

The Weekly Directory.

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Some Seventeenth Century Books and Authors.

(By W. P. Lawrence.)

**HOWELL AND SELDEN.**

These were two Oxford men and were given to prose more than poetry. Selden said: "Tis ridiculous for a Lord to print verse." "Verse proves nothing but the quantity of syllables." "Tis a fine thing for children to learn to make verse; but when they come to be men, they must speak like other men, or else they will be laughed at." "Tis ridiculous to speak, or write, or preach in verse." We may suppose these quotations express in general the opinion of poetry held by the average Oxford scn. And it is not surprising that Cambridge, then, is the home of English poetry.

Howell and Selden both had an excellent prose style. The one, widely traveled, is instructive and entertaining in "Familiar Letters" and the other, an encyclopaedia of law, theology, etc., is a delightful philosopher in "Table Talk." Ben Jonson said of him:

"You that have been Ever at home, yet all countries have seen, And like a compass, keeping one foot still Upon your centre, do your circle fill Of general knowledge; watched men, manners too, Heard what times past have said, seen what ours do."

**OWEN FELLTHAM.**

Several years since I read Francis Bacon's essays and was so taken with them that I made my own version of several of them. I thought I had forgotten them till I came to read Felltham. This eading conjured up so much of the Bacon matter that I suspected Felltham had drawn largely from that distinguished philosopher. Then a comparison. Many essays of the two bear the same title, but in the contents of half a dozen compared there is not the slightest suggestion that Felltham was influenced by Bacon. Both the essays, "Marriage and Single Life," refer to the opinion of matrimony among the Turks, but to different phases of it—no other resemblances.

Felltham has not Bacon's mental grasp or penetration, and is often tedious. His "Resolves" are a barrel of conceits packed in plenty of excelsior.

**JEREMY TAYLOR'S HOLY LIVING AND HOLY DYING.**

There was a group of seventeenth

century prose writers that might aptly be styled the moral preceptors. Jeremy Taylor is to this group what Moses was to the Hebrews and Solon was to the Greeks. His code of moral precepts is very full and comprehensive, and as hard to read for a recitation in college as the Proverbs of Solomon. To criticise Taylor's style from a rapid glance through this volume, or even after a careful reading, would be as unsatisfactory as a study of Blackstone, not for its basic principles in law, but as a literary exercise. Taylor does not parade his learning as Burton, and is superior as a moral preceptor to either Felltham or Selden. His apparent meekness reminds me of Herbert. I should place his "Holy Living and Holy Dying" as a companion piece to the Bible.

**IZAAK WALTON'S "LIVES" AND "THE COMPLETE ANGLER."**

As a biographer, Walton magnifies the subject's religious qualities and throws such a halo of glory around him that one comes away feeling that Donne, Hooker and Herbert were saints. The charm of Walton's style is in its simplicity and the skill in portrayal of personal qualities of character.

"The Complete Angler" is the next best thing to the actual sport it so simply yet so attractively describes. There is the element of comradeship, dialogue well written, remarkable familiarity with the subject, in short a classic without the author being classical either in knowledge or style. I should put Walton in a class to himself. We have had no biographer in this period that equaled him in that field. "The Worthies of England" and "The History of the Rebellion" cannot be classed with Walton's "Lives." "The Complete Angler" is in a field to itself both as to matter and form. It is so well done as to have a lasting vitality,—a characteristic or quality of every classic.

**CLARENDON'S HISTORY OF THE REBELLION.**

The three fine old folio volumes of this most valuable record of the civil wars in England and of the commonwealth, are a reprint from the first edition, and were published in 1703. As to their content, it is interesting reading because the author's life—a very active, vigorous existence in a most stormy period—is woven into the whole narrative.

As to their style, it is, in a way, that of a lawyer's brief. The language is that of a learned parliament, and the phrasing is often that of the court. This is due in a large measure to the manner in which the work is built up. Like Carlyle's Cromwell, it is a series of petitions, overtures, and the like, that passed between the representative heads of the two opposing factions, woven into a narrative full of personal feeling and comment from the viewpoint of a staunch royalist.

The chief value of the work is in its historical fact, rather than in its style.

**THOMAS FULLER.**

Fuller's "Holy and Profane States" is constructed very much as George Herbert's "Priest to the Temple," except he has extended his precepts beyond the parson, to a greater part of characters, both domestic and public. It is not only

the "Faithful Minister" he draws an interesting likeness of, but the "Good Wife," the "Good Husband," the good all along the line of human professions, vocations and crafts, and right well he does it, adding suggestiveness and life with the use of appropriate figures. His style, too, has much of the seventeenth century prose charm.

As an observer, Fuller shows himself not less accurate and scrutinizing in the subjects treated under "The Profane State" than in those under "The Holy State." He is a philosopher of no mean ability, and I cannot see how the world has kept a Bacon so fully alive and allowed a Fuller to die as dead as Hector. It is to be hoped a resurrection will come through a new edition and popularization of his works.

**PEPYS' DIARY.**

There is variety enough in the books we have been talking about to suit the most capricious mind—"Anatomy of Melancholy," "Religio Medici," "Table Talk," "Worthies of England," "The Rebellion," "Pilgrim's Progress" and the rest, and now "Pepys' Diary." There is variety for you. And the last is as varied within itself as the whole group. We do not want to approach a diary expecting literary merit. Such a work is not written for public inspection and criticism. "Pepys' Diary" is interesting above all things as a series of snap-shots of life, high and low, from 1660 to 1670. As I sailed through it—not having time or the desire to read it all—I found it as gratifying to my curiosity wherever I chanced to light as if I had, by chance, been overhearing a curtained secret, either of private life or of the English government. Its quaint style makes it a first-rate stereopticon lecture on the great plague of 1665-6, the terrible London fire, September, 1666, the London stage, and the lives of many great men in state and in literature during the period it covers.

**JOHN BUNYAN.**


Hawthorne's "Celestial Railway" led me some years ago to read "Pilgrim's Progress." My experience with this famous allegory was pleasing in a high degree. In the aptness of the whole plan of the book,—the names of the characters and the part each plays, the reality of action and the simplicity of language there is a sensation akin to that which comes over me on going from a library full of heavy learning into the depths of wild nature on an ideal June day. Bunyan's originality, his fervent soul, getting itself expressed so clearly and so charmingly, and his invention so novel in sev-

enteenth century prose fiction,—all these put him beyond the scholarly religious writers we have studied. Genius is always greater than scholarship. Soul is greater than mere intellect.

"The Holy War" is scarcely inferior to "Pilgrim's Progress" except in plot. The style is essentially the same, but the characters are less vividly drawn.

"Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," I think, is superior to Walton's "Lives," as a work of biography. Here both the bad and the good in the character are set forth as in Bible biographies.

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