

BALLADS OF BOOKS

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Ballads of Books by Brander Matthews

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BRANDER MATTHEWS

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OF BOOKS**

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CHOSEN BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS



NEW YORK
GEORGE J. COOMBES

275 Fifth Avenue

1887



Copyright, 1886,
By GEORGE J. COOMBS.

. 263/4.

Cambridge : Printed at the Riverside Press.

To
FREDERICK LOCKER

POET AND LOVER OF BOOKS

Come and take a choice of all my library
Thus Andronicus, iv. 2





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PREFATORY NOTE.



THE poets have ever been lovers of books ; indeed, one might ask how should a man be a poet who did not admire a treasure as precious and as beautiful as a book may be. With evident enjoyment, Keats describes

A viol, bowstrings torn, cross-wise upon
A glorious folio of Anacreon ;

and it was a glorious folio of Beaumont and Fletcher which another English poet (whose most poetic work was done in prose) "dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent Garden," and to pacify his conscience for the purchase of which he kept to his overworn suit of clothes for four or five weeks longer than he ought. Charles Lamb was a true bibliophile, in the earlier and more exact sense of the term ; he loved his ragged volumes as he loved his fellow-men, and he was as intolerant of books that are not books

as he was of men who were not manly. He conferred the dukedom of his library on Coleridge, who was no respecter of books, though he could not but enrich them with his marginal notes. Southey and Lord Houghton and Mr. Locker are English poets with libraries of their own, more orderly and far richer than the fortuitous congregation of printed atoms, a mere medley of unrelated tomes, which often masquerades as *The Library* in the mansions of the noble and the wealthy. Shelley said that he thought Southey had a secret in every one of his books which he was afraid the stranger might discover: but this was probably no more, and no other, than the secret of comfort, consolation, refreshment, and happiness to be found in any library by him who shall bring with him the golden key that unlocks its silent door.

Mr. Lowell has recently dwelt on the difference between literature and books: and, accepting this distinction, the editor desires to declare at once that as a whole this collection is devoted rather to books than to literature. The poems in the following pages celebrate the bric-a-brac of the one rather than the masterpieces of the other. The stanzas here garnered into one sheaf sing of books as books, of books valuable and valued for their perfection of type and page and printing, — for their beauty and for their rarity, — or for their association with some famous man or woman of the storied past.

Two centuries and a half ago Drummond of Haw-

thornden prefixed to the 'Varieties' of his friend
Persons a braggart distich :—

This book a world is ; here, if errors be,
The like, nay worse, in the great world we see.

The present collection of varieties in verse has little or naught to do with the great world and its errors : it has to do chiefly, not to say wholly, with the world of the Bookmen—the little world of the Book-lover, the Bibliophile, the Bibliomaniac—a mad world, my masters, in which there are to be found not a few poets who cherish old wine and old wood, old friends and old books, and who believe that old books are the best of old friends.

Books, books again, and books once more !
These are our theme, which some miscall
Mere madness, setting little store
By copies either short or tall,
But you, O slaves of shelf and stall !
We rather write for you that hold
Patched folios dear, and prize "the small
Rare volume, black with burnished gold."

as Mr. Austin Dobson sang on the threshold of Mr. Lang's delightfully discursive little book about the 'Library.'

The editor has much pleasure in thanking the poets who have allowed him to reprint their poems in these pages ; and he acknowledges a double debt of gratitude to the friends who have written poems expressly for this collection. Encouraged by their support, and remembering that he is not a contributor to his own pages, the editor ventures to conclude