## SOME NEW BOOKS.

### Mr. Matthew Arnold.

FIRST ARTICLE—THE POET.

Since Thackeray's visit to this country no Englishman of letters, possessing such high and manifold claims to honor at the hands of cultivated and thoughtful Americans as are incontestably possessed by Mr. Matthew Arnold, has been seen in the United States. Among living English poets there are several who are more widely read among us than the author of "Empedocles on Etna," and of "Sohrab and Rustum," just as there was at least one contemporary English novelist who could count more American readers than Mr. Thackeray, while among English essayists of this or the preceding generation, the writings of Carlyle, Macaulay, and Ruskin, and even those of De Quincey, are more generally known than the "Essays in Criticism" and the remarkable papers on "Culture and Anarchy," "Literature and Dogma," and "God and the Bible." When we bear in mind the level of our normal culture, it is to be expected that Dickens would find a dozen readers where Thackeray would find one; that Tennyson and Longfellow would delight many to whom Wordsworth seems flat, Browning unintelligible, and Matthew Arnold austere; that the rhapsodies of Carlyle and Ruskin, the commonplace glitter of Macaulay, and even the showy erudition of De Quincey would often dazzle and impress, while the serene and measured tone, the sober and weighty utterance of sounder, riper, and more esoteric teaching would fall unnoticed on the ear. Mr. Matthew Arnold's reputation has, indeed, this in common with Wordsworth's and with Thackeray's, that, even at home, it was not quickly or lightly won; that it was made, in the first instance, by fellow artists and fellow thinkers rather than by the reading community at large. To the cursory glance such a reputation may seem less imposing than one in which the uproar of popular applause stifles the still, small voice of discriminate approval, but it will not prove the less durable because primarily built on the deliberate homage of the men best qualified to discern literary merit. Observing the place of eminence to which, in his various functions of poet, thinker, and reformer, Mr. Matthew Arnold has attained in his own land, we recall with satisfaction the fact that here too he had, even from the outset of his literary career, some appreciative readers, "fit audience though few," and that the number of them has grown steadily, if not rapidly, until his influence on men who are themselves looked to for guidance and instruction has become greater than that exercised by any other Englishman now living—greater, indeed, than that exerted by any Englishman, living or dead, on the present generation since Carlyle's began to wane.

It is not unusual for poets to suppose themselves competent to discharge the critical as well as the creative function, and although the assumption sometimes leads to grotesque results, as in the instances of Victor Hugo and Mr. Swinburne, there are really more examples of a combination of the requisite powers than might at first sight be imagined. Not to go beyond recent times, and to mention only conspicuous illustrations, we observe that Dryden was an admirable critic, that Coleridge was a philosopher, that Voltaire was, perhaps, more distinguished as an observer and teacher than as a maker of verse, that our own Emerson will be remembered at once as a poet and as a student and seer; and that, finally, the greatest figure of the last hundred years, Goethe, is almost equally majestic and illustrious on the ratiocinative and on the æsthetic side. Now, it seems to us that, so far as English-speaking peoples are concerned, no man since Goethe has come so near as Mr. Matthew Arnold has come in these latter years to filling a place something like that which Goethe occupied in the estimation of the whole enlightened world. It is true that, in England itself, Mr. Arnold's authority is not unchallenged. Yet it is certain that with reference to those topics upon which he dwells most heedfully, the aims and processes of literature, considered as a fine art, the social functions of literature, and the relation of literature to religion, Mr. Arnold's opinions may be safely affirmed to have more weight than those of any other man now living. Of late years, indeed, attention has been so strongly drawn to his examination of the social and moral deflections and problems of the age that the merit of the creative work done by him, both in epic and lyric verse, has seemed at times to be eclipsed. It is the range and quality of Mr. Arnold's achievements in the field of poetry of which we would at this time remind the reader, reserving for another occasion a survey of the subjects discussed in his prose writings, and of his characteristic method of treatment. We must expect, however, to sometimes recognize the critic in Mr. Arnold's poetry, just as the poet is often revealed to us in his prose.

As a lyric poet Mr. Arnold belongs to the school of Wordsworth, and he has absolutely nothing in common with his contemporary singer, the author of "Atalanta in Calydon." In Mr. Swinburne's verse we are charmed rather by the melodious vehicle of expression than affected and absorbed by the burden of the song; Mr. Arnold never suffers us to lose sight of the thought or feeling which he wishes to express, and for that reason he chooses a medium of singular transluscency and simplicity. Even by Wordsworth the *Ars celare* was never carried further. We do not pause to note the beauty of the workmanship, the pictorial power of certain epithets, the music that results from certain collocations; we often feel, indeed, the presence of such qualities, but they are always subordinate to the author's central aim—namely, the communication of a noble emotion, the transmission of a generous and fecund idea. Let us look, for instance, at these stanzas, which we find among the earlier poems of their author. They are called "Requiescat:"

> Strew on her roses, roses,
> And never a spray of yew!
> In quiet she reposes;
> Ah! would that I did too.
>
> Her mirth the world required;
> She bathed it in smiles of glee.
> But her heart was tired, tired,
> And now they let her be.
>
> Her life was turning, turning,
> In mazes of heat and sound;
> But for peace her soul was yearning,
> And now peace laps her round.
>
> Her cabined, ample spirit,
> It fluttered and foamed at breath,
> To-night it doth inherit
> The vasty hall of death.

In the same key are these lines from a volume of lyric poems, published many years later:

> Come to me in my dreams, and then
> By day I shall be well again.
> For then the night will more than pay
> The hopeless longing of the day.
>
> Come as thou came'st a thousand times,
> A messenger from radiant climes,
> And smile on thy new world and be
> As kind to others as to me!
>
> Or, as thou never came'st in earth,
> Come now, and let me dream it truth,
> And part my hair and kiss my brow,
> And say: *My love! why suffer'st thou?*
>
> Come to me in my dreams, and then
> By day I shall be well again.
> For then the night will more than pay
> The hopeless longing of the day.

In the same later collection are to be found the two exquisite portraits, "Euphrosyne" and "Urania," the latter of which the reader will thank us for reproducing here. It has no rival even in Tennyson's gallery:

> She smiles and smiles, and will not sigh,
> While we for hopeless passion die;
> Yet she could love, times grown so dolefare,
> Were but men nobler than they are.
>
> Eagerly once her gracious ken
> Was turned upon the sons of men;
> But light the serious shade of eve
> She looked, and smiled, and saw them through.
>
> Our petty souls, our strutting wits,
> Our labored pomp, passion fit—
> Ah, may she scorn them still, till we
> Seem to them as bitterly as she!
>
> Yet show her once, ye heavenly powers,
> One of some worthier race than ours!
> One for whose sake she once might prove
> He dwelt deeply she was the scorn of love.
>
> His eyes be like the starry lights—
> His voice like sounds of summer nights—
> In all his lovely mien let pierce
> The magic of the universe!
>
> And she to him will reach her hand,
> And gazing in his eyes will stand
> And know his friend, and weep for glee,
> And cry, "Long, long I've looked for thee!"
>
> Then will she vanish with smiles till then
> Coldly she goes s the sons of men,
> Till then her lovely eyes maintain
> Their pure, unwavering, deep disdain.

It is naturally in Mr. Arnold's sonnets that we look for the embodiment of thought, as contradistinguished from feeling, so far as it is permissible to differentiate elements which, in varying proportions, are all fused in poetry. From the earlier ventures in this direction we quote the following, "written in Emerson's Essays," which will be read with peculiar interest just now, when the author has had occasion to define his more mature opinion of the American philosopher:

> "Oh, monstrous, dead, unprofitable world,
> That thou canst hear, and hearing, hold thy way!
> A voice oracular hath pealed to-day;
> To-day a hero's banner is unfurled.
> Hast thou no lip for welcome?" So I said,
> Man after man, the world smiled and passed by;
> A smile of wistful incredulity
> As though one spake of life unto the dead—
> Peaceful and strange, and sorrowful, and full
> Of bitter knowledge. Yet the will is free;
> Strong is the soul, and wise and beautiful;
> The seeds of godlike power are in us still;
> Gods are we, bards, saints, heroes, if we will!
> Dumb judges answer, truth or mockery?

In another sonnet, written about the same period, the author tells a friend that he had found his most helpful teachers in Homer, Sophocles, and Epictetus, and it is certain that we can trace the influence of the former two in his poetry and of the latter two in his prose:

> Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days my mind?
> He much, the old man, who, clearest-souled of men,
> Saw the Wise Power, saw the Aster, Fate,
> And Troedos Hill and Smyrna Bay, though blind.
> Much he, whose friendship I not long since won,
> That halting slave, who in Nicopolis
> Taught Arrian, when Vespasian's brutal son
> Cleared Rome of what most shamed him. But be his
> My special thanks, whose even balanced soul,
> From first to last, tested up to extreme old age,
> Business could not make dull nor passion wild;
> Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole;
> The mellow glory of the Attic stage,
> Singer of sweet Colonus and its child.

To the same group of early sonnets belongs the imperishable tribute to Shakespeare:

> Others abide our question. Thou art free.
> We ask and ask: Thou smilest and art still,
> Outtopping knowledge. For the loftiest hill,
> Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
> Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,
> Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling place,
> Spares not the cloudy border of his base
> To the foiled searching of mortality:
> And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
> Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honored, self-secure,
> Didst tread on earth unguessed at.—Better so!
> All pains the immortal spirit must endure,
> All weaknesses which impaired, all grief
> Your fate or your free will imposed, some great
> Spare him the cloudy border of his base
> To the foiled searching of mortality.