

THE BOOK SHELF.

(Conducted by ALBERT LEE, '91.)

So far as the reading of books is concerned, college men may pretty fairly be divided into two distinct classes, one of which pursues a "course of reading," while the other takes his books more or less indiscriminately as time, opportunity, inclination, or chance may provide. There is perhaps a third class of college men,—and doubtless a large one,—which does not read at all, outside of the morning paper and a magazine, but that one, of course, is excluded by our premises.

As to which is the greater of the two book-reading divisions of the college, I am unfortunately unable, from my present view point, to judge, and having been unobservant in my own time, my recollection upon the subject is of small account. My surmise, however, is that the second group,—the desultory crowd,—is the greater; and, further, my sympathies and convictions are wholly with the "Dabblers" and squarely opposed to the "Regulars Coursers." There must be a number of men in every class, and we have all of us known them, who think that their intellects need a "course of reading," and they resolve that during the term, or the year, as the case may be, they will read the works of Dickens, or of Thackeray, or of Balzac, or of Dumas, or of such writers as have earned high places in literature, making their selection according as their opinions go concerning what the "course of reading" should be. Most of these fellows nurse the fallacy that it is incumbent upon any man desirous of being considered

well read, to wade through everything written by Dickens or Thackeray or such authors as they consider "standard," whether they like and admire what these men have written or not.

I remember very well that this self same doctrine was pounded at me when I was a youngster, when I was about twelve or fourteen. A vigorous attempt was made to impress upon me the relative positions in literature of Charles Dickens, and Oliver Optic,—positions which I now frankly admit were, in their relations as propounded, directly the reverse to that which they held in my own boyish affections. They also told me that Dickens was humorous; *lingua pueri*, "funny". Then they gave me a copy of the *Pickwick Papers* and I plunged boldly in, enthusiastically expectant of a comic lecture. But my boyish conception of humor was not that of my elders. I had a very hard time of it with Mr. *Pickwick*. I plodded through the closely printed pages, urged onward solely by a sense of duty. I began to think I must be stupid, or perhaps too childish for my years, and I wondered if other boys liked Dickens, and why. At the end I could not recall more than one funny page in all the *Pickwick Papers*. That was the incident of the lost hat, and I certainly enjoyed reading of how Mr. *Pickwick's* headgear went bounding away from him, a sport to the wind.

That is all I remember to the present day about this book, except one thing. At an entertainment a few years later a gentleman read from the *Pickwick Papers*, and he spoke Mr. Sam Weller's dialogue just as Mr. Weller himself would doubtless have spoken it had he been there, and I was highly pleased. But I have always felt, down in the bottom of my heart, that the passage which this gentleman read (and perhaps all the other "funny" passages of the book) were not in the copy I had as a boy, for I never saw them, or seeing them I knew them not.

All of which is to lead up to the statement that I believe most boys are taught to hate the standard au-

thors by being dosed with them before they are mentally capable of appreciating them. The greater number of these boys doubtless overcome the antipathy and, perhaps, when they get to college, they read the authors again, when they are able to understand and enjoy. These are the ones who go in for a "course of reading;" those who can't get the taste out of their mouths are the ones who put their interest into contemporary literature.

The point I am endeavoring to make is that the college man, and just as much the college graduate, ought to have some way of finding out what kind of reading is most suitable to his tastes and to his necessities. He should not be compelled to take so much chaff with his wheat. If I could go back into Freshman year now, knowing what little I do to-day about books, I believe I could make very good use of the Linonia Library,—very much better use of it than I did in the halcyon days. A man in college, and afterwards, cannot read all the books there are. He can read only a certain number of volumes in the time he has at his disposal. Some men can devour more than others, but it is a question if these do not eventually suffer from literary dyspepsia. Therefore if those who are busy with other matters can have some means of ascertaining what books,—and I am now largely speaking of contemporary books,—will be the most profitable for their individual wants and tastes, they can save a great deal of time.

The critic has undertaken, in modern times, to point out these things which I have thought should be pointed out. But frequently the critic, from various motives, allows the element of personal opinion and prejudice to enter too largely into his dissertation. The college man and the college graduate, do not care so much for criticism, so far as current literature is concerned, as they do for what is colloquially known as a "tip." Therefore, if it were possible to point out that which is good on the book stalls, doing this from a general knowledge

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of the kind of book the college man is likely to be interested in, and writing of books and their contents from a college man's point of view, this column might serve some good purpose in the field of its endeavor.

Dr. Chase's Pamphlet.

A notable pamphlet of 27 pages has just appeared at Leipzig (Buchhandlung Gustav Fock) entitled, "A Bibliographical Guide to Old English Syntax." In it Dr. Frank H. Chase, '94, gives a list, complete to date, of all the treatises on Old English syntax, and afterwards classifies them (1) chronologically, (2) according to the universities at which they were produced, (3) according to syntactical categories, and (4) according to the various texts investigated. He then adds four or five pages of observations, suggested by his examination and use of the treatises tabulated. The little work will thus be indispensable to all investigators in this field. A single sentence will illustrate the character of his appended remarks: "The ideal dissertation in Old English Syntax should, it seems to me, be a complete historical account of a single form of expression, or group of such forms; it should distinguish between early and late usages, when a distinction exists; and should point out traces of Latin influence, if they are present. Copies of the pamphlet may be had in this country on application to the author at Cheshire, Conn.

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