sooner or later, and much more often sooner than later, the mocking demon of the individual, or, if a different phrase be preferred, the great and splendid mystery of the idiosyncrasy of the artist, will meet and baffle you." Yet the comparative method is *the* method of the critic who estimates himself aright as a judge, not merely a reporter of his own private and temporary likings and dislikings. He has to provide others with that which he has first gained himself from the widest reading, "a sort of conspectus of literature." Mr. Saintsbury's three wise axioms of criticism are, therefore: Compare, always compare; give heed to the literary and not the extra-literary character of the matter under examination; and declare a reason for the faith that is in you.

Mr. Saintsbury's remarks on an American novelist, who seems to him deficient in the wide and careful reading needful to make a good critic, will interest those who have read *Harper's Magazine* thoroughly of late years:

> We have at this moment an awful example of an exceedingly clever writer who has commenced critic, disdaining this preparation. Some of my friends jeer or comminate at Mr. Howells; for my part I only shudder and echo the celebrated, "There, but for the grace of God." Here is a clever man, a very clever man, an excellent, though of late years slightly depraved, practitioner in one branch of art, who, suddenly and without preparation, takes to another, and becomes a spectacle to men and angels. I hope that we shall one day have a collection of Mr. Howells' critical dicta on novels and other things; they will be one of the most valuable, one of the most terrible of books, as showing what happens when a man speaks without knowledge. To read what Mr. Howells says of Mr. Thackeray is almost an illiberal education. The reason of the error is quite obvious. It is simply that the clever American does not know; he has not sufficient range of comparison.

One need not be a thick-and-thin admirer of Mr. Saintsbury to appreciate the entire justice of these observations on a novelist turned critic in his leisure moments.

Mr. Saintsbury seems to us to have been successful in a high degree in applying his method and principles to the thirteen minor prophets of literature here treated. Men like Leigh Hunt, Hogg, Wilson, and Borrow ask for discrimination, not for eulogy or denunciation, when their personal character is in question. Authors like Crabbe, once famous but now neglected, and others like Lockhart, who have not had their due meed of fame from any generation, demand, too, a judge, not an advocate. In these candid, unrhetorical essays, they seem to come before a judge in equity, who strains no point for or against them, but gives, without pedantry and without bias, a well-reasoned account of each man's work as it has been preserved. Of the thirteen estimates, those concerned with Hogg, Hazlitt, Lockhart, Praed, and Borrow, are particularly happy in their appraisal, but all are good, and not one is dull. Mr. Saintsbury uses the first personal pronoun rather too frequently for us; yet it is as a matter of expression only, not as a token of egotism, that one remarks it.

ESSAYS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE.*

MR. SAINTSBURY'S collection of thirteen essays on as many writers of the first half of our century is distinctively more philosophical and more valuable than his volume on French writers, lately noticed by us. Here he is thoroughly at home, and has no such insularities of view to overcome as trouble English critics of French letters. For all his subjects, though none is of the highest standing as an author, he entertains a just regard, while he is a eulogist of none of them. The essays are biographical but in short part; comparative criticism forms the bulk of them. In the entirely new introduction (the essays are all reprints from *Macmillan's Magazine*), Mr. Saintsbury discusses, in a fresh and sensible way, "The Kinds of Criticism." So-called "scientific criticism" is one of the kinds which do not commend themselves to him:

> I have perceived that when this "scientific" criticism sticks closest to its own formulas and ways, it appears to me to be very bad criticism; and that when, as sometimes happens, it is good criticism, its ways and formulas are not perceptibly distinguishable from those of criticism which is not "scientific." For the rest, it is all but demonstrable that "scientific" literary criticism is impossible, unless the word "scientific" is to have its meaning very illegitimately altered. For the essential qualities of literature, as of all art, are communicated by the individual, they depend upon idiosyncrasy; and this makes science in any proper sense powerless. *She* can deal only with classes, only with general laws.

Generalization and classification may do their utmost in literature, "But always,

* Essays in English Literature. 1780–1860. By George Saintsbury. Pp. 451. Charles Scribner's Sons. $2.00.

His style is very racy, as of a man who is familiar with pungent and vigorous writers of classic repute; an occasional rare word adds to the effect of a style of pronounced individuality.

A few of Mr. Saintsbury's dicta we must find room for. To him "the singularly mean character" of Crabbe's usual style indicates that "save at the rarest moments, moments of some sudden gust of emotion, some happy accident, some special grace of the Muses to reward long and blameless toil in their service, Crabbe was not a poet. But I have not the least intention of denying that he was great, and all but of the greatest among English writers." Accepting Carlyle's declaration that in "Christopher North," with all his wonderful gifts, "the central tie-beam seemed wanting always," Mr. Saintsbury finds that "for the purpose of providing that pleasure which is to be got from literature, Wilson stands very high, indeed so high that he can be ranked only below the highest." The "unfailing life and vigor" of his miscellaneous work, "its vast variety, the healthy and inspiriting character of the subjects with which in the main it deals, are the characteristics which make its volumes easy-chair books of the best order. Its beauty no doubt is irregular, faulty, engaging rather than exquisite, attractive rather than artistically or scientifically perfect." In the second part of Praed's *Poems of Life and Manners*, Mr. Saintsbury sees

some of the best-bred and best-natured verse within the English language, some of the most original and remarkable metrical experiments, a profusion of the liveliest fancy, a rush of the gayest rhyme. . . . Unhappy is the person of whom it can be said that he neither has been, is, nor ever will be in the temper and circumstances of which Praed's verse is the exact and consummate expression; not much less unhappy he for whom that verse does not perform the best, perhaps, of all the offices of literature, and call up, it may be in happier guise than that in which they once really existed, the many beloved shadows of the past.

Of Leigh Hunt this is said quite justly: "Nobody can ever think of respecting Leigh Hunt; he is not unfrequently amiable, but never in the least degree venerable. Even at his best, he seldom or never affects the reader with admiration, only with a mild pleasure. . . . His writing of all kinds carries desultoriness to the hight. . . . Yet let us not leave him with a harsh mouth; for he loved the good literature of others very much, and he wrote not a little that was good literature of his own." In Hogg's chaotic prose work the critic finds, "though misnamed, one of the most remarkable stories of its kind ever written—a story which is not only extraordinarily good of itself, but insists peremptorily that the reader shall wonder how the devil it got where it is. This is the book now called *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Fanatic*, but by its proper and original title, *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*."

In George Borrow, the author of *Lavengro*, Mr. Saintsbury notes "the chief mark of a great writer—distinction. . . . He is the one English writer of our time . . . who seems never to have tried to be anything but himself. . . . A most self-sufficient person was Borrow, in the good and ancient sense, as well as, to some extent, in the sense which is bad and modern. And what is more, he was not only a self-sufficient person, but is very sufficient also to the tastes of all those who love good English and good literature." As for Moore, "The true poets and even the true satirists abide, and both as a poet and a satirist Thomas Moore abides, and will abide with them." To the man Sydney Smith, Mr. Saintsbury is drawn with affection, as all must be, for "here was a man who, for goodness as well as for cleverness, for sound practical wisdom as well as for fantastic verbal wit, has had hardly a superior and very few equals." Jeffrey's clearness and precision do not go unpraised of Mr. Saintsbury, but of that much more unequal person, William Hazlitt, he writes with stronger admiration:

Irregular as he is in his fashion of writing, no less than in the merit of it, the germs of some of the most famous styles of this century may be discovered in his casual and haphazard work. Everybody knows Jeffrey's question to Macaulay, "Where the devil did you get that style?" If any one will read Hazlitt carefully, he will see where Macaulay got that style, or at least the beginning of it, much as he improved on it afterwards. . . . Nor is there any doubt that, in a very different way, Hazlitt served as a model to Thackeray, to Dickens, and to many not merely of the most popular, but of the greatest writers of the middle of the century. Indeed, in the *Spirit of the Age* there are distinct anticipations of Carlyle. . . . In Hazlitt you may find something of almost everything, except the finer kinds of wit and humor. . . . Almost every other grace of matter and form that can be found in prose may be found at times in his. . . . He must have been one of the most uncomfortable of all English men of letters, who can be called great, to know as a friend. He is certainly, to those who know him only as readers, one of the most fruitful both in instruction and in delight.

Beside the authors we have named, this thoroughly enjoyable volume contains essays on Thomas Love Peacock, and, greatest of them all, Thomas De Quincey.
