

Literature

As Others See Us

The Condition of Women in the United States. By Mme. Blanc. (Th. Benton.) Roberts Bros.

AMERICA HAS SO LONG been a cynosure of the wondering interest of the French, as a practical and successful exemplification of some of the daring theories which Gallic temperament has rendered impracticable at home, that we should have become quiescently accustomed to their insistent and often kindly meant comments upon our manners and customs. But, in fact, we have developed an almost national and certainly vocal characteristic of sensitiveness to foreign opinions, chiefly under the spur of this branch of French literature. This year, as a direct consequence of the fierce light of advertisement which beat upon the World's Fair, we have the published notes of an unusual number of voyagers who have been with us garnering opinions and pruning prejudices. Chief among them, M. Paul Bourget was variously amused and appalled by those of our characteristics which fell under his notice; and now comes Mme. Blanc to record her observations. This clever lady left home prepared to approve of "The Condition of Women in the United States." She had read of us till she evidently believed that we were all to be divided into classes as scientifically defined as the fauna and flora of our continent. But, like many of her sex, she has not the faculty of exact reasoning. Her logic is obnoxious to the rule which schoolmen call the illicit process of the minor term, for, in generalizing upon American women, she drew her premises from the observation of cults only.

Her America reads more like the America of Emerson's time than that of to-day. She seems scarce to have tasted the broad life of our country, which to a really scientific observer is the wonderful charm of our development. Our complex nationality is now in the second or third generation of descent from the original grafting of pan-European shoots upon the Anglo-Saxon stock, and in the resultant efflorescence the really acute foreign student of modern American civilization should expect to find his best explanation of our aberration from his old-world standards. Mme. Blanc is certainly the most fair-minded of our critics, and she as certainly fraternized with good people while here, which is more than can be said for M. Bourget. What claimed her closest attention in Chicago was Miss Addams's work at Hull House. In Boston, Mrs. Howe, Miss Ticknor and Mrs. J. T. Fields, with the women's clubs, seemed to her to typify New England life. To her French way of thinking, the freedom of our women's colleges is almost monstrous. She was unable to comprehend, except with a shrug, the practicability of co-education as she saw it in Knox College at Galesburg, Ill. She exclaims over the Boston ways of Negroes in New Orleans, who (she says) study Greek and therefore evince the demoralizing effect of education on the lower races. In all she saw there was something to approve and much to marvel at; and, if sometimes she deplores the results we attain, her record of it is always good-tempered, and we read her book with real gratitude and renewed admiration for the woman whose novels have given us all such charming hours. We were particularly glad, moreover, to learn the few salient facts of Mme. Blanc's life which are prefixed to her book by the publishers. It may be added that it is there recorded that the "Th." of her pseudonym stands for her baptismal name, Theresa.