"Haphazard Personalities."*

MR. LANMAN would have made a capital Boswell, if he only could have found his Johnson. Such a combination being out of the question, in these degenerate days, he has rendered equally good service by giving us his reminiscences of some forty notable men with whom he has had to do. That his own personality enters so largely into the narration is not a blemish, as many reviewers have taken the pains to point out, but one of the very elements that give piquancy and charm to his book. Precise and formal biographies, wrought out by rule and line, according to the best critical dicta, one may find any day, and in any quantity; let us welcome the rarer annalist whom no fears of the cry of egotism deter from putting himself into his story as often as is essential to its point and completeness. We already know a good deal about these forty men; what we want, and what we find in this volume, is not a lot of general facts and incidents, but details of their relations with the chronicler. Thus we really arrive at a more intimate acquaintance with these persons than we should otherwise obtain; and that we also incidentally learn much about the gossiping narrator is no detriment to our enjoyment.

The 'personalities' concern such characters as Irving, Bryant, Longfellow, Clay, Everett, Greeley, Kane, Dickens, Tupper, Gen. Scott, McClellan and others of note in war, literature, science and politics. The pages abound in anecdotes illustrative of their habits of thought, mental and social qualities, and manner of life, while numerous letters give additional revelations of peculiarities of disposition. Irving said that his 'Knickerbocker' cost him more hard work than any other of his writings, though he considered it the most original of his productions. He never had a headache, and for twenty years was not conscious of the least bodily suffering. He usually wrote with great rapidity; some of the most popular passages in his books were composed with the utmost ease, while the more uninteresting ones were those which had given him most trouble. Longfellow's 'Excelsior' was suggested by the lofty sentiments contained in a letter received from Charles Sumner. 'The

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Psalm of Life' was the spontaneous outgrowth of his own mind, and so slightly esteemed by the author that he hesitated to give it to the public. 'The Wreck of the Hesperus' was written one December midnight, when the poet's mind was full of tidings of recent shipwrecks off the Gloucester coast. Mr. Lanman complains of the 'pittance' received for this fine poem, but he should take into account Park Benjamin's letter accompanying the check, and beginning as follows:—'Your ballad, "The Wreck of the Hesperus," is grand. Inclosed are twenty-five dollars (the sum you mentioned) for it, paid by the proprietors of *The New York World*, in which glorious paper it will resplendently coruscate on Saturday next.' This 'glorious paper' was a mammoth weekly, established in 1840, or thereabouts, by Mr. Benjamin, and conducted by him for five years 'with an enterprise, a gusto, and an ability which gave the American people some new ideas in regard to periodical literature.' The best writers of the day were among its contributors, and for a time it was the leading authority upon literary matters. Mr. Benjamin also originated the plan of republishing in cheap form the most popular books issued in England. Fond of entertaining his friends, he gave delightful little dinner-parties, at which the repast was excelled only by the brilliancy of the conversation. He was an admirable reader, and an amusing instance is related of the fascinating power of his elocution.

Among the many remarkable letters in the volume is one from George P. Marsh, describing, from memory, his valuable collection of books and engravings, and giving some hints on art. After advising the study of natural history, especially botany, geology and meteorology, as an aid to the cultivation of the eye, he says: 'Don't be led astray by Hazlitt, who was but a coxcomb in matters of art, after all. No Englishman ever had, or can have, a true idea on the theory of art. . . . Keep in mind the distinction between the art of seeing and the faculty of sight, for herein lies the difference between the artist and the man.' Equally entertaining is Mr. Lanman's picturesque account of the library of Peter Force, with its fifty thousand rare works on American history, occupying seven rooms of an old, dingy brick building in Washington, its silence unbroken except by an occasional visitor and the presence of an assortment of dogs and cats, who shared with mice and spiders the guardianship of the treasures. From Charles Mackay our author first heard of Thackeray's singular indifference to the works of nature; and that he did not have the curiosity to visit Niagara, when in this country. 'I had always been amazed at my own inability to wade through the novels of this famous author, but that information settled the whole question. He could, of course, describe a fashionable and heartless woman to perfection; but, for myself, I have no fancy for society follies when gone to seed.'

The much-abused Tupper will be consoled to read that 'the motive which prompted his "Proverbial Philosophy" was creditable and Christian-like; it was not equal to Shakespeare, nor did it aspire to such a position; it carried pure and comforting thoughts into thousands of domestic circles, without leaving behind it the slime which emanates from the popular or fashionable press; and I have thought that I would much prefer to be shut up from the world with that curious book than with a thousand and one of the novels and scientific dissertations which flood the bookstalls and libraries of the present day.' Though passing so much of his life at Washington, and associating so intimately with the nation's rulers—his 'Dictionary of Congress' being his great work,—Mr. Lanman seems not to have figured largely as a politician. His first and only vote at a Presidential election was cast for Henry Clay. He wrote a campaign life of Gen. Scott, which, he thinks, contributed to the election of Pierce; 'nor did I ever,' says he, 'try to help a political friend into the Presidency, without blasting his prospects forevermore.' The volume is so abundant in entertainment, that the author's intimation in the preface, that his store of recollections is by no means exhausted, but may be drawn upon again, will not be received with alarm.

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