

THE PIGSKIN LIBRARY

I have received so many inquiries about the "pigskin library" (as the list appeared in the first chapter of my African articles in "Scribner's Magazine"), and so many comments have been made upon it, often in connection with the list of books recently made public by ex-President Eliot, of Harvard, that I may as well myself say a word on the subject.¹

In addition to the books enumerated as belonging to the library, various others were from time to time added; among them, "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass," Dumas's "Louves de Machekoule," "Tartarin de Tarascon" (not until after I had shot my lions!), Maurice Egan's "Wives of Sexton Maginnis," James Lane Allen's "Summer in Arcady," William Allen White's "A Certain Rich Man," George Meredith's "Farina," and d'Aurevilly's "Chevalier des Touches." I also had sent out to me Darwin's "Origin of Species" and "Voyage of the Beagle," Huxley's Essays, Frazer's "Passages from the Bible," Braithwaite's "Book of Elizabethan Verse," FitzGerald's "Omar Khayyám," Gobineau's "Inégalité des Races Hu-

maines" (a well-written book, containing some good guesses; but for a student to approach it for serious information would be much as if an albatross should apply to a dodo for an essay on flight), "Don Quixote," Molière, Goethe's "Faust," Green's "Short History of the English People," Pascal, Voltaire's "Siècle de Louis XIV," the "Mémoires de M. Simon" (to read on the way home), and "The Soul's Inheritance," by George Cabot Lodge. Where possible I had them bound in pigskin. They were for use, not ornament. I almost always had some volume with me, either in my saddle-pocket or in the cartridge-bag which one of my gun-bearers carried to hold odds and ends. Often my reading would be done while resting under a tree at noon, perhaps beside the carcass of a beast I had killed, or else while waiting for camp to be pitched; and in either case it might be impossible to get water for washing. In consequence the books were stained with blood, sweat, gun oil, dust, and ashes; ordinary bindings would either have vanished or become loathsome, whereas pigskin merely grew to look as a well-used saddle looks.

Now, it ought to be evident by a mere glance at the complete list both that the books themselves are of unequal value, and also that they were chosen for various reasons, and for this particular trip. Some few of them I would take with me on any trip of like length; but the majority I should of course change for others—as good and no better—were I to start on another such trip. On trips of various length in recent years I have taken, among many other books, the "Memoirs of Marbot," Æschylus, Sophocles, Aristotle, Joinville's "History of St. Louis," the Odyssey (Palmer's translation), volumes of Gibbon and Parkman, Lounsbury's Chaucer, Theocritus, Lea's "History of the Inquisition," Lord Acton's Essays, and Ridgeway's "Prehistoric Greece." Once I took Ferrero's "History of Rome," and liked it so much that I got the author to come to America and stay at the White House; once De La Gorce's "History of the Second Republic and Second Empire"—an invaluable book. I did not regard these books as better or worse than those I left behind; I took them because at the moment I wished to read them. The

¹ The original list of the "pigskin library" was as follows:

- Bible.
- Apocrypha.
- Borrow: "Bible in Spain," "Zingali," "Lavengro," "Wild Wales," "The Romany Rye."
- Shakespeare.
- Spenser: "Faerie Queene."
- Marlowe.
- Mahan: "Sea Power."
- Macaulay: History, Essays, Poems.
- Homer: Iliad, Odyssey.
- La Chanson de Roland.
- Nibelungenlied.
- Carlyle: "Frederick the Great."
- Shelley: Poems.
- Bacon: Essays.
- Lowell: Literary Essays, "Biglow Papers."
- Emerson: Poems.
- Longfellow.
- Tennyson.
- Poe: Tales, Poems.
- Keats.
- Milton: "Paradise Lost" (Books I and II)
- Dante: "Inferno" (Carlyle's translation).
- Holmes: "Autocrat," "Over the Teacups."
- Bret Harte: Poems, "Tales of the Argonauts," "Luck of Roaring Camp."
- Browning: Selections.
- Crothers: "Gentle Reader."
- Mark Twain: "Huckleberry Finn," "Tom Sawyer."
- Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress."
- Euripides (Murray's translation): "Hippolytus," "Bacchæ."
- The Federalist.
- Gregorovius: "Rome."
- Scott: "Legend of Montrose," "Guy Mannering," "Waverley," "Rob Roy," "Antiquary."
- Cooper: "Pilot," "Two Admirals."
- Froissart.
- Percy's Reliques.
- Thackeray: "Vanity Fair" and "Pendennis."
- Dickens: "Mutual Friend," "Pickwick."

choice would largely depend upon what I had just been reading. This time I took Euripides, because I had just been reading Murray's "History of the Greek Epic."¹ Having become interested in Mahaffy's essays on Hellenistic Greece, I took Polybius on my next trip; having just read Benjamin Ide Wheeler's "History of Alexander," I took Arrian on my next hunt; something having started me reading German poetry, I once took Schiller, Koerner, and Heine to my ranch; another time I started with a collection of essays on and translations from early Irish poetry; yet another time I took Morris's translations of various Norse Sagas, including the Heimskringla, and liked them so much that I then incautiously took his translation of Beowulf, only to find that while it had undoubtedly been translated out of Anglo-Saxon, it had not been translated into English, but merely into a language bearing a specious resemblance thereto. Once I took the "History of the Growth of the Moral Instinct;" but I did not often take scientific books, simply because as yet scientific books rarely have literary value. Of course a really good scientific book should be as interesting to read as any other good book; and the volume in question was taken because it fulfilled this requirement, its eminent Australian author being not only a learned but a brilliant man.

I as emphatically object to nothing but heavy reading as I do to nothing but light reading—all that is indispensable being that the heavy and the light reading alike shall be both interesting and wholesome. So I have always carried novels with me, including, as a rule, some by living authors, but (unless I had every confidence in the author) only if I had already read the book. Among many, I remember off-hand a few such as "The Virginian," "Lin McLean," "Puck of Pook's Hill," "Uncle Remus," "Aaron of the Wild Woods," "Letters of a Self-made Merchant to His Son," "Many Cargoes," "The Gentleman from Indiana," "David Harum," "The Crisis," "The Silent Places," "Marse Chan," "Soapy Sponge's Sporting Tour," "All on the Irish Shore,"

¹ I am writing on the White Nile from memory; the titles I give may sometimes be inaccurate, and I cannot, of course, begin to remember all the books I have at different times taken out with me.

"The Blazed Trail," "Stratagems and Spoils," "Knights in Fustian," "Selma," "The Taskmasters," Edith Wyatt's "Every Man to His Humor," the novels and stories of Octave Thanet—I wish I could remember more of them, for personally I have certainly profited as much by reading really good and interesting novels and stories as by reading anything else, and from the contemporary ones I have often reached, as in no other way I could have reached, an understanding of how real people feel in certain country districts, and in certain regions of great cities like Chicago and New York.

Of course I also generally take out some of the novels of those great writers of the past whom one can read over and over again; and occasionally one by some writer who was not great—like "The Semi-attached Couple," a charming little early-Victorian or pre-Victorian tale which I suppose other people cannot like as I do, or else it would be reprinted.

Above all, let me insist that the books which I have taken were and could only be a tiny fraction of those for which I cared and which I continually read, and that I care for them neither more nor less than for those I left at home. I took "The Deluge" and "Pan Michael" and "Flight of a Tartar Tribe," because I had just finished "Fire and Sword;" "Moby Dick," because I had been re-reading "Omoo" and "Typee;" Gogol's "Taras Bulba," because I wished to get the Cossack view of what was described by Sienkiewicz from the Polish side: some of Maurice Jokai, and "St. Peter's Umbrella" (I am not at all sure about the title), because my attention at the moment was on Hungary and the novels of Topeilius when I happened to be thinking of Finland. I took Dumas's cycle of romances dealing with the French Revolution, because I had just finished Carlyle's work thereon—and I felt that of the two the novelist was decidedly the better historian. I took "Salamambo" and "The Nabab" rather than scores of other French novels simply because at the moment I happened to see them and think that I would like to read them. I doubt if I ever took anything of Hawthorne's, but this was certainly not because I failed to recognize his genius.

Now, all this means that I take with me on any trip, or on all trips put together, but a very small proportion of the books that I like; and that I like very many and very different kinds of books, and do not for a moment attempt anything so preposterous as a continual comparison between books which may appeal to totally different needs, totally different sets of emotions. For instance, one correspondent pointed out to me that Tennyson was "trivial" compared to Browning, and another complained that I had omitted Walt Whitman; another asked why I put Longfellow "on a level" with Tennyson. I believe I did take Walt Whitman on one hunt, and I like Browning, Tennyson, and Longfellow, all of them, without thinking it necessary to compare them. It is largely a matter of personal taste. In a recent English review I glanced at an article on English verse of to-day in which, after enumerating various writers of the first and second classes, the writer stated that Kipling was at the head of the third class of "ballad-mongers;" it happened that I had never even heard of most of the men he mentioned in the first two classes, whereas I should be surprised to find that there was any one of Kipling's poems which I did not already know. I do not quarrel with the taste of the critic in question, but I see no reason why any one should be guided by it. So with Longfellow. A man who dislikes or looks down upon simple poetry, ballad poetry, will not care for Longfellow; but if he really cares for "Chevy Chase," "Sir Patrick Spens," "Twa Corbies," Michael Drayton's "Agin-court," Scott's "Harlaw," "Eve of St. John's," and the Flodden fight in "Marmion," he will be apt to like such poems as the "Saga of King Olaf," "Othere," "The Driving Cloud," "Belisarius," "Helen of Tyre," "Enceladus," "The Warden of the Cinque Ports," "Paul Revere," and "Simon Danz." I am exceeding fond of these, and of many, many other poems of Longfellow. This does not interfere in the least with my admiration for "Ulysses," "The Revenge," "The Palace of Art," the little poems in "The Princess," and in fact most of Tennyson. Nor does my liking for Tennyson prevent my caring greatly for "Childe Roland," "Love

Among the Ruins," "Proteus," and nearly all the poems that I can understand, and some that I can merely guess at, in Browning. I do not feel the slightest need of trying to apply a common measuring-rule to these three poets, any more than I find it necessary to compare Keats with Shelley, or Shelley with Poe. I enjoy them all.

As regards Mr. Eliot's list, I think it slightly absurd to compare any list of good books with any other list of good books in the sense of saying that one list is "better" or "worse" than another. Of course a list may be made up of worthless or noxious books; but there are so many thousands of good books that no list of small size is worth considering if it purports to give the "best" books. There is no such thing as *the* hundred best books, or *the* best five-foot library; but there can be drawn up a very large number of lists, each of which shall contain *a* hundred good books or fill *a* good five-foot library. This is, I am sure, all that Mr. Eliot has tried to do.¹ His is in most respects an excellent list, but it is of course in no sense a list of the best books for all people, or for all places and times. The question is largely one of the personal equation. Some of the books which Mr. Eliot includes I would not put in a five-foot library, nor yet in a fifty-foot library; and he includes various good books which are at least no better than many thousands (I speak literally) which he leaves out. This is of no consequence so long as it is frankly conceded that any such list must represent only the individual's personal preferences, that it is merely a list of *good* books, and that there can be no such thing as a list

¹ Readers of this editorial by Mr. Roosevelt will be interested in the statements by Mr. Eliot which appear in an article by him in "Collier's Weekly" for April 23. From that article we quote three sentences; one because it so closely parallels Mr. Roosevelt's interpretation of what Mr. Eliot has undertaken to do, the others because they give some explanation of omissions from the "five-foot shelf" which Mr. Roosevelt notes later in his editorial:

"The purpose of The Harvard Classics is, therefore, one very different from that of the many collections in which the editor's aim has been to select the hundred or the fifty best books in the world; it is nothing less than the purpose to present so ample and characteristic a record of the stream of the world's thought that the observant reader's mind shall be enriched, refined, and fertilized by it."

"Many famous and desirable books on history had to be excluded because of their length."

"Finally, the whole of nineteenth century fiction, with two exceptions, was excluded; partly because of its great bulk, and partly because it is easily accessible."—THE EDITORS.

of the *best* books. It would be useless even to attempt to make a list with such pretensions unless the library were to extend to many thousand volumes, for there are many voluminous writers, most of whose writings no educated man ought to be willing to spare. For instance, Mr. Eliot evidently does not care for history; at least he includes no historians as such. Now, personally, I would not include, as Mr. Eliot does, third or fourth rate plays, such as those of Dryden, Shelley, Browning, and Byron (whose greatness as poets does not rest on such an exceedingly slender foundation as these dramas supply), and at the same time completely omit Gibbon and Thucydides, or even Xenophon and Napier. Macaulay and Scott are practically omitted from Mr. Eliot's list; they are the two nineteenth-century authors that I should most regret to lose. Mr. Eliot includes the *Aeneid* and leaves out the *Iliad*; to my mind this is like including Pope and leaving out Shakespeare. In the same way, Emerson's "English Traits" is included and Holmes's "Autocrat" excluded—an incomprehensible choice from my standpoint. So with the poets and novelists. It is a mere matter of personal taste whether one prefers giving a separate volume to Burns or to Wordsworth or to Browning; it certainly represents no principle of selection. "I Promessi Sposi" is a good novel; to exclude in its favor "Vanity Fair," "Anna Karénina," "Les Misérables," "The Scarlet Letter," or hundreds of other novels, is entirely excusable as a mere matter of personal taste, but not otherwise. Mr. Eliot's volumes of miscellaneous essays, "Famous Prefaces" and the like, are undoubtedly just what certain people care for, and therefore what they ought to have, as there is no harm in such collections; though personally I doubt whether there is much good, either, in this "tidbit" style of literature.

Let me repeat that Mr. Eliot's list is a good list, and that my protest is merely against the belief that it is possible to make any list of the kind which shall be more than a list as good as many scores or many hundreds of others. Aside from personal taste, we must take into account national tastes and the general change in

taste from century to century. There are four books so pre-eminent—the Bible, Shakespeare, Homer, and Dante—that I suppose there would be a general consensus of opinion among the cultivated men of all nationalities in putting them foremost; but as soon as this narrow limit was passed there would be the widest divergence of choice, according to the individuality of the man making the choice, to the country in which he dwelt, and the century in which he lived. An Englishman, a Frenchman, a German, an Italian, would draw up totally different lists, simply because each must necessarily be the child of his own nation.¹

We are apt to speak of the judgment of "posterity" as final; but "posterity" is no single entity, and the "posterity" of one age has no necessary sympathy with the judgments of the "posterity" that preceded it by a few centuries. Montaigne, in a very amusing and, on the whole, sound essay on training children, mentions with pride that when young he read Ovid instead of wasting his time on "'King Arthur,' 'Lancelot du Lake,' . . . and such idle time-consuming and wit-besotting trash of books, wherein youth doth commonly amuse itself." Of course the trashy books which he had specially in mind were the romances which Cervantes not long afterwards destroyed at a stroke. But Malory's book and others were then extant; and yet Montaigne, in full accord with the educated taste of his day, saw in them nothing that was not ridiculous. His choice of Ovid as representing a culture and wisdom immeasurably greater and more serious shows how much the judgment of the "posterity" of the sixteenth century differed from that of the nineteenth, in which the highest literary thought was

¹The same would be true, although of course to a less extent, of an American, an Englishman, a Scotchman, and an Irishman, in spite of the fact that all speak substantially the same language. I am entirely aware that if I made an anthology of poems, I should include a great many American poems—like Whittier's "Snow-Bound," "Ichabod," and "Laus Deo;" like Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" and "Biglow Papers"—which could not mean to an Englishman what they mean to me. In the same way, such an English anthology as the "Oxford Book of English Verse" is a good anthology—as good as many other anthologies—as long as it confines itself to the verse of British authors. But it would have been far better to exclude American authors entirely; for the choice of the American verse included in the volume, compared in quantity and quality with the corresponding British verse of the same period which is selected, makes it impossible to treat the book seriously, if it is regarded as a compendium of the authors of both countries.

deeply influenced by the legends of Arthur's knights and hardly at all by anything Ovid wrote. Dante offers an even more striking instance. If "posterity's" judgment could ever be accepted as final, it would seem to be when delivered by a man like Dante in speaking of the men of his own calling who had been dead from one to two thousand years. Well, Dante gives a list of the six greatest poets. One of them, he modestly mentions, is himself, and he was quite right. Then come Virgil and Homer, and then Horace, Ovid, and *Lucan!* Nowadays we simply could not understand such a choice, which omits the mighty Greek dramatists (with whom in the same canto Dante shows his acquaintance) and includes one poet whose works come about in the class of the "Columbiad."

With such an example before us, let us be modest about dogmatizing overmuch. The ingenuity exercised in choosing the "Hundred Best Books" is all right if accepted as a mere amusement, giving something of the pleasure derived from a missing-word puzzle. But it does not mean much more. There are very many thousands of good books; some of them meet one man's needs, some another's; and any list of such books should simply be accepted as meeting a given individual's needs under given conditions of time and surroundings.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

Khartum, March 15, 1910.