

very exacting critic loftily declared that it was not literature; he did not appear to consider that possibly it was not meant to be, nor that, at all events, it is life; which, after all, is much the greater and more valuable thing of the two.

A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK.

### BROWNING LETTERS.\*

All the best letters have been written by a man to himself. They may, it is true, be folded, slipped into an envelope, addressed by mistake to another person, and reach a wrong destination; but before that happens they have been the possession and pleasure of the writer. Horace Walpole sends himself all the gossip of the town, for until he has written to himself half its sportive or malicious meaning had not been extracted. Cowper makes lively the stagnation of Olney, for, while beside his standish, he needs some play with the very tame hares who were his neighbours. Lamb, escaped from the stool in the India office, rolls his jests like sweet morsels under his tongue. Jane Welsh Carlyle's palate is delightfully stimulated by her own bitter-sweets. These are the true letter-writers. There are, of course, documents misnamed letters which are quite of another kind. Some are words of command, which might as well be shouted from horseback down the line. Some are petitions for our money, our time, or our praise. Some state facts, and are a contribution to history—including domestic history—or to science. Some are smiling masks, some—and often the most courteous—are armour. Love-letters form a species in themselves; they are written partly because the writer loves love, and partly because, by an exchange of hearts, personal identity has been doubled. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the thrush in springtime is always fluting to the hen-bird; he is an artist who sings to himself, and he sings his song twice over because he is pleased with his performance, and has cried "Bravo!" and "Encore."

Robert Browning, except when he fluted from New Cross, Hatcham, to 50, Wimpole Street, with intricate notes delivered in a rich baritone, was not a true letter-writer. He was dutiful in answering correspondents, but he did not write his letters to himself; he did not love his letters; he wanted to despatch them and get them out of his way, in order that with a clear conscience he might enter into the soul of a murderer or a medium, a voluptuous old Italian bishop, or an amiable and homicidal Russian carpenter. And, by and by, he would be off to discharge the force of sociality that had been pent up in him, not in a letter, but in after-dinner talk, that chased its quarry, bound after bound, captured it and tore it to pieces. If youth and friendship—both apt to be effusive—could have made Browning a writer of letters which charm for their own sake, these letters to Domett, happily preserved, and now by Mr. F. G. Kenyon carefully edited, should take high rank in what our forefathers styled the literature of "epistolary correspondence." But even with Domett he seems impatient to fling out his piece of news, to give a cordial grasp of hand, and to have done with it. He grasps hands with genuine warmth several times across the ocean, when Waring had given his friends the trick—which was no trick, but a well-understood plan—and had made his home at the world's far end in New Zealand. But with the summer of 1846, when all Browning's mind was concentrating itself on marriage plans, the letters somewhat abruptly cease, and none were written from Italy. In those days the postal shuttle was not cast over the seas with regularity, weaving the woof of Empire. You had to hear from time to time of a ship that happened to be sailing leisurely towards Wellington or Auckland. Browning's imagination, which knew intimately the little stream, "outsmoothing galingale and watermint," hard by the little temple Baccheion, did not much affect the Antipodes. In 1873 he refers to Queensland as being a part of New Zealand. From Florence it may not, as Mr. Kenyon suggests, have been easy to despatch a letter; and, moreover, he was very happy in his Florence. At all events, no more letters were written by Browning, until Waring, having been Prime Minister of the Colony, had returned to London, after upwards of a quarter of a century, and a note from

Warwick Crescent commences with the words, "Dearest Domett, how very happy I am that I shall see you again!"

No series of letters, however, could be written by Browning without containing some passages of interest. He groans over the alterations made by Tennyson in earlier poems, which reappeared in the edition of 1842:—"The alterations are insane. *Whatever* is touched is spoiled. There is some woeful mental infirmity in the man—he was months buried in correcting the press of the last volume, and in that time began spoiling the new poems (in proof) as hard as he could." But "Locksley Hall" is "noble," and St. Simeon Stylites "perfect." In the winter of 1842, the only novelty in books is Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome"—"a kind of revenge on that literature which so long plagued ours with Muses and Apollo and Luna and all that, by taking the stalest subjects in it, and as plentifully bestowing on them the commonplaces of our indigenous ballad verse—'Then out spake brave Sir Cocolus'—'Go, hark ye, stout Sir Consul'—and a deal more. I have only seen extracts, certainly, but they give me this notion." Next year "Dickens is not asleep, but uproarious and (I think) disgusting with his Pecksniffs and (what Strafford said of the Parliament) 'that generation of odd names and natures.'" And again in 1843, the year of Macaulay's collected "Essays," Mill's "Logic," "The Christmas Carol," the first volume of "Modern Painters," the "Irish Sketch Book," and the "Song of the Shirt," he writes "What shall I tell you?—that we are dead asleep in literary things, and in great want of 'a rousing word' (as the old Puritans phrase it) from New Zealand, or any place out of this snoring dormitory. Carlyle has just given us a book, however." The book was "Past and Present," perhaps a sufficiently rousing word. The most notable thing of that year for Browning was the visit of Father Mathew to London—"this reverting to the simplest form of worship (for the converts are converts to his voice and hand and eye, and nothing beyond), all these men choosing to become *better* because he, who was standing there, better—he *bade* them become so; you should have seen it as I did. . . . I stood on the scaffold with him, and heard him preach, beside."

Perhaps the most remarkable passage in the letters is in the last of those written to New Zealand (July 13, 1846), in which Browning speaks of his own poetical efforts, seemingly so unsuccessful, perhaps leading to nothing, yet which he did not for a moment think of abandoning.

"At this moment I feel as everybody does who has *worked*—'in vain'? no matter, if the work was real. It seems dispiriting for a man to hack away at trees in a wood, and at the end of his clearing come to rocks or the sea or whatever disappoints him as leading to nothing; but still, turn the man's face, point him to new trees and the true direction, and who will compare his power arising from experience with that of another who has been confirming himself all the time in the belief that chopping wood is incredible labour, and that the first blow he strikes will be sure to jar his arm to the shoulder without shaking a leaf on the lowest bough? I stand at present and wait like such a fellow as the first of these; if the real work should present itself to be done, I shall begin at once and in earnest . . . not having to learn first of all how to keep the axe-head from flying back into my face; and if I stop in the middle, let the bad business of other years show that I was not idle nor altogether incompetent."

I spare the reader the appropriate quotation—"One who never turned his back, but marched straight forward"—from the Epilogue to "Asolando."

A letter from Browning's friend Arnould—afterwards Sir Joseph Arnould—gives a valuable record of the performance at Drury Lane on three successive nights, in February, 1843, of "A Blot on the 'Scutcheon,'" when Phelps, replacing Macready, took the part of Tresham and Helen Faucit appeared as Mildred. The first night was magnificent; the audience was enthusiastic; the gallery took all the points as quickly as did the pit. On the second night the boxes showed a "desolate emptiness"; Arnould was one of the sixty or seventy spectators in the pit; the gallery was full and sympathetic. The third night was evidently to be the last; not only did the great house look empty, but the few spectators were apathetic. The tragedy had caught cold and died of a galloping consumption.

Of "Elizabeth Barrett Browning in her Letters" it is

\* "Robert Browning and Alfred Domett." Edited by Frederic G. Kenyon. With Portraits. 6s. net. (Smith, Elder and Co.)

"Elizabeth Barrett Browning in her Letters." With a Portrait. By Percy Lubbock. 7s. 6d. net. (Smith, Elder and Co.)

only needful to say that the design is admirable, and the execution is as admirable as the design. We learn, indeed, nothing from the book that is not already known. But Mr. Percy Lubbock has reduced the affluence of Mrs. Browning's delightful letters to the dimensions of a single volume, and, accompanying his quotations by comment at once sympathetic and judicious, has made a book which becomes substantially a biography. Nor could we desire a better biography than one thus formed from Mrs. Browning's own words, with whatever may be helpful added of guidance in statement of fact and illuminative comment.

EDWARD DOWDEN.

### THE POETRY OF LIFE.\*

One of the gayest chapters in Mr. Carman's book is a Letter of Farewell to the Lyric Muse, from an Imaginary Correspondent. Very amiably, rather late in the day perhaps, but quite finally, he bids the portionless lady adieu. Or is it not exactly adieu? May it be that this correspondent is indeed only imaginary! Else, surely it must greatly qualify the poet's eloquent defence of poetry if his practice have ended only in estrangement. The Defence referred to is conducted skilfully and graciously, with open doors. The General Public is cordially invited, confided in; and perhaps, will depart convinced that its prejudice against the accused has been very inconsiderate. Mr. Carman expounds the purpose of poetry, its constituent parts, its place in the Commonwealth, in modern life, and in times to come. He does not concern himself with what some winning phraseologist has termed the Minor Poet. He ignores that contradiction in terms. But he does dangle before us such an unanswerable question as whether the poet should or should not work with his hands. Must he have milked a cow who is to roam on Helicon? Must he who soars on Pegasus be his own blacksmith? Or do the Muses only welcome to their gardens hands of daintiness, a voice with a lisp? The author is tempted occasionally to flog what can feel no more. But he lays on so deftly that he seems to galvanise the carcass. And the General Public—well, did the General Public ever much care what the quarrel was, so long as there were knots in the lash? But after all, need we much repine at the false and superficial notions current about poetry? We are more inclined to regret wasting a poet to refute them. Mr. Carman does refute them of course, ably, completely, and delightfully. But converts persuaded against their instincts are but converts bound for heresy. The ease of prejudice is difficulty enough for most men. Poetry, religion, science must ever be unintelligible, inexplicable to them. On the other hand, never yet lived human being denied altogether some strange and passing glimpse of poetry—of nature, childhood, dream, hope, or of love. It is a taper gleaming, however faintly, in all. All things mortal tend to obscure it. Only in the few it flames on, besieged with gloom, unquenchable, unconsumed; and will kindle again when they are gone. Donne, Shelley, Coleridge—what are they but miraculous impossibilities? Yet men will burn, rebel, and dream again, as did they.

But these are Mr. Carman's arguments, repeated, much less winningly and gracefully, against himself. We like best the contentious part of his book; least its criticism of individual poets. Quibbles never fail. Who but starts a little at that dull, jaded word—'popularity'? 'Chipmunks' and 'funny-house' need only digesting. Why, too, must we be for ever wondering what to-morrow's Shakespeare will make of our many inventions? Man's restless ingenuities, his opiate cleverness, his ever-varying delusions are transitory. Poetry will, at her need, embalm them all in amber, only the purer for its trivial fly.

WALTER DE LA MARE.

### ANGLING REMINISCENCES.†

Mr. E. Marston gossips very pleasantly of his angling days, and his new volume is a worthy companion for its pre-

\* "The Poetry of Life." By Bliss Carman. 6s. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

† "Fishing for Pleasure and Catching It." By E. Marston. 3s. 6d. net. (T. W. Laurie.)

"Seventy Years' Fishing." By C. G. Barrington, C.B. 10s. 6d. net. (Smith, Elder and Co.)

decessors. It is not in any sense a book of instruction how to fish: it is merely a diary recounting the mild adventures that befel Mr. Marston while angling for trout, chub, and other fish in England in 1903. Incidentally, there is introduced a good deal of natural history, about which all true anglers know much. The veteran fisher—he casually mentions rivers that he "knew seventy years ago"—in a prefatory note, tells that the present volume completes a round dozen of books which he has "inflicted" on his friends, and he says that now surely the time has arrived for him to cry off. Surely not! It is to be trusted that there are many angling summers before him, and many winters in which further reminiscences may be cast into book form.

Of a different, but equally welcome type, is Mr. Barrington's "Seventy Years' Fishing," which gives his experiences on many waters in pursuit of salmon and trout, and which has lucid chapters on the technical side of fly-fishing. His first trout was caught seventy years ago, under the tuition of Lord Grey, of Reform Bill fame, and the author has followed the sport ever since. His tastes are well-defined; one gathers, for instance, that worm-fishing for salmon would have no attraction for him. In a brief notice it is impossible to deal with the many interesting points which he raises; but it may be recorded that as regards the outlook of the trout-fisher his views are, on the whole, optimistic. He admits that angling clubs have taken water which in former days might have been fished free of cost, and that sport may thus have been made less easy to come at for those who have not the means of belonging to such institutions. Against this, however, he places the fact that modern facilities of travel have opened up places where trout-fishing costs nothing—places that can be reached by the less wealthy angler without unduly taxing his purse. London anglers are badly situated as regards trout-fishing; and for London trout-anglers who are not rich men, Mr. Barrington's book has nothing particularly cheerful to say. Taking a sort of average of the cost of fishing on club water accessible from a large town, he would say that for from £25 to £35 a year fair sport could be obtained, and that an annual subscription of £50 to £70 should command first-class trout-fishing. These figures, it has to be remembered, do not include travelling expenses or hotel bills. Among the fishes that Mr. Barrington has caught is that puzzling fish, the *salmo ferox*, which is got in a few Scotch lochs, may weigh anything from 6 lb. to 30 lb., and is a desperate fighter. The *salmo ferox* is generally—in fact almost always—caught by trolling, the bait being a parr or small trout, but "Watson Lyall" records cases of the fish being taken with fly, and in the Highlands one occasionally hears tales of such rare captures. It was Mr. Barrington's luck to kill two *ferox* with fly in Loch Quoich. One was taken with a large Blue Doctor, and each weighed about 8½ lb.

Like Mr. Marston, Mr. Barrington writes with refreshing enthusiasm, and both authors have the power of conveying to the reader the charm they find in their beloved sport.

DAVID HODGE.

## The Bookman's Table.

SCOTLAND AND THE UNION. By William Law Mathieson. 10s. 6d. net. (Glasgow: MacLehose and Sons.)

This volume is more than a mere history of the Union of 1707. It is really, as the sub-title bears, a history of Scotland from 1695 to 1747; and forms a continuation of Mr. Law Mathieson's previous work—"Politics and Religion: A Study in Scottish History from the Reformation to the Revolution." The present work, like its predecessor, is quite complete in itself, although the social changes of the period are not dealt with. These the author intends to handle, in still another volume, as illustrations of the progress of the latter half of the eighteenth century. Mr. Mathieson is patient in investigation, clear in statement, and philosophic in tone. His reading has apparently been wide and systematic; but there are indications that his familiarity with the period, and with some of the points he discusses, is not of very long duration. For example, he says that John Craig "protested against the Act of Assembly which forbade prayer for the Queen." The Queen