

Whoever can write anything which shall give a true and sufficient idea of John Donne, such an idea as will

make the general reader of poetry understand why he is regarded as a poet of surpassing genius, may deem himself no longer an apprentice in the art of criticism. Donne is the most baffling of the minor poets; Whipple and Lowell, Gosse and Dowden, and a number of lesser men, have tried their hands, and yet no lover of Donne feels that anything adequate has been said, and those who know the poet still remain an elect number. One bar to a more general reading of Donne is now removed by the publication of his poems in two volumes (Scribners), excellently edited by Mr. E. K. Chambers. A careful text and sufficient apparatus in the way of variants and notes are supplied by the editor, and the work appears in the attractive form of the "Muses Library," now becoming more and more familiar to us. There is, too, a very remarkable portrait, which is a better comment on the characteristic poems than much that has been written on the subject. But in coming to the introduction by Mr. George Saintsbury, the reader of other essays on Donne will feel a disappointment, less keen now for the many that have gone before. Mr. Saintsbury is known to be a devoted admirer of the poet, and it would go hard if such a one could say nothing rightly. Accordingly here, as in what Mr. Saintsbury had written of Donne in the "Elizabethan Literature," we have several good things well put; but taken all in all no sufficient word is said of the real man, the intense, the fascinating, the inscrutable poet. True to his own nature, as to the inevitable secrecy of youth, Donne drew around him a cloudy something which keeps him forever to himself. And whoever may have penetrated within has been unable, on coming forth, to render a good account of what he has experienced. The reader must still depend upon himself, and here he will be helped by Mr. Chambers's notes, for Donne is a poet who needs a good deal of annotation, and Mr. Chambers is often happy in suggestion and comment, and frequently offers something of value as to the historic fact.