"LITERATURE, THE NOBLEST OF THE ARTS"

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS AND PAPERS OF GEORGE SAINTSBURY, 1875-1920. *3 Volumes. 1174 pages. E. P. Dutton and Company. $12.50.*

THROUGHOUT these essays and papers, two of which have never before been printed, certain idiosyncrasies assert themselves. Inescapably apparent is "the old gay pugnacity" of one not thus far "disabled," as a corollary to which, we have an impenitent Toryism so opposed in every nerve to "the washy semi-Socialism, half sentimental, half servile, which is the governing spirit of all but a few politicians to-day," that it would seem in its own right at all events, to exemplify "that single-hearted and single-minded insanity of genius which carries a movement completely to its goal."

In the expert and so humorous biographical summaries, and paraphrases of plot, in the statement that the Cyropaedia "is a philosophical romance for which its author has chosen to borrow a historic name or two," in the critic's understanding of "the very important division of human sentiment, which is called for shortness love," we feel the ardour of the novelist. We feel the instinctiveness of experienced criticism when he exclaims, upon reading that Dickens' Agnes "is perhaps the most charming character in the whole range of fiction," "Agnes! No decent violence of expletive, no reasonable artifice of typography, could express the depths of my feelings at such a suggestion"; and the relish for life which results in the projecting of it, is nowhere more engagingly apparent than in the elaborating of the Ettrick Shepherd's statement that "A' contributors are in a manner fierce." "The contributor who is not allowed to contribute," says Mr Saintsbury, "is fierce, as a matter of course; but not less fierce is the contributor who thinks himself too much edited, and the contributor who imperatively insists that his article on Chinese metaphysics shall go in at once, and the contributor who, being an excellent hand at the currency, wants to be allowed to write on dancing; and, in short, as the Shepherd says, all contributors."

It is the author's firm conviction that "the greatest part, if not the whole of the pleasure-giving appeal of poetry lies in its sound rather than in its sense"—that "no 'chain of extremely valuable thoughts' is poetry in itself." Objections occur to one, and one receives accordingly with satisfaction the comment upon Matthew Arnold: "I cannot quite make out why the critic did not say to the poet, 'It will never do to publish verse like this and this and this and this,' or why the poet did not say to the critic, 'Then we will make it worth publishing,' and proceed to do so."

Despite trifling divagations from impartiality contained in an appeal to "any fit reader," to "any competent judge," to "any tolerably intelligent critic," one cannot but be lessoned and exhilarated in these papers, by the beneficent presence of equity as of law; equity being nowhere more apparent than in the statement "that it will be only in a way for [a man's] greater glory if you find out where and wherefore he is sometimes wrong." Essentially "a thoughtful person" in the desire to give facts "without violating the sanctity of private life," Mr Saintsbury admits that he "may have 'most politely, most politely' made some authors uncomfortable," but reminds one that in reviewing, "Stiletto and pole-axe, sandbag and scavenger-shovel are barred"—that one "can administer sequins as well as lashes, and send a man to ride round the town in royal apparel as well as despatch him to the gallows."

We are aware of the writer's contempt for "twentieth hand learning"—of a voracity that has "grappled with whole libraries." "I have seen disdainful remarks," says Mr Saintsbury "on those critics who, however warily, admire a considerable number of authors, as though they were coarse and omnivorous persons. . . . A man need not be a Don Juan of letters to have a list of almost *mille e tre* loves in that department." His impassioned absorption in the particular phase of genius which he is pleased to contemplate, appears in his refulgent terminology; as when he says Macaulay was thought to be "not only 'cocksure' but cock-a-hoop" and that "the average mid-century Liberal" regarded Carlyle as "a man whose dearest delight it was to gore and toss and trample the sweetest and most sacred principles of the Manchester School." He recalls to us, "the massive common sense and nervous diction" of Dryden whom he denominates "a poetical schoolman"; "the extraordinary command of metre which led Swinburne to plan sea-

serpents in verse in order to show how easily and gracefully he can make them coil and uncoil their enormous length"; and admiring Trollope's "economy and yet opulence of material," says of Mr Scarborough's Family, "If you have any sense of the particular art you can't help feeling the skill with which the artist wheels you along till he feels inclined to turn you out of his barrow and then deposits you at his if not your destination."

It would be "some task" as Mr Saintsbury "says the Americans say," to correct the speech of those who make our speech correct, but the "Heaven knows" of the British *littérateur*—of Mr Saintsbury, indeed—does seem to the untutored American, a superlative upon that which is complete. "With the imperiousness natural to all art," however, "style absolutely refuses to avail itself of, or to be found in company with anything that is ready made," and it is not surprising that in the work of one who has written a History of English Prose Rhythm, we should have "style"—a style, moreover, in which there should often be "a perfection of expression which transmutes the subject." Mr Saintsbury's concept of style as the incarnation of thought is conspicuous in his presentation of the work of others; as when he says, "There is no wing in Crabbe, there is no transport." Critics dare not, for the most part, exact excellences, standing themselves conspicuously in need of such. In these essays, however, dissatisfaction is offset by opulence; there is in them, abundance of "wing," grace being lent it very obviously by traces of an admiration for the Bible, for Cicero, for the seventeenth century, and for "the engaging idiom of the Gaul."

Of Carlyle's Sterling, says Mr Saintsbury, "I have seldom been able to begin it again or even to consult it for a casual reference, without following it right through." Space is lacking in which to name the essays in these volumes, of which one can speak with similar conviction. But if one were to begin, it would be with the essay on Lockhart, or that entitled Some Great Biographies, followed by those on the grand style, by those on Macaulay, and by Bolshevism in its Cradle—The Life and Opinions of William Godwin.

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