MR. FROUDE'S NEW BOOK.

A STUDY OF ERASMUS AND HIS RELATIONS TO LEARNING AND RELIGION.

LIFE AND LETTERS OF ERASMUS. Lectures delivered at Oxford, 1886-'94. By J. A. Froude, Regius Professor of Modern History. Pp. 433. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Mr. Froude's partiality for the memory of Henry VIII would be enough to make him choose Erasmus for the subject of a book, for the great Neutral of Reformation times was very well disposed to the King. He had a good opportunity at various times of studying the character of Henry as a young prince and as a King before religious controversy and frequent marital quarrels had given him the reputation for cruelty which he still bears in history. Erasmus held him to be not only well affected toward men of learning, but also to be that rare creature among princes, himself a learned man. On the vexed question, Who wrote Henry's book in reply to Luther, the testimony of Erasmus was as positive as that of any man could be who had not seen the manuscript. Shortly after the book appeared, Erasmus wrote a letter to George, Duke of Saxony, in which he praised it and declared that it was undoubtedly the King's own composition. When the divorce of Henry from Catherine set all Europe by the ears and the Lutheran controversialists were busy picking the King's reputation to pieces, Erasmus wrote to one of them to reiterate his belief in the genuineness of the work to which Henry had put his name. He could testify that Henry studied hard in his youth, that he came of intelligent parentage, that he was an apt talker and that he had studied the schoolmen, Aquinas, Scotus and the rest. Erasmus added that he had himself been suspicious about the book until one day he was shown a number of the King's letters corrected and altered in the royal handwriting. These convinced him that Henry was a capable scholar. Henry's bearing as a boy of nine years had struck him as at once regal and gentle. At fifteen the young prince is found answering a letter from Erasmus, and he was no sooner seated upon the throne than he invited his friend to a place in his Court. "Our acquaintance," he wrote, "began when I was a boy. The regard which I then learnt to feel for you has been increased by the honorable mention which you have made of me in your writings, and by the use to which you have applied your talents in the advancement of Christian truth." Erasmus was too witty and too skeptical to be a mere flatterer; but, of course, his words written to a King in an age when royalty had reached the very summit of grandeur in Europe may be subject to some diminution. Apparently he meant it all when he said that no prince was better prepared for war and none was more eager to avoid it than Henry, that he had cleared his country of robbers, had improved the laws, encouraged learning, set an example to his subjects of a pure and noble manhood, and had indeed brought back the poet's golden age to England. Future ages should tell how England throve, how virtue flourished in the reign of Henry VIII, how the nation was born again, how piety revived, how learning grew to a height which Italy might envy, and how the prince who reigned over it was a rule and a pattern for all time to come. The intelligence of the country would preserve the memory of his virtues, and scholars would set forth the story of a King who once reigned there and in his own person revived the virtues of the ancient heroes. "I seriously believe," adds Mr. Froude, "that this will be the final verdict of English History on Henry VIII."

But Mr. Froude also admires Erasmus for his own sake. Not that he ignores the dubious position which Erasmus occupied after Luther began to stir Germany to revolt against Rome. He calls the author of the "Adages" and the "Colloquies" and of "Encomium Moriae" a Laodicean, that is a lukewarm person, and compares him to Voltaire not only for the sharpness of his wit, but for the inaccuracy of his learning. He draws a parallel also between Erasmus and Lucian, the Greek scoffer. The suggestion comes from Erasmus himself. He found many features of life in the fifteenth century, when Christianity seemed to be nearly worn out, that were like those which Lucian saw in the second century, when the forces of antiquity were spent and nothing was left but lies and luxury and degradation. Mr. Froude calls attention to one of the dialogues of Lucian which attracted Erasmus's attention more than any other, though he made a Latin translation of nearly all of them. It told the story of a young man who was tempted by the promise of an easy life to become the companion of a nobleman, to write his letters, correct his verses, amuse his guests and write poems on demand. Lucian traced this unfortunate youth through the various stages of his servile career till he was supplanted by a new favorite and flung aside like a worn-out dress, and was forced for lack of any honest employment to become the attendant to the lapdog of the mistress of the palace. Now the fifteenth century was as much an age of patrons as was Lucian's own time. Erasmus, brilliant as he was, depended on the favor and presents of the great for his livelihood. Though his books were exceedingly popular and were put through many editions, the condition of the publishing business was such that comparatively little profit accrued to the printer and still less to the author. At the beginning of his life as a man of letters, he seems to have imagined that he could improve on the methods of Lucian's hero, who may have been Lucian himself for all that is known to the contrary. But Lucian's temper was too brittle and his tongue too sharp to let him reach the lapdog stage, as he described it; and the same could be said of Erasmus. One may see in Gil Blas what the fate of such a literary underling was like in the days before men of letters were recognized as having a profession of their own. In the palace of the Bishop of Cambray, or in the Castle of Tournehem under the protection of the lady whom he called his princess, Erasmus might have cut the very figure described by Le Sage, and might have ended, if not in the nursery of the lapdog, at least in the capacity of a tutor or a private chaplain. Perhaps Lucian saved him, as Mr. Froude suggests; perhaps his own fondness for liberty released him from servitude to those who befriended him. In the end they had to aid him because no man in Europe was useful in so many ways as he. He might have been greater, if he had been willing to be less—major futurus, si minor esse voluisset—was the malicious criticism of Scaliger; but at any rate his confidence in himself was such as to keep him out of the list of the nameless. He seems to have anticipated his future greatness even in boyhood. When he was eleven years old, there visited the school at Deventer, where he had been placed, a great man of the times, who is doubtless now forgotten except by the cyclopaedists, either Rudolph, Agricola or Zinthius, who patted him on the head with the words, "This little fellow will come to something by and by." By this time the boy had Horace and Terence by heart, and was devouring every book he could lay his hands on, writing verses of his own, and leading his comrades into disputation upon points of language or literature in the university style of the day. Thus he learned how to educate himself, though the schoolmaster was, in his opinion, an illiterate tyrant.

This was good training for one who was destined to be a literary wanderer, and who seemed to be born, as some one has said, with the mission of driving ignorance out of the world. What happened later, though it had an adverse look on the face of it, tended to the same purpose in the end. Mr. Froude discredits the story of Erasmus's illegitimate birth—ex furtivo concubitu benitus is the not very handsome remark of the Dominican Natalis Alexander—and the fact that the boy and his brother were heirs to an estate worthy of being cared for and squandered by three trustees is a good argument against the tradition, which only came to light when its victim was famous. Possibly it grew out of the name Erasmus, which was adopted along with its Latin equivalent, Desiderius, as a translation of the Dutch name Gerrard. As long as the money lasted Erasmus and his brother were kept at school, but when the guardians had wasted it all it was thought most convenient to put both into a monastery. Peter, the elder, who, as Erasmus said contemptuously, was well fitted to be a monk, yielded first. Erasmus held out long, and profited by his delay, since he was allowed, while he took time to consider, the use of a fine classical library in the house of the Augustinians, with whom he finally took his vows. But after he had become a member of the order his privilege of reading was withdrawn, that he might learn the virtue of obedience. But the prior saw that the youth was unfit for the life he had adopted and recommended him to the Bishop of Cambray. The latter easily obtained a dispensation from the Pope, and the young monk began life as his secretary, and subsequently, under his patronage, studied and taught in Paris. Thus originated Erasmus's quarrel with monkery, the only real grievance that he had with the Church. It gave a unity and direction to his life which otherwise might have been merely brilliant and frivolous. There were stories of escapades in Paris. Erasmus alludes to them himself. He was too busy with his books, with his literary ambitions, and with his resentments toward those who had used him ill and had come near wrecking his life at the outset, to be vicious. But the allusions to these early years in Paris continually recur to mind as one reads the valetudinarian complaints with which the letters translated by Mr. Froude abound. His lack of physical confidence in himself—throughout his life he was always anticipating death as near at hand—is in strange contrast with his mental courage. He could speak his mind and he knew how to speak it without giving his enemies, the monks, a legal hold upon him; but he had none of that personal daring which made Luther willing to brave the face of Huss. "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it," cried the monks. "Not at all," was his reply; "the egg I laid would have grown a hen, but Luther has hatched a gamecock." With his dread of war and physical conflict, Erasmus would have awaited the slow processes of reform within the Church itself. He was convinced that the idea which he had of a return to the faith and usages of the Fathers was a feasible one. But he failed to consider that human nature in general, and especially those elements of human nature which had suffered most from the abuses of which he himself compained, was not as calm and as devoid of passion as his own mind. The world ran away from him just as it had run away from Reuchlin, and as it was to run away from Luther. They had all helped to set in motion forces which they could not control. This was illustrated in dumb show on one occasion in the presence of the Emperor Charles V. One of the players in a doctor's robe brought in a bundle of sticks, some crooked and some straight, laid them on the hearth and returned to his place. On his back was written "Reuchlin." The next player tried to lay the sticks side by side, but the crooked ones would not lie as they were placed, and he retired in disgust. He was called "Erasmus." Then an Augustinian monk rushed in, threw the crooked sticks into the fire and fanned the blaze. He was labelled "Luther." An emperor tried in vain to put out the fire with his sword, and finally a player in pontifical robes, seeing two cans in the room, one filled with water, the other with oil, snatched up the latter as if by mistake, poured oil over the flames and raised such a blaze that he fled in terror. He was intended for Leo X.

Observe that it was Erasmus who thought that the straight sticks and the crooked sticks might be made to lie together without disturbance. If he did not see the near future as well as some others, he at least caught a glimpse of times when the dispute would be ended in weariness if not in harmony. "He was for toleration and concession, the Church rules of conformity to be relaxed, the demands of the laity to be satisfied as far as might be without a schism, the clergy to be allowed to marry, the Church land question to be settled by a compromise; while as to doctrine, the ancient Articles of Faith, on which all parties were agreed, were a sufficient basis for communion. On the new questions over which the world was quarrelling—the Real Presence, the priesthood, justification, predestination, free will, grace, merits and the rest of it, men might be allowed to think as they pleased without ceasing to be Christians or splitting into separate communities." It is this attitude of Erasmus toward the more virulent disputes of his day which attracts the admiration of Mr. Froude. But, adds he, "it required two centuries of fighting, and another century of suspicion, before mankind generally could be brought to accept what seems now so obvious a truth." Erasmus shrank from dogmatic statements. Of two dogmatists he was sure, not that one was right, but that both were wrong. He was hated by the extreme partisans on both sides. The Protestants thought him a coward, the Catholics thought him a heretic, and yet even to his last hour he was looked to (as no man of letters has ever been looked to before or since) to keep the peace of Europe. He reminded himself often, no doubt, of a story which he himself told about a certain Monk John, of rustic breeding, who attempted to part two prize-fighters and was killed for his pains. At all events, neither the Diet of Worms nor that of Augsburg saw his face. He was not the stuff of which martyrs are made, and there was no call upon him to be burned in a dispute where he saw right and wrong on both sides. But that he could put his doubts in a way to make men understand them is shown by the simple enumeration of the points upon which his commentary on the New Testament was censured by the Sorbonne. They were the celibacy of the clergy, the vows of monks, fasts and the interdictions on the eating of meat, observance of feasts, evangelical councils, the translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar tongues, the jurisdiction of secular courts, canonical hours, divorce and the like—all burning questions in those times. But admonition was the limit of authority in his case, for Erasmus's New Testament in Greek, with Latin translation, and notes unlike any that had ever before been written on the Scriptures, was dedicated to Leo X and was greeted by him with a letter of approval, in which he wrote: "Your lucubrations on the New Testament lately published have pleased us much, not because they were dedicated to us so much as because they were not commonplace, but were marked by novelty and learning." Leo's approval, doubtless, as Mr. Froude indicates, saved Erasmus from a worse punishment than the timid censure of a theological faculty. For the monks never quite gave up the hope of seizing him, while he lived. In all his writings, whether merely satirical or solemnly erudite, they had figured to their discredit, and these writings were so universally circulated that few men in the world who could read Latin failed to find in them instruction and amusement. The four cardinals and five archbishops who undertook to advise Paul III as to the abuses that had crept into the Church found among other things that the "Colloquies" were read by boys in school as a textbook, and declared that the practice must be forbidden, because the book contained many things likely to turn uncultured minds to impiety. This shows how thoroughly the satires of Erasmus had captivated the educated world.

As Erasmus looked at the matter, the main thing necessary in the reform of the Church was to purify the monkish orders. But even here he was opposed to extreme measures. He would not have abolished monasticism, but apparently he would have confined its vows to those who were fit for nothing else. To the monks he attributed all that mass of tradition and superstition under which, as he conceived, the Christianity of the Fathers lay buried. It is possible that his primary motive in editing the works of Jerome arose from the castigation which that author, himself a monk, had given to the vices of monasticism. When he was denounced on one side for not writing against Luther, and on the other for not writing in his behalf, and was, as he said, called a heretic by both parties, he turned for consolation to his old friend Lucian, in whom he still found the very picture of his own times. Mr. Froude, who glories in the English Act of Dissolution, and declares that at no time before that act was monasticism in England without the signs of inner corruption and degradation, is the last man to diminish the effect of Erasmus's methods in applying Lucian to the fifteenth century. "The enormous fabric of false legends and forged miracles," says he, "with which the monks had cajoled or frightened their flocks, had brought back to him the curious dialogue called 'Philopsendes,' in which Lucian had moralized over the fondness of mankind for lies—lies related, as Lucian says, so circumstantially and by such grave authorities, with evidence of eyewitnesses, place and time all accurately given, that the strongest mind could hardly resist conviction, unless fortified with the certainty that such things could not be." Then he translates one of the Erasmian epistles, in which the remark is made that it is no wonder if fools can be found to listen to the legends of the saints or to stories about hell, such as frighten cowards or old women. "There is not a martyr," added Erasmus, "there is not a virgin, whose biographies are not disfigured by these monstrous absurdities. One might fancy they were invented by knaves and unbelievers to destroy the credibility of Christianity itself." On the other hand, "the friends of liberty, who call themselves Lutherans, are possessed by some spirit of what kind I know not. Conscience has run wild; abandoned profligates quote Luther's books as an excuse for licentiousness, while the quiet and good are between the shrine and the stone." It was indeed no time of comfort for men of rational or sceptical temper, nor did the condition of things improve during the rest of Erasmus's life. He hated war and he saw little else. He hoped to mend matters, and he had made them worse. The world and the Church seemed to be going to wreck together. But if he were alive to-day he might see that there was nothing to regret in his own work, and that even the violence which he deprecated was an experience through which humanity had to pass. "The period was one," concludes Mr. Froude, "of which the story is still disfigured by passion and prejudice. I believe that you will best see what it really was if you look at it through the eyes of Erasmus."

A WOMAN'S REMINISCENCES

THE STORY OF FRANCES POWER COBBE.

LIFE OF FRANCES POWER COBBE. By Herself. In two volumes. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

Miss Cobbe, who is now a winning and witty old lady of more than seventy years, has given us in these volumes some of the most delightful reminiscences of our time. Few women of this century have had wider experiences of life and affairs or a greater number of acquaintances among interesting people; and but few could have profited so richly thereby as has this clever and large-hearted woman. To a strength of character and intellectual abilities of a sort generally called masculine have been united in her case a feminine depth of sympathy and fiery resentment of oppression and injustice. Her noble labors in reformatories, Ragged Schools and workhouses will not soon be forgotten in England, for she has done much to bring about many civilizing changes in law and custom; and even those who do not sympathize in her efforts to stop the cruelties of vivisection must respect the noble spirit in which she has conducted her crusades. Several chapters in these volumes are necessarily devoted to her humanitarian work, and it must be said in their favor that they are never dull, as such records are apt to be. The author's sense of humor, her quick eye for all that is quaint, grotesque and moving in human nature serve to make her simplest recollections vivid and entertaining.

Miss Cobbe congratulates herself upon being well born, in the truest sense, of parents good and wise, honorable and honored, sound in body and mind. In a more conventional sense, too, she was well born, for she was the daughter of two ancient families allied to many noble houses of Great Britain and Ireland. Miss Cobbe's great-grandmother was that Lady Betty Cobbe who once received from one of Queen Charlotte's ladies-in-waiting a letter begging her to give the Queen a true version of a certain family story. Lady Betty, as spirited a dame as her great-granddaughter, in reply, "presented her compliments, but was sure the Queen of England would not pry into the private affairs of her subjects, and had no intention of gratifying the impertinent curiosity of a lady-in-waiting." It may be added that the family matter about which the Queen was curious, concerned Lady Betty's grandmother, Lady Beresford, and was that famous story told by Walter Scott and others of the lady who wore on one wrist a sable ribbon to hide the mark of a ghost's grasp. Practical Miss Cobbe, after telling the tale of the appearance of Lord Tyrone's ghost to his cousin, Lady Beresford, and of the marks left by his fingers, concludes that Lady Beresford accidentally gave her wrist a severe blow against her bedstead while she was asleep, and that she saw the apparition in a dream. It is a reasonable version, though sadly unpicturesque.

Most of Miss Cobbe's early years were spent at her father's beautiful old Irish home, Newbridge, which was built in the last century by Archbishop Cobbe. Her sketches of life in the Ireland of the thirties and forties are sparkling with anecdote and with curious comparisons of these times and the old times. She points out the definite change in character since the early years of the century, the greater simplicity and higher animal spirits of those years having yielded to a more analytic and pessimistic frame of mind. As regards that former simplicity, she says that "ordinary ladies and gentlemen, even clever and well-educated ones, would, I think, if they could revive now, seem to us rather like our boys and girls than our grandparents. Thousands of allusions, ideas, shades of sentiment and reflection which have become commonplaces to us were novel and strange to them." Those were the days when the education of girls was so farcical in its shallowness that it is not to be wondered at that among women at least there was a simplicity of mind amounting to feebleness. To be an "Ornament of Society" was the sole aim which the schoolmistress of the period held up to her pupil. "Everything," says Miss Cobbe, "was taught us in the inverse ratio of its true importance. At the bottom of the scale were Morals and Religion and at the top were Music and Dancing; miserably poor music, too, of the Italian school then in vogue, and generally performed in a showy and tasteless manner on harp or piano. I can recall an amusing instance in which the order of precedence above described was naively betrayed by one of our schoolmistresses when she was admonishing one of the girls who had been detected in a lie. 'Don't you know, you naughty girl,' said Miss R., impressively, before the whole school, 'don't you know we had almost rather find you have a P' (the mark of Pretty Well) 'in your music than tell such falsehoods?'" And the cost of this kind of education, strange to say, was enormous.

Soon after the clever young daughter of Thomas Cobbe left school, an overwhelming sense of her ignorance came upon her, and she promptly proceeded to make up for lost time in ardent and remarkably systematic study. This she continued for many years, combining with it all the cares of the mistress of a household; for her mother was an invalid and the management of the paternal establishment was on the young lady's shoulders. Of course the friends of the family were moved to disapproval by the outrageous spectacle of a woman actually indulging in serious study; and apropos of this disapproval Miss Cobbe tells this story:

A certain dignified old lady, the Hon. Mrs. L., had paid a visit to Newbridge with her daughters, and in return she invited one of my brothers and myself to spend some days at her "show" place in County Wicklow. While there I talked with the enthusiasm of my age to her very charming young daughters of the pleasures of study, urging them strenuously to learn Greek and mathematics. Mrs. L., overhearing me, intervened in the conversation, and said, somewhat tartly, "I do not at all agree with you, Miss Cobbe! I think the duty of a lady is to attend to her house, and to her husband and children. I beg you will not incite my girls to take up your studies."

Of course I bowed to the decree, and soon after began admiring some of the china about the room. "There is," said Mrs. L., "some very fine old china belonging to this house. There is one dessert-service which is said to have cost £800 forty or fifty years ago. Would you like to see it?"

Having gratefully accepted the invitation, I followed my hostess to the basement of the house, and then, for the first time in my life, I recognized that condition of disorder and slattenliness which I had heard described as characteristic of Irish houses. At last we reached an underground china-closet, and after some delay and reluctance on the part of the servant, a key was found and the door opened. There, on the shelves and the floor, lay piled, higgledy-piggledy, dishes and plates of exquisite china mixed up with the commonest earthenware jugs, basins, cups and willow-pattern kitchen dishes; and the great dessert-service among the rest—with the dessert of the previous summer rotting on the plates! Yes! there was no mistake. Some of the superb plates handed to me by the servant for examination by the light of the window had on them peach and plum stones and grape-stalks, obviously left as they had been taken from the table in the dining-room many months before! Poor Mrs. L. muttered some expressions of dismay and reproach to her servants, which, of course, I did not seem to hear, but I had not the strength of mind to resist saying: "Indeed, this is a splendid service; 'style de l'Empire,' I should call it. We have nothing like it, but when next you do us the pleasure to come to Newbridge I shall like to show you our Indian and Worcester services. Do you know, I always take up all the plates and dishes myself, when they have been washed the day after a party, and put them on their proper shelves with my own hands—though I do know a little Greek and geometry, Mrs. L."

The most serious phase of the author's young womanhood was the religious doubt which early assailed her and which led, after her mother's death, to her temporary banishment from her pious father's house and to much mental suffering. The history of this experience differs little from that recorded by other generous and aspiring souls. Her struggles ended in the reading of what was to her an epoch-making book—Theodore Parker's "Discourse of Religion." Recovering her faith in God and in the life immortal, she undertook to turn to the good of humankind all that was best in her of sympathy, aspiration and executive power. Her first book, the "Essay on the Theory of Intuitive Morals," was written between her thirtieth and thirty-third year. It was widely read, and was reprinted in this country, and was generally supposed by the critics to be the work of a man. It was the first of several thoughtful and straightforward books from her pen. For the details of this work and of her larger work for the "suffering creatures of God," both man and beast, we must refer the reader to her own deeply interesting pages.

We find many glimpses of famous or amusing people in these volumes. This not very pleasant one of Byron comes from an autograph letter by Mrs. Hemans in the author's possession: "Your affection for Lord Byron will not be increased by the description I am going to transcribe for you of his appearance and manners abroad. My sister, who is now at Venice, has sent me the following sketch of the 'Giaour': . . . We went to a conversazione at Mlle. Benzoni's, where we saw Lord Byron; and now my curiosity is gratified. I have no wish ever to see him again. A more wretched, depraved-looking countenance it is impossible to imagine! His hair streaming almost down to his shoulders and his whole appearance slovenly and even dirty. Still there is a something which impels you to look at his face, although it inspires you with aversion, a something entirely different from any expression on any countenance I ever beheld before!" Mr. Finlay, who wrote the history of "Greece Under Foreign Domination" and who fought beside Byron in the Greek War of Independence, described the poet to Miss Cobbe as a most singular combination of romance and astuteness. Divers Greeks who happened to have selfish financial and political schemes and who imagined that the enthusiastic Byron must be rather soft-headed and easily humbugged, were surprised to find that it was impossible to get the better of him in any negotiation. In fact Mr. Finlay considered the poet rather close-fisted in money matters, and this opinion was afterward confirmed by Landor who said to Miss Cobbe that luxuriously as Byron chose to live in Italy he was by no means ready to pay freely for his luxury. During our author's visit in Italy she saw a good deal of another great English poet, Robert Browning, she records, was always full of impetuous spirits, always full of interest in everything great or simple, arousing laughter wherever he went and chatting lightly and playfully on frivolous themes. "At that time," says Miss Cobbe, "I do not think that anyone, certainly no one of the society which surrounded him, thought of Mr. Browning as a great poet or as an equal one to his wife, whose 'Aurora Leigh' was then a new book. The utter unselfishness and generosity wherewith he gloried in his wife's fame—bringing us up constantly good reviews of her poems and eagerly recounting how many editions had been called for—perhaps helped to blind us—stupid that we were!—to his own claims."

This same unassuming modesty, the author declares, characterized another English writer, John Stuart Mill. "Talking one day," she says, "about the difficulty of doing mental work when disturbed by street music and of poor Mr. Babbage's frenzy on the subject, Mr. Mill said it did not much interfere with him. I told him how intensely Mr. Spencer objected to disturbance. 'Ah yes; of course! Writing Spencer's works one must want quiet!' As if nothing of the kind were needed for such trivial books as his own 'System of Logic' or 'Political Economy'! He really was quite unconscious of the irony of his remark. I have been told that he would allow his cat to interfere sadly with his literary occupation when she preferred to lie on his table or sometimes on his neck." Another wise man who showed this trait of gentleness to animals was Charles Kingsley. "My friend's little fox-terrier, travelling one day with her mistress in the Underground, spied Kingsley entering the carriage, and incontinently leaving her usual safe retreat under the seat made straight to him, and without invitation leaped on his knee and began gently kissing his face! The dog never did the same or anything like it to any one else in her life before or afterward. Of course my friend apologized to Mr. Kingsley, but he only said in his deep voice, 'Dogs always do that to me'—and coaxed the little beast kindly till they left the train." One of the most amusing passages in these books deals with that odd genius, George Borrow, whose rough eccentricities were phenomenal. He had a queer mixture of knowledge and ignorance. Since Scott, he declared, he had read no modern writer; and he thought Scott greater than Homer. As for women he said it was right they should be ignorant and that no man could endure a clever wife.

The concluding chapter of these reminiscences relates an incident of the author's later life which reads more like romance than reality. Thomas Cobbe died while his daughter was still a young woman; and in accordance with old-fashioned ideas he left most of his large property to his eldest son, Frances inheriting an income so narrow that it would have been sufficient only if she had lived with her brother and sister-in-law. Her literary labors added considerably to this income, and enabled her to travel a little and to dwell comfortably in London with her friend and chosen companion, Miss Lloyd. But when age began to creep on the active woman, and it was less easy to work and the strain of London grew unendurable, the income narrowed again, and there was left only the resource of the simplest possible life in a country cottage. Miss Lloyd had inherited a beautiful old family estate in Wales, but the two friends had not enough money between them to keep it up. An agreement with an eager tenant was about to be signed, and the two ladies were spending a few last mournful days in the quaint and ancient house, when Miss Cobbe came down the staircase one morning—to find a fortune waiting for her in the hall, within the folds of a lawyer's letter. A venerable widow, a shy and quiet soul who had been drawn to her by sympathy in her humanitarian work, and of whose wealth she had had no inkling, had died and left to the tired worker what meant unspeakable comfort and peace. The prospective tenant was deprived of his bargain; and the old house, it is to be hoped, will long shelter the kind and generous woman who has so frankly told her story in these pleasant volumes.

AMINTA'S ROMANCE.

MR. MEREDITH'S TALE OF CONJUGAL DISSATISFACTION.

LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA. By George Meredith. 12mo., pp. 412. (Charles Scribner's Sons.)

There are books that come into the world all labelled, sub-titled and prefaced, so as to make their purport and their mission unmistakable. This is "a novel," that "a social study," the other "a story of real life." Sometimes such addenda to the names are useful; sometimes they are misleading. Most often they are quite superfluous, being given to books whose character is obvious; as if one should write "this is a mountain" across the brow of Mont Blanc. But here comes a volume not thus heralded, with nothing but its simple name to introduce it, and yet of all recent books one of the most puzzling and most bewildering to class. A novel, doubtless, for so all works of fiction claim to be. And indeed it quickly shows that it has the one essential element without which all novel-writing is in vain—a story worth the telling. There may be not much plot, or none at all, as Wilkie Collins understood the term. If you do not surely see the end from the beginning, that is not because the least attempt is made to blind or to mislead you. You merely wait for things to be developed in their natural course, just as they are in actual life. But from first to last there is no lack of interest. The story, the simple narration of occurrences, lays hold upon you with the opening page, and never loosens it until the last is finished; nor even then. Whatever one may think of its philosophy, as simple story-telling its worth is beyond dispute.

As for Mr. Meredith's character drawing, it is hardly necessary to say that it is the work of a master, unsurpassed in this phase of the novelist's art. These are real people, and are made to reveal themselves in action as men and women do in actual life. Lady Charlotte is one of the most vivid and original characters on the author's list, and Ormont, the victorious soldier cruelly warped by what he conceives to be his country's ingratitude, is not far behind. The reader's sympathy will be most fixed upon Aminta, or "Browny," and "Matey," and not often are there to be found in fiction two creations that deserve it more. There is a fascinating study in development in "Browny." She begins as a schoolgirl, just tremulous with the first dawning consciousness of womanhood, life and its passions not yet fully asserted. Soon she rises before us, the less than half-acknowledged wife of a self-absorbed and morose man, thrice her age, who represses her, stunts her, crushes her, making her, if possible, the merest puppet. The blood that had begun to throb in all her pulses, swift and hot, flows back to the heart and there congeals, but it remains blood, and the heart remains heart, through years of dreary waiting. Then the thawing and awakening begin. The old schoolmate, only half-consciously loved in childhood, returns; though not to speak of love. Others, less honorable, press around, with words of admiration and of tempting. Lord Ormont's hard and insulting indifference to the misery of her position grows daily less endurable. There is a long struggle between sense of duty and sense of wrong, the former growing weaker, the latter ever stronger. The whelp Mordfield is never dangerous, but her barrier against him is scarcely so much wifely duty as simple self-respect, or, perhaps, loyalty to a half-dream of the vanished past. That dream "Matey" never strives to recall to her. He is too generous, too wholesome, ever to play the tempter. Yet the passive temptation of his presence grows stronger every day. And soon we have this situation: that she and he are hopelessly in love with each other, and yet, remembering her formal bonds, are strong enough to hold their passion, self-contained, without so much as the accent of a syllable to reveal it. The plight in which these two, through a resistless destiny, are placed is not to be desired, yet in such plight let no one say it is impossible to do as they did. It is not only possible, it is natural, if we but have regard to the higher, not to the lower, nature.

The awakening proceeds apace. Aminta at last perceives that with Ormont her case is without hope. Either she must be not a woman but a slave, a chattel, a thing, or she must leave him. She makes the choice, and she does so, or thinks she does, sincerely, for her own sake. Her one thought is to escape from prison and from worse. It is simply that she flees from him, not that she flees to any one else. The dignity of womanhood rebels against the degradation forced upon her. The purity of womanhood revolts at the causeless insult to which she is subjected. Had she been more, or less, than woman she might remain. But she goes straight to Weyburn, or he to her with her consent? That is quite true, and that is exactly where legitimate question of her course begins. It is not enough that she does not actually seek him or go to him by previous arrangement. Above all else in the world she should have avoided him. She meets him, and they "read life's meaning in each other's eyes" in a "Sea Duet"—which, for perfect artistic beauty, it should be said, has few rivals in the realm of fiction. She tells him—what she should not have told—that she has left her husband. With that the remnants of his reserve vanish. He claims her as his own, with neither divorce from Ormont nor wedding with him. They fling convention to the winds. They agree that the world will be against them; yet they will not cease to try to serve it. They will be branded as social malefactors, but they will never consider themselves as such. They will live for each other and for the good they can do to those about them. And they even believe that, while they do offend good citizenship, they do not offend Divine law. This is a common sophistry. We may say love ought to be superior to all laws; the fact is it is not and cannot be till human nature gives place to divine. In an ideal abstract case we may not only pardon but admire Aminta, even in this extremest step. In practical, concrete life we should condemn her, and she would deserve the condemnation.

Never was there a more disjointed style than that of George Meredith. Words and sentences are simply thrown together. Yet it is not altogether bad. He is often obscure; but he is never vague. He is formless, but his formlessness is that of the rock, not of the nebula. There are those who call him an impressionist, which is a libel upon him. Impressionist he may be, in the higher and truer sense; but no one could be further removed than he from that school of "art" which flings a paint-pot at a canvas and calls it a symphony in bilious green, or from that decadent school of literature which first becomes maudlin and then incoherent, and finally dabbergasted with amazement at its own incoherence. He may throw words together, but he chooses them with faultless precision and throws them, with unerring purpose. He may seem incoherent at times; it is impossible to imagine him ever being maudlin.

He has not the faculty of form; that is the whole trouble. But that deficiency is not necessarily fatal. Browning suffered from it sadly, yet challenges the admiration of the world. Byron had similar lack, in less degree, but—with apologies to Mr. Swinburne—must yet rank among the greatest of our poets. Matter is more than manner, spirit than letter. And in matter and spirit we shall have to look far among the fiction-writers of to-day to find one who equals Meredith. His thoughts flow with the profusion, the impetuosity, even the roughness, of a mountain torrent; they come too swiftly to be shaped and graced. His characters are living, breathing, exulting, suffering. His incidents are natural, sympathetic. Intense, vital humanity pervades every page and line, and the air it breathes is pure and crisp and bracing. He is no haunter of the slums, no dweller in moral hothouses. He leads you out under the open sky, and shows you men and women, with hearts that beat and blood that circulates, fighting the battles of life and winning its victories, and you know that they are moving, not in the limelight of the stage, but in the clear sunlight of Heaven. These are the qualities that make his work perpetually welcome, and that will doubtless insure it an enviable immortality.

LITERARY NOTES

"The Seraph and the Dove" is the title of a charming bit of verse addressed by Nathaniel Hawthorne to his wife and never yet printed. It is to appear in the November number of "The Century," together with a collection of letters written by the novelist and his wife during their happy life at Lenox—letters which are filled with expressions of single-minded devotion. Their daughter, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, has edited these letters for the magazine, and has added to the list some characteristic epistles from George S. Hillard and Herman Melville, the author of "Typee."

Two of the forthcoming books announced by Roberts Brothers are George Egerton's "Discords" and "A Child of the Age" by Francis Adams.

M. Montbard's sparkling "Land of the Sphinx" is to be published soon by Dodd, Mead & Co. The book, which is illustrated by the author, has almost as much picture as text.

A volume of drawings by that clever artist, Mr. Charles Dana Gibson, is announced by the De Witt Publishing House. This book will contain a collection of about a hundred of Mr. Gibson's most piquant social sketches—the first which he has made. It is to be a holiday book, and will be ready about November 1. If we were to find fault with Mr. Dana's excellent work it would be because he clings so persistently to a very few types; but this may be attributed, perhaps, to the taste for conformity of the New-York girl rather than to a lack of the observing faculty on the part of the artist.

A Warwickshire man who has lately revisited the scenes of his youth, which were also those of George Eliot's early life, tells "The Paterson Press" that the novelist's relatives are reluctant to receive literary pilgrims or to tell them anything about Miss Evans's childhood, and that these people are ashamed to be known as kinsfolk of that famous lady.

It is stated that a good deal of interesting unpublished matter has lately been found in the Gibbon MSS. at Sheffield Park.

Of the late Emily Dickinson's verses it is said that there are still enough of them unpublished to fill several volumes as large as the first one printed. A correspondent of "The Boston Transcript" says that in addition to her intellectual gifts Miss Dickinson "was a past mistress in the art of cookery and housekeeping. She made the desserts for the household dinners, delicious confections and bread, and when engaged in these duties had her table and pastry board under a window that faced the lawn, whereon she ever had pencil and paper to jot down any pretty thought that came to her, and from which she evolved verses later. On some such occasion a little green snake made its way through the grass toward the window, which circumstance she commemorated in verse. Her large yellow pet cat lost its long fluffy tail by some accident, which she sent in playful humor by express to the present scribe. There was a pink ribbon tied round this disconnected appendage, with a verse accompanying it that unfortunately is lost."

"Duchess of Athens" is the title of Sardou's new play. Sarah Bernhardt is to play the part of the Duchess.

A limited edition de luxe of Spenser's "Faerie Queene," illustrated by Mr. Walter Crane, is coming out in London. Mr. Crane says that to illustrate this book has been the dream of his life.

Poetry and the drama, even when pursued by an Ibsen, are not particularly remunerative in the frozen North. The author of the "Doll's House" is taxed on an annual income of something under $5,000.

General Fitzhugh Lee's book on "General Lee," and that dealing with "General Hancock" and prepared by General Francis A. Walker, are notable autumn publications of the Appletons.

Rider Haggard's brother, Colonel Andrew Haggard, is bringing out a novel called "Tempest Torn."

Another volume of essays by Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie is announced by Dodd, Mead & Co. Three photogravures ornament the pretty little book.

Adele Braccio, whose strange crime and consequent misery are recorded in Mr. Marion Crawford's powerful story, "Pietro Ghisleri," reappears in his new story, "Casa Braccio." The opening chapters will soon be published in "The Century."

A comical tribute to the vigor of Mr. T. B. Aldrich's verse is mentioned by the Boston correspondent of "The Book Buyer." One of the poems in Aldrich's coming volume is entitled, "Insomnia," and is a picturesque record of the "horrors of sleeplessness." When this first appeared in a magazine it so deeply impressed the public that the poet received from many sympathetic strangers advertisements of sure cures for the trouble so graphically described. "The amusing part of it is," adds the correspondent, "Mr Aldrich admits that there never was a sounder sleeper than he."

The "Letters of Matthew Arnold" are not to be issued this year, "Mr. Russell," says "The Westminster Budget," "has only just got to work on them, and there are a great many to go through. Admirers of the poet will remember that at the time of his death Mr. Russell published in 'Time' a brief memorial sketch, afterward reprinted 'for the subscribers to the Arnold Memorial Fund,' which showed the subtle appreciation of a personal friend as well as a scholar and disciple. One of Mr. Russell's reminiscences was of finding Arnold, on the morning after the loss of his eldest son, a Harrow schoolboy, seeking consolation from his favorite Marcus Aurelius. If the volume of his correspondence draws as genial a picture of the man as that which Mr. Russell's sketch suggested it will be a delightful volume."

Professor W. M. Sloane's "Life of Napoleon," which "The Century" is preparing to publish in serial form, was undertaken, it is said, before the recent revival of interest in the Corsican began. The author has had the advantage of access to many original sources of information in Europe. The first chapters of the work will deal with Napoleon's career as a political agitator in Corsica.

A new volume of short stories by Mr. Thomas Nelson Page is announced by the Scribners, and they are also bringing out a new and handsome edition of Mr. Page's "Polly," illustrated by A. Castaigne.

An "Old English Library" has been projected by a London publisher, and the first volume will soon appear. This will contain the "Prose Treatises of Richard Rolle of Hampole," edited by Dr. Carl Horstmann.

It is said that Björnsterne Björnson has been for some time at work upon what is called "A Great Social Drama." He is going to Rome for the winter, and hopes to finish it there.

Too many books! There is great good sense in the advice given to amateur writers in the October "Scribner." "Let not a man," says the preacher, "who can do a particularly good piece of literary work fancy there is any need at all for him to do it. It will certainly enough