"ROSAMUND."

THE LATEST WORK OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

ROSAMUND, QUEEN OF THE LOMBARDS. A Tragedy. By Algernon Charles Swinburne. Octavo, pp. 81. Dodd, Mead & Co.

The question as to whether a drama by a lyric poet is adapted for presentation on the stage or not is settled chiefly by the manner in which the work is handled. In Mr. Swinburne's "Rosamund," however, the subject has a significance beyond that of the writer's method. It is a bare, bleak tragedy, the lurid gloom of which is relieved only by flames of passion too fierce and sinister to be borne anywhere save in the pages of a book. If, following the familiar law, it be legitimate to purge the emotions by the excitation of pity and terror, it is also essential that the tragic poetry through which this is accomplished should preserve, even in its most tremendous moments, the human quality, the touch that links exceptional crises to universal experience and sympathy. This "Rosamund" fails to do. "I see but as by lightning, Queen," says Hildegard, terrified and half blinded by the deadly proposals of her revengeful mistress, and a play illuminated thus from beginning to end as this one is is inconceivable in the theatre. "Macbeth" and "Antony and Cleopatra" have grandeur. "Rosamund" is merely horrible.

Albovine, having killed the father of his queen, forces her to drink the wine he has poured in the skull of the murdered man. In the first act he thus humiliates her:

Bring me the cup. Queen, thou shalt pledge with me
A health to all this kingdom and its weal
Even from the bowl that here to hold in hand
Assures me lord of Lombardy and thine
By right and might of battle and of God—
The skull that was thy father's; so shalt thou
Drink to me with thy father.

Grisly as is this situation, the events flowing from it are even more repulsive. Rosamund grips to her service, by means of devilish ingenuity, Hildegard, her innocent handmaiden, and Almachildes, the girl's lover and the friend of the king. The drama moves toward the murder of the latter with relentless singleness of aim, and Mr. Swinburne wrings from his reader the admission that at least the progress of the tragedy is well managed, at least the dramatist's constructive power is demonstrated. But what of the poetry, for which, after all, we are bound to look first in any production by this author? He exhibits in some of the briefer speeches a tense emotion reminiscent of some of his best work. Almachildes, rebounding in agonized terror from the plan of murder which Rosamund sets before him, bursts forth in words eloquent though few:

God must be
Dead. Such a thing as thou could never else
Live.

But the repulsive nature of his theme would seem to have deprived the poet of all that music, all that color and charm, in which his readers have recognized the sources of his individuality and strength. When Albovine, oppressed by the hot sun, and perhaps by some mysterious presage of his coming fate, exclaims

I would this fierce Italian June were dead,
So hard it weighs upon me,—

and, impatient of Rosamund's dubious words of reassurance, goes on to declare.

And well were that, if summer died with June,

there is heard, faintly, the sound of that rhythmic speech which we get from Mr. Swinburne at his best. Then the promise fades, and the drama is left with no lingering notes of music, without one flash of beauty. We may cite one other illustration, the address of Albovine to his queen:

Thy voice was honey-hearted music, sweet
As wine and glad as clarions; not in battle
Might man have more of joy than I to bear it
And feel delight dance in my heart and laugh
Too loud for hearing save its own. Thou rose,
Why did God give thee more than all thy kin
Whose pride is perfume only and color, this?
Music? No rose but mine sings, and the birds
Hush all their hearts to hearken. Dost thou hear not
How heavy sounds her note now?

In these lines, typical in the fullest measure, the accomplished writer is plainly visible. But there is no magic, there is no fire. "Rosamund" seems a tragedy manufactured with malice aforethought by a poet who could not be commonplace if he tried, but who must nevertheless pay the penalty paid by all men writing without inspiration. He interests us, languidly, and leaves us cold.

THE LAMBS.

THE OLD FAMILIAR TEXT WITH NEW PICTURES.

THE ESSAYS OF ELIA. By Charles Lamb. With an Introduction by Augustine Birrell and Illustrations by Charles E. Brock. Octavo, pp. xxii, 254. London: J. M. Dent & Co. New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

THE LAST ESSAYS OF ELIA. By Charles Lamb. With an Introduction by Augustine Birrell and Illustrations by Charles E. Brock. Octavo, pp. xi, 254. London: J. M. Dent & Co. New-York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE. By Charles and Mary Lamb. Introductory Preface by Andrew Lang. Illustrations by Robert Anning Bell. Octavo, pp. xxviii, 372. Truslove, Hanson & Comba, Limited.

MRS. LEICESTER'S SCHOOL. By Charles and Mary Lamb. Illustrated by Winifred Greene. Octavo, pp. ix, 129. London: J. M. Dent & Co. New-York: The Macmillan Company.

Lamb seems the last person in the world—at least in his essays—to be illustrated. His atmosphere no man could put into a picture. But there is many a little episode, as Mr. Brock shows, which can be set forth in a drawing. There is that passage in the essay "On Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago" describing "the cool impunity with which the nurses used to carry away openly, in open platters, for their own tables, one out of two of every hot joint, which the careful matron had been seeing scrupulously weighed out for our dinners." Mr. Brock has drawn the scene to a nicety. With a good deal of tact, also, he has portrayed Lamb himself in more than one of the drawings. The best instance of this will be found in the frontispiece to the second of the two volumes, which stands for the reference in the "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" to those street readers whom, says Elia, "I can never contemplate without affection—the poor gentry, who, not having the wherewithal to buy or hire a book, filch a little learning at the stalls—the owner, with his hard eye, casting envious looks at them all the while and thinking when will they have done." Lamb himself is not difficult to imagine "snatching a fearful joy in this way," and Mr. Brock has just indicated the familiar lean physiognomy in his drawing. His "owner . . . casting envious looks," in this same drawing, is perfect, and so also is his sketch of that Unitarian minister, whose skill in "keeping clear of secular contacts as he walked down the street studying a volume of Lardner," Lamb used to admire. Mr. Birrell, in his introduction to this edition, aptly says of the essays that they have, to use Lamb's own words, joined the class of "perpetually self-reproductive volumes, Great Nature's Stereotypes," and although he goes on to tell us something of the life of Lamb and his sister, he protests that all that an editor of the essays has to do "is to see that work so delicate, so conscientious, so elaborate, is neither insulted with bad type or ill-tempered paper, nor injured by careless printing." All this has been well seen to. These little volumes with their perfect presswork, their dainty title pages, their frontispieces in photogravure, their pretty end papers and their artistic binding, leave the publisher and the editor thoroughly acquitted of their responsibilities.

Mr. Andrew Lang yields to no man in appreciation of Charles and Mary Lamb, but if he is loyal to them, he is also loyal to Shakespeare, and, accordingly, we find him writing in a preface to the new edition of the "Tales from Shakespeare" with some reservations and a good deal of caution. To Canon Ainger's opinion that there is no first introduction to the study of Shakespeare so winning and so helpful as that supplied by these narrative versions, he opposes a view directly contrary. "I conceive," he says, "that children at the age of innocence (which was conservatively fixed at seven) are best introduced to Shakespeare by Shakespeare himself." He insists that, while this book may well be placed in the hands of children, "they should also have free access to Shakespeare himself," and he confidently asserts that Lamb would have abounded in the same opinion, wherein we agree with him. Charles and Mary Lamb were themselves "tumbled early, by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage." No child with the right stuff in him could fail to profit by the same experience; such a child should be allowed to get hold of Shakespeare himself at the very earliest reading age. On the other hand, as Mr. Lang points out, Lamb proved "a great innovator in style" when he labored over these tales. There are halfway houses and halfway houses. In this one the style and spirit are adequate and the transition from the Lambs to Shakespeare is singularly smooth and happy. Mr. Lang speaks of Lamb's "delightful abstinence from the 'learning of the subject.'" In the writing of these tales the poetry and the glamour of Shakespeare were the first things considered. The present edition is beautifully made, Mr. Bell's illustrations alone jarring on the reader. The cover is uncommonly attractive.

The gentle fancy and sweet sentiment of "Mrs. Leicester's School" are charmingly reflected in the new edition of the book illustrated by Miss Winifred Greene. We find these qualities in the very form and typography; the decorative borders and delicate binding all seem adapted to the nature of the writing. The illustrator has worked somewhat in the manner of Kate Greenaway, and her naïve little compositions, inclosed in dainty floral patterns, are in the very tone and spirit of the Lambs.

TENNYSON.

HIS BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS IN A UNIFORM EDITION.

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON. In Ten Volumes. Illustrated. Octavo. The Macmillan Company.

The admirable practice of bringing together in one set of volumes the biography and the works of a great poet is illustrated with peculiar felicity in this edition of Tennyson. The world is more and more coming to employ the method which was productive of such brilliant results in the hands of Sainte-Beuve; the method of studying the works in the light of the author's life and environment. Hallam Tennyson's memoir of his father met with especial appreciation on its appearance toward the close of 1897 because it included various important posthumous documents; but, as we said at the time, it is even more to be valued for its vivid portraiture of a noble man of genius, for its innumerable anecdotes, for the sayings and writings which it quotes from half the celebrities of the Victorian era. The mode of aloofness, of absorption in his high erected thoughts, so common in Tennyson, was not incompatible with a really intimate intercourse with many of his contemporaries. To read his biography with its riches of correspondence and reported talk is to realize the atmosphere in which his masterpieces were created; it is to feel with a new vividness the force of the social life which, in spite of all his habits of seclusion, contributed to the development of his genius. The record of his friendship for Her Majesty lends an added interest to those poems which testify to the feeling he had for her. Certainly the biography is a good place in which to find that version of "To the Queen," which was unpublished until the present Lord Tennyson gave the biographical volumes to the world. It is not inapposite to reproduce it here:

The noblest men methinks are bred
Of ours, the Saxo-Norman race;
And in the world the noblest place,
Madam, is yours, our Queen and Head.

Your name is borne on every wind,
Your flag thro' Austral ice is borne,
And glimmers to the Northern morn,
And floats in either golden Ind.

I give this faulty book to you,
For, though the faults be thick as dust
In vacant chambers, I can trust
Your woman's nature, kind and true.

In the present edition the memoir occupies the first four volumes, the poems filling the other six. The last of the biographical volumes and the last volume of the poems contain complete indexes. As for the form of the edition, it seems to us ideal, and really preferable to any that might have been produced with all those luxuries of vellum and spacious margins which are supposed to be indispensable to the "edition de luxe." This is a special limited edition, but it has been made for use. The size is a convenient octavo. The paper is strong and of a delicate surface. The type is clear and open. The interesting portraits which serve as frontispieces are reproduced in photogravure, and scattered through the text there are other apposite and valuable illustrations. The dark green silk binding is tastefully decorated on the back in gold, and a floral medallion, also in gold, is placed upon the front of the book.

QUEEN ELIZABETH.

A POPULAR EDITION OF BISHOP CREIGHTON'S MONOGRAPH.

QUEEN ELIZABETH. By Mandell Creighton, D. D. Oxon and Cambridge. Lord Bishop of London. With Portrait. Octavo, pp. vi, 307. Longmans, Green & Co.

The Bishop of London's monograph on Queen Elizabeth was originally published in 1896, in a magnificently printed and illustrated edition limited to a comparatively small number of copies. We are glad to record the publication of the work in a form readily accessible to every student. It is a very brief narrative, but the author is skilful in condensation, and we know of no more useful biography of the great queen. It portrays her at full length, and salient personages and events identified with her reign are sketched with an art that leaves them and Elizabeth in the right perspective. An ecclesiastical historian naturally pauses with especial interest and care on everything that relates to the Queen's conduct. The Bishop is candid, but he arrives by a thoroughly legitimate process at a conclusion which does not rob Elizabeth of the essentially admirable traits imbedded in her ambiguous character. The truth is that she is only ambiguous when tested by an exclusively modern rule of conduct. She and the conditions of her time are, as the author remarks, perplexing, but he assists us to arrive at a just estimate of both by considering them always with a perfect realization of all that was involved in that strange and fruitful epoch. The sympathetic and persuasive drift of the volume is well illustrated by the final paragraphs, which run as follows:

Elizabeth's imperishable claim to greatness lies in her instinctive sympathy with her people. She felt, rather than understood, the possibilities which lay before England, and she set herself the task of slowly exhibiting, and impressing them on the national mind. She raised Englishmen to a perception of England's destiny, and for this purpose fixed England's attention upon itself. She caught at every advantage which was afforded by the divided condition of Europe to assert England's importance. France and Spain alike had deep causes of hostility; she played off one against the other so that both were anxious for the friendship of a State which they each hoped some day to annex. England gained courage from this sight, and grew in self-confidence. To obtain this result Elizabeth was careless of personal dignity or honor. She did not care how her conduct was judged at the time, but awaited the result.

* * * *

Her private character is hard to detach from her public character. She behaved to those around her as she did to her people in general. She was surrounded by men representative of English life; they must be made to fall into line; and any method which served this purpose was good. Before all things she must impose her will equally on all. Personally she was attracted by physical endowments, and let herself go in accordance with her feelings up to a certain point. But she was both intellectually and emotionally cold. In politics and in private life alike she cared little for decorum, because she knew that she could stop short whenever prudence made it needful.

It is easy to point out serious faults in Elizabeth, to draw out her inconsistencies, and define her character in a series of paradoxes. But this treatment does not exhibit the real woman, still less the real queen. Elizabeth was hailed at her accession as being "mere English"; and "mere English" she remained. Round her, with all her faults, the England which we know grew into consciousness of its destiny. The process was difficult; the struggle was painful, and it left many scars behind. There are many things in Elizabeth which we could have wished otherwise; but she saw what England might become, and nursed it into a knowledge of its power.

LITERARY NOTES.

The long expected biography of Huxley, prepared by his son, is nearly ready for publication. It is of a varied nature, and will interest, we are told, not scientific people only, but all educated readers.

In the just published memoirs of the late Lord Playfair there is a note pronouncing the present Czar a singularly well read man. "It required," added Playfair, "all my knowledge of geography to keep up with him in his talk about the Kurile Islands, which stretch from Yezo to Kamchatka." Concerning Longfellow Playfair told this funny story: "He was too amiable to refuse any one who called, however obtrusive they might be. On one occasion I went to lunch with him, and observed a number of chairs in the library, so I remarked that he seemed to have had many visitors. 'Yes,' said the old poet, 'countrymen of your own who had a leader called Mr. Cook [?Cook's excursions]. They sat there staring, without conversation, till a fat old lady opened it by saying: "Now, Mr. Longfellow, explain to us your views on the immortality of the soul." This I positively declined to do.'"

A collection of letters from American authors dealing with the subject of word coinage fills several pages of "The Chautauquan." Most of these writers disclaim the production of any word of consequence or of any word at all. Mr. L. Lockwood, a student of language and a collector of newly coined words, writes: "I have very few new words by Americans. Englishmen are the great word makers, and good ones they make, too. They surge up against a blank wall in the language and forthwith build a ladder to clamber over. You can't suppress them. They are thinkers; we—no! We are plunged into a slough of vanity thickened with love of lucre. Your American authors, for the most part, are not authors, but merely relationists. Any fool can write a story, but put thought into it—'hic labor, hic opus est!'"

Mr. Owen Wister contributes an amusing note to the discussion. "Your question about coining words," he writes, "has just made me open 'Worcester's Unabridged.' It happened to open at page 1,179, where I found raip, raivel, rakee, rakeshame, rakestale, rakevein, ralliance, ralspite and ramadan—and as I have never heard of any of them before, I turned for consolation to another page. It happened to be 166, where there struck my eye boxen, boyar, boyan, boyblind, boyism, boyn, boyship, brabble, braccate, brack, bracky, bracteolate and brad, to say nothing of brachygraphy, brachystockhrone, and some others—some forty words on the first two pages I tried—and all entirely unknown to me until to-day. Further experiments brought revelations equally humiliating. So, you see, the English language is not only enough for me, but a good deal too much, and I shall not attempt to add to it at present."

BOOKS OF THE WEEK.

RED COTTAGE. By Mary Cholmondeley. 12mo, pp. 375. (Harper & Bros.)

THE PRIVATE STABLE. Its Establishment, Management and Appointments. By "Jorrocks." 8vo, pp. 562. (Little, Brown & Co.)

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PETER NEWELL'S PICTURES AND RHYMES. (Harper & Bros.)

THE SIGNORS OF THE NIGHT. By Max Pemberton. 12mo, pp. 268. (Dodd, Mead & Co.)

GREAT PICTURES. As Seen and Described by Famous Writers. Edited and Translated by Esther Singleton. 8vo, pp. 317. (Dodd, Mead & Co.)

A HISTORY OF WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY, 1838-'99. By J. J. Fahie. 12mo, pp. 325. (Dodd, Mead & Co.)

E. P. ROE. Reminiscences of His Life. By His Sister, Mary A. Roe. 12mo, pp. 235. (Dodd, Mead & Co.)

PRIMITIVE LOVE AND LOVE STORIES. By Henry T. Finck. 8vo, pp. 351. (Charles Scribner's Sons.)

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MRS. JOHN DREW. With an Introduction by Her Son, John Drew. With biographical notes by Douglas Taylor. Illustrated. 12mo, pp. 200. (Charles Scribner's Sons.)

HUMANISM IN EDUCATION. By R. C. Jebb. The Romanes Lecture, 1899. Pamphlet. (The Macmillan Company.)

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