

NEW BOOKS.

SLOANE'S "NAPOLEON."*

Professor Sloane's exhaustive life of Napoleon was put to a severe test when it was made to appear in serial form. It is hard to form a correct estimate of a work of this kind when it comes out in monthly instalments, for if the reader is interested, he is tantalised by the postponement, and if he is bored, he is denied the privilege of skipping. Worse than either of these hardships is the fact that by the time the next number appears, he is apt to find that he has clean forgotten what the author has said in the last. Of all subjects, history is the least fitted for serial publication, for continuity is absolutely indispensable, and what comes after is meaningless except in the light of what has gone before. For these reasons the two volumes of Professor Sloane's *Napoleon*, published by the Century Company, are most welcome. It is a pity, however, that the publishers have hampered the would-be reader even now by making these volumes of such weight and size that without a small derrick or some other kind of machinery reading is accompanied with physical pain. It seems as if they had meant the book in either case to escape being read, and to occupy the place of volumes merely to be looked at. In its present form, when the remaining two or three volumes appear, it will be beyond the power of any but athletic enthusiasts to enjoy its contents. To quarrel with the merely mechanical features of the book before speaking of its subject-matter seems rather frivolous, but this must be pardoned one whose knees have tottered under its weight, and who has shattered the articles on a study-table in trying to open it.

In treating of the contents of the work it is our purpose to discuss the author's method of presenting the subject, his literary style and his choice of detail, rather than to attempt an estimate of its value as a contribution to historical science. This is because his aim appears to be primarily the treating of his subject in a popular way, and because he does not

depart in essentials from the views of recent authorities. So far as historical accuracy is concerned, it is not believed that criticism will disclose any very serious lapses. Some objections have been made to the military side of his narrative, and his account of Napoleon's campaigns is not likely to satisfy the specialists. It is meagre and has a perfunctory tone, as if the author found the task somewhat irksome. In some instances, as in the description of the campaign and battle of Marengo, the account is too elliptical to be intelligible. He tells us that such and such a manœuvre was a remarkable proof of Napoleon's genius, and writes in an exclamatory way about the resulting success, but there is nothing in the context to initiate us into the cause of his enthusiasm. We are left wondering, like the little boy in the poem, just why it was a "glorious victory." As a military historian Professor Sloane is not particularly luminous. Fortunately, he seems to know it, and does not long linger over this branch of the subject. Fortunately, too, there is no lack of writings on these matters; and, after all, it is only a limited class of readers that crave the minute details of a campaign.

The author flies in the face of all orthodox historical doctrine in laying claim to impartiality in the treatment of a subject so recent. Bishop Stubbs holds that no period later than the Middle Ages can be handled impartially. Nevertheless, as compared with other works on the same subject, the present book has this merit in a high degree. The author's tone is judicial, and if he has not achieved perfect impartiality it is due to the character of the subject and not to the spirit in which he treats it. He refuses to be dazzled by the great man's deeds. He analyses his motives and never extenuates. The evolution of Napoleon's character is traced in the style of a psychological novelist, exposing the meanness and self-seeking of the long-headed young hero, the wretched shifts of his early days of struggle, and the sublime selfishness of his successful manhood. In this study of Napoleon's character Professor Sloane is at his best. The pic-

* Napoleon Bonaparte. A History. By William Milligan Sloane. Vols. I. and II. New York: The Century Co. Sold by subscription.

ture he draws is very impressive. We feel the sense of something superhuman, something "dæmonic," as the author calls it, in the career of this marvellous man. There is something at once inspiring and revolting in it all—inspiring, because the wonderful mental power of Napoleon is more strikingly set forth than by almost any other biographer. This effect is produced not by sky-rockets of rhetoric, which are sent off by some authors with self-conscious complacency as if awaiting the "ahs" of the ecstatic spectators, but by showing in a clear and dispassionate way just what were the obstacles in Napoleon's path and how he surmounted them. We seem to see the how and wherefore of his greatness. The repulsiveness of the picture lies in the author's just but merciless treatment of Napoleon's character. He finds in it no consistency but the consistency of an extraordinarily intelligent selfishness. Yet of immorality in the ordinary sense we have no consciousness. Somehow immorality would almost seem a redeeming trait. We feel that Napoleon was a being wholly devoid of moral feeling; that he was what may be called *unmoral*, a splendid intellectual machine, beneficent beyond all others when the selfish motives happened to lie in the direction of the general good, satanic in its resistless evil when his egoism and the world's happiness were opposed.

In the earlier portion of the work, especially that relating to Napoleon's boyhood and youth, the subject is handled in a graphic and vigorous way. It would be hard to find in the mass of Napoleonic literature anything to equal the account of Napoleon's schooldays, his attempts in literature, his early ambitions, and his career as a young officer of artillery. The following passage is a good specimen of the author's treatment of this period :

"The life of the young officer had thus far been so commonplace as to awaken little expectation for his future. Poor as he was, and careful of his slim resources, he had, like the men of his class, indulged his passion to a certain degree; but he had not been riotous in his living, and he had so far not a debt in the world. What his education and reading were makes clear that he could have known nothing of the scholar's comprehensive thoroughness except the essentials of his profession. But he could master details as no man before or since; he had a vast fund of information, and a his-

toric outline drawn in fair proportions and powerful stroke. His philosophy was meagre, but he knew the principles of Rousseau and Raynal thoroughly. His conception of politics and men was not scientific, but it was clear and practical. The trade of arms had not been to his taste. He heartily disliked routine, and despised the petty duties of his rank. His profession, however, was a means to an end; to any mastery of strategy or tactics or even interest in them he had as yet given no time, but he was absorbed in contemplating and analysing the exploits of the great world conquerors. In particular his mind was dazzled by the splendours of the Orient as the only field on which an Alexander could have displayed himself, and he knew what but a few great minds have grasped, that the interchange of relations between the East and West had been the life of the world. The greatness of England he understood to be largely due to her bestriding the two hemispheres.

"Up to this moment he had been a theorist, and might have wasted his fine powers by further indulging in dazzling generalisations, as so many boys do when not called to test their hypotheses by experience. Henceforward he was removed from this temptation. A plan for an elective council in Corsica to replace that of the nobles, and for a local militia, having been matured, he was a cautious and practical experimenter from the moment he left Auxonne. Thus far he had put into practice none of his fine thoughts, nor the lesson learned in books. The family destitution had made him a solicitor of favours, and, but for the turn in public affairs, he might have continued to be one. His own inclination had made him both a good student and a poor officer; without a field for larger duties he might have remained as he was. In Corsica his line of conduct was not changed abruptly; the possibilities of greater things dawning gradually, the application of great conceptions already formed came with the march of events, not like the sun bursting out from behind a cloud."

It cannot be said that the above-quoted passage is representative of the author's style, which is in fact very unequal. At times he is terse, lucid, and easy, but again he will fall into a cumbrous way of putting things that makes very difficult reading. The former qualities are present more especially in the early part of the work—that embraced in the first volume of the present edition. In the later portions the style is more forced and involved, and one has to re-read many passages before their full import is clear. Possibly in the later parts, which deal with the more serious and complicated matters of history, he is possessed with the ideal of the modern scientific school of American historians—everything for matter and nothing for form. At all events, the work gives a good illustration of the contrast between the two methods of writing history,

some passages having a distinct literary quality, others being crabbed and ultra-German in style. This is a pity, for surely the persistence in the use of clear and vigorous English would not have detracted from the scientific value of what he has written. At his best he is never brilliant, but he has shown that he can make his subject attractive. It is a common complaint among the readers of the biography that the style is dry, and it cannot be said that he has written a book which is likely to hold one's attention continuously without an effort of will. Yet much of the criticism is of a sort that reflects credit on the author, for it proceeds from the disappointed sensation lovers whose palates crave more of the endless tittle-tattle of the memoir-writers, and would have a historian treat his subject in the manner of the newspaper reporter interviewing the distinguished foreign visitor as to the habits of his daily life and personal preferences in the matter of clothes, food, and so forth; or else they long for the usual rhapsodies of hero worship. Neither of these qualities is to be found in Professor Sloane's work. It is not their absence which makes so many of his paragraphs dull reading, but rather his attempts to explain his subject by an elaborate description of contemporary military and political affairs. He does not go far enough into these to satisfy the historical student, and at the same time he goes too far to retain the interest of the general reader. In these parts of his work his treatment results in neither a biography nor a history. Worse than this, these passages are not clear. He lacks the faculty of portraying vividly the character of a period by a few brief touches. These are the main defects of the book. In spite of them it must be admitted by all that it is the best work on Napoleon that has yet appeared in English. That it will be permanently popular is very doubtful, but passages in it will always be read with interest, and it is safe to say that it is the most valuable contribution to Napoleonic literature of recent years.

One word more as to the mechanical features of the book. The illustrations are admirably executed and in many cases well selected, but the choice of purely ideal pictures is of doubtful value, especially when practical illustrative matter, such as political and military

maps, are either lacking, or when present have serious defects. No one but a specialist could trace a campaign on some of his diagrams. In the matter of paper, type, and the other features of the make-up the book is all that could be desired.

F. M. Colby.

WITHOUT PREJUDICE.*

Mr. Zangwill tells us, in his prefatory note, that he has omitted from the present volume of his collected *causeries* "those pieces which hang upon other people's books, plays, or pictures." That means we have now to greet the humourist and not the critic. I doubt, indeed, if the present volume could be true to its title if Mr. Zangwill the critic should appear there. It would be a new phenomenon in the experience of art if a creator, however liberal and sympathetic, could write of this extremely serious business of art "without prejudice." That is the one time when he becomes partisan and speaks out his faith roundly. So, generous as we know to be Mr. Zangwill's dealing with other people's books, we are willing to wait for the "possible collection of his critical writings in another volume," to put him down as a man with his preferences.

When once convicted of the charge that he could always see two sides to every argument, Mr. Zangwill is said to have replied, "That is why I am a novelist and not a logician." He might have said, "That is why I am a humourist and not a logician." But in the present volume he is not only the humourist, the man who sees life imaginatively rather than literally; but he is the man who takes the pose of the humourist—that is, who will not be "tied down to one point of view." "Give me an argument, and I'll show you the other side of it," he says in effect, "That will be in the interest of Truth which is always double-faced." As a man "without prejudice," he is bound to see justice done to the opponent. So Mr. Zangwill explains his title, and so his title explains the shock of epithet and paradox in these really disconcerting *caus-*

* Without Prejudice. By I. Zangwill. New York: The Century Company. \$1.50.