

PROBABILISM AND THE JESUITS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In the *Nation* of October 27, "J. R. S." writes a letter about "Probabilism," almost every paragraph of which contains an error or a fallacy.

(1.) He intimates that Newman's Tract should have had weight in determining the validity of his orders; whereas, the orders of a priest do not depend upon his belief, but upon the manner of his ordination.

(2.) He criticises Rome for waiting until Duchesne's history was translated into Italian before condemning it. But the Congregation of the Index, as is well known, does not condemn *instantly* every heretical work; and it was because Duchesne's book had sufficient importance to be put into Italian that it was placed on the list of forbidden publications.

(3.) Whatever may be thought of Liguori's opinions, it is quite certain that the Society of Jesus has never made itself responsible for them. The Pope may have approved them, but the Jesuits would be bound only by the Pope's *ex cathedra* utterances. Otherwise they might be supposed to approve of certain former Papal decrees against their order. Only declarations permitted or approved by the general of "the company" can be taken as declarations of the Jesuits themselves.

(4.) "J. R. S." remarks: "No doubt Tyrrell would have lived and died a Jesuit if left alone." This is simply to say that if the general of the Jesuits had not discovered Tyrrell's heresy, he would not have punished that heresy.

(5.) To say, as "J. R. S." does, that "by a deft use of probabilism nearly everything is condoned," amounts to a perversion of the doctrine. A "deft" use of Bishop Butler's argument from analogy might lead to an equally unhappy result.

(6.) The authority of Brownson, "the greatest of all American Catholic writers" (*sic*), can hardly be sufficient to prove that the French Revolution is to be laid "at the door of the Jesuits." A. A.

Neuchâtel, Switzerland, November 5.

THE NOSE IN POETRY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Should it not be noted that the nose is described in English poetry, as well as in that of America, India, and Greece?

In our older poetry, Chaucer alone has at least eleven noses! Of the six feminine ones, that of the Prioress was a "nose tretys"; Hate's was "snorted up for tyme"; Beauty's "wel wrought"; Idylness had one of "good proporsoun," while that of Fraunchise

... was wrought at poynt devys
For it was gentyl and tretys.

Despairing of doing justice to the nose of Gladnesse the poet says:

I not what of hir nose descryve
So faire hath no womman alyve.

The men's noses are also worth mentioning. Sir Thopas "hadde a semely nose." Myrthe's nose was "by measure wrought full right," while that of Daungere was "frounced," and "full kirked stode." The miller of the "Reeve's Tale" had a "camuse nose," and in the "Prologue" the mil-

lers's nose is very carefully, if somewhat unpleasantly, described thus:

Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
A werthe, and thereon stood a tuft of heres,
Reed as the bristles of a sowes erys;
His nosethirles blake were and wyde.

Chaucer even thought it worth while to consider that the shape of the nose might be hereditary and gives the daughter in the "Reeve's Tale" a "camuse" nose just like her father's.

A little later than Chaucer, the poet Stephen Hawes describes a lady's nose as "straight and fayre."

Nor is the nose entirely neglected by our modern poets. The very "flower" of all noses in English poetry, a nose right under everybody's nose, is that of the petulant maiden in Tennyson's "Gareth and Lynette," of whom it is so poetically and tactfully said

... and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.

MARGRETTA MARTIN.

Mount Holyoke College, November 19.

EXCAVATING THE CATACOMBS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Your reviewer of Wilpert's latest book ("Die Papstgräber"; see the *Nation*, October 6) expresses the wish that further excavating may be made in the Roman Catacombs. That is indeed devoutly to be hoped, but money is lacking. Why should not an international fund for excavating the Catacombs be raised by some great university in your country? Subscribers would easily be found in all parts of the world. Of course, the excavating should be directed by the Papal archaeologists; there can be no question of creating an international committee for that purpose. But the principles of scientific excavation are now so well known and so generally applied, that no intellectual assistance need be offered to scholars like Wilpert and Marucchi, who are surrounded by some very promising pupils. The only help needed is money. The Christian and Jewish Catacombs of Rome have been, to a certain extent, the cradle of modern thought, and of modern morals; would it not be paying a debt if the modern world, without exception of creed, belief, or unbelief, were to help towards exploring them completely? About two-thirds of the work remains to be done.

SALOMON REINACH.

Paris, November 6.

COLLEGE GRADUATES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: I have just received a pamphlet advertising "The Health and Efficiency League of America," with headquarters in Battle Creek, Mich. On the first page setting forth its origin and aims, there appears in a prominent place the statement, "The small proportion of college graduates who succeed in any profession is notorious." It is surprising that a statement so wholly unwarranted could be countenanced by an organization boasting a distinguished array of officers. According to the statistics given by "Who's Who," 1910, more than 60 per cent. of the professional men listed are college graduates, and these figures would be increased to

more than 70 per cent. if the names of those were included who attended college but did not graduate. The statement is all the more astonishing in view of the percentage of college graduates the Health League itself has honored by election to official position in the organization. Its list of vice-presidents, counsellors, and executive committee is composed of the names of twenty-one men. Seventeen of these names appear in "Who's Who." Of these seventeen names, eleven are college graduates, one attended college two years, four graduated from medical colleges, and only one never attended a college of any kind. It is to be regretted that so misleading a statement against college efficiency should be distributed broadcast into the homes of the land.

T. LINDSEY BLAYNEY.

Central University of Kentucky, November 12.

Literature.

THE AUTHOR OF "VATHEK."

The Life and Letters of William Beckford of Fonthill. By Lewis Melville. New York: Duffield & Co. \$3.50 net.

Beckford's letters now first given to the public are not intrinsically very interesting, and the editor has lessened their value as a document by faulty transcriptions and by omissions and confusions so glaring that the perusal of his volume leaves one in a state of irritation. And besides these minor errors of editing, Mr. Melville, where he adds his own comment, has, we are obliged to think, utterly misrepresented Beckford's character and ignored what Beckford really stood for. To read Mr. Melville one would never suspect that Beckford in his strength and more particularly in his weakness was one of the most characteristic products of the romantic movement. Yet not only do his early letters fairly teem with the influences of Rousseau and "Werther" and Ossian and Chateaubriand, but he had the courage and the means to carry into practice what other men were only dreaming, and thus to become more even in his life than in his famous romance of "Vathek" a symbol of the glowing fierce aspirations and the final spiritual bankruptcy of the new generation.

William Beckford was born at Fonthill-Gifford in Wiltshire, October 1, 1760. His father, Alderman and twice Lord Mayor of London, the celebrated radical and friend of Wilkes, had inherited an enormous estate in Jamaica. By his first wife, he had a stepdaughter, Elizabeth March, afterwards Mrs. Hervey, who wrote some foolish, sentimental novels which her half-brother William lauded as a boy and caricatured in his "Azemia" as a man. The Alderman's second wife, the mother of William, belonged to the Abercorn branch of the Hamilton family. One of his brothers, William's uncle Julines, had a son

Peter, who married in 1773 Lousia Pitt, second daughter of Lord Rivers. For Mrs. Peter Beckford and her sister (apparently Marcia-Lucy), William had a profound and enigmatical attachment. At the age of ten, the boy lost his father and fell largely under the influence of his mother. Instead of undergoing the wholesome discipline of public school and university, he was, by the advice of his godfather, Lord Chat-ham, placed under the tutelage of the Rev. John Lettice, who seems, indeed, to have been a scholarly and sensible man, but who at least was unable to drag his charge out of the fantastic dream-world into which he had fallen.

When seventeen, William went with his "bear-leader" to Geneva, to continue his studies. From here, we have the first of his letters, some of them addressed to Mrs. Elizabeth Hervey, others apparently to the same person, although for some reason the superscription is omitted. The tone of these letters is of a frantic extravagance that might remind one of a sort of hybrid of Ossian and Rousseau, both a little mad. At the end of 1778, Beckford was back in England pouring out his youthful revolt in letters from Fonthill: "I will seclude myself if possible from the world, in the midst of the Empire, and converse many hours every day with you, Mesron and Nouronihar"; and satisfying his ambition by writing his first book, "Biographical Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters," which, for the benefit of the housekeeper who showed strangers through the galleries of Fonthill, attributed the pictures to such artists as Og of Basan, Watersouchy of Amsterdam, Herr Sucrewasser of Vienna, and the like. Mr. Melville seems to see a contradiction in this union of sentiment and burlesque in the same mind; they are, in fact, but different aspects of the romantic desire to escape from reality, and have often gone together, from the days of the double theme in Spanish drama to the magnificent audacities of "Don Juan."

After a year and a half William made the grand tour with his tutor, and in May of 1782 went abroad for the third time, travelling now with all the luxurious state that befitted the richest commoner of England. Some time in the interval between his second and third journeys, he had met at Bath Lady Margaret Gordon, with whom he fell in love, and whom he married May 5, 1783, coming back to England for this purpose. Two children were born to them; but after a union of three years his wife died, and the children, seeming, so far as the letters indicate, to have passed quite out of his mind, were placed under the charge of his mother; while he himself was hurried about Europe by his friends who, according to his biographer, were "fearful of his losing his reason or taking

his life." Mr. Melville asserts that "the marriage had been an ideal union," and thinks that the memory of Beckford's loss, "acting upon an emotional nature, may have had more to do with his subsequent retirement than is generally supposed." It may be so; yet such practical endurance of grief scarcely accords with the romantic temperament as one reads the annals of those days; and indeed there is an aspect of this whole affair which is unpleasantly suggestive, but which cannot be entirely overlooked, as Mr. Melville overlooks it, without a gross misrepresentation of what Beckford stood for to his contemporaries.

Before he had met Lady Margaret and during his courtship he was writing letters filled with disquieting confessions. Especially there is a series of letters to Mrs. Peter Beckford which are filled with allusions to a thoroughly unwholesome mixture of passions which exhales the unclean atmosphere of the Schlegels and their sentimental circle. These letters are sometimes obscure, and the editor gives no help to their interpretation—rather, his story of Beckford's life is incompatible with them as they stand. Of the still uglier rumors about Beckford, which, as readers of Byron know, formed the real legend of his life, it would be desirable perhaps to say nothing. Mr. Melville declares categorically that there is not a particle of evidence to support them, and dismisses them as preposterous. Yet he himself admits that Beckford's "Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents," printed at this time, was withdrawn from circulation probably because its romantic tendency might give some color to the noxious scandals. Some of the evidence he deliberately suppresses. Thus he quotes Rogers's vivid description of a visit to Fonthill, when Beckford read to the younger man the episodes intended for "Vathek," but never published. He does not add the comment of Rogers: "They are extremely fine, but very objectionable, on account of their subjects. Indeed, they show that the mind of the author was, to a certain degree, diseased."

One of the reasons for Beckford's return to England, in 1781, from the grand tour was that he might celebrate his coming of age in a manner befitting the fame of Fonthill. The festivities, which lasted for a week, followed the usual custom of the day, and might be dismissed with a word, were it not that they seem to have been one of the influences that governed the rest of his life. "My spirits are not sufficiently rampant," he writes to Lady Hamilton, "to describe the tumult of balls, concerts, and illuminations in which we were engaged here a fortnight ago. . . . On the desert down which terminates the woody region of Fonthill blazed a series of fires. . . . On the

left of the house rises a lofty steep mantled with tall oaks amongst which a temple of truly classical design discovers itself. This building (sacred to the Lares) presented a continued glow of saffron-colored flame, and the throng assembled before it looked devilish by contrast."

These scenes at Fonthill, ending with the necessary touch of diabolism, sound almost like a chapter of "Vathek," and, indeed, they certainly, combined with Beckford's early reading of the "Arabian Nights" and later acquaintance with the Oriental tales then popular in France to inspire that strange book. He himself gave this explanation, late in life, to Cyrus Redding, and declared that the great hall at Fonthill, with its many doors opening into dim corridors, suggested to him the idea of the Hall of Eblis. The old tradition of Beckford's literary performance is well known—how he told Redding, in 1835, that he had written the story at one sitting of three days and two nights, during which time he never took off his clothes. Unfortunately, Beckford's correspondence with the Rev. Samuel Henley, which has since come to light, quite shatters that heroic legend. He was, as a matter of fact, at work on the manuscript at least for a number of months, and was tinkering at it at intervals for about five years. Mr. Melville undertakes to reconcile Beckford's statement with the facts by supposing he had in mind, when he was talking with Redding, not the whole book of "Vathek" as we have it, but merely one of the episodes designed for it, but never printed. That is possible, although, unless the episode was extraordinarily long, the feat becomes rather commonplace; and one or two other lapses in Beckford's memory rouse the suspicion that he was not incapable in his old age of investing his youth with imaginary powers. Beckford wrote the story in French, and to his friend Henley, a scholar of considerable Oriental attainments, was entrusted the task of furnishing notes and of making an English translation. Probably out of impatience over Beckford's dilatoriness, Henley put out an edition of his version, in 1786, with a prefatory note stating that it was translated from the Arabic. Beckford was naturally incensed at this treachery, and immediately, in 1787, published the original French with a reply to Henley's misrepresentation. We have thus the curious fact that one of the classics of our literature was written in a foreign tongue; but the correspondence between Henley and Beckford shows that the latter passed judgment on the English and virtually stamped it as his own.

"Vathek" is probably little read today, and, indeed, a good deal of its extravagant fancy and grotesque humor rings rather flat, after the lapse of

years. But the book was popular in its time, and is still one of the main documents to any one who wishes to study the sources of the romantic movement. Its theme is the *unendlichkeitsstreben* and *Titanenthum*, the insatiable thirst of experience and the self-torturing egotism, which were beginning to run like wild-fire through the literature of Europe, and which reached their consummation in "Faust." Instead of the mediæval setting of Goethe's poem, Beckford's hero is an Eastern prince, at whose feet lie all the pleasures and powers of the world. Being dissatisfied with the magnificence of his predecessors, he adds to his palace five wings in which, like a Des Esseintes of the Orient, he can indulge in the quintessential charms of the five senses. His thirst for knowledge is equal to his appetite for pleasure, "for he wished to know everything, even sciences that did not exist." His power was greater than his knowledge; "when he was angry, one of his eyes became so terrible that no person could bear to behold it, and the wretch upon whom it was fixed instantly fell backward, and sometimes expired." Only one thing the Caliph cannot command in his earthly paradise—content; the stars above his head, as he stands on his tower looking down contemptuously on mankind, are an irritation to his desires and a humiliation to his pride. Then enters the tempter, in the form of a hideous Giaour, who in return for a monstrous crime offers him the possession of the palace of subterranean fire where reposes Soliman Ben Daoud, surrounded by the talismans that control the world. For a space the story is lost in grotesque adventures; but at the end, as Vathek and the Princess Nouronihar approach their goal, the imagination of the author kindles and the sense of foreboding deepens and intensifies step by step, until in the great Hall of Eblis (for to this the promises of the Giaour bring them), at the sight of the vast unresting multitude who roam ceaselessly hither and thither in furious agony or in rapt absorption, heedless of everything about them and forever avoiding one another, each with his right hand pressed upon his heart—the feeling rises to real terror and sublimity. At last the trembling pair are led to the great Soliman, seated aloft, yet with his hand, like the others, pressed upon his heart, and listening intently to the sullen roar of a vast cataract, which was the only sound that intruded on the universal silence. He tells them of his doom, and concludes:

"In consideration of the piety of my early youth, my woes shall come to an end when this cataract shall for ever cease to flow: till then I am in torments, ineffable torments! an unrelenting fire preys on my heart."

Having uttered this exclamation Soliman

raised his hands towards Heaven, in token of supplication, and the Caliph discerned through his bosom, which was transparent as crystal, his heart enveloped in flames.

The device of the burning heart Beckford borrowed from a French writer now forgotten, but he has more than made it his own. His genius was fitful and never under control; he was no philosopher or seer, but in this consummation of the undisciplined revolt of romanticism he came closer to the facts of history, and showed a profounder insight into human nature, than Goethe displayed when he resolved Faust's craving for unbridled experience in a rather futile act of sympathy.

And as the Hall of Eblis is a magnified and Orientalized image of Font-hill, so the career of Vathek is a grotesquely conceived symbol of Beckford's own life and of the romantic ideal. This is no place to go into an account of Beckford's rebuilding of Font-hill at an extravagance and with a dæmonic energy which quite bewildered his contemporaries, or to follow him through his loss of fortune and secluded days at Bath. Mr. Melville closes his introductory chapter with the words of Beckford: "I have never known a moment's ennui." The saying may be true, but is suspicious. Beckford was indeed of a robust physique, and had the inherited strength of very prosaic and practical forebears. Ennui he may have kept at bay until the end by his unceasing activity. But withal it is not easy to read his letters and the story of his insane thirst and haste in building, or to picture his obstinate seclusion from the world in an artificial and barbarously ornate paradise, without remembering the last scene of his allegory of "Vathek."

This at least is certain: One who knows the literary history of that period may be thankful to Mr. Melville for printing these letters, but he will find it difficult to accept the hero whom Mr. Melville pretends to find in them.

CURRENT FICTION.

Tales of Men and Ghosts. By Edith Wharton. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

The enervating influence upon our popular story-writers of American magazine "policy" does not decrease with the seasons. One recalls the announcement, made something like a year ago, that Mrs. Wharton had been booked to write a series of ten or a dozen stories "about men." Here they are in the predestined number, capably turned out according to contract. They are ingenious and readable: so much the most doubtful forecaster must have been sure of. But their ingenuity is altogether too patent: they are too clearly trumped up out of the author's fancy; even the doubtful forecaster must have hoped for

better things from the writer of "The Valley of Decision" and "The House of Mirth." Her use of the short-story form is not to be complained of, since it is true that she is naturally an interpreter of the episode and the situation, rather than of action upon a large scale. Her latest essay in the novel, "The Fruit of the Tree," resulted in a not very happy patching together of several distinct and obstinately detached episodes. But the book left one with an impression of earnest endeavor, if not of actually lofty achievement. Mrs. Wharton may have enjoyed the writing of these "Tales of Men and Ghosts," but we venture to suppose that her enjoyment was upon the comparatively trivial plane of technical facility.

Not the least puzzling thing about this collection is its uncertainty of style. Two of the stories, "Afterward" and "The Letters," are (rather ineffectively) in her earlier manner—that Anglo-Gallic manner, with its nuances, its compunctions, its hiatuses; which reminds us of Bourget, when it does not go farther and fare worse by reminding us of Henry James. In "The Valley of Decision" this style seemed to have been so thoroughly assimilated by Mrs. Wharton, that one regarded her simply as one of the "psychological" school, as the cant was. Now one almost comes to doubt the spontaneity of that manner, with her. At all events, the rest of the stories here collected show hardly a trace of it. Their style is rather that alert and commonplace style of the magazine fiction of the day as turned out by an army of skilful practitioners.

Max. By Katherine Cecil Thurston. New York: Harper & Bros.

The author of "The Masquerader" has hit upon a kindred motive for her present story. It is a fresher motive than that of the Dromios: a girl who passes herself off as her own twin brother is a new engine of mystification. "Max" is the name taken in vain by a young Russian princess, who, on the eve of marriage, runs away in the disguise of a boy. She is determined to win fame by pencil and brush, in that notorious haunt of genius and nursery of fame, Bohemian Paris. But, first of all, it is her ambition to "possess herself," to remain independent of authority—above all, the authority of love. Of course, there is a man in Paris who is destined to wreck this ambition: an Irishman of the world, nearly middle-aged, who has never really loved. A quick intimacy springs up between this gentleman and the so-called "Max." If that young person's speech and action are correctly reported, it is hard to see how any man of ordinary intelligence could have failed to see through her disguise. But Rosalind so deceived her Orlando, and Portia her Bassanio: if we begin to jib at such situations, we shall have an end