

THE BOOK OF ESSAYS DEDICATORY

I have been bothered about this book this three months. I have written scarcely anything since Llewellyn asked me for it, for when he asked me I had really nothing on hand. I had just published every line I had ever written, at my own expense, with Prigsbys. Yet three months should suffice for one of Llewellyn's books, which consist chiefly of decorous fly-leaves and a dedication or so, and margins. Of course you know Llewellyn's books--the most delightful things in the market: the sweetest covers, with little gilt apples and things carelessly distributed over luminous grey, and bright red initials, and all these delightful fopperies. But it was the very slightness of these bibelots that disorganised me. And perhaps, also, the fact that no one has ever asked me for a book before.

I had no trouble with the title though--"Lichens." I have wondered the thing was never used before. Lichens, variegated, beautiful, though on the most arid foundations, half fungoid, half vernal--the very name for a booklet of modern verse. And that, of course, decided the key of the cover and disposed of three or four pages. A fly-leaf, a leaf with "Lichens" printed fair and beautiful a little to the left of the centre, then a title-page--"Lichens. By H.G. Wells. London: MDCCCXCV. Stephen Llewellyn." Then a restful blank page, and then--the Dedication. It was the dedication stopped me. The title-page, it is true, had some points of difficulty. Should the Christian name be printed in full or not, for

instance; but it had none of the fatal fascination of the dedicatory page. I had, so to speak, to look abroad among the ranks of men, and make one of those fretful forgotten millions--immortal. It seemed a congenial task.

I went to work forthwith.

It was only this morning that I realised the magnitude of my accumulations. Ever since then--it was three months ago--I have been elaborating this Dedication. I turned the pile over, idly at first. Presently I became interested in tracing my varying moods, as they had found a record in the heap.

This struck me--

Then again, a little essay in gratitude came to hand--

TO
PROFESSOR AUGUSTUS FLOOD,
Whose Admirable Lectures on
Palæontology
First turned my Attention to
Literature.

There was a tinge of pleasantry in the latter that pleased me very

greatly when I wrote it, and I find immediately overlying it another essay in the same line--

To the Latter-day Reviewer,
These Pearls.

For some days I was smitten with the idea of dedicating my little booklet to one of my numerous personal antagonists, and conveying some subtly devised insult with an air of magnanimity. I thought, for instance, of Blizzard--

SIR JOSEPH BLIZZARD,
The most distinguished, if not the greatest, of contemporary anatomists.

I think it was "X.L.'s" book, *Aut Diabolus aut Nihil*, that set me upon another line. There is, after all, your reader to consider in these matters, your average middle-class person to impress in some way. They say the creature is a snob, and absolutely devoid of any tinge of humour, and I must confess that I more than half believe it. At anyrate, it was that persuasion inspired--

To the Countess of X.,
In Memory of Many Happy Days.

I know no Countess of X., as a matter of fact, but if the public is such an ass as to think better of my work for the suspicion, I do not care how soon I incur it. And this again is a pretty utilisation of the waste desert of politics--

MY DEAR SALISBURY,--Pray accept this unworthy tribute of my affectionate esteem.

There were heaps of others. And looking at those heaps it suddenly came sharp and vivid before my mind that there--there was the book I needed, already written! A blank page, a dedication, a blank page, a dedication, and so on. I saw no reason to change the title. It only remained to select the things, and the book was done. I set to work at once, and in a very little while my bibelot was selected. There were dedications fulsome and fluid, dedications acrid and uncharitable, dedications in verse and dedications in the dead languages: all sorts and conditions of dedications, even the simple "To J.H. Gabbles"--so suggestive of the modest white stones of the village churchyard. Altogether I picked out one hundred and three dedications. At last only one thing remained to complete the book. And that was--the Dedication. You will scarcely credit it, but that worries me still....

I am almost inclined to think that Dedications are going out of fashion.