

"FINES LIBRORUM."

By "RUSTICUS."

"WHEN *Finis* comes the Book we close,
And somewhat sadly Fancy goes
With backward step from stage to stage
Of that accomplished pilgrimage—
The thorn lies thicker than the rose!

And Time will sweep both friends and foes
When *Finis* comes."

"Old World Idylls," AUSTIN DOBSON.

"**S**IR," said old Sam Johnson to Sir Joshua Reynolds, "there are two things which I am confident I can do very well. One is an introduction to any literary work, stating what it is to contain, and how it should be executed in the most perfect manner; the other is a conclusion showing from various causes why the execution has not been equal to what the author promised to himself and to the public."

I doubt if the great lexicographer had been much in request as a writer of "prefaces," still less of "conclusions," in these marvellous polite times on which Grub-street has fallen, when criticism is synonymous with log-rolling, and the "savagely and tartarly" days of the Quarterly are of the sacred past. Be that as it may, the fashion has changed little in two centuries. The demand for "prefaces" still exists. Rarely a book of any pretensions goes on to the market without a fulsome introduction from the pen of some broken craftsman or influential Maecenas. Each author, however, must indite his "Finis" proper, and it is with these we propose to deal. As in a play much depends on the drop scene, so we cannot under-rate the value of an effective ending, whether we have in hand old Omar's "Book of Verses

underneath the Bough," a romance of Sir Walter's, or a fin-de-siècle storiette from the blase brain of Mr Henry James. The interest of the plot is worked up, page by page, till it reaches a height in the closing chapter, and the reader lays down the book with a sigh of satisfaction and a murmur of appreciation, like the epicure who has dined well, and rises from his wine and walnuts in excellent humour with himself and the world at large. The fashions in the endings of books are legion. There is the ending melodramatic, endings cynical and pathetic and apologetic; endings, in sooth, to suit every taste.

The yellowback, with a florid atmosphere of princes, noble lords and grand dames, of estates, town houses and Mediterranean villas, ends a la mode in the strictly Ouidesque manner. It is doubtless familiar to the reader. I spare him quotation.

Again we may have our "Finis" attuned to the chimes of merry marriage bells, the *sine qua non* of conventional noveldom.

Thousands, I may safely say, of Edwins and Angelinas fade from the tear-blurred vision of their friends in the dear, old-fashioned way. And somehow, next time we meet their facsimiles we are eager as ever