We know of no volume which could be called the precursor of one published by Harper & Brothers and bearing the not very happy title of *Four Centuries of English Letters*, edited by W. Baptiste Scoones, an English *littérateur*. The title will deceive the unwary, as the "English Letters" is not the general designation of literature; but the much smaller department of epistolary correspondence, which flourished some scores and centuries of years ago, but which this age of matter-of-fact, this age that has no patience with sentiment and delicious nonsense, this age of the curt postal-card, has now nearly or quite extinguished. It is yet, however, quite *en regle* to praise the dead art which no one cares to practice, and Mr. Scoones has done a praiseworthy work in gathering a very judicious selection of letters written from 1450 to 1868, which is the latest, we notice, one from Charles Dickens to his youngest child. Not all these letters are models of style. Some are rugged, some affected and stilted; but there is character in each, or some fine sentiment, or some historical or biographical value. Indeed, we should hardly know how to spend a more profitable hour of miscellaneous reading than in perusing this book. Among the hundred and twenty writers, we find that Dr. Donne contributes five letters to the volume, James Howel five, Dean Swift four. Joseph Addison four, Lady Mary Wort-

ley Montagu four, Dr. Johnson four, Cowper seven (a just pre-eminence), Lord Nelson eight, however, Wellington six, Lamb five, Byron six, Hood four, Macaulay four, Dickens four, and Charles Kingsley four. It is like a course in history to read these letters, and sometimes like an excellent course in ethics. Mark F W. Robertson's letter, earnest and indignant as he could make it, to a friend who was taking morphine to assuage pain. Or take that charming letter of Charles Kingsley's—to take one of the more weighty of these epistles, which is really a bit of earnest self-defense against a critic. That single letter is a revelation of a man's deep heart, such as one seldom has the opportunity to see. In it Mr. Kingsley contrasts the prudent, money-getting, and eminently respectable and religious modern English Jacob with his wild, birthright-despising brother, Esau, who hunts and rides and makes brave food for powder in Crimean battle-fields. He confesses himself willing to let others preach smooth things to the smooth-skinned Jacob, if he can only get at the heart of the rough Esau. Listen:

"And what if, when I tried, I found that Esau would listen to me; that he had a heart, as well as Jacob: that he would come to hear me preach, would ask my advice, would tell me his sorrows, would talk to me about his mother and what he learnt at his mother's knee, because he felt that I was, at least, one of like passions as himself, who had been tempted in all points, like as he had, *and with many sins?* What if he told me, at the same time, that he could not listen to Jacob's private chaplains; that he did not understand them, nor they him; that he looked on them with alternate fear and contempt? If I said to myself more and more clearly, as the years rolled on, I will live for Esau and with Esau; if I be called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners, there is One above me who was called the same, and to him I commit myself and my work; it is enough that he knows my purpose, and that in Crimean battle-fields and Indian marches poor Esau has died with a clearer conscience and a lighter heart for the words which I have spoken to him."

But the variety is great and excellent, and we commend all to our readers.