NEW PUBLICATIONS.

RENAISSANCE IN ITALY. Italian Literature. By JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS. 2 vols., 8vo, pp. 561, 642. Henry Holt & Co.

With these two volumes Mr. Symonds brings his important work on Italy to an end. Without premeditation and almost without intention we wrote "on Italy;" but we allow our spontaneous words to stand, without apology and without qualification; for the five volumes, of which those before us are the last two, although the Renaissance in Italy is their nominal subject, are a series of literary pictures of the Italian people from about the end of the thirteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth. These pictures, however, are not truly pictorial. They are not works of representative art, nor are they intended so to be. Mr. Symonds has not written in the spirit of Macaulay; he does not wish to present us a canvas on which there is a composition sketched out in proportion, with grouping, contrast of light and shade, and strong local color. Still less does he seek to produce "effects,"—effects to which truth of detail, or any truth, is sacrificed, for a purpose, honest or dishonest. His work from beginning to end is critical and may be compared to a series of carefully studied and accurately drawn anatomical plates, which place before us the structure and the mode of action of the various subjects which he has undertaken to illustrate. The result is knowledge. The attentive and thoughtful reader of Mr. Symonds's work will know more of Italy, the great Italy which was the active pioneer in the regeneration of Europe after the middle ages, than can be learned from any other book known to us in English literature; and it is not likely that such a book upon the same subject will be written in our language for at least many years to come. All readers who are interested in his subject—one of the most important and variously instructive in the history of the human mind—owe Mr. Symonds thanks and honor for his conception and his thorough execution of a great design, which he has fortunately been able to carry out to a perfect and satisfactory completion.

We have heretofore given the readers of THE TRIBUNE an estimate of the preceding three volumes of this series, which began by presenting in "The Age of the Despots," the political and social condition of Italy preceding and during the renaissance period; which next, in "The Revival of Learning," showed what the renaissance was and how it was brought about; and which then, in "The Fine Arts," traced the influence of the new birth of the European mind in producing a development, or we might almost rather say an efflorescence, of the arts of design unsurpassed by any other, and unrivalled except by that of Greece in the days of Phidias and Praxiteles. We have now to consider the author's presentation of the renaissance literature; that literature which was the consequence and the outcome of the humanism of the revival of learning acting upon the Italian nature and the Italian society of three centuries ago. Remarkable—in a large sense—as the result of that action was, it never rose in importance and in interest to equality with that which was produced in art. The Italian poets and *novellieri* and publicists and philosophers of the renaissance were in every way below Italian architects and sculptors and painters of the same period. The world could better spare Boiardo and Ariosto and Poliziano and Pulci and Machiavelli and Aretino than it could spare Brunelleschi and Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael and Michael Angelo and Titian and Giorgione and Benvenuto Cellini and John of Bologna, not to mention others who were inferior only to these, and in some peculiar traits their equals and even their superiors; for the throng of great Italian masters of the arts of design in the renaissance period is as a throng of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven—and of hell. For hell must never be left out of the renaissance. It soared to regions celestial; but it went down too into the bottomless pit. And as to its literature, heavenward it went never; but was most intensely human. It was body and blood and fleshly lust of power and of pleasure made vocal. It was as Lucio says (in "Measure for Measure,") his wife was not "cardinally given"; in which grotesquely humorous twist of language Shakespeare perhaps had a satirical as well as a comical purpose; for of all carnal creatures the cardinals of his day and the century preceding (the renaissance period) seem to have been the carnalest. But although the Italian literature of the renaissance was thus inferior to its art, and although its weakness was on its spiritual and moral and even, we must say, on its intellectual side (using "intellectual as of higher significance than "mental") we must not, therefore, underrate its value, nor shut our eyes to the influence which it exerts upon the soul of awakening Europe. The splendor of European literature in the last three centuries had not only its dawn, but its bright morning, in the renaissance literature of Italy.

Mr. Symonds shows us step by step the development of this literature. Man by man he marches the brilliant array in review before us;—poets, tellers of tales, historians, writers on statecraft, philosophers, dramatists, critics, and not disdaining even the pedants, pompous and ponderous, or petty and piddling. Most of this somewhat motley although splendid band are all of them strongly Italian in feature and in costume, and all of them are loaded with spoils from the ruins of ancient Greece and Rome; every one of them, with two or three notable exceptions, priding himself more upon what he has taken from others than upon what he was himself; being indeed not unlike in this respect most other men of all sorts, of all times and all countries, among whom to have has ever seemed of more importance than to be. Mr. Symonds's volumes are really a critical study of Italian literature from the *trecento* period, where Dante's gloomy figure towers on the border of the middle ages, down to the decadence of the renaissance in the sixteenth century.

Of Petrarch, the first famous poet and man of letters of the new epoch, our author has already said not a little in his second volume; and of necessity; for Laura's lover was a force of the first magnitude in the revival of learning. But we have here an appreciation of him as a leader in Italian poetical literature which strikes us as being notably just in its appreciation and subtle in its discrimination. Mr. Symonds points out that while Dante remained a Florentine, Petrarch was the first Italian. Dante refused all honors because they were not offered to him by his commune. He was one of those impracticable men who insist both on being prophets and on being honored in their own country and among their own people. Petrarch, although also a Florentine, toook his laurel crown thankfully at Rome on the steps of the Capitol. He shows no political prejudices, no local preferences. He writes Italian which is of Tuscan origin but with no trace of dialect. From his verses and his habit of example may have been formed the long-established rule and test of good Italian—"lingua Tuscana in bocca Romana" (Tuscan words in a Roman mouth). In his treatment of love, Petrarch, as Mr. Symonds says, shows a tendency to generalization. This is true, and in this too the poet of the new epoch differed from his great—his greater—predecessor of old. But we must differ from our author in his opinion upon the value of this difference. It may be true that "the *canzoniere* strikes a note which vibrates more universally than the *Vita Nuova*"; but it is not, we think, for the reason assigned, that "the majority of men cannot but prefer the comprehensive to the intense expression of a personal emotion." On the contrary, the history of literature seems to show that what the human heart vibrates to responsively *is* the intense expression of a personal emotion. The defeat, or the insufficiency, of the *Vita Nuova* in this regard is that the love does not seem to most men a veritable hungry passion, but an exaggerated artificial sentiment in regard to an abstraction called Beatrice. How Dante could really feel a personal love is shown in the episode of Francesca di Rimini in the Inferno, and something altogether beyond Petrarch's power of expression, and, we believe, of experience. Francesca's "Questi, che mai da me non fu diviso," uttered in the midst of eternal torment, is worth all the *canzonieri* put together. Boil them all down and you would not get from them one such burning drop as that. Wherefore the story of Francesca, as Dante told it, which is not the true story, is known and read again and again with ever increasing emotion and delight, the world over; while the *canzoniere* is read only by students of Italian literature, often more as a duty than as a pleasure. Nevertheless it is true of Petrarch, as a literary artist, that he was "the first to open a region where art might be free, and to find for the heart's language utterance direct and limpid"—free and limpid, at least, if not quite direct. It is true also that he had no objective faculty, and failed to depict things as he saw them; in which he differed most widely and characteristically from Dante, who is the most vivid and incisive of all describers—surpassing in this respect even Homer. Mr. Symonds says well of Petrarch that "instead of scenes he delineated the moods suggested by them."

Petrarch's manhood coincided with the boyhood of the next great Italian writer, Boccaccio. He was the illegitimate son of a rustic who went to Florence and there obtained citizenship. His mother was a Frenchwoman with whom his father became acquainted during a business residence at Paris. He was therefore "irregular" in every way. He was not a genuine Florentine, nor even a true Italian. In these conditions of his life Mr. Symonds finds, with reason, the causes of his mental characteristics, and, measurably, of the quality of his work. Nevertheless he regards Boccaccio as the typical Italian *bourgeois*, the representative of the class who finally determined the renaissance. Those who do not understand—and there are many who do not understand—when they read Boccaccio's *Novelli* the high position to which he is assigned in literature, finding him gross, sensual, scoffing and without penetration beneath the surface of life—in all which judgments they are right—may profit by Mr. Symonds's critical summing up of his qualities: "He was the first to substitute a literature of the people for the literature of the learned classes and the aristocracy. He freed the natural instincts from ascetic interdictions and the mysticism of the transcendental school. He exposed the shams of chivalrous romance and the hypocrisies of monkery with ridicule more deadly than satire or invective. He brought realism in art and letters back to honor by delineating the world as he found it—sensual, base, comic, ludicrous, pathetic, tender, cruel—in all its crudities and contradictions. He replaced the abstractions of allegory by concrete fact. He vindicated the claims of appetite and sensuous enjoyment against ideal aspirations and the scruples of a faith-tormented conscience." This presents strongly and favorably but not more than justly, Boccaccio's actual achievement. But the bastard French-Italian Florentine *bourgeois* had no such purpose. He sought only to entertain his fellow-citizens in a way pleasant and profitable to himself. His writings express the spirit and tone of his time and of his own nature;—a love of beauty, a delight in natural sensuous enjoyment, a satirical vein of humor, an enjoyment of coarse jokes, of such tricks as faithless women play upon dull, confiding husbands. It was in the free daring way in which he did this, and particularly by his disregard of all the conventional and religious restraints which were then felt, but which people were ready to break away from and to laugh at, that he became one of the literary pioneers of free thought and free action. He was entirely without moral purpose, and even without moral tone and dignity; but he was a true literary artist; and he first developed a model narrative style in what was then called the vulgar tongue, in contradistinction to Latin, in which all professed literary men before his time had written, even upon coarse and familiar subjects. The number of broad, indecent anecdotes, more indecent even than any of his *novelli*, which are lightly concealed in "the obscurity of a learned language," is legion. We cannot give to Mr. Symonds's ample and discriminative discussion of Boccaccio the attention we should like to give, but must pass rapidly over the remainder—and that is the bulk—of his work, touching here and there only the most impressive passages. We only remark further, and with perfect accord, upon the opinion which he sets forth impressively, and repeats, that one of Boccaccio's chief traits and functions was he introduction of a popular tone—Mr. Symonds calls it bluntly a plebeian tone—into literature, setting thus a fashion which was followed by nearly all the writers of *novelli*. Another was the use of ironical narrative. Boccaccio and his followers delighted in telling a story which in itself was a good-humored satire of chivalry or of the priesthood or of court life. They must have been regarded by the high-society of their day merely as a set of very clever and amusing blackguards. And from a certain point of view, high-society—coarse and ruffian-like as it was itself beneath the surface—was not much in the wrong in passing such a judgment. The amazing fact to us of this day, however, is, that high-society, both in Church and State—female as well as male—enjoyed these gross and blasphemous *novelli* (which were not at all like, and did not pretend to be like, our novels or our tales and sketches of the present day); and even that churchmen who became bishops wrote some of the most outrageous specimens of this sort of literature. It is perhaps hardly less strange, hardly less in violation of consistency or of seeming possibility, that all this literary freedom and all the coarseness and licentiousness which was thus so freely portrayed and so keenly enjoyed, coexisted with an appreciation of moral duty, of family affection and of social decorum which are not surpassed, if they are equalled, by the tone and the fashions of our own day. Alberti's book upon the Family, upon which Mr. Symonds remarks in this part of his work, and which he has before criticised and appreciated, presents a picture of a Florentine family of condition which as to moral tone and good manners is in most respects admirable.

Boccaccio and his immediate followers do not belong strictly to the renaissance of the literature of which they were rather the ushers. Of that literature two of the most important men were Lorenzo di Medici and Poliziano, who here reappear upon Mr. Symonds's ample canvas,—a canvas rather panoramic in its design than truly pictorial and artistic. He gives much attention to Lorenzo as a poet, and finds his power to please his contemporaries, and to mould Italian literature, in his thorough sympathy with the Italian people; in his love for his vernacular tongue, although he was an elegant if not a profound scholar. "He uses language like a man who has habitually spoken the words which he commits to paper. His brain was vigorous and his critical faculty acute. He lived, moreover, in close sympathy with his age, never rising above it, but accurately representing its main tendencies. At the same time he was sufficiently a poet to delight a generation that had seen no great writer of verse since Boccaccio. Though his work was in no sense absolutely first-rate, he wrote nothing that a man of ability might not be pleased to own." We should agree with this judgment except in its use of the phrase "first-rate," which it seems to us should not be applied to Lorenzo di Medici, even as a standard of depreciatory comparison. He wrote nothing that was even absolutely second-rate. He is a very interesting man to the student of Italian literature and society; but the reader of poetry for its own sake may spend his time—as life is short—more to his profit and his pleasure than in reading Lorenzo's clever and dexterously wrought verses.

Nor is there any poetical substance of real value in Poliziano, to whom better than to almost any modern writer before him or after him may be applied that queer new word, "stylist," for which we would—not only in regard to Poliziano—substitute "style-monger." The elaboration of style for its own sake is poor business. He who has that to say which is of real importance and interest to the world may trust to his thought and his feeling to inform his style. Mr. Symonds himself sees this, and says plainly of Poliziano—the literary Magnus Apollo of the renaissance—"Yet it must be confessed that after all it is chiefly the style of Poliziano that deserves praise. Like so much else of renaissance work,—like the Farnesina frescoes in Rome, or Guilio Romano's luxuriant arabesques at Mantua, or the efflorescence of foliage and cupids in the bas-reliefs of palace portals at Venice,—there is but little solid thought or serious feeling underneath this decorative richness. Those who cannot find a pleasure in form for its own sake, independent of matter, will never be able to do Poliziano justice." And then he points out, with that true penetration and inflexible justice with which we must always credit him, that after Dante had sung the epic of the human soul, and Petrarch had finished a portrait of the life through love of an impassioned man, and Boccaccio had told a hundred tales delineating society in all its aspects, and the Muse of Italy had fallen into deep sleep, Poliziano "aroused her with the full, deep intonations of a golden instrument to tell—how Guiliame di Medici loved the fair Simonetta, and bore away the prize in a toy tournament. The poem which opened a new age for Italian literature had no nobler theme than a court pageant." And he was the leader and the model of the modern Italian school of poetry. The princes and the great ones of the earth had bought the charms of the new venal Muse of Italy. To flatter with false pedigrees, to deploy absurd mythologies, to tickle the ears of lustful lads of princely rank and debauchees in scarlet hats and stockings with coarse jests lightly veiled and fanciful panegyrics—this was the motive of the song of the Muse of the new-born daughter of old Rome.

Among the great names of Italian literature the next of world-wide fame is Ariosto. But before him there came a poet who,—speaking according to our own moderate acquaintance with his verse, and guided by what Mr. Symonds himself says—we should rate as the most genuine and truly inspired poet of the renaissance, Boiardo. Matteo Maria Boiardo was a nobleman, and was born about 1434. He lived until 1494, and was contemporary with Pulci, and Lorenzo di Medici and Poliziano. He was a scholar, a diplomatist, and an administrator of the government of two cities. In all his functions he showed ability; but he was celebrated for his clemency, and for his indifference to legal formalities. An enemy wrote of him: "He was a man of excessive kindness, more fit for writing poems than for punishing crimes." He wrote many poems, but his principal work is the "Orlando Innamorati," which, notwithstanding its great poetical merit, has, because of the comparative rudeness of its style, been almost forgotten by posterity. And yet we believe that Mr. Symonds is moderate in this appreciation of Boiardo's little-known *chef d'œuvre*: "His poem, chivalrous, free, joyous, with not one stain of Ariosto's servility or of Tasso's melancholy, corresponded to a brief and passing moment of the national art. In the pure and vivid beauty which distinguishes it, the sunset of chivalry and the sunrise of modern culture blend their colors, as in some far northern twilight of midsummer night. Jocousness pervades its cantos [and is elemental in its inspiration—the joy of open nature, of sensual though steadfast love, of strong limbs and eventful living of restless activity, of childlike security. . . . The genius of Boiardo might be compared to some high-born lad, bred in the country; pure-hearted, muscular, fair to look upon. . . . It was probably the discord between Boiardo's spirit and the prevailing temper of the sixteenth century, far more than the roughness of his verse or the provinciality of his language, that caused him to be so strangely and completely forgotten." Mr. Symonds presents us with some half a dozen passages of Boiardo—one of nine stanzas—translated with such spirit and in such keeping with the theme and the period of his poem, that we cannot but wish that he might be led to give us the whole poem in an English version. Rose's sketch of it is unsatisfactory and even tantalizing; and such a reproduction as Mr. Symonds has shown that he could give would be heartily welcomed and would bring the writer hardly less reputation than an original poem of the same importance.

Of Ariosto our author does not leave us with a very pleasant memory. He holds him up, indeed, as the supreme master of the modern Italian tongue, as unrivalled in style, as the greatest artist of the sixteenth century; he even says that "the fairy-like fantastic structure of the 'Furioso' has a groundwork of philosophical solidity. Externally a child's story-book, it is internally a mine of deep world-wisdom, the product of a sane and vigorous intellect"; but he tells us plainly and truly that this great literary artist was without either moral depth or manly earnestness, an easy-going, self-seeking, witty, worldly-wise voluptuary, who expressed his nature in his verses. His forte was description; he had no real dramatic faculty; indeed, we are somewhat surprised at Mr. Symonds saying that many of the episodes in the "Furioso" are eminently dramatic; and unless he here uses "dramatic" in the sense of vivid, highly interesting, we should differ from him wholly; as indeed he would differ from himself, for he says of Ariosto: "He rarely allows a situation to be briefly indicated or a sentiment to be divined. The emotions of his character are analyzed at length, and their utterances, even at the fever heat or passion, are expanded with a dazzling wealth of illustration. . . . The persons do not act before us or express themselves by direct speech." This is not at all the dramatic method, it is descriptive, analytic; and we should reckon Ariosto's synthetic creative power as confined to his picture-painting, in which he is without a rival, if we accept pictures like the images in a Claude glass as perfection. There is a precise daintiness of touch and a pellucid clearness of medium in his picture-painting that fascinates for the moment; but it is not grand art, although it is lifelike and exquisitely finished. He had a fine sense of beauty, a mind untrammelled by prejudice, grace and vividness of style, urbanity and delicacy; but reckoning Homer, Dante and Shakespeare as first-rate poets, Milton and Goethe as second-rate, Ariosto stands in the third or even in the fourth rank. He is not Tennyson's equal.

We have already mentioned the *novellieri*, and we must pass over without remark the chapter on the barren subject of the drama in Italy; that upon the pretty but feeble and emasculated pastoral poetry, which is at its best and highest in the well-known "Aminta" and "Pastor Fido"; and even that upon the more amusing and characteristic theme of burlesques, poetry and satire. But we earnestly commend to all students of literature, all nascent critics, and chiefly all intending poets and novelists and essayists, an attentive perusal of the chapter on "The Purists." In both his literary history and his literary criticism Mr. Symonds is sound and instructive on this point. What he says of Italian purism is no less true of any other. *Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur.* Purism is a mortal literary disease.

The man who saw this most clearly, who felt it, and who put his faith and his feeling into his action—Pietro Aretino,—came too late, and was too morally incompetent to save Italian literature from its swift decadence. By most modern readers Aretino is thought of as a scurrilous, sharp-tongued blackguard, who lived by levying blackmail upon the fears and the vanity of great people. So he was; but he was much more. It is difficult for us at this day to comprehend, or even to apprehend, the personality of such a man as Aretino; still more to understand how such a life as his was possible. He was born in the last decade of the fifteenth century, the bastard of a nobleman by a woman of the town. He was brought up by his mother, who was beautiful enough to be employed as a model by artists; and his early education was such as he received by intercourse with them and with the visitors to such a house as his mother kept. He seems to have begun life at Rome as a lackey, and to have gradually risen by flattery and by making himself generally and unscrupulously useful to his superiors. He managed to make himself useful to the Medici, and was in the retinue of the two Popes, Leo X. and Clement VII. He began to write satirical and witty poems. He was a great writer of letters, and letters were much more important and formidable things in his day than they are in ours. A well-written letter was then passed from hand to hand, and had an influence in society. By social arts, by craft unrestrained by the sense of honor or of self-respect, by unbounded pretence and assumption, he crept up, until he acquired to a certain degree an Italian reputation. Great people began to fear his wit and to propitiate him by favor and by presents. And when this once began there seems to have been no bounds to it. Gifts and pensions (virtually blackmail) poured in upon him, until the base-born lackey was able to live like a gentleman, to ruffle it with the boldest if not with the best, and to have hangers-on of his own. He was now in the habit of familiar intercourse with men of the first rank, princes, kings, cardinals, and with men of letters and artists of the highest reputation; and all this when he was hardly thirty years of age. In 1527 he retired to Venice, cut himself free from patronage, and resolved to live by his pen. There he remained for thirty years, until his death in 1557, levying blackmail on kings, noblemen and churchmen, from whom he extorted a princely income, on which he lived in princely style, corresponding with the most illustrious men of all nations, and treating the society which received and feared him with a caprice and insolence which nowadays would not be tolerated for a week in a prince of royal blood. The secret of Ariosto's success was a combination of knowledge of the world in which he lived, of satirical wit, and of absolute unscrupulousness. He knew the society in which he was; and knew it from within and from below. He had as a lackey served the lowest purposes of the greatest men of his day. He conceived the scheme of making all such men fear his tongue and his pen; he "tried it on," and he succeeded. He fawned and flattered; he railed and stung; and great men bought his flattery and his silence. He was as gross in life as Domitian, as foul in mouth as Thersites; and he managed to shock and outrage even the outward sense of decency of his day; but he was ingenious enough to win his way back again to his old position. His published letters fill six bulky volumes; and those addressed to him four more; and his correspondents ranged downward from the Doge of Venice, the King of France, and Titian and Michael Angelo, and even Vittoria Colonna. His house was so thronged by those who sought his favor that he was obliged at times to seek retirement. The Sultan Solyman, the pirate Barbarossa, the Pope and the Emperor were among his tributaries. The Empress gave him a golden collar worth four hundred crowns; the Infante of Spain and Francis I. made him still more valuable and distinguished presents. Medals were struck in his honor—in honor of this foul-mouthed, lying son of a common harlot; on one of these he is styled—by his own contrivance of course—"Divus P. Aretinus Flagellum Principium" —the divine Pietro Arentino the scourge of princes; on another he is seated upon a throne, with noble clients laying precious vases at his feet. This is what Aretino was as a man; his services to literature were his defiance of purists and pedants and grammarians and rhetoricians. He openly avowed his ignorance of the learned languages; he even declared that he hardly understood the structure of his mother-tongue. Vagabond as he was, he made himself the efficient apostle of nature. He preached simplicity and directness, and above all, self-hood. "It is far better," he said, "to drink out of one's own wooden cup than another's golden goblet." He did not fear to meet in controversy or to attack the most learned men of his time; and such was his natural vigor and spirit, such his dexterity in the use of language, that he was always able to hold his own. For pedants, people who set themselves up on what they knew about the writings of others and rested upon that, he felt and expressed the most pitiless scorn and contempt. He wrote poems and comedies and dialogues which are all coarse and commonplace in tone, but which are distinguished by veracity, acumen, prolific vigor, animal spirits and outspokenness. Among a nation of indecent men and an army of indecent writers, he was eminent for indecency.

¶ We must curtly close our presentation and our appreciation of Mr. Symonds's valuable and instructive work, passing over in silence much that we had marked for hearty approval, and a little upon which we might have dispensed some unwilling censure. Mr. Symonds has mastered his subject; he has treated it comprehensively, although with notable fulness of detail; his criticisms are distinguished by calmness and penetration, and by a constant sympathy with what is manly and sweet and generous. His ideal is a high one; and therefore, as he is eminently conscientious, he is obliged to temper his admiration constantly with protest and with warning. He sees the lack of seriousness and earnestness, of depth of feeling and elevation of thought, in all Italian literature of the renaissance period; and he says so plainly. No complaint can be made that he magnifies small things or conceals foul ones. He presents the truth as it is. His work is the worthy product of distinguished talent and many years of study, and while it must be valued highly as a book of authority and of reference upon its subject, it will also be read with lively pleasure as a collection of critical and historical essays.

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