Literature.

The prompt mention in our list of "Books of the Week" will be considered by us an equivalent to their publishers for all volumes received. The interests of our readers will guide us in the selection of works for further notice.

STODDARD'S POEMS.*

THE handsome volume whose title we have placed at the foot of this column will be very acceptable to the friends of Mr. Stoddard and the lovers of his poetry. The Messrs. Scribner have done themselves credit in the mechanical get-up of the book, which in paper, type, and binding is thoroughly satisfactory.

Mr. Stoddard is too well known to the reading public to require commendation from us. One, however, gains a juster notion of a writer from a survey of his complete works. One has thus better opportunity to gather into a connected whole the impressions that have been derived from various isolated productions. All men are many-sided, and the poet more than other men. It is especially needful in his case that we be acquainted with his different moods and phases, and that we do not try too mechanically to cut him according to our own measure. It is pleasant to trace these different lines of development, to compare the utterances of the man's youth with those of his maturer age, and to learn from him some of the deeply-lying truth that it is given the poet to speak.

Mr. Stoddard has his own distinct individuality. There is always smoothness and grace in his verse, and manliness and directness in his thought. Yet we may see in his poetry several distinct sides. There is a Wordsworthian love of Nature, which sometimes rises to intense longing and almost mystic worship. There are various poems in the volume before us devoted to communing with Nature, and the poet makes a full confession of faith in the "*Carmen Naturæ Triumphale*," p. 80, in which, after professing his love for her various manifestations, he identifies himself with her in the words:

> "My life with Nature now is blent,
> She is a portion of my blood;
> I am her passive instrument,
> The creature of her every mood."

The passionate love of Nature is a striking peculiarity of our author's poetry, and a very excellent one. True, it seems sometimes to take the shape of pantheism, as is the case also with Wordsworth and Tennyson. He gives expression to this feeling in the piece, on p. 288, beginning: "Why stand ye gazing into Heaven?" The pantheistic tendency is a natural one to the poet of external Nature; but we may put aside his speculations, and with him surrender ourselves to the poetic contemplation of Nature, and all the healthful influences that come from it, without surrendering the didactic-theistic view of the Hebrew psalms. We judge Mr. Stoddard to be a lover of Wordsworth, of whom there are echoes, especially in the "Hymn to the Beautiful," p. 31, and the "Carmen," p. 80. In the "In Memoriam," p. 328, and other pieces we recognize the psychological reflectiveness of our age, of which Mr. Tennyson is the generally-accepted exponent. And in such poems as the "Cæsar," p. 278, we see that conversational-philosophical style that might be characterized as "Browningian," but for the objections to that term on the score of euphony. All these are natural tendencies of our time, faithfully reflected by Mr. Stoddard, who is a genuine child of his age, and whose collection of poems is, on that account, very valuable.

There is another side of the thought of our times, not wanting here—that which is sometimes called realistic. Our poet has an Anacreontic vein, and has rollicking love-songs, such as Tom Moore delighted in; only he is always in earnest, and has so far the advantage of Moore. He is earnest also and pure, even where the thought and expression are more passionate and warm. The recognition of the physical in the passion of love is a part of the return in modern art to the study of Nature; but there need not be anything but respectful love, and so it is in Mr. Stoddard's "realistic" passages, where, as he says in "The Castle in the Air," "Love doth brood and dream, while passion dies."

Among the most pleasing poems in the volume are the stories, such as the "Abdication of Noman" and "The King's Bell." There is a vein of well-considered reflection and knowledge of human nature in these narratives, that is very interesting. They contain a sort of philosophy of life, put in pleasing concrete shape. In the earlier poems this philosophy is rather negative and devoted to ease. The poet intimates, as in the "Ode," p. 18, that action was not made for man in Nature's plan, and his "castle in the air" is a "life of ease and mirth." This may be said to be one side of life. But elsewhere the poet, in later years, speaks differently, as in the admirable piece on pp. 392, 393, where he puts aside fame and all other torments, and bids man retire into himself. Here is contemplation, freedom from strife, but nevertheless activity.

There is pleasing variety in Mr. Stoddard's poetry, and a great deal of suggestive thought. Sometimes there is a line of exquisite descriptive power, as the mention of cedars of Lebanon, p. 5:

> "Veined with the rings of vanished centuries";

or the picture, p. 9, of the "Dear and Gentle Wife," who

> —— "lies in quiet deep,
> Like some immortal Dream upon the couch of Sleep."

But generally the poems must be read connectedly to get the power of the thought. We are sorry that our space will not permit us to quote at length from different parts of the volume. We regard it as an addition to our poetical store. If we can't always accept the poet's negative and *far niente* philosophy, we can always find something in what he says to accept and cherish.

*THE POEMS OF RICHARD HENRY STODDARD. Complete edition. Flowered cloth, 12mo, pp. xiv, 406. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.