

MR. SCUDDER'S ESSAYS.*

HABITUAL readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* for the last two or three years have taken note of a series of critical essays marked by a catholicity of tone, a breadth of treatment, a readiness of insight, and a clear simplicity of style which set them out at once as far superior to the average anonymous magazine reviewing of the day. Among literary people their authorship has long been an open secret, and it is pleasant now to find the author throwing off the mask and appearing *in propria persona* before the general public. The eleven papers brought together by Mr. Scudder in this volume are of the sort that wears well. They have something more than a momentary interest. They are original, sound, and full of suggestion. They advance in a quiet, unobtrusive manner many a significant idea. They bear the stamp of sincerity and their suggestions are results of thorough knowledge and mature thought.

The subjects chosen by Mr. Scudder are in keeping with the current of the times, while they exhibit a freedom of choice that is characteristic of the writer. The opening essay on Elisha Mulford is a delightful portrayal of a unique man, bringing us into immediate relation with his strong, vigorous personality and yet never saying a word too much. Of "Longfellow and his Art" Mr. Scudder writes with earnest appreciation. He is the first, we believe, to point out the critical epochs in the career of Longfellow, and to determine "the bent of his genius . . . toward the artistic use of the reflected forms of nature and of the product of human forces." "He was first of all a composer, and he saw his subjects in their relations rather than in their essence." Another essay on "The Shaping of Excelsior" is familiar to the readers of the *Literary World* as it originally appeared in these columns.

Mr. Scudder writes of Maurice as "A Modern Prophet," one chiefly noteworthy for a vivid perception of a few large truths and their vehement application to conduct. Landor is lauded as a classic. "Apart from a course of study in the Greek and Latin classics," says Mr. Scudder, "I doubt if any single study would serve an author so well

as the study of Landor." Dr. Muhlenberg is the theme of a brief but forcible characterization. From the growing familiarity of Americans with the facts of their history a quickening influence upon the stage is predicted. "Emerson's Self" is dwelt upon as the most enduring charm of Emerson's work, while Emerson's lack of passionate nationality is lamented. In an essay on "Aspects of Historical Work" the scientific method of writing history is urged as a necessary prelude to philosophical conclusions regarding national tendencies. Annie Gilchrist is depicted from the side of personal friendship as a large, devoted, genuine, serene nature. In discussing "The Future of Shakespeare" Mr. Scudder makes the interesting prediction that "the time will some day come for a new and interesting study of Shakespeare—namely, the study of Shakespeare as reflected in successive generations of men." Our summary is brief, but it will show that Mr. Scudder does not follow the beaten track and that his opinions have the merit of sincerity and discernment. Thoughtful readers who would take note of the trend of current literature and biography will find in these essays a pleasure of no transient or uncertain kind.

* Men and Letters: Essays in Characterization and Criticism. By Horace E. Scudder. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. \$1.25.