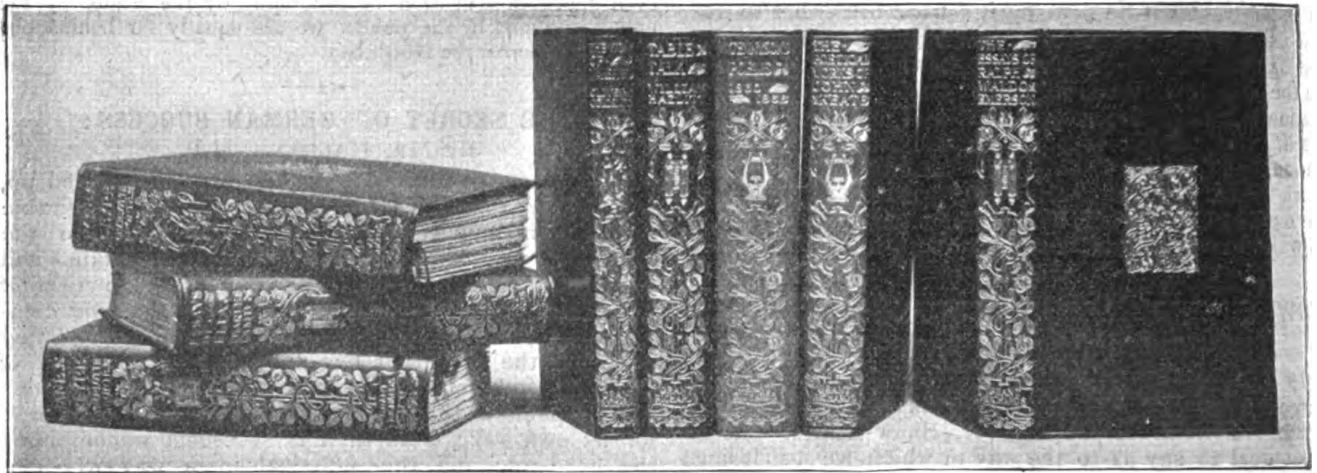


# THE WORLD'S CLASSICS ; OR, BOUND BOOKS FOR THE MILLION. THE LAST WORD IN CHEAP LITERATURE.



A few of the World's Classics in leather binding.

A GOOD many publishers have made a good many shots at meeting the popular demand for the issue of the best books at a price which renders them accessible to the million. I had a try at it myself some years ago, when I published the Penny Poets and the Masterpiece Library, and several people have been labouring in the same field. The other month, as readers of the REVIEW OF REVIEWS will remember, Mr. W. Laird Clowes published a prolonged wail over the lack of any library in this country corresponding to the "Reclame" Library in Germany, and he made various suggestions as to how this need might be met. But Mr. Clowes, although his suggestions were admirable in many respects, laid down a scheme that was not sufficiently elastic. He contemplated selling his library in a series of volumes, issued every month or fortnight. His proposal was the production of a volume a week of all the best books in the world, unabridged and carefully indexed, at a subscription price which would average out at 10d. a volume in paper, and 1s. 2d. in cloth. £6 a year for fifty-two volumes, he thought, could be obtained, his idea being that the £6 could be paid on the instalment plan, so much down, and then so much a week afterwards, the volumes to be sent by post every week to the subscriber. But this would not be quite so cheap as the Penny Poets, which gave sixty-four pages for a penny, and it does not overcome the one great difficulty which stood in the way of the Penny Poets—namely, the insuperable repugnance of most people to keep books that are not bound so as to stand upon their shelves. No such difficulty exists in France, where nearly every book is issued in paper covers. In this country if a book is to be regarded as a book, it must be bound. Now the cost of binding adds so materially to the cost of producing a book that it is practically impossible to produce any bound book of ordinary dimensions at sixpence. Messrs. Cassell brought out a very useful series of little books at sixpence in cloth and threepence in paper covers ; but

with that exception no one has really attempted to bring out bound books at sixpence. If anything is to be done to supply the British public with books on a scale anything approaching to that of the German Library, it would be necessary to bring them out at one shilling and to bind them in cloth. Of shilling series there have been several, of which, up to this year perhaps, the chief was that edited by Henry Morley, the Universal Library. But this series, although excellent in its way, and doing good work in its time, never quite hit the popular fancy. Hence the field has been left very open for the advent of a new shilling library, which makes a bold bid to fill the vacant space.

Mr. Grant Richards, the young and enterprising publisher of 9, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, began this year the publication of what it is to be hoped will become a world-wide library of English bound books—the World's Classics it is called. The size is handy ; the paper is good ; the printing is clear ; the binding is strong cloth boards. The books can also be obtained in leather at two shillings, and a very capital binding it is. The leather-bound two-shilling volume can be folded double backwards without in the least spoiling the binding or causing the book to rumple. Up to the present moment he has only published ten volumes, but if these meet with the success which they deserve, there is practically no limit to the range of this bound library for the million, and already a dozen new volumes are in preparation.

Everyone who has travelled is familiar with the Tauchnitz Library, each volume of which costs 1s. 4d., and none of which is bound. Mr. Grant Richards's new library is not so wide in the page as the Tauchnitz, but about the same height ; the paper is better ; the print is practically the same. But his volumes are sold at one shilling ! Some of the first issued are marvels of cheapness, neatness, and convenience. They are books at once for the shelf and for the pocket, are of type clear

enough to be read in a railway train, and yet are quite pleasant to hold in the hand in a library. There is one place where a good deal of reading is done by a good many people, and that is in bed. It is not a good habit, excepting for invalids. When you go to bed you should go to sleep. But there are many people who read themselves to sleep, and for all such this new library is a blessing. The type is clear enough to be read by candlelight; the book is handy enough to be held by the reader without weariness. So far as the make, shape, texture, and get-up are concerned, Mr. Grant Richards must be congratulated upon having achieved a great success. And the printers of the series, Messrs. T. and A. Constable and Messrs. R. and R. Clark, both Edinburgh firms, deserve praise too. Something has generally been lacking in the printing of popular series up to the present. Mr. Grant Richards has avoided the possibility of such defect by entrusting his books to the two firms whose reputation for fine printing is world-wide.

But it is not enough to have a bound volume that is unexceptionable from the point of view of the printer and the bookbinder. The success of any such library will depend upon the books selected for publication. Heretofore one great difficulty in the way of the publisher of cheap bound books has been the impossibility of including the longer books in his series. A German publisher gets over this by bringing them out in parts. But he does not bind them. Mr. Grant Richards contemplates publishing any book of ordinary length in a single volume. It is doubtful whether he will be able to print "Vanity Fair," which is of portentous length, at one shilling. Neither could he possibly bring out Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" within the covers of a shilling volume. Such great historical works will appear in due course in a series of volumes. Macaulay's "History of England," for instance, would probably require three or four volumes for its completion; but even if you have the set in three or four volumes, it would only cost three or four shillings, much less than it now costs bound in any other shape or edition. The first ten books in the series, however, are all complete in single volumes, and they cover a very wide range. Here is the list of the ten shillings' worth:—

- (1.) **Jane Eyre.** By Charlotte Brontë.
- (2.) **The Essays of Elia.** By Charles Lamb.
- (3.) **The Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1830-1858.**
- (4.) **The Vicar of Wakefield.** By Oliver Goldsmith.
- (5.) **Table Talk: Essays on Men and Manners.** By William Hazlitt.
- (6.) **Essays.** By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- (7.) **The Poetical Works of John Keats.**
- (8.) **Oliver Twist.** By Charles Dickens.
- (9.) **The Ingoldsby Legends.**
- (10.) **Wuthering Heights.** By Emily Brontë.

Mr. Grant Richards began with that masterpiece of English fiction Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre." It is a useful book for comparison with those of other shilling series. "Jane Eyre" in the World's Classics—for that is the name of the series—fills 570 pages. The book measures nearly 1½ inch in thickness, six inches in length, and four inches in breadth, and weighs 10½ ozs.

The second number of the World's Classics is devoted to "The Essays of Elia," which is a smaller book. All the essays are printed in 394 pages, and the volume weighs only 9½ ozs.

First the novel, secondly the essay, thirdly the poem. Mr. Richards was well advised in selecting as the first poets of his World's Classics the early poetry of Lord

Tennyson. It is impossible to publish the whole of Tennyson's poems, for the simple reason that those which he wrote after 1858 are still copyright; but the poems written before 1858 include much of his best work and that by which he is best known. This shilling Tennyson is a volume of 504 pages, of the same size and weight as "Jane Eyre."

This affords us a very good opportunity of comparing the bound library of World's Classics with the cheapest edition of Tennyson yet published, that of the Penny Poets. I published "In Memoriam" and several other poems in a sixty-four page paper-backed number of the Penny Poets. The paper is by no means so good as that of the World's Classics; the type is about the same. It would take eight numbers of the Penny Poets to make a volume of as many pages as this number of the World's Classics. The Penny Poets were stabbed with wire-stitching. The World's Classics are bound with thread and in cloth case, and published at one shilling net. No doubt we would have a larger quantity of printed matter put into eight numbers of the Penny Poets than is to be found in this shilling Tennyson; but the paper and the binding are inferior, and it would have been impossible to bind them neatly so as to sell them at a shilling. Mr. Grant Richards, therefore, may be said to have broken the record so far as cheapness and excellence of production are concerned. It may also be added that, whereas in the Penny Poets we found it necessary to supplement the receipts by advertisements, the World's Classics are innocent of any advertising matter. They do not even contain a list of Mr. Grant Richards' own publications. The following is a list of the next six numbers of the World's Classics:—

- The Origin of Species.** By Charles Darwin.  
**Robinson Crusoe.** By Daniel Defoe.  
**The Poems of Robert Herrick.**  
**The Works of William Hazlitt.** II.  
**The Pilgrim's Progress.** By John Bunyan.  
**English Songs and Ballads.** Selected by W. H. Crosland.

The list of the first sixteen books includes five novels—"Jane Eyre," "Wuthering Heights," and "Oliver Twist," and, if they may be called novels, "The Vicar of Wakefield" and "Robinson Crusoe"; four collections of essays by Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, and Ralph Waldo Emerson; five volumes of verse, Tennyson, Keats, Herrick, "English Songs and Ballads," and "The Ingoldsby Legends." There is one religious work, "The Pilgrim's Progress," and one scientific, "The Origin of Species." It would be difficult to make a more varied and more popular selection, although, if criticism might be permitted, I somewhat demur to giving "The Ingoldsby Legends" so prominent a place in the World's Classics. With the exception of "The Jackdaw of Rheims," and one or two others, there is very little of Thomas Barham that could be considered as in any sense classic. I should also be disposed to demur to the decision to give to the Brontës two of the first six novels selected. But upon this we can well agree to differ. The essential fact is that at last a publisher has arisen who has had the courage to attempt to bring out at one shilling books fit to stand on any library shelf containing complete editions of the very best work to be found in the literature of the world.

Now the question immediately arises as to the periodicity of the publication of these books. Although they are published in a series, each volume stands by itself, and can be bought without reference to

those which have preceded or to those which follow. At the same time, for a permanent financial success, it is well that Mr. Richards has arranged that a new volume will be brought out every month. Considering the hundreds of thousands of persons who buy sixpenny magazines of light literature which beguile a passing moment and are then thrown on one side, it ought not to be an impossible thing to secure a monthly circulation of 100,000 copies for the World's Classics. Years roll on rapidly, and every volume would be a permanent addition to the library shelf. Besides, it is astonishing how much more reading can be done if the idea is once grasped of mastering one volume each month. I am quite sure it is only necessary that this series should be universally known for it to achieve a brilliant success, not merely a *succès d'estime*, but a success of usefulness.

This, however, is a question for the future. For the moment I content myself with suggesting to anyone who is in doubt as to the choice of a Christmas or New Year's present, that he can get nothing cheaper or better than a set of twelve volumes of the World's Classics for 12s. in cloth, or 24s. in leather.

I am naturally interested in Mr. Grant Richards, for he gained much of his first acquaintance with the responsibilities of publishing in the office of the REVIEW OF REVIEWS. I well remember when I first made his acquaintance. I was calling upon his uncle, the late Mr. Grant Allen, who asked me whether I thought I had a post on the REVIEW that would suit his nephew. It was the first year of the REVIEW, and I was glad to avail myself of the offer of an energetic and ambitious youth who was so closely connected with Mr. Grant Allen. After remaining with me for several years, he started on his own account a business which was destined to very great development. Since then Mr. Grant Richards has distinguished himself not only as an enterprising publisher, but as one who has shrewd insight into the popular taste. It was he who first introduced the immortal Mr. Dooley to the British reading public, one of the minor but excellent services which he has rendered to the reader. He published for me several books, among others M. Bloch's famous work on "The Future of War." One of his earliest and greatest successes was in the publication of "A Book of Verses for Children," a selection by Mr. E. V. Lucas of all the best children's poems in the language. There are, however, few branches of popular literature in which he has not made his mark. One of the most successful of his ventures was the invention of the "Dumpy Books for Children," one-and-sixpenny volumes; daintily got up, beautifully bound, and copiously illustrated, and of which perhaps the most successful was "Little Black Sambo," although it is being well followed by "The Flower Book" and "The Pink Knight." Here is a complete list of these "Dumpy Books":—

- (1.) **The Flamp, the Ameliorator, and the Schoolboy's Apprentice.** By E. V. Lucas.
- (2.) **Mrs. Turner's Cautionary Stories.**
- (3.) **The Bad Family.** By Mrs. Fenwick.
- (4.) **The Story of Little Black Sambo.** By Helen Binnerman.
- (5.) **The Bountiful Lady: A Fairy Story.** By Thomas Cobb.
- (6.) **A Cat Book.** By E. V. Lucas.
- (7.) **A Flower Book.** By Eden Coybee and Nellie Benson.
- (8.) **The Pink Knight.** By J. R. Monsell.
- (9.) **The Little Clown.** By Thomas Cobb.
- (10.) **A Horse Book.** By Mary Tourtel.
- (11.) **Little People: an Alphabet.** By Henry Mayer and T. W. H. Crosland.

Encouraged by the demand for these admirable little volumes, Mr. Grant Richards has now ventured upon a new departure in the same field, and this season he is bringing out a series of "Larger Dumpy Books," which are published at half-a-crown. Of these one of the first is "The Six-Inch Admiral," a delightfully original and amusing book for children. Those who like the little "Dumpy Books" will welcome the bigger series, which possess all the distinctive attractions of their smaller predecessors. The three volumes so far published are:—

**The Six-Inch Admiral.** By George A. Best.

**Holidays and Happy Days.** By E. Florence Mason and Hamish Hendry.

**Pillow Stories.** By S. L. Heward and Gertrude M. Bradley.

Another series brought out by Mr. Grant Richards deserves special mention. The idea was a happy one, and the title, though somewhat catchy, has certainly caught on. It is the "How to" series. The title is taken from the first two words in the titles of each of the books. The first that was published was "How to Deal with your Banker." It was followed by several others, such as "When and How to Dine in Paris," "How to Write for the Magazines," "How to Choose your Banker," "How to Write a Novel," "How to Invest and how to Speculate," "How to Enter the Civil Service," "How to Succeed in your Examination," and "How to Study English Literature." Some of these are published at 2s. 6d., others at 3s., while the rest are published at 3s. 6d. They are handbooks and guides as to how to do things which a great many people wish to do, which many people have to do, and which all of us would be better for knowing how to do. Most of us have learned to do those things without having anyone to tell us how to do them. The consequence is we have made a great many mistakes. As Mr. Knowlson says in his interesting book upon "How to Study English Literature," the idea is that "this little book will guide those who may use it in their first attempts to understand the subject, and by a wise economy of time and the adoption of true methods bring about the best result of enjoyment and culture." This series, however, has the defect of all similar books, in that after reading "How to Study English Literature" a good many people will have come to the conclusion that it is no use beginning, for there is so much to do. On the other hand, many who will read "How to Write for the Magazines," which is written by one who has been lucky enough to make £600 a year by the operation, will be apt to indulge in expectations which will be somewhat cruelly disappointed in reality. But the two little books about how to choose your banker, and how to deal with him when you have chosen him, contain many suggestions which enable the depositor or customer to be on his guard against various methods by which his banker often profits at his expense. One purchaser has declared that he saved £200 a year by following the advice of the "how to" writer; but there are few persons whose dealings with a banker are sufficiently extensive to enable them to effect such an economy.

I have said enough, however, to show that Mr. Grant Richards is a publisher of wide range, with a keen eye to the actualities of life, and one who already, while hardly in his thirtieth year, has created a business which promises to hold a foremost place in the annals of British literature.