

**AMONG MY
BOOKS: PAPERS ON
LITERARY SUBJECTS**

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Among My Books: Papers on Literary Subjects by Various

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VARIOUS

**AMONG MY
BOOKS: PAPERS ON
LITERARY SUBJECTS**

AMONG MY BOOKS

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Among My Books

Papers on Literary Subjects by
the following Writers

Augustine Birrell

Andrew Lang

'Ian MacLaren'

J. P. Mahaffy

Austin Dobson

Leslie Stephen

'A'

Edmund Gosse

Goldwin Smith

Herbert Paul

Earl of Crewe

'John Oliver Hobbes'

'Fernon Lee'

Stanley Lane-Poole

Arthur Machen

Hon. Lionel A. Tollemache

George W. Smalley

D. H. Madden

Percy Fitzgerald

Reprinted from 'Literature'

With a Preface by
H. D. Traill, D.C.L.



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1898

P R E F A C E

THE literary *causeries* which form the contents of this volume made their first appearance in the pages of *Literature*; and, as Editor of that Journal, I have been honoured with an invitation to introduce this collection of them with a few words of my own. It gives pain to my patriotism to find that before three of these words have been set down, I am forced to become a borrower from the French language, but in truth there is no escape from the necessity of raising this forced loan. The word *causerie*, as it is known and understood in the literary and artistic world of France, describes the scope and spirit of these papers with substantial accuracy; and no English word does. They are too short to be called essays in the modern sense, though, to be sure, they are nearly all of them longer than most of Bacon's, with whom their authors will not object to be compared; and only in one or two cases do they at all approach to the character of a specific and detailed review of any particular work. They are, in short, what it was our desire that they should be when we sought the aid of the distinguished men and women of letters who have contributed them—that is to say, con-

versational discourses on every and any variety of literary topic that might suggest itself to the student and book-lover sitting down to write under the conditions and in the surroundings indicated by the title of the series.

This title has of course been criticised, principally, no doubt, by those who have never themselves undertaken the perplexing duties of sponsor at one of these arduous christenings ; and it has been said that some of the writers show no signs of having derived even so much as an accidental and momentary inspiration from the contents of their libraries. *Among My Books*, contend these captious critics, is no very appropriate title for a paper which might have been inspired (say they) 'by a review read in a railway train, or a novel lying on a club table.' I confess I am not much moved by this objection. To me it seems that the reflections of a scholarly and thoughtful mind need not, and do not, savour less of the library, because their theme may have offered itself from the world without. On the contrary, there is no keener whet to the studious appetite than the student derives from his 'walks abroad,' nor anything more likely to move him to utterance, on his return to the library, than his sharp sense of the contrast between the sobriety of temper, the maturity of judgment, the perfection of form—in a word, the genuine, time-tried merits of the dead and gone writers on the shelves around him, and the hasty verdicts, the crude deliverances, the sham attractions, the noisy

réclame, with which current literature too much abounds.

This observation, however, applies but to a few of the *causeries* included in the volume. In the large majority of the contributions to the *Among My Books* series, the association with the library is not, I think, difficult to trace. A book-lover among his books has many moods, and the spirits of their departed authors speak to him with many voices. Now he seems to hear the plaintive whisper of some 'inheritor of unfulfilled renown' who was promised immortality, and for all that one can see now, has as good a right to it as many who have won it; and then the student feels moved to remind the world once more of this forgotten one, and to protest against his doom of unmerited neglect. Now it is he himself who is the accused, and as he listens to the reproachful sigh of some teacher of his youth who has long since ceased to offer him a 'key of the universe,' his conscience urges him to acknowledge his debt and to explain his defection. Or again, 'the book' may suggest 'the critic,' as it did to the admired essayist who played coryphæus to the series, and diverted his readers with one of those agreeable exercises in raillery which are a stumbling-block to the humourless and a delight to everyone else. Or perhaps it is not a single voice that we hear from our laden book-shelves, but a chorus of voices, a moan, a murmur as from an overcrowded population, asking when this perpetual and suffocating

addition to their numbers is to cease. When that happens, a terror seizes upon the bookman, and, despairing of any effective results from the efforts of the reviewers, who, to do them justice, try their hardest to 'expose' the weakly infant at birth, an eminent critic propounds an ingenious plan providing for the automatic extinction of all neglected books at the age of one hundred years. Few of us, I suppose, are strangers to the emotions which found expression in this proposal, but it is not well to encourage them. 'That way madness lies.' If for a moment I revive them, it is only for the purpose of illustrating the variety of the ways in which their libraries have appealed to the various contributors to this volume, and of the responses which the appeal has called forth. A glance at the table of contents, with its titles ranging from an essay on style to a chapter of biography, and from a colloquy on ethics to a Shakspearian 'squib,' should suffice to satisfy the reader that the volume contains food for the most diverse literary tastes. That they will find it both palatable and nutritious, the reputation of its purveyors should prove a sufficient guarantee.

H. D. T.

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