



The Roxburghe Library.

REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING DEC. 31ST, 1868.

IN the exact words of the "Revised Prospectus," issued Feb. 1, 1868, "The Roxburghe Library was organized in 1867, with the object of bringing within the reach of everybody who cares for them the best inedited remains of our ancient literature for a moderate yearly subscription."

The original intention of the Promoter of this new claimant to public favour was to have divided the responsibility, both literary and monetary, between himself and a certain number of coadjutors, forming a Committee of Management in the same manner and on the same principles as other societies which exist, or have existed, among us. With this view a communication was made to several gentlemen, whose names are well known in antiquarian circles, stating the Promoter's plans and wishes, and he was successful in obtaining the adhesion of two or three literary friends, whose assistance and advice would have been extremely welcome and valuable to him. Others, however, with whom he had desired to act, were precluded by pre-engagements or by their regular avocations from joining him; and

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he has only to add, that on mature consideration, he resolved to dispenſe with a Council, and to attempt, ſingle-handed, the conduct of the ſcheme which he had ſet on foot. He felt that, if it ſhould be ſucceſſful, ſo much the better ; if it ſhould be a failure, that blame would reſt with him alone. In conſequence of this determination, the ROXBURGHE LIBRARY became, in September, 1867, an accomplished fact, ſo far as its eſtabliſhment was concerned, and in January, 1868, it iſſued its firſt volume.

Although, it is believed, there are at the preſent moment, and have been in former days, a few ſo-called Societies, which to all practical intents and purpoſes are under individual ſuperviſion, and follow the guidance of a ſingle directing hand, the Book-Club now inſtituted may claim to be the firſt and only enterpriſe of the kind in this country, which is not merely oſtenſibly but avowedly and ſpecifically under the control of one perſon. This ſyſtem, for which the recommendation of novelty is thus claimed rightly or wrongly, has its advantages and alſo its diſadvantages.

Its advantages appeared to the Promoter at the time—and he muſt confeſs that he has ſeen no reaſon to alter his opinion—to conſiſt in the facilities which are thus afforded of carrying out without reſtraint or interruption the programme ſubmitted to the public, or that portion of the public, at leaſt, which is intereſted in ſuch matters, and of which the latter may ſeem to indicate approval and acceptance by ſubſcription to the undertaking ; ſecondly, the removal of any riſk of thoſe internal differences, which have proved diſaſtrous to ſeveral Societies launched under the moſt favourable auſpices ; and thirdly, the centralizing of all reſponſibility in one perſon.

On the other hand, a Book-Club conducted on this perſonal principle labours under certain inconveniences and diſadvantages, which,

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so far from desiring to shirk, the Editor has every wish to make clear, and generally known. In the first place, it is an invidious task for any man to ask for several hundreds of pounds from those to whom he is, for the most part, a stranger, for the purpose of carrying out entirely at his own discretion certain literary designs, of which the character cannot be exactly known to any beyond his own circle of friends, till it is too late to retract. Again, a man is apt by this means, to incur the suspicion of putting money into his own pocket, under the pretence of benefiting others; and however groundless and I must add preposterous, such an idea may, and *would* be, intending supporters are doubtless deterred from coming forward by the consideration in question. A third drawback may be, that the Editor is possibly engaged in more important pursuits, and that delays may take place in the production and distribution of the volumes forthcoming and due for the annual subscription, or (a still worse contingency) that the work is hurried and imperfect, while, where the labour of editorship is divided among several, greater promptitude and efficiency are at once secured.

The editor of the Roxburghe Library does not raise these objections for the sake of answering them; he merely puts down on paper what he is fully aware has been in some quarters alleged against his project. To the first and second points one reply may seem sufficient and satisfactory. Accompanying these remarks will be found a statement of accounts for our first financial year, ending December 31, 1868, from which the Subscribers will at once perceive that the Editor has fulfilled his engagements to his supporters not only without any *honorarium* or profit, but at a pecuniary sacrifice. With somewhat under 100 subscribers, he has given three books, of which two cost upwards of 100*l.* each, not reckoning Agent's commission.

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The third, which was the first in order of time—the “Paris and Vienne”—was a smaller volume, and proportionably less expensive. It cannot be disputed, that these works might have been produced more cheaply, if woodcuts had been omitted, and other accessories had been dispensed with; but it was part of the plan, it may be recollected, to represent in the Roxburghe Library texts, as closely as possible, the original publication or MS.; and competent transcribers, engravers, and typographers very properly expect the highest market price for what they do.

To the third objection, the best reply, and perhaps the most desirable mode of replying, will be a reference to what has been achieved, and a candid review, justifiable by the perfect ease with which it is capable of being verified or disproved, of the works which have been transferred from the editor's hands to the shelves of subscribers, in the course of the twelvemonth.

The Roxburghe Library, in the first year of its existence, has reprinted an unique romance, interesting in itself, and also of value as having been printed (and probably translated) by Caxton; as a work, of which no English MS. is known; and in a philological respect. In the Preface, the Editor endeavoured to collect all that was known of the literary history and bibliography of the story, and in a few Notes at the end of the volume, he explained a few obscure allusions to the best of his ability, and compared the English narrative as printed by Caxton with the best French text.

The first instalment of the Works of WILLIAM BROWNE, the Devonshire poet, formed the second issue of last year. The Editor had the good fortune to meet with many new biographical facts relating to Browne, which, if they did not go so far as could have been wished towards the solution of obscurities and the removal of our uncertainty, in regard to many leading features in the poet's life, at

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least supplied some *lacunæ* and hitherto missing dates, and placed the author of "Britannia's Pastorals" more clearly and *humanly* before us. Exception has been taken to the choice of Browne's Works as among the earliest volumes of the present series; and the ground taken, oddly enough, was the cheap rate, at which they were already procurable. To any one conversant with the facts, it will be unnecessary to point out how totally this idea proceeds from a misapprehension; for the truth is, that no good edition of Browne, at all pretending to completeness and uniformity, either exists, or has ever been attempted hitherto; and that the entire body of Browne's poetry, including much that has never been collected, and more that has never been edited in the strict sense of the term, is to be found in the volume already forwarded to subscribers, and in a second which will be in their hands this very summer, and to be found *nowhere else*. When it is added, that in these writings are some of the most delightful compositions of the kind in our language; that there MILTON met with passages which fixed themselves in his still greater mind, and which he has reproduced with added force and new embellishments, and that the author of them is believed to have executed nothing of any consequence after he had passed his nine-and-twentieth year, we have said enough, it is presumed, in vindication of the step here taken.

We have a second phenomenon in our early literature of the same sort; but RANDOLPH, who died very young, although he far excelled Browne in fancy and wit, and left behind him the masterly and first-class pastoral comedy of *Amyntas*, did not exhibit, or perhaps possess, that genius for delineating the scenery and pursuits of the country, that grace and sweetness of manner, and that rare chastity of style, which have very justly recommended Browne to attention. Nor, indeed, where the occasion demanded it, has the Devonshire poet shown himself unequal to higher flights, as the