

THE SCHAFF-GILMAN LIBRARY OF RELIGIOUS POETRY.*

WHETHER or no Religion be giving way, as some modern prophets insist, before the aggressive march of Science, it seems certain that Religious Poetry is not on the wane. No period has witnessed so much writing and compiling activity in this field as ours. The advance of taste, the increasing requirements of criticism, are felt and shown here no less than elsewhere. What satisfied the fathers does not necessarily satisfy us, who care less, possibly, about Jove and Mars, but more for Apollo and the Graces. Loose rhymes, rough diction, and prosaic sentiment will no longer pass muster in poetry; nor will inaccuracy and slovenliness in editing. Alike in books designed for public worship and for private reading, a vast change has come about within twenty years. If we look back so far, the best works in these two lines were the Andover *Sabbath Hymn Book* and *Hymns of the Ages*. What was then wanted was fervor, grasp, feeling for the good and beautiful in a large, vague way, with an inkling of novelty; not carefulness in detail, minute or systematic arrangement of contents (unless designed to be sung), nor full knowledge and zealous reproduction of texts, nor biographic information. Says the maker of an immensely popular hymnal: "In 1862-65 no account was made of authorship—nobody knew, and nobody cared. I had no solicitude whatever; even authors were not sensitive or ambitious." It did not matter whether a piece was written by Tom Moore or by Hannah More; one name would do as well as the other. Wesley and Cowper were interchangeable; and a poem whose true date was 1850 might without offense be fathered on somebody who lived in 1750.

The progress of ideas has modified this philosophic indifference. Even in small matters, we now perceive, it is as well to be accurate; whatever is worth doing is worth taking some pains with—though it be but the making of a book for the promotion of piety by the aid of meter. Falsehood, when avoidable, is never pious; and blunders of whatever sort are sins against that realism whose reign is coming in and to be prayed for and promoted by all healthy minds. As a man of note said long ago, we want to avoid mixing things. And why should the names and words of small poets be mixed, any more than matters of greater weight?

*A Library of Religious Poetry. A Collection of the Best Poems of all Ages and Tongues, with Biographical and Literary Notes. Edited by Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D., and Arthur Gilman, M.A. With Illustrations. Dodd, Mead & Co. 11 D. La Guernsey, agent for New England, 61 Cornhill, Boston. \$5.00.

To begin with these minor points, the book before us marks eminently the change of which we have spoken. Here are some 750 verse-makers, and accounts of the great majority of them. To each poem the name is appended, and in very many cases the date. This last is a feature only of quite recent books, and an excellent one. Further research might have corrected some of these dates and supplied others; but that would have involved immense labor, perhaps disproportionate to the gain; and we may well be thankful for what we have.

No work of man is perfect; and the most painstaking scholarship has never yet produced a collection of verse taken from all quarters, and traced with unflinching accuracy. With so vast an amount of material and range of selection as we have here, it was inevitable that there should be errors and omissions. Dr. Walsham How (not Howe, as in the Index) is now a bishop. Mrs. Voke's authorship of the lines on page 190 is very dubious; the earliest text yet found, from which this modern one is extracted and altered, gives them to "a Bristol Student," and the date is 1803. The translator of Mauburn (p. 734) is not "unknown," but Mrs. Charles, abundantly known and cited from elsewhere in the book. Luther had not a great deal to do with "Flung to the heedless winds" (p. 384), and W. J. Fox's authorship of it rests on no better authority than that of the *Methodist Hymnal* (1878), which is given to rash statements; it is not in Fox's *Hymns and Anthems*, and has not been traced back of the Baptist *Psalmist*, 1843. Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges acquires fame unduly, as he has often done before, at the expense of Matthew Bridges, a very different person and much better poet; of his lyric on p. 901, part was taken from Charles Wesley; while that on p. 100 omits the last stanza, for sound Protestant rather than literary reasons. One might go further with this list; but it is an ungracious task to point out blemishes where there has been an honest effort to avoid them. In general, the accuracy of statement here may be relied on, and will compare favorably with that of any other book of the kind.

But are there other books of the kind? Surely not on such a scale. Rogers's *Lyra Britannica*, Schaff's *Christ in Song*, Prime's *Songs of the Soul*, have none of them one third such an array of contents as this. For size it must be ranked, not with collections of sacred poetry, but with the largest compendiums of poetry of all sorts. It exceeds by one third Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets*; the volumes of Dana, Emerson, and Bryant are not so big. More emphatically than any preceding work, it is a collection, not a selection. The publishers' claim is just; they offer for the first time what may be called a "Library of Religious Poetry."

These facts must be borne in mind in at-

tempting to estimate the literary merit and value of the work. Obviously, it is too soon to do that with adequate criticism; he who would master and analyze two thousand closely printed columns must take more months for it than weeks have elapsed since the appearance of these, and then boil down the fruit of his investigations into small compass, or publish it at his own expense. Space and time are limited, and life is short.

Quantity should not exclude, though it may limit, quality; and the editors' names may be a guarantee for the latter, Dr. Schaff being no novice in hymnology, nor Mr. Gilman in general literature. There is of course a temptation, proportional to the size of the work in hand, to bring in as many names as may be. Some singers not hitherto famous are admitted to this extensive choir; as John Skeffington, Viscount Massacreene and Ferrard. If nigh two hundred years ago there was a "mob of gentlemen who write with ease," how is it now? They write not only with ease, but gracefully and devoutly. Among the multitude of cotemporary versifiers general recognition must be the main, though it cannot be the only, test of worthiness. That is here applied discreetly; and Dr. Neale, Caswell, and Miss Winkworth receive due prominence as eloquent transmitters of foreign strains, if not as utterers of their own. Of poets of another sort, Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare supply copious extracts; for this is not, like most, a gathering of sacred *lyrics* only; and the epic and dramatic masters may well be drawn upon, for there will always be those who prefer their venison hashed.

The exclusions here must be more noticeable than the admissions. Of Lowell, Clough, and perhaps of Robert Browning there might well be more; and a friend expresses his surprise at the omission of R. H. Dana, "one of our very first American poets, not only original and bright, but heartily religious; at least three from him are worthy of place in a much smaller collection." But of such compilations, as of hymnals, "he that would have a perfect one must make his own, and then be content to find nobody else agree with him."

So vast are our stores of pious verse, that they are by no means exhausted by this immense draft upon them. It would be entirely possible to make another volume as large as this, that should contain nothing admitted here, and yet nothing beneath criticism or worthy of contempt. Older and newer authors, from Quarles and John Mason, and yet earlier than they, to Lynch and Palgrave, with some native reinforcements, could furnish a mine of gems that either have not yet been fully appreciated or have partly been forgotten. They would not all be of the first water, indeed; nor is anybody in this generation likely to under-

take the herculean task of digging them out and polishing them up for the counter. And if it were done, some precious things that Mr. Gilman and Dr. Schaff have set their mark on would be sorely missed. The lovely legend of "Sir Pavon and St. Pavon," for example, could not be duplicated.

A friend professes to find an error on the very title-page, in the first line of the stanza quoted there. "Blessings *be with* them and eternal praise," Wordsworth wrote, he says. We cannot undertake to verify either reading now. But a truce to details of criticism. We have to thank the compilers for their huge labor successfully accomplished, and to hope that it may be duly appreciated. There is no reason why it should not be, for the book steps into a place hitherto vacant, and fills it honorably, and, as will doubtless appear, usefully.