THREE NEW VOLUMES OF THE CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH LITERATURE.*

The great "Cambridge History of English Literature" is rapidly marching to its goal; for Volumes VIII., IX., and X. bring it almost within striking distance, as it were, of the end at first proposed. However, in addition to Volumes XI.-XIV., which are needed in order to fill out the original plan, we still expect two supplementary volumes of illustrative extracts; and yet two other volumes, it is now understood, are to be devoted to American literature — a welcome afterthought.

The general characteristics of the work as it has progressed have been sufficiently discussed in our previous reviews. Accordingly, we may take up the present three volumes in order, dwelling upon one point and another in a running comment. Volume VIII. begins

* THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. Edited by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller. Volume VIII., The Age of Dryden. Volume IX., From Steele and Addison to Pope and Swift. Volume X., The Age of Johnson. Cambridge, England: University Press. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

with an able chapter on Dryden, not by Professor Saintsbury (as one might have predicted), but by the Master of Peterhouse himself. Needless to say, the treatment of Dryden by this celebrated historian of dramatic literature is competent and readable; though he has permitted himself many long sentences with parenthetical qualifications, and has a trick of using French words, such as *venue, revue, revanche,* and *remaniement,* when there is no adequate ground for not writing English. *Morigeration,* too, on p. 39, would seem to be an unnecessary freak of style. And for "less rigidly adhering to . . . rules," may an American suggest "less rigorously," etc., as better usage? As for substance, it is undesirable to speak of "the conclusions reached" in "An Essay of Dramatick Poesie," where, according to Dryden, all he has said "is problematical" — that is, tentative, and in keeping with the nature of a dialogue. Since the chapter, all things considered, though sound and true, is not inspired, one might supplement the good things in it with the following little-known but vigorous criticism of Dryden by Wordsworth, who writes to Scott concerning the latter's great edition:

"I was much pleased to hear of your engagement with Dryden; not that he is, as a poet, any great favorite of mine. I admire his talents and genius highly, but his is not a poetical genius. The only qualities I can find in Dryden that are essentially poetical are a certain ardor and impetuosity of mind, with an excellent ear. It may seem strange that I do not add to this, great command of language; that he certainly has, and of such language, too, as it is most desirable that a poet should possess, or, rather, that he should not be without. But it is not language that is, in the highest sense of the word, poetical, being neither of the imagination nor of the passions — I mean of the amiable, the ennobling, or intense passions. I do not mean to say that there is nothing of this in Dryden, but as little, I think, as is possible, considering how much he has written. You will easily understand my meaning when I refer to his versification of 'Palamon and Arcite,' as contrasted with the language of Chaucer. Dryden has neither a tender heart nor a lofty sense of moral dignity. Whenever his language is poetically impassioned, it is mostly upon unpleasing subjects, such as the follies, vices, and crimes of classes of men or of individuals. That his cannot be the language of imagination must have necessarily followed from this, that there is not a single image from Nature in the whole body of his works; and in his translation of Virgil, whenever Virgil can be fairly said to have his eye upon his object, Dryden always soils the passage."

In the same volume, Professor Schelling contributes one chapter out of three on the drama of the Restoration, paying due attention to French influences. Mr. Whibley writes well on Congreve, Farquhar, and Cibber, and later on the "Court Poets." Mr. J. Bass Mullinger does not write so well on "Platonists and Latitudinarians." The trouble is not so much with what the erudite gentleman says as with his way of saying it. Here, for example, is a passage that almost defies interpretation. After a long quotation from Whichcote, we read:

"The drift of the above passage is unmistakable. Tuckney believed that Whichcote, when at Emmanuel, had come under the influence of certain students and admirers of Plato, not that he had influenced them; had he done so, indeed, it is difficult to understand how the fact could have failed to attract the notice of his former tutor, and the latter have omitted to make any reference to the same in the above controversy."

This actually means: At Emmanuel College, so Tuckney believed, Whichcote had been influenced by certain enthusiastic students of Plato, not they by him. Indeed, had the influence come from Whichcote, how could it have escaped the notice of his tutor there, and what would keep the tutor from mentioning it in the subsequent controversy?

Substance and form considered, the best chapter in the volume is the last, on "The Essay and the Beginning of Modern English Prose," by Mr. A. A. Tilley. This writer is fond of expressions like "a lucid survey," a "straightforward and simple style," "the clearness and readableness of diplomatic dispatches," and "a writer of clear and agreeable prose"; and similar terms are applicable to the chapter and its writer.

Volume IX. we must pass over rapidly. It opens with an interesting account of Defoe by Professor Trent, containing various references, naturally, to "Robinson Crusoe." There is, however, no exhaustive treatment of this masterpiece in itself, and but passing allusion to the literature of travel and discovery to which it is heavily indebted. Something was said on this topic in THE DIAL for October 1, 1907; but the whole subject still awaits a patient investigation. Light is needed also on the relations existing between "Robinson Crusoe" and subsequent narratives like "Gulliver's Travels" and the fascinating "Peter Wilkins" of Robert Paltock; and between all of these and the sources they may have in common. If the indexing is complete, the only reference to Paltock in the present three volumes of the Cambridge History is in one of the bibliographies (Vol. X., p. 478). No censure of Professor Trent is implied in the foregoing remarks; a separate chapter for the discussion of the influence of geography upon literature in the

England of the eighteenth century would have fitted well enough into the scheme of the general editors. Still another desideratum would be the separate treatment of the character-sketch and its influence throughout the century; an influence which was exerted not least upon the literary periodicals,—their very titles betray it: "The Tatler," "The Idler," "The Rambler," "The Spectator," and so on. (The subject has been dealt with by Professor Edward Chauncey Baldwin in the "Publications of the Modern Language Association" for 1903-4.) In this volume we have twenty-eight pages on Defoe, forty-three on Steele and Addison, twenty-seven on Pope, and forty-four on Swift,—no unfair division of space, as it seems; in English scholarship generally Swift has not of late received the attention he deserves. The chapter on Swift here is very matter-of-fact, especially at the beginning. One could wish for as many pages, had they come from Dr. Elrington Ball. What we have from Mr. Aitkin makes better reading toward the close, partly because of the quotations from his author. In Chapter XIII. ("Scholars and Antiquaries") the first section, on the "Scholars," was not intrusted to Professor Sandys, who could have written in masterly fashion on Bentley; for the section on the "Antiquaries," by Mr. H. G. Aldis, no substitute could be desired. In the last chapter, XV., on the history of education from the Restoration through the reign of George the Third, there is an allusion to "the anonymous Latin book 'Nova Solyma' (1648)." Mr. Adamson is safe in not mentioning the attribution of this work to Milton. As a writer in "The Library" (July, 1910) has proved almost beyond doubt, the author was a contemporary of Milton at Cambridge, Samuel Gott. No chapter in this or the next volume deals with the history of literary criticism during the period concerned,—something really more needful under the circumstances than a history of education. To tell the truth, the development of criticism in the eighteenth century, except for Addison, Johnson, and one or two others, is imperfectly known. The course of many critical ideas must sometime be traced in the thought of authors who are now well-nigh forgotten.

With Volume X. we come to a period which in some sense is our own, and to men like Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, who belong to a literature with which we feel ourselves akin. The authors of several chapters have not previously distinguished themselves in treating the subjects now allotted them. It might have been better to select Professor Cross to write on Sterne, and Professor John Edwin Wells to write on Fielding. Of the many valuable studies in Fielding by Professor Wells, Mr. Harold Child seems to be quite unaware. In Chapter IV. Professor Nettleton has given in advance the main conclusions of his more recent book entitled "English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century." Mr. A. Hamilton Thompson writes of "Thomson and Natural Description in Poetry," not uninterestingly, though there is little that is new in his way of looking at things, and something threadbare in the talk about "nature,"—but for the democratic use of "lower case" throughout the Cambridge History, the magic word would doubtless be spelled with a great N. The chapter is unexpectedly severe in its strictures upon Thomson's "Castle of Indolence." A melancholy interest attaches to the chapter on Gray, the last contribution of the late Duncan C. Tovey to the study of a poet he had made peculiarly his own. From beginning to end it is vital. Unfortunately, the author did not live to correct the proofs, or, it would seem, to compile a bibliography that would match the excellence of the chapter. The final touches, then, are wanting, though there is no lack of essential finality in the substance. A slight omission may be noticed: there is no reference to Isola, assistant to Gray, and subsequently Wordsworth's instructor in Italian. In Chapter VII. the Panurgic Mr. Saintsbury discusses after his own fashion "Young, Collins, and Lesser Poets of the Age of Johnson." His own fashion, as usual, is distinctive enough; one is forced to borrow a word from the style itself to describe it, that is, "journalese." The lesser poets are familiar domain to Professor Saintsbury; but it appears that he is in sympathy with none of them save Collins. That the others are "minor" is assumed in the title; why, then, reiterate the notion in the text? "A true critic," says Addison, "ought to dwell rather upon excellencies than imperfections, to discover the concealed beauties of a writer, and communicate to the world such things as are worth their observation." Chapter VIII. is on Johnson and Boswell. Is it difficult or easy to write on Johnson? Many have written well besides Boswell, many ill besides Macaulay. On the whole, since the researches of Birkbeck Hill, there is no good reason for misunderstanding either Johnson or Boswell. Professor D. Nichol Smith has done superlatively well with both. So, too, has Mr. Austin Dobson with Goldsmith. Of the more general chapters, one may single out for approbation that of Professor Ker on "The Literary Influence of the Middle Ages"; that of Dr.

Henry B. Wheatley and the Ven. W. H. Hutton on the "Letter-writers"; and the second of the two essays on the "Historians,"—that is, the chapter on Gibbon by Sir Adolphus Ward. The sketch of Gibbon's life, in the main, it seems, extracted from his autobiography, is followed by an illuminating account of his critics, and this by an estimate of his style and personality, thus: "But it is quite obvious to any candid student of 'The Decline and Fall' that its author had no sympathy with human nature in its exceptional moral developments — in a word, that his work was written, not only without enthusiasm, but with a conscious distrust, which his age shared to the full, of enthusiasts."

Herewith we must close these casual remarks upon three volumes which it is virtually impossible to describe in a general way apart from those that have gone before. One thing, however, at least to the present reviewer, is very evident. Though the editors do not ignore the existence of American scholarship in the field of English, and in general have chosen their American collaborators with skill, many of the bibliographies appended to the separate chapters show a lamentable want of information concerning special books and articles that have been produced in this country. It was to be expected that a careful scholar like Professor Ker would know such things as Farley's "Scandinavian Influences in the English Romantic Movement"; and so he does; his list of books is admirable. But in other cases, as the bibliography of Gray, the omissions pass belief. Professor Cook's Concordance, indispensable in the apparatus for a study of the poet, is not mentioned; nor is Professor Northup's edition of "Gray's Essays and Criticisms," in spite of the favorable review in the London "Times" (Aug. 24, 1911),—not to speak of his article on "Addison and Gray as Travellers" in the Hart memorial volume. More astonishing yet is the reference to translations and parodies of Gray; for these, so we read in the Cambridge History, "see Bradshaw's bibliography." Bradshaw's edition of Gray appeared in 1891; Professor Northup's far more extensive list of adaptations appeared in "Notes and Queries" just twenty years later. Under Biography and Criticism we are referred to an appendix on "Gray's Knowledge of Old Norse" in a volume of selections bearing the date 1894, and not to Farley's "Scandinavian Influences," which appeared in 1903. Rolfe's edition of Gray is nowhere included. In view of these omissions, which are chance discoveries, it is obvious that the talented author of the chapter had very little to do with the bibliography; he may have furnished some of the titles, but we owe it to his memory not to hold him responsible for the final form.

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