

## ALEXANDER MACMILLAN.\*

One's first thought on opening the book of "Alexander Macmillan" may have been, as I think it was with me, that it would not prove sympathetic. As an exercise in Self-help, with a plentiful infusion of the dour and the canny, and instruction, maybe, in the art of self-elevation from £12 a year to £12 a day, its general tendency might seem a foregone conclusion. Of such misgivings one was soon to be ashamed. The theological vein in Alexander Macmillan's character is occasionally a slight stumbling-block, but one has to recognise this as an inseparable element of the Scottish character. I realised this in its entirety only last August, when in coming away from Ayr in a railway-carriage full of people returning from the races the talk seemed to settle quite naturally upon the subject of predestination. But there was in Alexander Macmillan far more than the "releegion" and the practical sagacity of the successful Scot. He had a genius for bookselling, with not merely a flair for good books, but some of that curious magnetic power which the born bookseller exercises over all those who like books; and he was not merely a desperate toiler in the book-crusade, but he was a faithful friend and teacher of men.

After half starving as an usher, Alexander Macmillan came up from his native Ayrshire in 1839, aged just twenty-one. His brother Daniel (for whom Tom Hughes stood biographer) obtained him a situation in Seeley's. In 1843 the brothers had set up a small bookshop in Aldersgate, and while there Alexander wrote a little book on "The Genius of Shelley"—"poor dear Shelley," as he calls him later, and published the three questions, "What am I? Whence came I? Whither do I go?" to which we are told on excellent authority † that the caustic answer of Longman was "A beggarly Scot—from the land o' cakes—to the Devil!" The next step—to Trinity Street, Cambridge—was made in 1845. A visitor to the new shop was the venerable poet William Wordsworth, and an inmate of the attic was the now venerable bookseller, the doyen at least of his profession, the Hadji of the Haymarket, "Mr. Bain." Community with the Hares, the Brimleys, and "Bass" Evans led the way to intimacy with Charles Kingsley and F. D. Maurice.

About this time, in the late 'fifties, the Macmillan circle began to do more service in the cause of intellectual communion and enlightenment than almost any other institution in Cambridge. There was no tutorial staff, there were no disciples, and the bond of union was one of general sympathy in all high endeavour. The value of the influence thus exercised is well indicated by Dr. Evans.

"During my undergraduateship at Emmanuel," he writes, "not a single one of my supposed instructors from first to last ever betrayed the faintest indication of any interest in me personally. Once in the year we were invited to take wine with the Master between hall and chapel, and once in every term with the tutor. These functions afforded our sole opportunities of what was called social intercourse with these dignitaries. The men of light and leading in the college were few, and, so far as the ordinary undergraduates were concerned, they neither lighted nor led. Guidance and supervision were non-existent."

The function of kindly, informal advice given freely by a maturer mind to inquiring youth at the moment of its greatest need, left unperformed by tutors, parsons, and professors, was filled, he assures us, by a Scot, not in Holy Orders and in no way connected with the educational arrangements of the University. Mac's real faculty, Dr. Evans thought, lay in this direction of teaching by shrewd advice. The circle crystallised in 1860 about the "Round Table" of *Macmillan's Magazine*. Alexander by this time was proud to be the publisher of "Tom Brown," "Westward Ho," Masson's "Milton," and a score or so of books

almost equally well known. The inaugural dinner of the new "Maga," the close contemporary of the *Cornhill*, included Masson, Hughes, Maurice, Fitzjames Stephen, Charles Bowen, Robert Bowes, and J. L. Roget, who enlivened the occasion by his rendering of "Little Billee." Tennyson, Huxley, and Darwin were already among the clients of the firm. Woolner was soon to suggest the golden title if not the design of the "Golden Treasury" Series, while Aldis Wright and Clark did their best to deprecate the suggestion of a "Globe" Shakespeare as being rather too "clap-trappy."

In the meantime another epoch was reached in 1863, when the publishing department was removed from Cambridge to London. The letters begin to be more and more part and parcel of the literary history of the Victorian age from 1860 to 1880. Tutored in some degree by Kingsley and Goldwin Smith, "Alec" had become a sincere disciple of the national school of historians represented by Johnny Green and E. A. Freeman. How much he felt at home with these pundits is amusingly illustrated by a jocose letter written to the formidable author of "The Norman Conquest," and raising the point as to whether the mother of the Confessor, whom Freeman persisted in writing Eadward, really called him Yedward.

His critical insight is seldom seen to better advantage than in a description he gives of the impression produced upon him by the author of "Geoffrey Hamlyn":

"A younger brother of Kingsley's—Henry by name—who has spent many years in Australia, principally in the back-woods, is writing a story of Australian life—chiefly back-woods—partly in England. I have seen about 100 pages of it, and so has Mrs. Macmillan. We are both delighted with it, and augur good things from it. He has his brother's power of describing, but he does not write in the same style at all; it is wonderfully quiet and yet powerful—a kind of lazy strength which is very charming; some of the characters too are drawn with a masterly hand. Convicts, emigrant gentlemen from decayed families, farmers emigrant for various reasons—these are characters he draws. Each one stands firm and clear on his feet, like a man in actual life."

Perception as keen is shown in the very interesting letter written to Mr. Hardy *à propos* of his maiden novel, the unpublished "The Poor Man and the Lady," and to Mr. John Morley in connection with the English Men of Letters. His desire to get George Eliot to write on Shakespeare seems to me characteristic.

Mr. Graves has done his work with the utmost skill and adroitness. In the presentation and arrangement of the various letters and documents the deftness of perfect disposition is so complete as to defy criticism and almost to elude specific praise. The interest that transcends all others in the book is of course the sense which it leaves behind it of the imperceptible but profound change which has transformed the book world since the days of Alexander's empire. The patronage of nobles and of booksellers alike was of course a thing of the past when the Macmillans commenced; but we are made to feel that publishing was still pre-eminently a partnership in the dissemination of certain ideas. A publisher worthy of the name was deemed, half a century back, to be a philosophic friend and instrument of a certain social group, the operations of which he stimulated, moulded, or restrained as necessity required. There was an atmosphere of the higher seriousness with suggestions of a theological college overshadowing the association. Production was assumed to be limited to the best books, while important books and valuable properties were accepted as synonymous terms. The doctrine of the identity of interest between author and publisher was pushed it may be a little too far. Yet there is much to linger over in the picture. The present conditions of Gargantuan production and "something for everybody" are in the main, it must be presumed, a necessary adaptation to environment. But it is hardly in human nature to repress a sigh of regret over the days when the more or less necessary conflict of interest between author and publisher was so sedulously shrouded and concealed by art and diplomacy

\* "Life and Letters of Alexander Macmillan." By Charles L. Graves. With 4 Portraits. 10s. net. (Macmillan.)

† The authority cited is *THE BOOKMAN* for May, 1901.

as to be scarcely perceptible, and when the first authors of the day were invoked not as patentees of alimentary products but as disinterested magicians and friends of humanity.

THOMAS SECCOMBE.

## Novel Notes.

**THE PILGRIM.** By Arthur Lewis. 6s. (Blackwood.)

Mr. Arthur Lewis is known as the author of several volumes of poems that have deservedly given him place among the few who lift their heads above the crowd of present-day poets. If he has written any novel before this it has not come to our notice; if he writes any novel after this—and it will be strange if he does not—we shall look forward to having sight of it. For "The Pilgrim" has all the freshness and morning glow of a first novel without the crudity that too often accompanies these; instead of praising it for what it promises, one can judge of it as in itself a considerable achievement. It is a romance of the eleventh century, and opens at "the dawn of a November day, and in the heart of old Genoa." Here are the pilgrims of various nationalities gathered in the kitchen and courtyard of the "Leathern Bottle," setting forth to continue their journey towards the Holy City of Rome. Among these pilgrims are the man and the woman on whom the whole story centres; among them, too, the guide of the party, is the mean rascal who is to play an important part in the later developments of it. The story is just such a tale of love and mischance, ideal passion, jealous hatred and the mad desire of vengeance as would have come fittingly from the lips of some great troubadour; it is picturesque, brilliantly imaginative, alive with stirring incidents, and the very spirit of old romance breathes through it all. Mr. Lewis has no little skill in characterisation, and writes with a charm of style and a quiet narrative power that make "The Pilgrim" an attractive and quite uncommonly interesting book.

**ENCHANTED GROUND.** By Harry James Smith. 6s. (Constable.)

Mr. Smith is another new writer of promise, and his first novel shows no traces of the amateur. In some ways this is even a disadvantage, for the reader is apt to forget that the book is not the work of one who is skilled in the production of fiction, and to become impatient of its few faults. Of these the worst, to our mind, is that the book is too long—although a bare three hundred pages—for its story. Mr. Smith should have made up his mind either to develop his situations to the utmost of their capacity—which would have been a risky proceeding—or to have been content to omit certain rather irrelevant episodes. Nevertheless there is a good deal of freshness in this study of modern life in New York, and the book is very readable. We shall be disappointed if Mr. Smith's next book is not very much better, for he possesses senses of drama and of character which should be capable of considerable development.

**THE GIRL FROM NOWHERE.** By Mrs. Baillie Reynolds. 6s. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

Mrs. Baillie Reynolds has a knack of making one see a thing from half a dozen different points of view. She gains our sympathy for one character after another in "The Girl from Nowhere," by quietly explaining and accounting for their faults and showing us things from their standpoints. The plot is a strong one and so deftly handled that it keeps the reader keenly interested through-

out. When the curtain goes up we find the hero, Felix Vanston, just about to commit suicide. He is fresh from prison, having served a two years' sentence for being connected with a Dynamite Club, and in utter despair he has smuggled into his lodgings a supply of laudanum. He pens a letter to his wealthy half-brother, who has refused to have anything more to do with him unless he shows signs of "real effort to improve," writes a note to the coroner "to be read at the inquest," and burns the MS. of his book, which has been rejected. He then proceeds to pour out the laudanum—raises it to his lips—when the Girl from Nowhere suddenly appears; and her entrance into the story is one of the strangest "first appearances" of a heroine that we have ever met with. The story is written in an easy, unaffected manner; it has some thrilling dramatic moments, and will be fully appreciated by the large and increasing public to which Mrs. Reynolds appeals.

**A ROYAL STORY BOOK.** By H.M. the Queen of Roumania ("Carmen Sylva"). 6s. (Digby, Long.)

Royal authors are necessarily scarce, and we have none living who challenges comparison as poet or novelist with "Carmen Sylva." In this new book of hers the Queen of Roumania has gathered together nine stories of her own country. "The Dacian Virgin" is a tale of the far-off heroic days when the Romans were bent upon the conquest of the land, and the Dacians, the original possessors of it, were opposing them, and dying valiantly in the hopeless effort. "Bucur and Ilena" is a charming love-story, racy of the soil; and "The Poet" is an apocryphal romance of Ovid's exile and an adventure that befel him in the



"Ovid seized the reptile with all his force."

From "A Royal Story Book," by H.M. the Queen of Roumania, "Carmen Sylva." (Digby, Long & Co.)