytic stroke, which has affected, too, one of his eyes, and placed over the mouth of the vault, into which, in all probability, he must himself so soon descend: think how unpleasant a situation! He bore it all with a firm and unaffected countenance. This grave scene was fully contrasted by the burlesque Duke of Newcastle. He fell into a fit of crying the moment he came into the chapel, and flung himself back in a stall, the Archbishop hovering over him with a smelling bottle; but in two minutes his curiosity got the better of his hypocrisy, and he ran about the chapel with his glass to spy who was or was not there, spying with one hand, and mopping his eyes with the other. Then returned the fear of catching