TALKS ABOUT THE NEW BOOKS

A MONTHLY GUIDE TO CURRENT LITERATURE

ONE of the insistent demands made upon fiction is that it shall amuse and entertain. A novel that is dull and requires forced attention, whatever other merits it may possess, loses half its value and all its charm. In "The Embassy Ball" (F. Tennyson Neely, New York) Virginia Rosalie Coxe fully satisfies these requirements and has fulfilled another one as well—that of portraying scenes and characters with which she is familiar, and in a way that leaves little to be desired. The story sparkles with life and vivacity, and is replete with epigrammatic sayings. It is written in two parts, the first of which is told autobiographically by the hero, Delancy Courtney, who has just returned from a five years' sojourn abroad. Mrs. Coxe has invested him with an egotism that shows that she has studied men to some purpose. In the second part the thread of the story is taken up and related by the author. While Mrs. Churchill is not the heroine of the story, when considered in the old-time way, she is by all odds the personality to whom attaches the most interest. If a "dry-as-dust" critic were allowed to form an opinion of an author, I should be ready to judge that some of the pertinent, witty and odd things with which this character is credited would come very naturally in conversation from Mrs. Coxe herself. One pessimistic remark is in regard to life, where she speaks of it as "a disagreeable dose that we must gulp down in a hurry if we do not want it to taste bad. . . . Taken quickly, like a bad pill, it is endurable; taken slowly, it is like sipping cod-liver oil or some other nauseous dose." A man's verdict in regard to marriage is that "it is only a polite way of putting a halter around one's neck." This book of Mrs. Coxe's can be described in no more terse and true way than by calling it an "up-to-date" society novel, and it leads one to expect that she will do still better work in the future.

It is many times inconvenient to handle an unabridged dictionary in order to "look up" a word. The ordinary abridged editions rarely contain the word you seek. To meet both these objections and to overcome them—the first fully, the latter nearly so—Messrs. Funk & Wagnalls have issued an octavo edition of their Standard Dictionary, to be known popularly as The Student's Standard Dictionary, abridged from the larger and more comprehensive work, and yet retaining the salient features of excellence and value of that now well-known edition. This book has been awaited with widespread interest and anticipation both by leading educators and the general public. It gives the orthography, pronunciation, meaning and etymology of over sixty thousand words and phrases, with synonyms and antonyms, and also an appendix of proper names, foreign phrases, faulty diction, disputed pronunciations, abbreviations, etc., etc.—a sea of information from which no literary fisherman need return empty-handed.

In the spelling and pronunciation of words the editors had the advantage of the aid and supervision of fifty leading philologists and educators of the world, and by a simple system in the case of disputed pronunciations one may readily see those which were preferred by the members of the committee and those given by the leading dictionaries—as, for instance, that word of many pronunciations, "advertisement," is given thus: "Advertisement, ad-ver'tiz-ment, C.[1] E.[1] S. W.[1] Wr.[1] 43;—ad''ver-taiz'-ment, C.[2] E.[2] M.[2] W.[2] Wr.[2] 12." The pronunciation is accurately indicated by the Scientific Alphabet which was prepared and promulgated, after critical investigations, by the American Philological Association.

The definitions are definitive, clear, exact, and as thorough as possible, giving the accurate and recent meanings, distinctions, as well as the etymology of each word traced back in a direct line.

Not the least valuable is the department under the heading of "Faulty Diction," which is designed as an aid in the correction of many faults common in speech and writing, and the consultation of which is much to be advised.

Another feature of marked value is the system of synonyms and antonyms, which no one can fail to appreciate who has ever had occasion to write to any extent.

The above are but a few hints and suggestions of the mine of information contained in this handy volume. In conclusion it is sufficient to say that it is not a luxury, but a necessity, and worth many times the amount of money necessary to place it by one's side. It is invaluable.—[Funk & Wagnalls, New York. Cloth, $2.

"The Flowers of Life," by Anthony J. Drexel Biddle (Drexel Biddle, Philadelphia), is a collection of essays (my apologies to Emerson) and "remarks" which have done some good at least. Their publication furnished employment for the printers and binders.

Charles H. Crandall has issued a collection of his poems in a little volume which he calls "The Chords of Life" (The Author, Springdale, Conn.) The initial poem is probably the best. There is none of them of any great merit, nor yet are they as poor as many of those which are denominated "magazine poems," though some of them are reprints from leading periodicals and newspapers. They deserve no especial praise,

and yet do not warrant condemnation, while some of them may strike a responsive chord in many a reader's life.

A unique book in its way is "Sunny Life of an Invalid," by Prof. C. Howard Young. The author has been an invalid for over twenty-six years, the last fourteen of which he has been confined to his bed with what, on enumeration, is a startling complication of ills. As he says in one place, in reply to a question: "There are about seven hundred diseases, and I have had them all, *or am about to have them.*" Certainly not a state of affairs calculated to make one cheerful, or regard life as "sunny." Yet the book is written in a breezy, half-humorous vein, full of philosophic resignation, and with the intent to "encourage sick men to bear their burdens patiently, and even joyfully, and with love." Not an easy task, surely, and yet here is one man who has evidently succeeded in doing so, and "what man has done, man can do." The book is a lesson in patient resignation, a sermon to those who have health and yet complain, and an exposition of the fact that nothing is so bad but that it might be worse.

The sub-title of "Facts and Fakes about Cuba" (George Munroe's Sons, New York), by George Bronson Rea, who signs himself "Field Correspondent of The New York *Herald*," is "A Review of the Various Stories Circulated in the United States Concerning the Present Insurrection." It might more truthfully have been called "A Perversion of the Various Stories, etc., to Suit the Taste of The New York *Herald*." The author painstakingly perverts all he saw, to the discredit of the patriots, and to a laudation of the Spanish government and generals. In his introduction he speaks of the Cuban leaders as being "*opera bouffe* generals," though he grudgingly admits to "a certain admiration" for that gallant hero, Antonio Maceo, "despite his color." Noble magnanimity! Further on he says: "Is it any wonder that my letters to the *Herald*, while he (Maceo) was alive, had a tendency to favor the Cuban cause?" as though an apology were needed for "a tendency to favor the Cuban cause." Possibly it was, since it conflicted with his employers' idea of what "tendency" his letters should take. In speaking of General Gomez he deems it necessary to put the adjective "renowned" in quotation marks of sarcasm, and says that he "soon began to see the rottenness of the whole affair." The "rottenness" of a people striving for liberty against a decadent, brutal, cruel and blood-thirsty monarchy and its butcher-generals! Had Mr. Rea been living in 1776 he probably would have seen the "rottenness" of the struggle of the American patriots, and have been as bitter in his denunciations of them as he is of these men, who are imbued with the same spirit. He does well, in his opening paragraph, to say that his is a "thankless task." Yes; we are not all deaf to the cries and blind to the horrors with which that "unhappy island" is afflicted. As near as I can gather his meaning, Mr. Rea, to use a euphuism, insinuates that he alone, of all the correspondents of American newspapers, has told the truth. He calls the account of Maceo's murder "the greatest insult and calumny perpetrated during the war." Mr. Rea forgets his cue; according to his philanthropic and humanitarian friends, the Spanish, there is no "war" in Cuba.

The meaning of words as well as of actions depends much upon the point of view. According to Mr. Rea, when the Spaniards put a Cuban to death, they "execute" him; when the case is reversed, and a Spaniard suffers the death penalty, it is "murder." Of the Cuban women he says "the majority cannot aspire to anything higher than seamstress or washerwoman," and characterizes those few whom he found with the active forces as being, with one exception, "dissolute." Verily Mr. Rea would make a fair specimen of a Spaniard himself. Were it not for the exigencies of space, I should like to give some more of the many similar samples of Mr. Rea's "Facts"; but I have already wasted too many words upon both him and his book. To Spaniards, haters of Cuba, and to all those who oppose the American idea and spirit of liberty, the book will furnish a plentiful supply of the material they seek to support their views. To a reader with any idea of justice the book possesses no merit whatever.

Although the demonstrated ability to write one successful story does not always insure a repetition of the same, still, when one has thoroughly enjoyed the work of an author, they pick up a new book bearing the same name with confidence and an anticipation of pleasure. "A Social Highwayman" was so widely read, and became so much of a favorite both as a book and a play, that it paved the way for the acceptance of Elizabeth Phipps Train's latest story, "A Queen of Hearts" (J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia). It is written autobiographically, and in the person of a member of the theatrical profession, who makes the confident assertion that a woman can remain loyal to the highest ideals of true womanliness and rectitude of life, and yet occupy the place of a sensational dancer. The interest of the book depends largely upon the contrasting of the private and the public life of the heroine, the author emphasizing the fact of the dual rôle—that of the woman as a woman and the artist as an artist—remarking that the scanty apparel her part necessitated "was as much a tool of stagecraft as is the surgeon's scalpel an implement necessary to his profession." To say that the book compares very favorably with the author's former story is to give it praise enough to all who read that highly entertaining novel.

In "The Exploits of Myles Standish," Henry Johnson ("Muirhead Robertson") deals with the early as well as the later life of that hero. He says: "Comparatively little is known with certainty of the first thirty-six years of the life of Myles Standish. In dealing with this period the author has used the license of probability and inference to supply the deficiency of accredited facts." So the story opens with an account of the boyhood of the great Puritan soldier, in Lancashire, England; dealing then with his experience as a soldier in Holland, his joining the Puritan Separatists, the departure for America, and his numerous exploits and adventures in the wild, unsettled country, and the quiet ending of his turbulent, exciting life, "very auncient and full of dolourous pains," in 1656.

J. FREDERIC THORNE.