

A THOUSAND OF THE BEST NOVELS

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THE BEST NOVELS**

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NEWARK, NEW JERSEY
1919

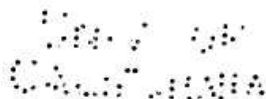
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A THOUSAND OF
THE BEST NOVELS

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THE BAKER PRINTING COMPANY
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2,000 (Third Revision) Jan., 1914, Newark, N. J., Library.
3,000 (Fourth Revision) Jan., 1919, Newark, N. J., Library.

INTRODUCTION TO FOURTH EDITION

No change has been made in this list for five years. In preparing this edition all books included in the last, that of 1913, were carefully considered, 174 of them were dropped and 173 were added to take their places. (Through an error the 1913 list contained 1,001 titles.)

In making these changes we engaged the services of Myron R. Williams, now professor of English at Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N. H. To him the whole project was submitted, for criticism of the old list and for suggestions for the present one. His work proved most helpful in many ways, and particularly by adding the outlook of the whole field of fiction which is taken by a wide and generous reader and eager student of literature, to the views of the practising librarians, members of the Newark library staff, who were eager to make a list which shall please our own peculiar clientele. The correspondence with Mr. Williams was conducted for the library by Miss Marie L. Prevost, our head cataloger. It was vigorously pressed on both sides and was keenly enjoyed by all of us who kept in touch with it. The result was the inevitable, and to us very admirable, compromise. That Mr. Williams was fairly well content to have the number of changes made as few as 173, is evidence that the old list, itself the product of many hands through several revisions, had no small merit. It should be noted, however, that Mr. Williams,—as well as the librarian, and Miss Prevost, and Miss Beatrice Winsor, assistant librarian and several assistants,—was restrained in his freedom of choice in no small degree by the statements concerning the character of the list which are found in the preface to the first edition, 1904, here reprinted. These statements were accepted by all of us as still binding. That is to say, the list is not Mr. Williams' list; but is a list to which he can give a fairly generous approval, in view of the limitations set by the purpose for which it is intended.

Miss Prevost it should be said, not only made the first copy for the printer, including the examination of editions, publishers' prices, etc.; she also, like Mr. Williams, gave the whole field of fiction, and especially novels of the last five years, a careful review. The list owes much to her work and study.

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J. C. D.

Newark, N. J.

January, 1919.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

Much of the best literature is fiction. Shakespeare's fancy did not burden itself with facts. His history was far less accurate than Winston Churchill's. His imagination waited on his humor, as always in the fabulist. Dogberry's original would be harder to find than David Harum's. All dramas are novels plus a playwright's stage directions. Poetry is fiction first, and then poetry. Chaucer began the great line of English story-tellers; and Hardy and Barrie, and scores of others, are their worthy followers.

If printing was a happy thought and books are not a curse, then novels must be praised. They belong, with the dramas and the poems, among the good things which make our heritage; which unite men by community of thought and feeling; which make it a joy to have the art of reading; and give us simple pleasures, strong emotions, knowledge of our fellows, and sympathy with all mankind.

One may live well and be happy and read no stories; but most are wiser, happier and worth more to their fellows for the novels they have read.

There is much discussion of the novel and most of it quite profitless. To no two men does life seem the same. Each, if he writes, must report that which he sees. One talks of realism, and professes to give us a transcript of life as it truly is, and forgets that the life which truly is, for him, is a life no other ever saw or ever can see, and that his own vision set out in words of his own choosing is a part of his own self, and real to no other mind.

It pleases some to write the fanciful romances. They lay the scene in fairyland, in Cæsar's Rome, in Cromwell's England, or in a Kansas country town, as is to them easy and attractive. If well done they seem true to fact as one reads them. They portray men and women who seem like the men and women of our daily experience. Between this good romance and the best of realistic novels, who can draw a line of separation?

And shall the novel have no purpose? May it not try to make a little history more real? To enforce a moral? To plead for some reform? To expose some abuse, gird at some folly, satirize some weakness? To these questions the sufficient answer is the abounding fact. If trees may grow and birds may sing then

novels may be as their writers please. Moreover, supply follows demand. Many like their history, sermons, satires, psychology, and all their studies of their fellowmen set forth in fiction, and dramas, poetry and the novel are straightway produced. Why quarrel with this? And why beat the air with a vain discussion of forms, influences and rules and principles? Tom Sawyer is a good story, but its moral is not easily found. Many have found morals in King Lear, and call it also a good tale. Neither story is true. To say both are realistic makes neither better worth reading. To condemn either because it differs from the other is absurd. To read discussions of either by one less a poet than Shakespeare or less a humorist than Twain is a waste of time.

And yet as some novels are surely better than others, as well as different from them, it is wise to read chiefly the better ones; and how shall we distinguish if one does not compare? Are there not principles of literary criticism which one may learn, and then may apply and then may see fiction humbly classify itself into best, good, poor and bad before one's eyes? Because novels pass from the best to the worst by an infinite series of minute gradations are we estopped from saying of any one, this is in the upper ranks, of another, this is in the lower ranks? Within certain limits, yes. Is there no way of telling a good novel when you see one? No, there is not.

Here are poems, plays and stories. Their prime purpose is to please. If that statement seems to set too high a value on pleasure and to underestimate teaching and preaching, then we can at least say that if novels do not please they are not read and fail at all points. If they please a few, they are in so far good; if they please many we may call them better. How shall we arrive at a more definite estimate? Is the best poet he who is most read? May we insist that in the rating of the poet's work the character of his readers be considered as well as their number? May a poem or a story prove its greatness by its popularity? Does it lose its greatness as its popularity wanes? Have we a supreme court of fiction?

The conclusion of the whole matter is simple. We cannot make rules for pleasures, or regulate taste by laws. Tastes, feelings, pleasures come by nature, and they come differently to everyone. They do not come by reason and they do not change to order. A good general guide in art, in belles-lettres, in fiction,