

him a General, or a Governor or Commissioner, or something, so that we may read his collected Despatches. He will describe so well, and will have done so much worth describing.

Y. Y.

LETTERS OF JOHN RICHARD GREEN.*

If the extensive method of biography now in fashion be taken for granted as the best, nothing remains but to congratulate Mr. Leslie Stephen on a tactful performance and a pleasing exhibition of the art of self-effacement. In my single opinion the whole thing is a monstrosity. Green was a delightful man, his History a delightful work, and his life exemplary in its gentleness and high, bright courage. But he did not happen to be a letter-writer, and here are some 450 pages to prove what might have been stated in half a dozen words. Whatever else they contain of instruction might have been extracted by a hand so skilful as Mr. Leslie Stephen's, and in place of a respectable but somewhat dull book, we should have had a piece of real literature in 150 or 200 pages. Mr. Stephen's narrative assures us of this, though he uses it but to tie (so to speak) the bundles of letters together. It is vain to protest. We are all the slaves, just now, of the silliest convention that ever ruined an art. For biography was an art, and Green's letters bear the same relation to the true "Life of Green" as a well-selected pile of stones to the building for which they were carted.

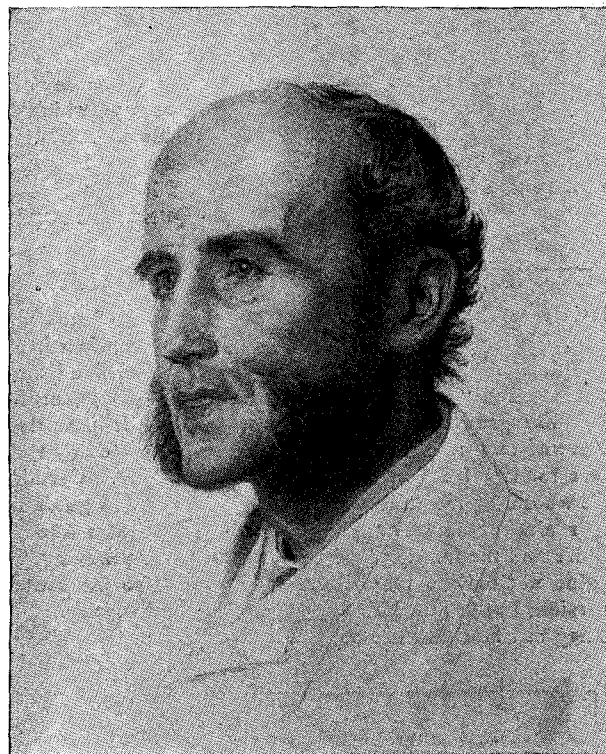
It may seem cruel to choose a book of letters so unpretentious as Green's for an opportunity to raise a general lament. But, in truth, Green was just the man to suffer by this sort of handling. He seems (in common with many good men) to have loathed letter-writing; he was, to tell the truth, a poor hand at it. In all this collection the letters to the Misses von Glehn are the only ones which seem to have been written for the pleasure of writing; and of these only one—or rather an extract from one prompted by the loss of his dear friend, Mrs. Ward (mother of Mr. Humphry Ward, and wife of his first vicar)—can be called excellent. The rest are the work of a man who sat down, as we all must, to ask or answer questions of his distant friends, and took no delight in the task itself. Doubtless his character and a great deal of his charm can be collected by a skilful use of the sieve. But doubtless also Mr. Stephen was capable of sifting them out.

Here, for instance, in a letter to his friend Mr. (now Professor) Boyd Dawkins, is a passage which no biographer would dream of omitting, for it tells us in brief how the "Short History" came to be written:

"You know perhaps that my earliest project in the department of history was that which Dean Hook has since carried out—a series of lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury. . . . I left Oxford with the full purpose of becoming the historian of the Church of England. Few, I felt, were more fitted, by the historical tendency, the predominant feeling of reverence, the moderation, even the want of logic or enthusiasm in their minds, for the task of describing a Church founded in the past, yet capable of wondrous adaptation to the needs of the present, the creature of repeated compromises, essentially sober yet essentially illogical. The prospect widened as I read and thought. On the one hand I could not fetter down the word 'Church' to any particular branch of the Christian communion in England; after the Reformation, therefore, all historical unity would have been gone, though throughout the hubbub of warring sects an ideal unity might still have been sought and found. On the other, I could not describe the Church from the purely external and formal point of view taken by the general class of ecclesiastical historian; its history was, with me, the narrative of Christian civilisation. And to arrive at a knowledge of this, it was necessary to know thoroughly the civil history of the periods which I passed through; to investigate the progress of thought, of religion, of liberty, even the material progress of England. No existing history helped me; rather, I have been struck with the utter blindness of all and every one to the real subjects which they profess to treat—the national growth and development of our country. I should then have had to discover the History of England, only after my investigations to throw them aside and confine myself to a narrower subject. . . ."

This was written on September 11th, 1862, and on the 12th he records in his diary: "Yesterday I resolved to abandon the more limited subject which I had chosen as my theme, and to become the historian of England. . . . I pray God, in whose name and to whose glory I undertake this work, to grant me, above all, the earnest love and patient toil after

historical truth." The "Short History" did not appear until 1874, and in the meanwhile Green had abandoned his clerical career and, more gradually, his clerical outlook. It would be difficult to discover from internal evidence that the "Short History" had been fertilised by the ashes of any such enterprise as a History of the Archbishops of Canterbury. But the change was an organic change, answering to a vital change in the man. His love of truth—an earnest, even a passionate love—worked it slowly into its final shape, and in the end Green had not only written a great book, but had found greatness. The earlier letters of this volume, though bright and honest, suggest a man astray. His boyhood in Oxford had not been a happy one, his career at Jesus College was no



JOHN RICHARD GREEN.

From the Drawing by Frederick Sandys.

(Reproduced by kind permission of Messrs. Macmillan and Co.)

great success, his labours in London parishes, though conscientious, have no intensity of aim. But when we come to the "Short History" we are dealing with a man whom devotion has lifted into greatness, and his heroic end brings no astonishment, but is simply felt to be worthy of him.

He took endless pains with the book, and the judgments of his friends to whom from time to time he showed the MS. were by no means uniformly encouraging. They thought that, having written so much for the *Saturday Review*, he had fatally contracted the style of that journal—fatally, that is to say, for a historian. "He gave up the *Saturday Review*, though he could ill spare the loss, to master the task; and revised and corrected until his friends at last complained that he was too fastidious, and induced him to bring out the book." They had in their minds a manual for schools; they thought (as Freeman put it) that it might be useful to those who already knew history, but would not provide the ignorant with elementary knowledge—and so on. They did not see, in short, that here was a history which, though travelling over a road which hundreds had travelled, was yet that rarest of things, a thoroughly new book.

Faults it had, of course. Two articles in *Fraser's Magazine* (September and December, 1875) piled up a long list of superficial errors, and suggested that Green was a superficial writer. Mr. Morley, to whom the first article had been offered for the *Fortnightly*, showed his usual good sense by returning it to the critic with the suggestion that instead of publishing it as a criticism, he ought to send it to Green as a useful list of corrections for his next edition. As in most books written with a man's life-blood, that which preponderated in boyhood preponderates yet. Mercia and Oxford hold a place they would not have held in the work of a man not

* "Letters of John Richard Green." Edited by Leslie Stephen. 25s. net. (Macmillan.)

born and bred in Oxford. But who will not forgive that prominence for the sake of his chapter on "The Universities in the reign of John"?—a chapter which so entranced me in boyhood that even now I can hardly read it without tears for the wonderful visions it conjured up. Before Green wrote, boys had read of Hastings and Crecy; but what boy had read of Edmund Rich?—

"His mother was a pious woman of the day, too poor to give her boy much outfit beyond the hair shirt that he promised to wear every Wednesday; but Edmund was no poorer than his neighbours. He plunged at once into the nobler life of the place [Oxford], its ardour for knowledge, its mystical piety. 'Secretly,' perhaps at eventide when the shadows were gathering in the church of St. Mary's, and the crowd of teachers and students had left its aisles, the boy stood before an image of the Virgin, and placing a ring of gold upon its finger took Mary for his bride."

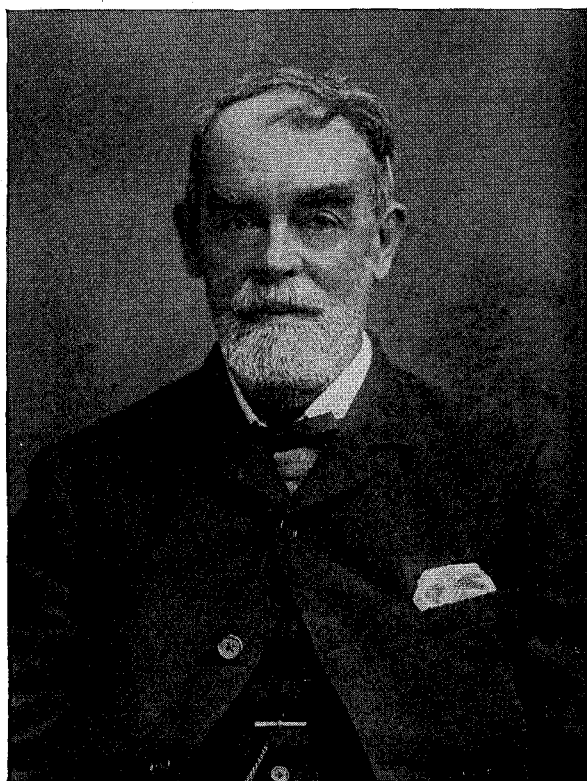
Sweet of nature Green had always been, and wise in his simplicity (read the gentle reproof of Freeman on pp. 253-4 for his club-headed attacks on Froude and Kingsley, "There are blunders of taste as well as blunders of fact, you know!"), but the "Short History," and the happy marriage which followed it, set a seal of more than success on his short life. He died too soon; because he felt that he had more to say, he died hard; and, in his own words, he "died learning."

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH.

EREWHON AFTER THIRTY YEARS.*

It is now almost thirty years since "Erewhon" was published. Since then it has been several times reprinted, and the author states that he still finds it on second-hand book-stalls, marked "6d., very readable": but to the generation which has grown up since its appearance it is practically unknown, and it is to be hoped that this new edition will secure for it a fresh and well-merited popularity. Certainly those who in their youth visited, under Mr. Butler's guidance, that realm of topsy-turvydom, where magistrates fine for measles and the family physician prescribes for pilfering, will be glad not only to renew their memories of so pleasant an excursion, but to join Mr. Butler in his second voyage.

They will find that the country still contains some hitherto



MR. SAMUEL BUTLER.

From a photograph specially taken for this number by Russell & Sons.

undescribed curiosities. "The College of Spiritual Athletics," for example, would alone justify the expenditure of six shillings in order to "revisit" Erewhon. At that institution a man can "try his moral strength" and have "every kind

* "Erewhon," New and Revised Edition, and "Erewhon Revisited." By Samuel Butler. 6s. each. (Grant Richards.)

of ordinary temptation provided on the shortest notice." If he wishes to learn whether "his composure stands in need of further development or no," by placing a penny in the slot he can secure "a jet of fine pepper, flour, or brickdust thrown on to his face"; if he is doubtful of his powers of domestic endurance, "Mrs. Tantrums, Nagger" will supply "ordinary nagging" for "two shillings and sixpence per hour—hysterics extra"; while, should he be going out to dinner, "Professor Proser, certificated bore, with or without anecdotes," is there to teach him how to suffer fools gladly. Then from this interesting college the visitor can pass to the "Deformatory" for boys, and hear from the Principal, "a beaming, dapper-looking, little old gentleman," how, in accordance with the last minute of "the Grand Council of Education," the sound principle that "we should aim at promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number," is put into practice as an instrument of school discipline. Afterwards he can call upon Dr. Downie, "Professor of Logomachy, and, perhaps, the most subtle dialectician in Erewhon, who could say nothing in more words than any man of his generation," while he had earned so "high a reputation for sobriety of judgment by resolutely refusing to have definite views on any subject . . . that while still young he had been appointed to the lucrative post of Thinker in Ordinary to the Royal Family."

Though Erewhon, however, thus still retains many of its peculiarities, those who "revisit" it to-day must be prepared for a shock. They will remember that when Mr. Higgs—the hero of the original narrative—effected his escape from the country, he did so by means of a balloon, which he was allowed to construct on the plea of visiting the air-god, in order to prevail on him "at a personal interview" to stop a serious drought by sending rain. When he returns, after an interval of twenty years, he finds to his amazement that he has been deified as "the Sunchild." Beneficent rains had, it appears, immediately followed his departure, and the Managers of the "Musical Banks" (the Churches of Erewhon), whose credit was at the time very poor, had taken advantage of the popular excitement which he had created to give their religion a new start by asserting that he had returned to heaven in the chariot of his Father the Sun, after communicating to them his divine teaching. A new era was consequently dated from the time of his ascension; his sayings—emended and interpreted by the Managers and Professors—were collected into a sacred volume, and on his return he found that he had arrived just in time to assist at the dedication of a splendid temple to himself. The situation thus created is certainly novel. Men have been known to look forward to canonisation, but the process of being deified must always be trying. Even a grim soldier like the Emperor Vespasian appreciated its oddity, and his dying words, *Vae! puto, Deus fio*, are, perhaps, the tersest and best bit of satire in the world. But Mr. Higgs has to sit through a whole sermon demonstrating his divinity, with the added pleasure of knowing that Professor Hanky, the preacher, is fully aware of his identity, has his eye upon him, and is quite prepared to have him burned as a blasphemer if he ventures to reveal himself. To depict such a scene, and to describe the feelings of the victim of apotheosis, is a task worthy of a master hand; but Mr. Butler is equal to the task. Alike in imagination and execution he here shows himself a great artist.

It would be easy to fill a column with witty sayings from his new volume, but it is unfair to spoil the reader's relish for a good work by picking out the plums, and a word must be said about its chief characteristic. One of the great charms of "Erewhon" lay in its deliberate absence of purpose. It was frank fooling, and had, as its author observes, no "central idea." On the other hand, "Erewhon Revisited" is dominated by a clear intention, and consequently much of its wit becomes satire, the object of that satire being dogmatic theology. The doctrine, for instance, of the Ascension, as it is stated in a materialistic shape in the Fourth Article, the writer clearly regards as an incredible fiction, while those who profess to assert its truth participate in a more or less conscious fraud.

If, indeed, the motto which he places on the title-page is to be accepted, he ought to loathe such men with a great loathing. "Him do I hate, even as I hate Hell fire, who says one