

appreciated and that his welfare is fairly considered. If, after the church has done all this, the minister goes away, common sense will bring the church to one of two conclusions: it will either bow to the providential decree that has removed a faithful teacher, or it will thank God that it is rid of a trifter.

Our Printers.

OUR readers will have noticed that the imprint of Francis Hart & Co., as printers of THE CENTURY MAGAZINE and ST. NICHOLAS, has recently given way to that of Theo. L. De Vinne & Co. This is a change in name, but not entirely a change in fact. Since the death of Mr. Hart, Mr. De Vinne has for years carried on the business of "the firm" under the old style. Mr. De Vinne has an individual reputation as the author of a work entitled "The Invention of Printing," and of various essays in this and other periodicals on the history and art of printing. It is known to many, moreover, and should be known to all, that it is mainly to Mr. De Vinne that credit is

due for the high reputation of American printing of wood-cuts. The refinement to which wood-engraving has been carried in America would have come to naught if the printing of the wood-cuts—the rapid steam-printing required by the periodicals—had not kept pace with the advance in wood-engraving. This corresponding excellence of printing has not been reached without a long and difficult struggle. An interesting chapter might indeed be made of the experiments and devices resorted to during many years, of endeavors and accomplishments requiring, no one can imagine how much intelligence, patience, forbearance,—how much knowledge, and how many of the Christian virtues as well. Mr. De Vinne has given some points of this history himself in his articles on "The Growth of Wood-Cut Printing," in this magazine for April and May, 1880; but he has not told how much should be placed to the credit of his own individual account. In the name of the readers of THE CENTURY (who have good reason to be interested in the fortunes of the new firm), we wish long life and prosperity to "our printers."

LITERATURE.

Lounsbury's "James Fenimore Cooper,"*

PROFESSOR LOUNSBURY'S life of Cooper is, so far, the most important contribution to this series. The lives of Irving and Thoreau had already been written, so that the work of their biographers consisted largely in selection and condensation; while Noah Webster and George Ripley occupy hardly any position in the history of American literature, as distinguished from scholarship and journalism. Cooper remains the most popular of all native writers of fiction; and, with the possible exception of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and portions of the writings of Irving and Longfellow, his books are still more universally read than those of any American author whatever. A generation has passed since his death, and yet this is the first biography of him, if we except the slight and inaccurate sketches of his life in cyclopedias and periodicals, and Bryant's funeral oration delivered at New York, in 1852.

"When Cooper lay on his death-bed," says Professor Lounsbury in his prefatory note, "he enjoined his family to permit no authorized account of his life to be prepared. * * * It is a necessary result of this dying injunction that the direct and authoritative sources of information contained in family papers are closed to the biographer." The men of Cooper's own age, who might have furnished personal reminiscences, are long since dead. Hardly anything in the shape of diaries or private correspondence is obtainable.

Such material as exists is widely scattered, and is mainly in the form of references in contemporary newspapers, or in the prefaces and introductions to the novelist's own books. The biographer was, therefore, driven to take the line of Cooper's public career, and especially of his career as an author. This is, however, the line which has been adopted in all the lives of the present series, and is perhaps the one which Professor Lounsbury might have deliberately chosen as appropriate to the design of the series, even had matter been at hand sufficient to furnish forth a more personal and private memoir.

In one respect the biographer has been fortunate in his subject. Cooper was a man who fairly bristled with characteristics. His views were strong, and his expression of them decided. His prejudices were many and frequently diverting. His walk was upon the toes of his contemporaries, and of the British and American public, and loud were the screams which attended his progress. Perhaps no other writer except Byron has been at once so eagerly read and so shrilly cursed by his own countrymen. One of the most striking episodes in his life was the war which he waged for years against the leading Whig newspapers of the State of New York, assailing them one after another with libel suits, which in nearly every instance he carried to a triumphant conclusion, conducting his own cases and securing damages varying from fifty to four hundred dollars. The chapters devoted to these conflicts are written with force and humor, and form a dramatic narrative. The reader may doubt whether Cooper's

* James Fenimore Cooper. By Thomas R. Lounsbury. [American Men of Letters Series.] Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

game was worth the candle, but he cannot fail to bestow his admiration upon the pluck, tenacity, and ability with which the noble old Roman maintained the fight, or to sympathize with his joy of battle and his final victory.

The biographer has handled his material skillfully. It is a pleasure to meet with such a thorough and well-constructed piece of work. There is no padding in the volume, and no riding of hobbies,—defects from which some of the lives in the series have been by no means free. The perspective is correct, the method judicious, and the narrative clear and sensible. In literary quality, and as a specimen of the art of biography, Mr. Scudder's "Webster" is the only book in the series which compares with this; and Mr. Scudder, though a charming writer, labored under the disadvantage of a dry subject into which he was forced to instill juice from sources outside. Professor Lounsbury is the master of a vigorous, perhaps, at times, rather over-emphatic style. His pages abound with epigrammatic sayings, some of which we venture to quote. Speaking of Cooper's career at Yale, he says: "We need not feel any distrust of his declaration that little learning of any kind found its way into his head. Least of all will he be inclined to doubt it whom extended experience in the class-room has taught to view with profoundest respect the infinite capability of the human mind to resist the introduction of knowledge." Alluding to Bryant's remark that, "to a casual inspection," the revised edition of "Precaution" seemed almost another work, he says: "The inspection which could come to such a conclusion must have been of that exceedingly casual kind which contents itself with contemplating the outside of a book." He describes "The North American Review" in its earlier years as "ponderously revolving through space." Of William Sotheby, an English friend of Cooper, he writes that "he had to endure the double degradation of being called a small poet by the small poets themselves." Of Mrs. Wilson, a character in Cooper's novel "Precaution": "This lady is the widow of a general officer, who, the reader comes heartily to feel, has, most fortunately for himself, fallen in the Peninsular War." Of "General" George P. Morris, one of the editors of the "New York Mirror": "Besides being an editor he had the position of general of militia; accordingly, he was often styled by his admirers 'he of the sword and pen,' which was just and appropriate to this extent, that he did as much execution with the one as with the other."

These instances of the author's cleverness are taken nearly at random, and as being easily quotable. They do not of course represent the keen remark and serious discussion which could only be exhibited by the citation of continuous passages. An important part of the biographer's task has been the vindication of his subject against the personal detraction of the man and the hostile criticism of the author, which Cooper's everlasting quarrels provoked. In the former of these he has succeeded fully, and it is fair to say that the prejudiced reader—if there be any such at this late day—will be ready, when he reaches the last chapter, to join heartily in the eloquent tribute to Cooper's real nobility of character with which the volume closes. Whether he has succeeded equally well in rescuing

the novelist from the hands of the critics, we must leave the individual reader to judge for himself. The circulation of the best of Cooper's novels is still large, and their popularity seemingly unabated. Professor Lounsbury is rather severe on the critics, and particularly on the New England critics. In his analysis and comparative estimate of Cooper's too numerous writings, he seems to us nearly always right, and he is not sparing of their many and obvious faults when separately considered. His general estimate of Cooper as a writer is nowhere summed up, and is perhaps rather implied than expressed. We can only say, therefore, that so far as we gather an impression of it from the book as a whole, it seems to us too high.

The truth in this matter of criticism *vs.* popularity appears to be about as follows: Criticism is the articulate judgment of the few; popularity the inarticulate judgment of the many. Both are liable to be mistaken, the former through narrowness, pedantry, and the crotchets which beset the minds of the merely literary; the latter because it is heedless and unintellectual, and in search of nothing better than amusement. To afford any criterion of the final rank which an author will obtain, criticism must be consenting and popularity must be lasting. Kotzebue is held up by Carlyle as an awful example of the fallacy of popularity as an ultimate test. "Helen's Babies" has reached its *nth* edition; but is "Helen's Babies" really a work of superior genius? Popularity is, in fact, the judgment of the many in one particular only: it pronounces a book *readable*,—nothing more. Doubtless the very critics who undervalue Cooper have read his novels with breathless interest; but when they come to ask themselves whether those same novels possess high and enduring qualities, they have to say no. We think it likely that "The Leatherstocking Tales," "The Spy," and the best of the sea stories, such as "The Pilot" and "The Red Rover," will be read for many years to come, and will go through numerous editions; but the estimate of them will hardly be higher than it is to-day, and probably not so high.

If statistics were obtainable, it would doubtless be found that the great majority of Cooper's readers are boys, or men whose intellectual development is not much in advance of boys. We have all enjoyed Cooper in our early youth. When we reach a more reflective stage his novels fail to satisfy. The reason of this is obvious. They address themselves mainly to our curiosity. It is the story that we are after. They belong to the same class with the books of Marryat, Simms, and Mayne Reid, though they are, of course, much the best of the class. In the invention of incidents and situations, in the narrative of wild adventure at once natural and exciting, Cooper has no superior. He was the inventor of the sea-novel and the Indian novel. He originated the Indian himself, the Indian of literature. He created Leatherstocking, who, with much about him that is improbable, is, in truth, as Professor Lounsbury pronounces him, a great original character.

It is in the dynamical part of his work that Cooper is at his best,—in the movement and the action. He is frankly external. In the strict sense he is hardly a novelist at all, but an epic or story-teller. The weakness of his dramatic portions has been too much