

# **MY LITERARY PASSIONS**

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My literary passions by W. D. Howells

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**W. D. HOWELLS**

**MY LITERARY  
PASSIONS**



# MY LITERARY PASSIONS

BY  
W. D. HOWELLS

AUTHOR OF

"A TRAVELER FROM ALTBURIA" "THE COAST OF BOHEMIA"  
"A HAZARD OF NEW FORTUNES" ETC.



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## CONTENTS.

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CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE BOOKCASE AT HOME . . . . .	1
II. GOLDSMITH . . . . .	10
III. CERVANTES . . . . .	20
IV. IRVING . . . . .	28
V. FIRST FICTION AND DRAMA . . . . .	34
VI. LONGFELLOW'S SPANISH STUDENT . . . . .	33
VII. SCOTT . . . . .	40
VIII. LIGHTER FANCIES . . . . .	44
IX. POPE . . . . .	48
X. VARIOUS PREFERENCES . . . . .	60
XI. UNCLE TOM'S CABIN . . . . .	65
XII. OSSIAN . . . . .	66
XIII. SHAKESPEARE . . . . .	69
XIV. IR MARVEL . . . . .	82
XV. DICKENS . . . . .	83
XVI. WORDSWORTH, LOWELL, CHAUCER . . . . .	104
XVII. MACAULAY . . . . .	114
XVIII. CRITICS AND REVIEWS . . . . .	119
XIX. A NON-LITERARY EPISODE . . . . .	124
XX. THACKERAY . . . . .	129
XXI. LAZARILLO DE TORMES . . . . .	139
XXII. CURTIS, LONGFELLOW, SCHLEGEL . . . . .	145
XXIII. TENNYSON . . . . .	150
XXIV. HEINE . . . . .	166
XXV. DE QUINCEY, GOETHE, LONGFELLOW . . . . .	175

CHAP.	PAGE
XXVI. GEORGE ELIOT, HAWTHORNE, GOETHE, HEINE,	183
XXVII. CHARLES READE . . . . .	191
XXVIII. DANTE . . . . .	198
XXIX. GOLDONI, MANZONI, D'AZEGLIO . . . . .	206
XXX. PASTOR FIDO, AMINTA, ROMOLA, YEAST, PAUL FERROLL . . . . .	216
XXXI. DE FOREST, JAMES, ERCKMANN · CHATRIAN, BJÖRNSSON . . . . .	222
XXXII. TOURGUENIEF, AURRBACH . . . . .	229
XXXIII. CERTAIN PREFERENCES AND EXPERIENCES . .	234
XXXIV. VALERA, VALDÉS, GALDÓS, VERGA, ZOLA, TROL- LOPE, HARDY . . . . .	243
XXXV. TOLSTOY . . . . .	250



## MY LITERARY PASSIONS.



### I,

#### THE BOOKCASE AT HOME.

To give an account of one's reading is in some sort to give an account of one's life; and I hope that I shall not offend those who follow me in these papers, if I cannot help speaking of myself in speaking of the authors I must call my masters: my masters not because they taught me this or that directly, but because I had such delight in them that I could not fail to teach myself from them whatever I was capable of learning. I do not know whether I have been what people call a great reader; I cannot claim even to have been a very wise reader; but I have always been conscious of a high purpose to read much more, and more discreetly, than I have ever really done, and probably it is from the vantage-ground of this good intention that I shall sometimes be found writing here rather than from the facts of the case.

But I am pretty sure that I began right, and that if I had always kept the lofty level which I struck at the outset I should have the right to use authority in these reminiscences without a bad conscience. I shall try not to use authority, however, and I do not expect to speak here of all my reading, whether it has been much or little, but only of those books, or of those authors that I have felt a genuine passion for. I have known such passions at every period of my life, but it is mainly of the loves of my youth that I shall write, and I shall write all the more frankly because my own youth now seems to me rather more alien than that of any other person.

I think that I came of a reading race, which has always loved literature in a way, and in spite of varying fortunes and many changes. From a letter of my great-grandmother's written to a stubborn daughter upon some unfilial behavior, like running away to be married, I suspect that she was fond of the high-colored fiction of her day, for she tells the willful child that she has "planted a dagger in her mother's heart," and I should not be surprised if it were from this fine-languaged lady that my grandfather derived his taste for poetry, rather than from his father, who was of a worldly-wiser mind. To be sure, he became

a Friend by Convincement, as the Quakers say, and so I cannot imagine that he was altogether worldly; but he had an eye to the main chance: he founded the industry of making flannels in the little Welsh town where he lived, and he seems to have grown richer, for his day and place, than any of us have since grown for ours. My grandfather, indeed, was concerned chiefly in getting away from the world and its wickedness. He came to this country early in the century and settled his family in a log-cabin in the Ohio woods, that they might be safe from the sinister influences of the village where he was managing some woolen mills. But he kept his affection for certain poets of the graver, not to say gloomier sort, and he must have suffered his children to read them, pending that great question of their souls' salvation which was a lifelong trouble to him.

My father, at any rate, had such a decided bent in the direction of literature, that he was not content in any of his several economical experiments till he became the editor of a newspaper, which was then the sole means of satisfying a literary passion. His paper, at the date when I began to know him, was a living, comfortable and decent, but without the least promise of wealth in it, or the hope even of a much