

ence to page and line, all the corresponding matter in The Yellow Book and the poem. At any point in the text of the book or of Mr. Hodell's essay all the corroborative or contradictory passages may be found by turning to the indicated note. To enable one, while reading "The Ring and the Book," to reach the same material, a full alphabetical index is given, besides a "Line Index to Annotations." Thus, to take an example, one is reading the "Caponsacchi" and stops at the lines:

There she stood—leaned there, for the second time,
Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke:
"Why is it you have suffered me to stay
Breaking my heart two days more than was need?"

What authority, one asks, had Browning for interposing this delay of two days? By means of the "Line Index" and note one finds there is only a single allusion in the "Yellow Book" (Francesca's Deposition, p. 71) to the delay:

Then he told me he would secure the carriage, and when that had been arranged he would give me a signal by letting his handkerchief fall in passing before our house, as he had done before. But the next day went by, and although I stood at the blinds, he did not give the signal. When the day following had also passed, I spoke to him again as above, and complained to him that he had broken the word he had given me. And he excused himself, saying that he had not found a carriage in Arezzo. I answered him that, at any rate, he should have procured one from outside, as he promised to do.

On this point Professor Hodell here remarks that "Browning has made this delay of two days [which plays no further part in the documents] take a profound meaning in the life of his hero, a time of rapid growth to the full stature of Christian heroism." Following the editor's reference to "The Ring and the Book," vi, 937-1,062, we read:

In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
Alike abolished—the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
That pulled me down. . . .
Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange—
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady,—to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'Twas God's.

For this spiritual struggle and conversion there is not a word in the documents, and indeed it is not likely that any Italian of Caponsacchi's day would have felt the kind of conflict described by Browning between the dead service of the church and the living inspiration heard in a woman's words. And following the scene in the poem a few lines further, we find that in place of the simple excuse of the document, "He had not found a carriage in Arezzo," Brown-

ing's hero indulges in such general language as this:

. . . Lady, waste no thought, no word
Even to forgive me! Care for what I care—
Only! Now follow me as I were fate!

So, step by step, we get a notion of Browning's method; we learn that the hero of the poem is not quite the Caponsacchi of the documents, and, being curious to see how far this transformation extends, we turn to the Subject-Index, where, by means of the references *s. v. Caponsacchi*, we can answer the question in all its details. And, by an extension of the same process, the whole creation of the poem is laid before us.

In his Essay Mr. Hodell has summed up the substance of the matter with considerable skill, although not every one will go with him in his excessive admiration for Browning, or set the emphasis just as he sets it. Thus, to magnify the poet's creative genius, he speaks of the Yellow Book as "a mass of chaotic, unpromising material"; it seems to us, on the contrary, as it seemed to Browning himself, that no more splendid material has often fallen into a poet's hands. It is no doubt chaotic in form, but the story within is palpitating with life and offers a plot at once novel and susceptible of the most passionate development. One cannot read through the works of Tennyson without feeling how desperately he was driven to find suitable themes and how often he fails simply because his theme was trivial. After all, as Aristotle said long ago in good Greek, the plot's the thing; and Browning in stumbling on his Yellow Book was lucky beyond the fortune of his brothers. This is not to belittle his genius, if a large part of genius is just the cunning to wring all its capabilities from chance.

Of Browning's skill in manipulating the incidents of his story there can be no doubt; but in regard to the so-called spiritual element added by him, we are not quite so sure as is the editor. Browning himself, to take one instance, has said of his Francesca Pompilia: "She is just as I found her in the Book." Now, Mr. Hodell cannot find her in the Book, save perhaps in the evidence of Fra Celestino, who ministered to her while dying. For our part, with some knowledge of the priestly habit of magnifying the sanctity of death-bed scenes, we fail to recognize even there the poet's "lily-thing to frighten at a bruise." As we read the documents, she appears a good-looking but fairly commonplace young woman, not over-sensitive or nice, who was driven to desperation by a brutal husband. Her transformation into the saint, as Caponsacchi's change to the love-rapt champion, is wholly the poet's work—his own creative impulse, we take it, rather than any deeper insight into the facts of the actual case. The poetic value of this transmutation, including

the whole motive of the "Platonic" love between the two runaways, will be accepted by most readers, as it is by Mr. Hodell, without a question. After some pondering over the original story, as we now have it, we cannot escape a certain doubt. At least it would be interesting to see that renaissance story treated in the full human manner of the renaissance used by Shakespeare for his "Romeo and Juliet" and other Italian plays. We confess the heresy of finding some of Browning's "spiritual" interpretation not quite true to spirit or flesh. But that is a matter of the personal equation, and Mr. Hodell will have the majority on his side.

CURRENT FICTION.

The Pulse of Life. By Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. \$1.50.

Never was a book more unluckily named; the title serves as a perpetual reminder of just what this long, solid, carefully written novel lacks—the pulse of life. The principal characters are only four, and we are told a great deal about them; they are moved about and lighted up from various points of view, but they never move of themselves. Sabine, the Austrian Archduchess, fleeing from a repulsive marriage, is a delicately tinted replica—a miniature in water-colors—of the youthful Marie Antoinette, easily visualized by the reader on account of this frequently mentioned likeness, but without individuality of her own. Francis Domville, heir of an ancient and impoverished Catholic family, wears the costume of Count Fersen when he falls in love with her, and continues to play the part. The atmosphere of a fancy-dress ball, in fact, surrounds this couple throughout, and airs from Ruritania—though that kingdom is expressly ruled off the author's map—play about their graceful forms. A shade more of interest attaches to the second couple, whose fortunes, by the way, are quite unrelated to those of the first by any but the arbitrary ties of blood-relationship. Anne Leycester, gentle, *recueillie*, endowed with a mysterious gift of healing, and silently enduring the long strain of an unselfish, undemanding love, is a gracious and touching, if somewhat dimly outlined, figure; and there is something tragic, even perversely noble, in the equally unselfish but passionate and ruinous devotion of the object of her tenderness, her Russian cousin, Paul Feyghine, to a heartless little dancer, evidently studied from the portrait, at least, of "Carmencita."

A clever realist would make us know these characters intimately; a vigorous romancer would at least make them *do* something, might even so thrill us by their emotional and dramatic life that they would pass with us for real. Mrs. Lowndes can do neither; her story does

not "march"; with all its elaboration of detail it remains a preparatory sketch—*mémoires à servir*. The one successful bit of portraiture is the character-sketch, slightly caricatured one may hope, of a Russian grand duke. The combination of the primitive animalism of the man with the artificial but undeniable dignity of the personage is cleverly accomplished and remains easily the most memorable thing in the book.

The Passer-By. By Prince Pierre Troubetzkoy. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co.

The way of the transgressor is hard. Hard too is the way of the reader who has to accompany the transgressor "as she is written" in modern fiction. Her sins are so detailed! Her conversion so incidental to the main current! And the sins of the party or parties of the second part are so prominent that the loftiest flights of reasoning and rectitude achieved intermittently by parties of the third part do not avail to color the production as a whole. In this story a Russian saves the situation, and succeeds in holding back from a precipice the chameleon who figures as heroine, with a "spell of affinity" for A., and a "chain of affinity" for B., her husband being F. It is true, too, that this Russian renounces his own chances of felicity. Therefore, any objector to the book could well be answered that decency asserts itself in the end. Remains the fact that the end is only a small part of the story.

In the school readers of our fathers, there flourished a certain Orator Puff, who had two tones in his voice. The same richness may be found in the style of Prince Troubetzkoy's book. At times, the text is set to the terse, curt, monosyllabic scale of Russian fiction. At other times, under the spell of "the gracility of adolescence," or "accidental exteriority," or "supreme acuity," or of trying to "congruously deviate the conversation," the reader, in fancy's eye, sees the Sunny South, flowering lushly, and invaded by the dictionary. And he turns back to the dedication:

To you Amélie, who wrote "Augustine the Man," I dedicate this book because it is due to you as the light is due to the flame.

The Dark Corner. By Zach McGhee. New York: The Grafton Press.

Both within and without this is a little book. Its close fine print is yet neat and clear; its size and shape and weight are of a comforting fitness to the hand. Of its contents something analogous may be said. They are limited and often crude, but there is a reality, a sincerity that impart positive quality. Its naïveté is overtopped by the actual substance. The burlesque humor is forgotten in the real. The tasteless is for-

given for the sake of the genuinely inspiring. It offers a picture of educational conditions, or the lack of them, in a benighted part of the South, where the presence of the school as it existed was worse than its absence. The hero, Jim Thompson, becomes a "perfesser" in a military institute, conducted on principles of arrant quackery. He soon offends the powers of charlatanism and takes his leave. Then moved by pity for the ignorance in a poor white region known as "The Dark Corner," he decides to give up a cherished plan of becoming a lawyer and devotes his life to building up better ideals of education and of living. There is a nice little story of love connected with that of civilizing, and a nice little tale of chivalry to offset extravaganza. There are engaging glimpses of child life; and striking passages of realism from "poor white" life that go far to counteract the elsewhere overdone in manners, customs, and speech. With many rawnesses and roughnesses, it is in some inscrutable way a very likable little story.

The Climber. By E. F. Benson. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co.

Mr. Benson evidently believes there is still a serious novel-reading public. He has written a solid book which refuses to be skimmed, and which might even bear a second reading. Yet it exploits no virgin field, has no dubious scene, no purple patches, and no apparent purpose other than the dramatic representation of character. The social group to which most of the persons belong is a cultivated section of the English upper class, or—more democratically speaking—of the "smart set." *The Climber*, Lucia Grimson, is a near spiritual relative of Mr. Pinero's Iris and Mrs. Wharton's Lily Bart. Living in quiet boredom with her two tea-drinking, patience-playing maiden aunts—capitally drawn and differentiated—she nourishes a dream of luxurious self-realization. She finds her opportunity in the priggishly æsthetic, very correct young Lord Brayton, who is not only affected by her personal charms, but is also persuaded that she can make his home the centre of a "New Set" devoted to a very refined type of culture. This æsthetic lord seeks the beautiful in life and art with curious self-conscious and humorless gravity. Lucia, clear-headed and hard-hearted, conducts a Napoleonic social campaign, winning every battle, fulfilling every self-indulgent desire, till at last real passion touches her. Then, relentlessly, as she took Lord Brayton from her best friend, she takes away her best friend's husband. High tragedy cannot befall the two diversely fervid egotists of the drama; but such disaster as their souls are capable of comes swiftly upon them.

No other novel of Mr. Benson's shows such sobriety and maturity of workmanship. The story moves firmly, harmoniously, if somewhat slowly, forward under the conduct of a critical intelligence. The earlier chapters, indeed, make one a little impatient. The author is in no haste to get into action. He describes his field with excessive particularity as if assured of an attentive hearing. He has the bad habit of explaining the precise significance of every important speech, and he gives the reader a sharp nudge when the speech is clever. He has worked with such laborious conscientiousness that he cannot bear to let any good stroke pass unnoticed. Yet his characters are complexly alive, they develop, and they meet in sharp dramatic conflict. One may detest them all; but they survive the closing of the book.

The Catholic Church in the United States of America: To Celebrate the Golden Jubilee of His Holiness Pope Pius X. Vol. I: The Religious Communities. New York: The Catholic Editing Co.

The publishers of this work, which is to appear in six large folio volumes of 460 pages each, containing in all nearly 7,000 illustrations, have made a strange choice in form. The book is simply impossible to handle on account of its size and weight, and it fits in nowhere in an ordinary room of these flat times of living.

Offered as a history, it must be judged by modern critical standards, and by these this first volume may be set down as a remarkable collection of pictures, valuable and novel in their extent, rather than a record comprehensive in detail, exact in statement, and complete in scope. From the hour that the great-hearted and far-seeing friar of La Rabida put new hope and vigor into the fortunes of the dispirited and dejected Columbus, down to the present time, the religious communities have played a large part in the progress of the Catholic Church here. In this volume the Rev. Dr. John Talbot Smith devotes a very comprehensive introduction to an exposition of their general history, work, aims, and character. There are now about 5,000 priests, 7,000 lay-brothers, and 56,000 women working in the various Catholic religious communities in the United States. To each group of 3,000 Catholics there are two diocesan priests, one community priest, and nine brothers and nuns. The special work of each religious community, its foundation here, and the extent of the territory and the operations therein, make up the volume. The illustrations consist of portraits of prominent members of these orders and congregations and pictures of institutions under their charge. In going over this list of com-