

*Life-records of
a noble woman.*

In Helen Abbott Michael's "Studies in Plant and Organic Chemistry, and Literary Papers" (Riverside Press)

we have the record of a simple but strenuously active life. Born in 1857 and dying in 1904, Mrs. Michael has left us records of investigation not only surprising in bulk, but, as Dr. Wiley, the government chemist, says, "prominent in the annals of American chemistry." For Mrs. Michael was a chemist, and long before her marriage Helen Abbott was known to the learned societies of this country and of the world as an investigator of wonderful originality, ability, and skill. Her work lay in the domain of organic chemistry, especially the chemistry of plant products; and it was her contention that the true taxonomy of vegetable forms lay revealed in their attainments in the construction of chemical compounds. This is not the place to enter upon extended criticism either of Mrs. Michael's theories or her work; suffice it to say that she has done more than any other woman in the United States to promote research in this particular field, and must be reckoned with hereafter by all, in all lands, who attempt work in the subtle chemistry of plants. Withal, Mrs. Michael appears to have been a woman of charming personality, possessed of all the graces of her sex, and fortunate in an acquaintance world-wide in its extent. The volume contains an extended biographical sketch; an introduction to Mrs. Michael's work in chemistry, by Dr. Wiley; sixteen papers on organic chemistry, four of them in German; and four literary papers which discuss such themes as "Science and Philosophy in Art," "The Drama in Relation to Truth," Whitman, Browning, etc. A photogravure portrait forms the frontispiece and shows the face of a most attractive woman.

*A famous
Frenchwoman
and her friends.*

A glamour is inevitably cast about the memory of a beautiful woman like Madame Récamier, who during the first half of the nineteenth century had in her court men that, politically, socially, and intellectually, were the most prominent in Europe. Mr. H. Noel Williams has given a comprehensive account of this famous Frenchwoman in his book entitled "Madame Récamier and Her Friends" (Scribner). Virtuous, sympathetic, and tactful, she seems to have been able to fill her *salon* with notable personages of widely varied schools and opinions, and of all grades of social rank. Soldiers and dandies of the Empire, statesmen and diplomats of the Restoration, poets and novelists of constitutional France, all paid her homage. Mathieu de Montmorency, Prince Augustus of Prussia, Ballanche, Canova, Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël, and Chateaubriand

were her devoted friends. Since, as has been aptly observed, her career runs like a fine silver thread through the web of history and is inseparable from it, the reader of her biography receives, in a desultory way, some vivid pictures of the times. Were this not true, Mr. Williams might be said to lack an excuse for his work, since Madame Récamier had no creative ability and her talent was merely social. But granting the *raison d'être* of the biography, it may be said that the author has conscientiously studied the life of his heroine, together with those of her friends as they affected hers, and presents the results in a pleasant, easy manner, which makes the book an entertaining one.

*Letters on the
art of painting.*

Seventeen letters of W. Ostwald, which appeared partially in a scientific supplement of a Munich newspaper during the years 1903-4, compose the "Letters to a Painter," which are translated by Mr. H. W. Morse, and published by Messrs. Ginn & Co. In these letters, Mr. Ostwald discusses the methods in the technique of painting; the various processes, their advantages and limitations. He makes a definite plea for a knowledge of science in art, and insists that unconscious inspiration must give way to conscious understanding of the processes and methods of work. The art student will find in these letters much food for reflection, particularly in the treatment of media, their optical characteristics and results. The general reader, perhaps, unable to cope with Mr. Ostwald's theories, will nevertheless learn from the book many interesting facts concerning the art of painting. By means of concise explanations, the technical terms necessary to the subject-matter are made intelligible even to the layman.

*The namesake
of America.*

In his book on Amerigo Vespucci in the "Heroes of American History" series (Harper), Mr. Frederic A. Ober not only gives, in concise readable form, all the details known of the life of the Florentine navigator and explorer, but enters into a discussion of the fortuitous circumstances by which for three centuries after his death Amerigo was regarded as having robbed Columbus of the credit of his great discovery and of having foisted his own name upon the newly-found continent. The conclusion is reached that a great injustice was done to Amerigo, and that it was due wholly to circumstances in no way influenced by him that the name America instead of Columbia was conferred upon the new continent, while the actual exploits of Amerigo entitled him to the position in which the German biographers placed him four hundred years ago.

*Sir Walter and
his Edinburgh.*

Scott's being a name to conjure with, Mr. W. T. Fyfe's "Edinburgh under Sir Walter Scott" (Dutton) is a book to attract readers. Mr. Fyfe is a resident of Edinburgh, and is learned in the history and antiquities of this northern Athens, as well as enamored of her charms. When it is recalled that from the

death of Johnson to that of Sir Walter, or for nearly half a century, the Scotch rather than the English capital was the intellectual and literary centre of the kingdom, it becomes clear that a writer dealing with this period has abundant matter to furnish an attractive picture of Edinburgh society. Nor has Mr. Fyfe neglected his opportunities. The memoirs of the period, with Lockhart's work as one of the most important, have been diligently searched and freely drawn upon. The personal element is made much of, and many pleasing character sketches, with some good anecdotes, are given. Of all books, this one should have had an index — if only for the convenience of busy reviewers.