

Bangs John Kendrick

Cobwebs from a Library Corner



John Bangs

Cobwebs from a Library Corner

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TO

SISTER ANNE

BOOKISH

A PESSIMISTIC VIEW

A little bit of Thackeray,
A little bit of Scott,
A modicum of Dickens just
To tangle up the plot,
A paraphrase of Marryat,
Another from Dumas —
You ask me for a novel, sir,
And I say, there you are.

The pen is greater than the sword,
Of that there is no doubt.
The pen for me whene'er I wish
An enemy to rout.
A pen, a pad, and say a pint
Of ink with which to scrawl,
To put a foe to flight is all
That's needed – truly all.

But when it comes to making up
A novel in these days
You do not need a pen at all
To win the writer's bays.
A pair of sharpened scissors and
A wealth of pure white page
Will do it if you have at hand
A pot of mucilage.

So give to me the scissors keen,
And give to me the glue,
And I will fix a novel up
That's sure to startle you.
The good ideas have all been worked,
But while we've gum and paste
There shall be books and books and books
To please the public taste.

THE MASTER'S PEN – A CONFESSION

In my collection famed of curios
I have, as every bookman knows,
A pen that Thackeray once used.
To be amused,
I thought I'd "take that pen in hand,"
And see what came of it – what grand
Inspired lines 'twould write,
One Sunday night.
I dipped it in the ink,
And tried to think,
"Just what shall I indite?"
And do you know, that pen went fairly mad;
A dreadful time with it I had.
It spluttered, spattered, scratched, and blotted so,
I had to give it up, you know.
It really wouldn't work for me,
And so I put it down; but last night, after tea,
I took it up again,
And equally in vain.
The hours sped;
I went to bed,
And in my dreams the pen came up to me and said:
"Here is the list of Asses who have tried
To take up pens the master laid aside;
Look thou!" I looked, and lo! – perhaps you've guessed —
My name, like Abou Ben's, led all the rest!

BOOKWORM BALLADS

A LITERARY FEAST

My Bookworm gave a dinner to a number of his set.
I was not there – I say it to my very great regret.
For they dined well, I fancy, if the menu that I saw
Was followed as implicitly as one obeys the law.

“’Twill open,” he observed to me, “with quatrains on the half.
They go down easy; then for soup” – it really made me laugh —
“The poems of old Johnny Gay” – his words were rather rough —
“They’ll do quite well, for, after all, soup’s thin and sloppy stuff.

“For fish, old Izaak Walton; and to serve as an *entrée*,
I think some fixed-up morsel, say from James, or from Daudet;
The roast will be Charles Kingsley – there’s a deal of beef in him.
For sherbet, T. B. Aldrich is just suited to my whim.

“For game I’ll have Boccaccio – he’s quite the proper one;
He certainly is gamey, and a trifle underdone;
And for the salad, Addison, so fresh and crisp is he,
With just a touch of Pope to give a tang to him, you see.

“And then for cheese, Max Nordau, for I think you’ll find right there
Some things as strong and mushy as the best of Camembert;
And for dessert let Thackeray and O. Khayyám be brought,
The which completes a dinner of most wondrous richness fraught.

“For olives and for almonds we can take the jokes of *Punch*—
They’re good enough for us, I think, to casually munch;
And through it all we’ll quaff the wines that flow forever clear
From Avon’s vineyards in the heart of Will of Warwickshire.”

IDEAS FOR SALE

I'm in literary culture, and I've opened up a shop,
Where I'd like ye, gents and ladies, if you're passing by to stop.
Come and see my rich assortment of fine literary seed
That I'm selling to the writers of full many a modern screed.

I've bacilli for ten volumes for a dollar, in a bag —
Not a single germ among 'em that's been ever known to drag.
Not a single germ among 'em, if you see they're planted right,
But will grow into a novel that they'll say is out of sight.

I have motifs by the thousand, motifs sad and motifs gay.
You can buy 'em by the dozen, or I'll serve 'em every day:
I will serve 'em in the morning, as the milkman serves his wares;
I will serve 'em by the postman, or I'll leave 'em on your stairs.

When you get down to your table with your head a vacuum,
You can say unto your helpmeet, "Has that quart of ideas come
That we ordered served here daily from that plot-man down the
street?"
And you'll find that I've been early my engagement to complete.

Should you want a book of poems that will bring you into fame,
Let me send a sample packet that will guarantee the same,
Holding "Seeds of Thought from Byron, Herrick, Chaucer,
Tennyson."
Plant 'em deep, and keep 'em watered, and you'll find the deed is
done.

I've a hundred comic packets that would make a Twain of Job;
I have "Seeds of Tales Narcotic; Tales of Surgeons and the Probe."
I've a most superb assortment, on the very cheapest terms,
Done up carefully in tin-foil, of my A 1 "Trilby Germs."

So perchance if you're ambitious in a literary line,
Be as dull as e'er you can be, you will surely cut a shine,
If you'll only take advantage of this opportunity,
When you're passing by to stop in for a little chat with me.

You may ask me, in conclusion, why I do not seek myself
All the laurel and the glory of these seeds I sell for pelf.
I will tell you, though the confidence I can't deny is rash,
I'm a trifle long on laurels, and a little short of cash.

THE AUTHOR'S BOOMERANG

He frowns with reason; he has always said,
“The public has no knowledge of true art;
The book of worth these days would not be read;
'Tis trash not truth that goes upon the mart.”

And then was published his beloved work —
Some twenty-six editions it has had —
And he his own conclusion cannot shirk:
With such success as this it must be bad!

TO AN EGOTISTICAL BIOGRAPHER

I've read your story of your friend's fine life,
But really, gentle sir, I fail to see,
Why you have named it "Blank, and Jane his wife,"
When you had better called it simply "Me."

NO COPYRIGHT NEEDED

I've penned a score of essays bright,
In Addison's best style;
I've taken many a lofty flight,
The Muses to beguile.

Of novels I have written few —
I think no more than ten;
With history I've had to do,
Like several other men.

And still, to my intense regret,
Through all my woe and weal,
I've never penned a volume yet,
A foreigner would steal.

INGREDIENTS OF GREATNESS

The style of man I'd like to be,
If I could have my way,
Would be a sort of pot-pourri
Of Poe and Thackeray;

Of Horace, Edison, and Lamb;
Of Keats and Washington,
Gérôme and blest Omar Khayyám,
And R. L. Stevenson;

Of Kipling and the Bard of Thrums,
And Bonaparte the great —
If I were these, I'd snap my thumbs
Derisively at Fate.

A COMMON FAVORITE

Charles Lamb is good, and so is Thackeray,
And so's Jane Austen in her pretty way;
Charles Dickens, too, has pleased me quite a lot,
As also have both Stevenson and Scott.
I like Dumas and Balzac, and I think
Lord Byron quite a dab at spreading ink;
But on the whole, at home, across the sea,
The author I like best is Mr. Me.

A "first" of Elia filled my soul with joy.
A Meredith de luxe held no alloy.
And when I found *Pendennis* in the parts
A throb of gladness stirred my heart of hearts.
A richly pictured set of Avon's bard
Upon my liking bounded pretty hard;
But none brought out that cloying sense of glee
That came from that first book by Mr. Me.

And so I beg you join me in the toast
To him that I confess I love the most.
He does not always do his level best,
But no one lives who can survive that test.
His work is queer, and some folks call it bad,
And some aver 'tis but a passing fad;
But I don't care, the fact remains that he
Has won my admiration – dear old Me.

THEIR PENS

The poet pens his odes and sonnets spruce
With quills plucked from the ordinary goose,
While critics write their sharp incisive lines
With quills snatched from the fretful porcupines.

AN UNSOLVED PROBLEM

If Bacon wrote those grand inspiring lines
At which alternately man weeps and laughs,
Who was it penned those chirographic vines
We know these times as Shakespeare's autographs?

THE BIBLIOPHILE'S THREAT

If some one does not speedily indite
A volume that is worthy of my shelf,
I'll have to buy materials and write
A novel and some poetry myself.

MY TREASURES

My library o'erflows with treasures rare:
Of "Dickens' firsts," a full, unbroken set;
And in a little nooklet off the stair
The whole edition of my novelette.

A POET'S FAD

He writes bad verse on principle,
E'en though it does not sell.
He thinks the plan original —
So many folk write well.

THE POET UNDONE

He was a poet born, but unkind Fate
Once doomed him for his verses to be paid,
Whereon he left the poet-born's estate
And wrote like one who'd happened to be made.

A WANING MUSE

“Why art thou sad, Poeticus?” said I.
So blue was he I feared he would not speak.
“Alas! I’ve lost my grip,” was his reply —
“I’ve writ but forty poems, sir, this week.”

MODESTY

“What hundred books are best, think you?” I said,
Addressing one devoted to the pen.
He thought a moment, then he raised his head:
“I hardly know – I’ve written only ten.”

MY LORD THE BOOK

A book is an aristocrat:
'Tis pampered – lives in state;
Stands on a shelf, with naught whereat
To worry – lovely fate!

Enjoys the best of company;
And often – ay, 'tis so —
Like much in aristocracy,
Its title makes it go.

THE BIBLIOMISER

He does not read at all, yet he doth hoard
Rich books. In exile on his shelves they're stored;
And many a volume, sweet and good and true,
Fails in the work that it was made to do.
Why, e'en the dust they've caught since he began
Would quite suffice to make a decent man!

THE “COLLECTOR”

I got a tome to-day, and I was glad to strike it,
Because no other man can ever get one like it.
'Tis poor, and badly print; its meaning's Greek;
But what of that? 'Tis mine, and it's unique.
So Bah! to others,
Men and brothers —
Bah! and likewise Pooh!
I've got the best of you.
Go sicken, die, and eke repine.
That book you wanted – Gad! that's mine!

A READER

Daudet to him is e'er Dodett;
Dumas he calls Dumass;
But prithee do not you forget
He's not at all an ass;

Because the books that he doth buy,
That on his shelf do stand,
Hold not one page his eagle eye
Hath not completely scanned.

And while this man's orthoepy
May not be what it should,
He knows what books contain, and he
"Can quote 'em pretty good."

FATE!

I feel that I am quite as smart
As Edward Bulwer Lytton, Bart.

I'm also every bit as bright
As Walter Scott, the Scottish knight;

And in my own peculiar way
I'm just as good as Thackeray.

But, woe is me that it should be,
They got here years ahead of me,

And all the tales I would unfold
By them already have been told.

A PLEASING THOUGHT

They speak most truly who do say
We have no writing-folk to-day
Like those whose names, in days gone by,
Upon the scroll of fame stood high.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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