

We have found the generality of books written for children of late so thoroughly bad, as void of invention as they are full of vulgarisms in thought and language, that it is a downright pleasure to meet with one so fresh and graceful as this of Actæa's. We hope she will follow it with a series, for she has shown herself qualified to do for science what Hawthorne has done for mythology.

*Poems.* By ANNE WHITNEY. New York : Appleton & Co. 1859.

THIS modest volume is a collection of Miss Whitney's previously printed poems, scattered about in forgotten newspapers, with perhaps as many more, which now appear in print for the first time. The uncommon merit of some of her early poems, especially "Bertha," "Hymn to the Sea," and "Lilian," (here most unpoetically called "Facts in Verse,") long ago awakened a desire in lovers of good poetry to know more of Miss Whitney and what she had written; and the desire is gratified by the publication of this book. We can hardly say that the new poems are better than the old; though some of them, as "The Ceyba and the Jaguey," "Undine," "Dominique," and "My Window," are marked by the same quick insight, the same force and dignity of expression, which charm us in the earlier verses. We still find "Lilian" the best of all, as it is the longest; there are in it passages of description as clear and vivid as the landscapes of Church and Turner, and touches of profound and glowing imagination; and the whole poem, in spite of its obscurity, affects the mind like a strain of high and mournful music. The Sonnets are all more or less harsh and unintelligible,—a criticism which applies to many of the other poems. Miss Whitney evidently despises foot-notes as utterly as Tennyson, and leaves much unexplained in her titles and in the poems themselves, which might help us to understand them, if we knew it. Obscurity of thought and a lack of facility in versification cause evident defects in her otherwise fine book; on the other hand, she is never flat and seldom feeble, but writes as one whose thoughts and feelings move on a high level, sustained by a familiarity with the strength and beauty, rather

than the grace and tenderness of literature. Few of our countrywomen have written better poems, and her little book gives finer food for thought and fancy than many a more bulky volume. Is it ungracious to charge her with affectation? for this is the clinging curse of modern poetry, and one may trace it even in the noble idyls of the greatest English poet now alive. The Brownings overflow with it, and it is the chief characteristic of scores of the lesser poets of the day. If all who write verses could learn how sacred language is, how full of beauty is its austere simplicity, they would cease from their endless tricks of word-painting and the Florentine mosaics of speech. Miss Whitney offends less than many in this way, and has shown some of the rarer gifts of that indefinable being,—a true poet.

*Sword and Gown.* A Novel: by the Author of "Guy Livingstone." Boston: Ticknor & Fields.

THIS is rather a brilliant sketch than a carefully wrought and finely finished romance. The actors are drawn in bold outlines, which it does not appear to have been the purpose of the author to fill up in the delicate manner usually deemed necessary for the development of character in fiction. But they are so vigorously drawn, and the narration is so full of power, that few readers can resist the fascination of the story, in spite of the intrusive little digressions which everywhere appear, and which, jumping at random through passages of history, religion, art, politics, literature, as a circus-rider forsakes his steed to dash through the many-colored tissue screens that are invitingly held out to him, interfere quite seriously with its progress. It is certainly a book in which the interest is positive, and from which the attention is seldom allowed to wander; and is, so far, a success.

But there is also another relation in which it is to be considered. Without being much of a moralist, one may clearly perceive that its tone is unhealthy and its sentiment vicious. What it aims at we would not assume to decide; what it accomplishes is, to secure a sympathy for a reckless and dare-devil spirit which drives the hero through a tolerably long career of

more than moderate iniquity, and leaves him impenitent at the end. It will hardly do to say that the object of the book is only to amuse. Dealing with the subjects it does, it must work good or evil. Its theme is this: An imperious beauty, whose heart has been seared in earliest youth, and whose passions are half supposed to be dead, is brought in contact, at a French watering-place, with a man whose life has been passed in wildest excesses, whose amatory exploits have echoed through Europe, and who knows no higher human motive of action than the prosecution of selfish and sensual enjoyment. His good qualities are dauntless personal courage, which, however, often sinks into brutal ferocity, and occasional touches of generous emotion towards his friends. The young girl's heart-strings are again set in tune, and made to quiver in harmony with those of the determined conqueror. Just as her soul is yielded, the intelligence that her lover has a living wife is imparted to her. Here a resemblance to a striking incident in "*Jane Eyre*" may be detected; but mark the difference in the result:—*Jane Eyre*, resolute in her righteous convictions, flies from a struggle which she perhaps feels herself incapable of sustaining; the present heroine consents to re-

main near her lover, on his promise of good behavior! What follows cannot be averted,—who would expect that it should be? The elopement which is planned, however, is prevented by the interference of a third party, and the lovers submit to their destiny of separation. They meet once again, but it is only when the hero, mortally wounded in a Crimean battle, lies expiring at Scutari. With the bitter agony of the dying farewell, the scene closes. The characters remain unchanged to the end. The Sword, though stained in many places with impurities, still glistens with a lustre that bewilders and confuses the senses. The Gown—which seems introduced at all only for the purpose of mockery, its representative being invested with all contemptible and unmanly attributes—still lies covered with the reproach that has been cast upon it.

The moral of such a book is not a good one. The author does his best, by various arts, to make the reader look kindly upon a guilty love, and to regard with admiration those who are animated by it, notwithstanding the hero is no better at the end than he was at the opening, and the heroine is rather worse. And such is his undeniable power, that with many readers he will be too likely to carry his point.

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