

LITERATURE.

Seignobos's Political History of Europe.*

As a strictly political history of Europe since the downfall of Napoleon, this is the closest approach to the ideal standard we have, either in the language in which it was written or in that in which the present editor and translator render it. Fyffe's three octavos are all we have to compare with it. They begin somewhat earlier, with the declaration of the Revolutionary war against Austria by Louis XVI in 1792, twenty-two years earlier than the point chosen by Seignobos, the fall of Napoleon in 1814. They end in 1878, about twenty years previous to the events which form the conclusion of the present work. In Fyffe's three volumes the history is presented in a less condensed, more flowing literary English style. It remains a political study in which attention is held to political events, transformations and movements. What led up to them and what they resulted in are the centers of interest. The work lacks, however, in proportion, and the balance of the parts. The author was not always able to secure the highest degree of impersonal detachment, and there is some inequality in the latter parts of his work.

Seignobos, on the other hand, relieves himself at once of the whole French Revolution as a period standing by itself and which, if it has not been exhausted, has at least been studied over and written about until the reading public may ask to be spared, for a while at least, any further exposition of that epoch-making perturbation. Taking the fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna for his starting point, Seignobos has the whole political history of Europe since 1814 before him. It is the game of politics played as it never was played before, among the governments with each other and with their own subjects, on the basis of the balance of power on the one hand

and with the fierce intensity of revolution, or reform, or rational passion added to it, on the other. There never was a time in the history of the world when political history counted for so much, when its changes came so near to the life of man or involved so many or so great human interests as in this century, or stirred so much and so deep passion.

This is what renders it so vastly important, on the one hand, and, on the other, so difficult to write with serene, passionless impartiality.

This qualification M. Seignobos possesses in the highest degree. The taint of national prejudice, which, with all the broadening of modern life and culture, has grown more intense than it ever was before, he has so fully eliminated as to have become, Frenchman as he is, an impartial reporter of the events which made Alsace and Lorraine German soil. "*Tros, Tyriusve, mihi nullo discrimine agetur.*" He is another example of the old remark that the most tranquil observer comes always from the burning center of commotion, the zone of highest temperature and fiercest political agitation. This impersonality makes his work neither cold nor lacking in human interest. He possesses in a remarkable degree the instinct which carries him to the vital center of a movement and presents events in a sequence which shows how one thing grew out of the other, what its value is in relation to the well-being of mankind.

The work as now presented to the American public is a translation, but a translation of uncommon merit. It has had the benefit of a free revision by the editor of a kind it would not be altogether safe to intrust to less competent or less judicious hands than Professor Macvane's. The translation was made under his responsibility by another person whose name is not given. Numerous useful footnotes are added all through the volume to explain the text. Some omissions of unimportant or obscure matter have been made, and occasionally larger liberties have been taken, especially in the chapters on England. The

* A POLITICAL HISTORY OF EUROPE SINCE 1814. By Charles Seignobos of the University of Paris. Translation edited by S. M. Macvane, Professor of History in Harvard. Henry Holt & Co. Pp. 887 \$3.00.

net result is that the American edition is not a mere translation, but a revision, which presents the original with very few changes and those directly in line with the author's plan and such as to make his work more acceptable to the new public to which it is introduced by the English translation.

Readers who are familiar with Goldwin Smith's two volumes on the "Political History of the United Kingdom" will feel a certain meagerness in the three chapters and their scant one hundred pages which were all that room could be found for in the overcrowded work. The subject is, however, laid out so well and developed with such vigorous restriction to characteristic and decisive points as to present a wonderfully clear and rational account of the three periods into which the whole movement naturally divides, aristocratic and conservative England before the reform of 1832, England between the reform of 1832 and 1867 in the throes of the new political conditions, and England under the influence of its new democratic life—a view which the author presses quite as far as the facts will bear him out and with some needless emphasis on the socialistic tendencies of recent politics in England. The summary generalization with which these chapters conclude has a suggestiveness and instructive value not commonly found in the ordinary histories.

The political history of France follows, treated in much the same lines and in the same kind of brevity, which, after all, omits nothing vital to the evolution or characteristic of the subject. Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal require less space. So does Italy, tho the chapter assigned to it is one of marvelous interest and brings the history down to Crispi's government and the year '96.

Germany presents a more complex problem, to which the author has brought his best powers. It is worked out with the highest scientific skill combined with great simplicity. The five chapters divide the whole period logically into its constituent elements and carry the reader on by a natural sequence of political events from the Germany of particularistic States and qualified despotic paternalism and from a Prussia which in 1850 submitted to humiliation at Olmutz, to

the formation of the North German Confederation in '66 and of the Empire in '70, and its development in these last years of the century.

Austria presents a far more difficult problem in her political history, which, great as it is, seems not to be brought back into the central stream of European politics, but to take its place in the side currents with Sweden and Norway, Turkey, the Christian nations of the Balkans and Greece. The three chapters which compose Part II and the four chapters of Part III show the author again at his best. They discuss the political results which have followed the vast changes in the material conditions of life, the Church and Catholic parties, and the political influence of international and revolutionary societies. Part IV completes the work and is devoted to a kind of summary generalization which ordinarily is worth little except when done by men of the highest competence. Fortunately, M. Seignobos shows himself in this class. They treat of the rivalry between England and Russia, French Preponderance and the Nationalist Wars, German Ascendancy and the Armed Peace, and round up the work with a splendid summary survey of the Political Evolution of Europe during the period under review. Nothing more useful or more satisfactory in the way of a manual of the recent political history of Europe can be put into the student's hands than this volume. It belongs to a class of works which afford little opportunity for literary display, and are so much the worse for every attempt in this direction. It is, however, full of living interest; treats of matters which lie close to the heart of things, and while it makes them real, makes them also intelligible.