RALPH WALDO EMERSON.*

It is a natural interest which leads us to wish to know something of the personality of those whose names are familiar to us through their actions or their writings. This little book will therefore have a wide circulation and will tell many people much that they did not previously know of Mr. Emerson; and yet we can hardly call it a good book of its kind. We do not know who Mr. Guernsey is, but his book has a curiously homiletic smack about it suggestive of lectures originally delivered to a congregation or to a church literary club, and subsequently boiled down into a book — but not boiled down enough. There is altogether too much of Mr. Guernsey in the book and too little of Mr. Emerson. He cannot leave us alone with Emerson, but must be constantly either illustrating his views of Emerson by long reflections of his own or guarding us against Emerson's shortcomings or heresies by statements of his own opinions thereon. Sometimes this approaches the impertinent, as when he is giving an account of Mr. Emerson's relinquishing the ministry owing to conscientious objections to the Communion Service. After quoting his explanation that he did not believe that Christ intended to institute it as a perpetual ordinance, Mr. Guernsey continues thus (the italics are ours):

"Mr. Emerson admits that St. Paul presents a view of the Supper which accords in general with the common view of its origin and nature. But in this matter he gives little weight to the authority of Paul. *To us who regard the authority of Paul as not inferior to any other, the argument of Emerson and the conclusion based upon it have no validity.*"

Who in the world wants to know what Mr. Guernsey thinks of the Apostle Paul? Still this is only a few lines of superfluity, but what shall we say when frequently whole pages are dragged in of mere sermon or lecture padding? Thus in his chapter on Emerson's writings, after dismissing his lectures without the slightest attempt to describe that side of his work, on the apparent ground that he (Mr. Emerson) "had never thought them adapted for publication," he goes on:

"But the written book possesses this great advantage over the spoken word: it preserves the very thought of the author and in the very form in which he wished to express it."

Even that was hardly necessary, but less ex-

* RALPH WALDO EMERSON, Philosopher and Poet. By Alfred H. Guernsey. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

cusable is it when our biographer proceeds—"A good book is the most imperishable of man's works. Herodotus will live when the Pyramids shall have crumbled into dust. Thucydides has outlived the Parthenon. Shakespere and Milton will be as fresh," etc. etc., and two whole mortal pages of the same sort of rhetoric and water touching on the Hebrew Scriptures, Manuscripts, Palimpsests, lost books of Livy, Æschylus, and Sophocles, winding up with a little glorification over the recovered tablets and cylinders of Assyria! In fact, truth to say, the whole thing is very meagrely done. Of Emerson as a lecturer, there is, as we have said, not the slightest attempt at a sketch; and when he thus comes to Emerson as a writer, after exhausting himself in the above-mentioned dissertation on the value of books, he does not attempt himself to estimate Emerson as a writer but simply quotes "Whipple on Emerson," two pages from Appleton's Cyclopædia, and Frothingham upon Emerson, three pages from "New England Transcendentalism." Perhaps, however, we should be thankful for this self-abnegation, since one hardly wants to read any lengthened opinions from a writer who had already summed up his judgment of the greatest intellect America has produced in the words:

"Of Emerson we must say, what he said of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures: 'His utterances have no special integrity and are not shown in their order to the intellect.'"

The sketch of Mr. Emerson that shall really do justice to his character and writings has yet to be written. Of the man himself this little book says hardly anything; and yet there is something in his calm, gracious simplicity of life and character that to those who know him, who have ever been in his company for half an hour, adds greatly to the interest of his writings. One cannot talk with him without feeling the beautiful spirit of fairness that pervades his judgment of men and things. It is this spirit which has more than anything else helped to make his mind fuller and rounder as he has grown into old age. Many of the great writers of our age have become more and more self-opinionated with their years, more bitterly dogmatic in their judgments. Few people have been able to read the later utterances of either Ruskin or Carlyle with the same feeling of admiring discipleship with which they pored over the "Seven Lamps of Architecture" or "Sartor Resartus." But it is the very opposite in the case of Emerson. Intellectually, of course, his later papers, such as those of the volume on "Society and Solitude," will not compare for depth and philosophic subtlety with the earlier essays, such as those on "Compensation," "Nature," and "Representative Men." But morally and spiritually there is growth evident throughout, and in his latest writings of all there is a prophet-like clearness of view in the direction of God and immortality which has made them a real power in face of the doubts and materialism of the present day. We hope that the day may be yet distant when Emerson's life and writings have to be studied as things of the past; but when that day comes we believe that he will take his place as one of the very greatest and most inspiring of the thinkers of our age.

BROOKE HERFORD.