

NEW BOOKS.

LETTERS OF MATTHEW ARNOLD.*

The effect of the publication of Matthew Arnold's letters will be to increase respect for him, by supplementing the impression of his books with more direct and various knowledge of his personality in certain aspects that found imperfect reflection in either his verse or prose. He was believed to be supercilious, hard, and narrow; but the first two of these epithets will not longer be applied to him in an unqualified way, and the question of his narrowness becomes simplified. His sense of superiority, which was felt to be offensive, was college-bred and a part of his academic, even his Oxford nature, and his hardness turns out to be a hardness of opinion only and not of character. On the unliterary side he gains as a man in ordinary human relations, and becomes essentially of a persuasive, if not a winning type—one of those natures in which there is an attractive and to some an overmastering charm. It is seldom that a writer who has published so much and for so long a time is so materially served by the private records of his life; in this instance the letters of his daily composition are an addition to the stores of literature, and particularly on the side of character.

Matthew Arnold was of too complex a make to permit of any ready analysis of his nature or any brief presentation of its elements, nor do these volumes afford material for such an estimate. To take the most marked deficiency in the letters, he was of permanent interest in literature as a poet; but these are not the letters of a poet. It is true that they exhibit sensitiveness to the milder elements of landscape, but no more than belongs to a cultivated man without the gift of poetry; and, in general, they show no traces of that inward life of the emotions, that heat and luminousness of temperament, that grace and weight of phrase which characterise the intimate and personal records of poets' lives. One must go to Arnold's poems to find the "faculty divine;" and to

say that is to limit the range of these letters in the most important phase of his interest to literature. On the other hand, much, too, that is here is in no way characteristic of his life as different from other lives; the story of his long labour in the schools, honourable and instructive as it is, does not place him apart; others, hundreds of others, lived just such lives in the routine of their mill-round; and the large portion of the letters which is concerned with such details, whatever its educational interest, does not lift him as an inspector and commissioner into the place of public discussion. The substantive part of the volumes, however, does present him in certain well-defined personal ways which can be lightly touched on.

The deepest impression is made by the public spirit he everywhere and unceasingly shows. In a true sense, he was a public man. As his father's son he would instinctively mould his life upon this plan, and his circumstances favoured his development along its lines. He was, merely as a school inspector, brought into constant contact with many parts of the population and with men of all kinds; and, as a Foreign Commissioner on Education, he saw several State systems on the Continent in a way to inform and stimulate his civic interest; and the subject of education itself, which was his lifelong topic for almost daily work and thought, is one intimately bound up with the modern State throughout its vital system. With his tastes and training, his imagination and his historic sense, it was inevitable that he should become, as he did, in such surroundings, a critic of civilisation, mainly of its English phase, but incidentally of its foreign states also. He was not only a critic; he meant to make his ideas prevail, and was a conscious reformer. He took the practical side of the matter with the greatest seriousness. The language he uses concerning himself, in connection with his hopes of influence, touches the verge of discretion. "I mean," he writes in 1864, "to deliver the middle class out of the hand of their Dissenting ministers;" and again, in 1869, in connection with the Irish Church Bill, he writes:

* Letters of Matthew Arnold, 1848-88. Collected and arranged by George W. E. Russell. 2 vols. New York; Macmillan & Co. \$3.00.

"The Protestant Dissenters will triumph, as I was sure they would. But I am equally sure that, out of the House and the fight of politics, I am doing what will sap them intellectually, and what will also sap the House of Commons intellectually, so far as it is ruled by the Protestant Dissenters; and more and more I am convinced that this is my true business at present." He began, early in manhood, with an unflattering view of the state of civilisation in his own country; and he undertook to give them what he thought they most needed—the great gift of "intelligence." He declares that he made his statements clear, incisive, and unflinching, as an incident to the polemical mission of his pen; and he meant to attract attention by his satire—the satire which he invented. Perhaps the striking thing in all this is not that he believed himself a crusader, but that he is so solitary in his crusade. He never writes as if he had fellows, or any small band of followers with him; he stands alone and hews away with his single sword at the great dragon. It is very fine, but it looks very lonesome, and meanwhile for the others, whose egoistic attitude was not unlike his own, for Ruskin and Carlyle he has only an averted eye, congratulating the one that in evening dress his fancy is forbidden to wander through the world of coloured cravats, and commenting upon the other that the English people did not need any sermons on "earnestness." What one feels is the thorough conviction of Arnold that he is doing the one thing needful for England, and doing it with all his might; and, similarly in the case of other nations, if he dislikes our country and thinks the Belgians the most despicable people in Europe, and is much bored by the Teutons wherever found, and is not quite sure about the French being saved either, all this is of one piece with his ever-present sense of the desperate condition of the "Protestant Dissenters" and those who are above and below them. His influence was certainly great in the minds of his readers, and he liberalised others by adding, at least, his own to their original narrowness; for it cannot but be allowed that his range is as narrow in the academic way as that of the Protestant Dissenters in the ecclesiastical way, nor can this be regretted since it was necessary for the work he

had to do that his mind should be of a rifle-bore. He was, however, a soldier of fortune, and unattached to any command; and one result is that one looks for the continuers of his work in vain. If, as he said, the Broad Church among the clergy died with Arthur Stanley, did not his own untimely departure take the issue of Philistinism out of the English arena? He has left a noble example of public devotion and of perfect intellectual bravery in a fighting cause; nothing that has been said above is meant to limit that truth; but his example rather than his principles seem to survive, and possibly one reason is that he put his principles into the form of phrase and watchword, telling at the time, but phrase and watchword—such words as "culture" and "barbarians" and "sweetness and light"—a generation soon wears thin, and tepid imitators have now dissolved them away.

Next to Arnold's public spirit and the ways into which it led him, his asides as a literary critic are the passages of broadest interest. It is marvellous how he found any time or strength, in an existence so bound down to labour of a different kind, to attend to literature, and his conditions must be held to bear the blame, if any there be, for the small amount of poetry that he produced in comparison with his contemporaries. He did, however, make a lasting reputation as a critic of literature in widely different fields, and the wonder is that he obtained such a survey as he did. His knowledge was certainly neither catholic nor profound, as is plain in his essays. The letters often show the essays germinating in his mind, but they add little of opinion in detail or of general principle. A few brief sentences occur here and there, which, though transparently honest, were not, it must be remembered, deliberately so stated for the world to read. He thought George Sand the greatest spirit in Europe since Goethe, and he tells us the letters of De Musset to her were those "of a gentleman of the very first water." He dismisses Mrs. Browning, naturally anti-pathetic to him, by saying: "I regard her as hopelessly confirmed in her aberration from health—nature, beauty, and truth." Burns, too: "Burns is a beast, with splendid gleams, and the medium in which he lived, Scotch peasants, Scotch Presby-

terianism, and Scotch drink, is repulsive." Swinburne was, when first seen, "a pseudo-Shelley," and always using one hundred words to the service of one. But there are very few of these remarks, by the way; the letters are not explicitly literary in interest; one concludes that Arnold said all he had to say in his essays and used up the stock of his knowledge and ideas as rapidly as he accumulated it. What he says of Tennyson must be quoted: "I do not think Tennyson a *grand et puissant esprit*; and therefore I do not really set much store by him, in spite of his popularity." This was in 1864, and there is more of the same sort both before and after. The marked passage of all is the following: "My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter of a century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it. It might be fairly urged that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson, and less intellectual vigour and abundance than Browning; yet because I have, perhaps, more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn, as they have had theirs." This is exceedingly interesting biographically, and being in a home-letter is relieved of any appearance of undue egotism that it might otherwise bear. Arnold, as a poet, has certainly been accepted with much greater authority and even popularity in his class than seemed likely at the time of the publication of his principal verse. Such limitations as he had in criticism, as shown above, however, are neither different nor greater than his essays themselves exhibit.

It is when we come to the last and greatest interest of these letters, to that which will be perennial so long as Arnold's name is remembered, that we find ourselves grateful without qualification for the gift his family have here made to literature; these volumes have dignified its records with a singularly noble memory of private life. Few who did not know Arnold personally could have been prepared for the revelation of a nature, so true, so amiable, so duti-

ful. In every relation of private life he is here shown to have been a man of exceptional constancy and plainness. The letters are mainly home-letters; but a few friendships also have yielded up their hoard, and thus the circle of private life is made complete. Every reader must take delight in the mental association with Arnold in the scenes of his existence, thus daily exposed, and in his family affections. A nature, warm to its own, kindly to all, cheerful, fond of sport and fun, and always fed from pure fountains, and with it a character so founded upon the rock, so humbly serviceable, so continuing in power and grace, must wake in all the responses of happy appreciation and leave the charm of memory. Here was a man, to take only the kernel of the whole, who did his duty as naturally as if it required neither resolve nor effort, nor thought of any kind for the morrow, and he never failed, seemingly, in act or word or sympathy, in little or great things; and when to this one adds the clear æther of the intellectual life where he habitually moved in his own life apart, and the humanity of his home, the gift that these letters bring to us may be appreciated. It is the man himself, but set in the atmosphere of home, with sonship and fatherhood, sisters and brothers, and children and children's children, with the bereavements of years fully accomplished and of those of babyhood and boyhood—a sweet and wholesome English home, with all the cloud and sunshine of the English world drifting over its roof-tree, and the soil of England beneath its stones, and English duties for the breath of its being; to add such a home to the household rights of English literature is perhaps something from which Arnold would have shrunk, but it endears his memory.

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MR. WILLIAM WATSON'S NEW VOLUME.*

Mr. William Watson exercises the judgments of the day, as many worse and better writers have done before him. It is the extreme difficulty of

* The Father of the Forest, and other Poems. By William Watson. Chicago: Stone & Kimball. \$1.25.