LITERARY NOTES.

The unexpected is, indeed, happening where the official life of Lord Beaconsfield is concerned. It is not only to be written by a member of the staff of "The London Times," Mr. Monypenny, but it is to be issued from the press of that newspaper. The announcement seems to have caused a little uneasiness here and there among English critics. They wonder if the biography of a modern statesman published under such auspices will be altogether free from political prejudice.

In the current number of "Scribner's Magazine" we find a picturesque poem, "The Glacier," by Florence Wilkinson. From it we take these stanzas:

I am the mother of rivers.
And out of my bosom of snow
Restless, tormented and leaping
My passionate children go.

They spring from the poignant silence
Of a white and passionless life,
Yet far below from the valleys
Comes a rumor of their strife.

. . . . . .

I am white as the whiteness of dawning,
I lift a perpetual brow,
A frozen and pitiless beauty,
Yet once I was driven as thou.

I mounted to crests of anguish,
I sank to the cruel crevasse;
Yet, even from this is calmness,
And lo! it has come to pass.

I was sculptured midsea of my passion
Millions of ages ago.
My lips are locked; I am speechless;
But I know, my child, I know.

In a book called "Behind the Footlights" (Dodd, Mead & Co.) Mrs. Alec-Tweedie gushes at large about the modern English stage and its celebrities, making twittering little excursions now and then further afield. In her girlhood she thought she could act, and pleaded with her father to be allowed to go on the stage, but he persuaded her to wait, at least until she was twenty-one, and by that time her "wild dreams of glory and success" had given place to common sense. She has made up for her disillusionment, however, by going much to the theatre to enjoy performances from the more comfortable side of the footlights, and by making friends with the people of the stage. Her book is largely composed of enthusiastic talk about the actors and actresses she knows, friendly gossip which we wish we could say we had found amusing. As a matter of fact, the anecdotes in this book, to which even a mild interest attaches are few and far between. Here is one of the best, about Mr. W. S. Gilbert:

He once told me a rather amusing little story about "The Mikado." A gentleman who had been many years in the English Legation at Yokohoma attended some of the rehearsals, and was most useful in giving hints as to positions and manners in Japan. Mr. Gilbert wanted some effective music for the entrance of the Mikado—nothing Mr. Arthur Sullivan suggested suited—so turning to the gentleman he said:

"Can't you hum the Japanese anthem?"

"Oh, yes," he said cheerily. And he did.

"Capital—it'll just do."

Mr. Sullivan—for he was not then Sir Arthur—made notes, wrote it up, and the thing proved a great success. Some time afterward came a furious letter from a Japanese, saying an insult had been offered to the Mikado of Japan; the air to which that illustrious prince entered the scene, instead of being royal, was a music hall tune!

The author has made the acquaintance of Ibsen and describes him in his home in Norway, which he told her he considered "the most lovely country in the world." She talked with him in his study, where he is, she asserts, "faddy and tidy almost to the point of old maidism." We wonder if the canny dramatist was not poking a little fun at his guest in the matter of the trinkets about which she has this to say:

On the table beside the inkstand was a small tray. Its contents were extraordinary—some little wooden carved Swiss bears, a diminutive black devil, small cats, dogs and rabbits made of copper, one of which was playing a violin.

"What are those funny little things?" I ventured to ask.

"I never write a single line of any of my dramas unless that tray and its occupants are before me on the table. I could not write without them. It may seem strange—perhaps it is—but I cannot write without them," he repeated. "Why I use them is my own secret."

Mr. Frederick A. Richardson is steadily making "The International Quarterly," which is now published by Fox, Duffield & Co., a better and better magazine. The papers in the October number, just issued, are nearly all interesting, and in certain cases are written with special authority. George Brandes, for example, is delightful in his essay on "Ernest Renan as a Dramatist," a suggestive study of "L'Abbesse de Jouarre," and the other compositions in which the famous Frenchman gave free play to his nimble wit. In these dramas, says the critic, "the style is perfect, melodious and rhetorically pure at the same time. All the thoughts are lightly flung out, as we fling out bubbles from a clay pipe, to amuse ourselves by watching the sunshine sparkle on their light spherical or globelike forms." Brandes has an odd epigram on his subject, odd because so cleverly put, and yet of such dubious value. "Renan's characters," he says, "are shadows in comparison with Shakespeare's, but Shakespeare's ideas are naif in comparison with Renan's." A happier contribution is made in the following fragment:

Renan belongs to the large group of romanticists that spend their lives in fighting against romanticism.

For the rest, he remained, as a private individual, unworldly, placidly refractory, an idealist without imprudence. He got on well with each of the French governments the last twenty years.

Renan quotes, approvingly, a friend's remark about him: "He thinks like a man, feels like a woman, and acts like a child." He felt strongly, but like women, whose hearts never run away with them, and acted in an unworldly manner, but like children, whose ignorance of life does not preclude an instinctive shrewdness.

His feelings rendered his thought supple, more supple than has perhaps hitherto been perceived, except by such great minds as Goethe's, or such keen ones as that of Sainte-Beuve. He was great at understanding the complex and the shadowy. Whereas his friend and contemporary, Taine, who had quite as decided a gift of comprehension, sought everywhere for fundamental principles, the solid and the permanent in the variety and changeableness of the phenomenon, the osseous structures, the granite, the mountain ranges and watersheds, whence one may see life's rivers divide and rush to divers sides, Renan followed up these rivers through all their curves and windings. He shunned the crude and the decided. Others have seen and do see truth in clear, strong colorings, see it red, or blue, or shimmering white. He never believed that it could be made prisoner within such capacious words. He saw it in shades, in imperceptible transitions from one color to another. And if he were a child in action, the reason of it was that one cannot act in shades.

But one can understand them, and the finest soul is the one that understands them with the greatest certainty. Renan was naturally fitted to see only shadows, pick out the right one tactfully, and give it its undefined name.

Truth, to him, was a butterfly. It could not be hit with blows of a club. To him, the coarse syllogisms of logic were like blows of a club.

To his childlike simplicity had succeeded the infinitely manifold receptivity of modern criticism.

It is not so very long since Mr. H. Noel Williams began to make books, luxuriously published, with fine illustrations, out of the social side of French history. Two of his gossipy and interesting works, "Memoirs of Mme. de Pompadour" and "Memoirs of Mme. de Montespan," have already been brought out by the Scribners, and the same firm now announces another volume from his pen, the "Memoirs of Mme. du Barry." This is the first illustrated life of the famous courtesan to appear in English. It will be full of anecdotes, and will include a number of love letters written to Mme. du Barry by the Englishman, Henry Seymour.

Mr. A. E. Gallatin, who has for some time been interesting himself in the study of Whistler's career and work, is soon to bring out a volume embodying the fruits of his researches. It will be entitled "Whistler's Art Dicta and Other Essays."

The G. W. Dillingham Company announces for publication on November 1 a new book by "Josiah Allen's Wife" (Marietta Holley). It will be called "Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition," and will, of course, contain a good deal of the author's familiar humor. The volume will be profusely illustrated.

The penultimate volume, the eleventh, in the new edition of "The Collected Works of William Hazlitt" (McClure, Phillips & Co.), edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, has just been published. It is devoted to "Fugitive Writings," the miscellaneous items which have in only a few cases been hitherto reprinted. They are brief newspaper contributions for the most part, and while not indispensable to the rounding out of Hazlitt's literary character, must nevertheless be welcomed by all true lovers of that stalwart critic. Philosophy, history, the drama, art, manners, politics and divers other subjects are treated in these casual outpourings. Many a passage in the mass of writing here (which runs to over five hundred pages) invites quotation, but we must be content with a dip into the paper printed in "The Yellow Dwarf," early in 1818, on the Shakespearian lecture, delivered not long before by Coleridge, to a "numerous and genteel audience." Hazlitt seems to have been much put out by this discourse. "Why does Mr. Coleridge provoke us," he asks, with manifest irritability, "to write as great nonsense as he talks?" With Hazlitt the political instinct was never long asleep, and that it was promptly stirred to activity by the lecturer on this occasion is shown by the following outburst:

Shakespear, said Mr. Coleridge, always spoke of mobs with contempt, but with kindness. Mr. Coleridge does better; he speaks of mobs with contempt, and of Courts with kindness. Again, says this critical discoverer of a meaning in a milistone, Caliban had that envy of superior genius and virtue, which was a mark of the true Jacobins in the time of the French Revolution. We are sorry to hear, that on one occasion Mr. C. was interrupted in a tirade upon this favorite topic, on which he was led out of pure generosity, to enlighten the grown gentleman who came to hear him, by a person calling out in good broad Scotch, "But you once praised that Revolution, Mr. Coleridge!" The worst is, that Mr. Coleridge praised that Revolution when it was triumphant, going on "conquering and to conquer," as it was thought; and now that it is fallen, this man of mighty mind, of gigantic genius, and superiority to interested motives and mob-sycophancy, insults over it—tramples on the carcase—kicks it with his asinine hoofs—and brays a long, loud, dreary, doleful bravura over it. Of what the Jacobins were in the year 1793, this person has a right to speak, both from experience and observation. The worst he can say of them is, that he was once one of the set.

Thus were the literary dovecotes fluttered in the good old hard-hitting days. This volume may not be packed with imperishable wisdom, but it is full of the vitality of an original mind and a rich temperament; it supplies an abundance of good, discursive reading.

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