SEVENTEENTH CENTURY STUDIES.*

WHEN a work on literary criticism and biography reaches a third edition it makes the reviewer pause. The magic of no great name has commended this book to public notice, since its heroes are Lodge, Webster, Rowlands, Captain Dover, Herrick, Crashaw, Cowley, The Matchless Orinda, Etheredge, and Otway, a cluster of modest authors, not one of whom is to the general student of English literature much more than a name. Mr. Gosse, indeed, deliberately omits Donne, because he "felt Donne to be as far beyond the scope of his work as Ben Jonson would have been." Nor does he seek to catch our interest by relating the moving accidents of the Puritan Revolution and the Restoration, although these great historical facts form the recognized background of his story. The marked success of the book is rather to be found in a singularly happy accord between matter and manner, a delicate sense of the scope and limit of the work, an absence of desire to make the personages of his history larger than they are, and an instinctive avoidance of anything bordering on extravagance of style. The work is probably too widely known already to require a minute review. One passage may, however, be quoted, containing not only the author's avowal of his aim, but also a pleasing personal reference. "Why," he asks at the close of his chapter on Cowley, "why recall to our attention a writer whose verses are now long past all hope of revival?" In his reply he says:

> I confess that I find a particular fascination in the study of these maimed and broken poets, these well-strung instruments upon whose throbbing strings Destiny has laid the pressure of her silencing fingers. The masters of song instill me with a sort of awe. I feel embarrassed when I write of Milton. But Cowley has surely grown humble in the long years of his exile, and he will not exact too much homage from the last of his admirers.

Milton does not form the subject of a separate study, yet, by a curious felicity of style, the sound of his organ voice is occasionally heard, but at such a distance as not to overwhelm the flute-like notes of the minor poets. (Cf. pp. 154, 156, 197, 202, 214, 226, 228, and 314. Only three of these references are found under "Milton" in the index.)

In the entire volume there is little which one would wish to see changed. As the book may be reprinted, however, it may be well to notice that "study Protestantism" (p. 159, l. 2) should be "sturdy Protestantism;" the phrase, "no difference or slight should be perceived between them" (p. 61, l. 1), should have commas after "difference" and "slight;" "sympathies arraign themselves on the side of" (p. 58, l. 8) should be "array themselves." In the essay on Robert Herrick (p. 147, l. 25) two trifling emendations might be made. Mr. Gosse writes that Herrick, "in a charming little 'Ode to Jesus,' wishes the Saviour to be crowned with roses and daffodils, and laid in a neat white osier cradle; in 'The Present' he will take a rose to Christ and, sticking it in His stomacher, beg for one mellifluous kiss." For easy reference and in strict accuracy the passage should read: "In the charming little 'An Ode of the Birth of our Saviour' Herrick suggests that for the kingly stranger roses and daffodils and interwoven osiers would be more becoming than a homely manger; in 'To his Saviour, a Child, a Present by a Child' he tells a child to take a rose to Christ and, sticking it in His stomacher, beg for one kiss from His mellifluous lips." In explanation of the single kiss Mr. Gosse overlooks the dignity attaching to the last two lines of the poem:

> Then never take a second on,
> To spoil the first impression.

On page 226 the text runs, "From Cowley to Darwin all the poets made oratorical effect take the place of observation of nature." "Darwin," as the context shows, is a mistake, and ought, perhaps, to be "Dryden."

Only one point disturbs the otherwise serene atmosphere of Mr. Gosse's book, *i. e.*, the significance which he gives the adjective "Puritan" or "Puritanical" (pp. 6, 48, 106, 146, 162, etc.). Ordinarily a writer might without question use the word in the sense of "narrow-minded" or "bigoted," but Mr. Gosse is dealing with the seventeenth century when Puritanism was a pronounced aspect of history and literature, and he should have given to the word something of the magnitude belonging to the names of Cromwell and Milton. By habitually employing the word in its narrower sense Mr. Gosse is responsible for suggesting to the reader that he is prejudiced. Nowadays it is quite within the compass of the average literary critic to do justice to the grace and music of the Royalist poets without slighting the reputation of the opposite political party. But in fixing attention upon this one trifling defect and asking it to be withdrawn, we feel ourselves to be in the dangerous predicament of the scientific Aylmer, of the *Mosses from an Old Manse*, who, by concentrating his gaze upon the birthmark on the cheek of his wife, Georgiana, lost sight of the beauty of her whole face and form.

*Seventeenth Century Studies. A Contribution to the History of English Poetry. By Edmund Gosse. Dodd, Mead & Co. $1.50.