

# "The Best Books of the World"

MAX MÜLLER'S Fine Word on What is Really  
Immortal in Literature.

The memorable attempt made by Sir John Lubbock, a few years ago, to draw up a list of the Hundred Greatest Books of the World, suoke to a deep human passion, the desire and the aspiration to know the best that has been written and spoken by those whom Emerson calls "the great voices of Time."

But when it came to actually making out such a schedule of "the chiefest hundred," it was found there was almost as great a variety of opinion as there were books to name. "What is called gold by one critic is called rubbish by another." No two could agree.

When Mr. Ruskin got through putting his pen "lightly through the needless—and blottesquely through the rubbish and poison of Sir John's list," there was not a great deal left of it. Prof. James Bryce, whose fine work on "The American Commonwealth" makes his opinion of especial weight with us, wished to change almost every other line. The poet Swinburne made an entirely different catalogue, and the late William Morris contrived yet another that was wholly and wonderfully his own. Bookman and statesman, theologian and man of science, poet and novelist, each had his special set of names without which such a list would not be worth a moment's while! So that if we were to add up all the books proposed in the course of this very interesting discussion, for this "indispensable library," we should have not a hundred but much nearer to a thousand "greatest books."

## A List Impossible.

The plain fact of the matter is that it is impossible to draw up a list of no more than a hundred volumes, which will not contain works which many readers find dull, flat, stale, and unprofitable, while leaving out many others that might prove the inspiration and the delight of their lives. Moreover as much harm may result from making a fetich of the "classes," as from neglecting them altogether. How many, of this day, have in their heart of hearts thanked gruff old Doctor Johnson for bluntly calling "Paradise Lost" a tiresome book?

Altogether the sanest word in the whole discussion,—so it appears to us as we have recently been re-reading the little volume in which the various letters and lists were printed—were spoken by Prof. Max Mueller, of Oxford, when he said that he found "few books that are supremely great from beginning to end," while on the other hand there are parts and passages or whole poems which he could read "again and again, wondering more and more, every time, how one man could have written them."

"If I were to tell you," wrote the great philologist, "what I really think of the 'hundred best books,' I am afraid you would call me the greatest literary heretic, or an utter ignoramus. Take

the greatest poet of antiquity, and if I am to speak the truth, I must say there are long passages even in Homer which seem to me extremely tedious. Take the greatest, or at all events one of the greatest poets of our century, and again I must confess that not a few of Goethe's writings seem to me not worth a second reading. There are gems in the most famous, there are gems in the least known of poets, but there is not a single poet, so far as I know, who has not written too much, and who could claim a place for all his works in what might be called a Library of World Literature.'

## A Need Strongly Emphasized.

Nothing, it seems to us, could better describe the practical futility of Sir

our estimate of its value deepens and broadens.

It goes almost without saying that such a work would be next to valueless if it were not done by the most trained and competent hands. Mr. Warner's new work, however, edited by the ablest, and its critical portions written by the most eminent of living men of letters, is a truly notable enterprise—one of the most important literary undertakings of the century. This new library, we feel more and more, must rank in the field of literature as does the Encyclopedia Britannica among the arts and sciences.

First of all, it accomplishes vastly more than could any set list of the Hundred Best Books, even though such a list were to be extended to a thousand. It is not mere dry compilation, it is very far from being simply a "collection of literature." It does indeed give, in a most marvelous way, that

of the author's life, so to speak fixing his place in the perspective of time, so that we read not at random, but with our path lit from the lamps of the wisest and finest scholarship of the day.

The plan of Mr. Warner's library seems to us simply ideal. We can conceive of no other possible means by which such a vast variety of the most interesting information and the most entertaining reading, together with such an array of eminent men,—the foremost writers of Europe and America,—as we, we believe, never before engaged in a single literary undertaking.

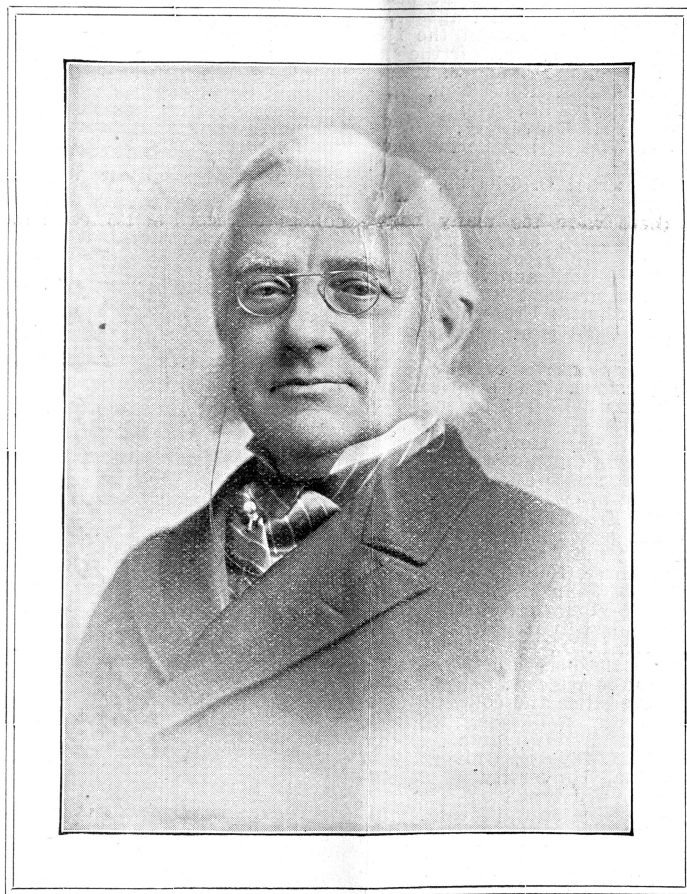
The latest volumes of the new library which have come to our desk renew and emphasize the impression we first gained, that so fine is the work here being done it will never be done over again in so magnificent a way. It is, in a word, the one standard work which gathers and preserves for each individual or family "that which is best and most enduring in the literature of the world."

## Amazing Range of Subjects.

But after all this is said it seems next to impossible to convey any adequate idea of the true literary charm and the deep human interest of every paragraph and page we have yet read, and the amazing range and variety of the subjects covered. We conceive that this superb library, when complete, will form the finest and most instructive History of Literature that has yet been published in any tongue. It will be not only a delightful introduction to the study of literature of any individual author, but at the same time a vast repository in which one may delve endlessly, finding anew each time something to pleasure and profit the passing hour. Even a general knowledge of all that is contained in this really epochal publication would afford a liberal education of the broadest kind. It is a whole university in itself.

When we consider that this new library is a work of permanent and lasting value, comprising the very essence of the world's best literature, together with the finest criticism upon that literature obtainable from modern writers; and when, moreover, we consider that it is possible to secure the 30 volumes of the completed library for a third of what any set of "a hundred best books" would require, we believe it is just to say that Mr. Warner has done a greater service for the reading public of his time than any other living man. The library is indeed the ripe fruition of a long and rarely useful life, and will constitute such a monument as any one, however eminent, well might envy.

We call the attention of our readers to an important arrangement which has been made by the publishers with The Harper's Weekly Club of 91 Fifth Avenue, New York, whereby it becomes possible to obtain this superb treasury of literature at a reduced price and upon very easy terms. For this purpose of introducing and advertising the library, the publishers have arranged to furnish the Harper's Weekly Club with the first edition of the work, printed from the new, clear plates. The first edition is always to be especially desired, and in view of the very considerable saving which can be made in this way, we advise readers to write promptly for particulars. The club now forming will, we understand, practically exhaust this desirable first edition, and it will be well, therefore, to take advantage of the publishers' offer at once.



MAX MÜLLER.

John's attempt; and nothing on the other hand could emphasize more strongly at once the need and the high value of what Max Mueller calls a "Library of World Literature,"—such a library as would bring together, in a convenient number of volumes, and at a price within the purchasing power of the great reading public, just those single poems, those great parts of great books,—"the immortal part of their most mortal bodies,"—which, as this famous Oxford critic says, "make it seem a very miracle that they could have been composed by man."

It is because Charles Dudley Warner's Library, now in course of publication, seems to us to meet just this need so fully and so finely that we have given it the welcome we have. We have already spoken in terms of high praise of this splendid work, but as the succeeding volumes come from the press,

which is most vital, enduring, and truly representative of the greatest writers, not merely the poets and novelists, but the historians, the dramatists, the biographers, the essayists, the men of science, neglecting not a single field in the wide domain of printed books.

But this, great and valuable service as it is, seems almost subsidiary or at least but a part of the broad purpose of this monumental work.

## Mr. Warner's Chief Idea.

Mr. Warner's chief idea, apparently, has been exposition and interpretation; he has given not merely what we wish to read of an author's own writings, but he has prefaced all of these by a remarkable series of critical articles, telling the circumstances under which the book was written, giving a succinct but often wonderfully vivid story