

NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

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"ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY."*

IF the original narratives, the sources of history, are to be published for the benefit of the general reader, success in the undertaking is wholly dependent upon the manner in which the material is selected and edited. If the antiquarian theory that one fact is as valuable as another because they are both facts, be adopted, the results of the publication of original sources would be copious and would remain unread except by those who would read them in any event. If, again, to the antiquarian theory be added as an inflexible guide the doctrine of the scientific historian, illustrated by Professor Bury, that literature and history have no connection, a popular publication of original sources becomes at once a contradiction in terms and a sheer waste of good paper and ink.

Fortunately Mr. Jameson, the general editor of this excellent series, and his associates in the preparation of this first volume, evidently reject the view that all facts are equally valuable, and hold to the old-fashioned belief that there is a connection between literature and history. In practice, certainly, they demonstrate by this volume that they do not accept the theory of the equal values of facts or believe that literature has nothing to do with history, because they know that no one would read history destitute of literary quality except people who like to read catalogues, and unread history would be, to borrow the words of an American humorist, as "barren as an un-kissed kiss."

* Original Narratives of Early American History. General editor, T. Franklin Jameson. "The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot," edited by Julius E. Olsen and Edward Gaylord Bourne. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1906.

In this volume on "The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot," and as the prospectus indicates, in its successors, the selection could not be improved. Judging from this volume alone, it may also be said that nothing could be better than the editing. We have the best texts accompanied by brief but clear introductions, and explained by notes which are sufficient to guide and instruct and not sufficient to puzzle and encumber. In each case a short list of authorities is given which will direct those who wish to pursue their inquiries upon any one of the three subjects, in the way in which they should go, to find all the sources and the last words of modern research and antiquarian learning. The selection and editing could not, in fact, have been better done for the purpose which the editors had in view.

That purpose, as I understand it, was to give in popular form to the general reader, not to the historian or historical student engaged in research, the principal contemporary narratives upon which early American history rests. It is a wise plan. There is no better way to learn history than to read it in the words of the men who made it, or who watched it in the making. The great mass of original sources are unmeaning and wearisome to the general reader, and only become possible to him when the real historian has winnowed and coordinated them and brought forth from the confusion the ordered narrative, interpreted, touched with imagination and graced by the quality of style which will give it savor and put it safely into the literature of the time or of the world. But among the welter of original sources, great and small, there are some narratives or documents with a literary charm of their own, and which also have the human feeling which alone makes history real to those who read. Of such narratives is this volume made up.

For the voyages of the Northmen we have so much of the Sagas of Eric the Red, and of the Flat Island book as tell of the expeditions to Vinland. In those Sagas is contained practically all the evidence that exists of the Norse voyages to North America, south of Greenland. The supposed monuments or relics which were once believed in have all withered in the light of investigation. The armor found in Connecticut, upon which Longfellow based his poem, and which unfortunately perished in a fire, was found to resemble so closely in workmanship and form the similar armor discovered at Palenque in Mexico, as to leave no doubt that

it belonged to the highly civilized Indians of the South. The inscription on the Dighton Rock, now unhappily perishing, is obviously Indian picture-writing, and the Stone Tower at Newport is an equally obvious mill-tower of a familiar English type. The mounds and hollows at Cambridge may be anything, but they prove nothing. The fantastic fabric of Norse settlements and Norse cities, reared by various writers from Gravier to Professor Horsford, rest on nothing but the imagination of the various authors. Indeed, Professor Olsen goes so far as apparently to give his authority to the proposition that Leif and his successors went no farther south than Nova Scotia. Yet the Sagas certainly seem to indicate, not only by the presence of the wild grapes, but by the description of the coast-line, that the Northmen came as far as Rhode Island, and Cape Kiarlanes agrees with Cape Cod, in their accounts, far more nearly than with any other portion of the coast. The great fact, however, is that in the year 1000 the Norsemen came to North America and followed the coast far to the south of Greenland. In the Sagas one finds the great and daring story told, a story delightful to read and ponder. The Sagas are traditional, oral in the beginning, but founded on a solid basis of fact with a surprising care and conformity of detail in many cases. But, above all, they are poetic in their essence, with the freshness and force of primitive folk-tales. They give us the first glimpse of America as it flashed for a brief moment upon the vision of Europe, but they give much more in their picture of that wild and daring race who, sword in hand, fought their way from the North Sea to Constantinople, and crossed and recrossed the wild waters of the North Atlantic in open boats which to-day would hardly be thought safe out of sight of land.

The Columbus story is a far greater one than that of the Norsemen, issuing out of the gray mists for one shining moment only to return again with the clash of steel and the roar of waves sounding ever about them. The story of Columbus is one of enormous achievement, so vast in its results that it cannot be measured even now. That his deeds wrought a political and economic revolution, even now still incomplete, is but part of his significance. He changed the current of the thoughts of men, something accomplished by only very few of the greatest of human minds. Of him it can be said, after his first voyage:

“And lo! Creation widened in man’s view.”

Here in this volume we have the journal of that first voyage, and there are few things that have been written about the adventures of men better worth reading. The earliest entries as he fared across the Atlantic are little more than the notes for a ship's log, and yet we can feel the excitement even now palpitating in each day's brief record. Every bird they saw, every bit of floating weed, every cloud shape in the heavens, was scanned, and in them all the Admiral thought he read the sign of land. Never had any man sailed for such a prize, and as we read we feel the strain in every word. It is of no great consequence whether Guanahani was Watling's Island or some other. It is the great fact that the new world was then and there discovered, which concerns us all. And this journal, simple, clear, full of faith and generous hope, brings home that fact in a way that no retelling of the marvellous tale could ever accomplish. It is all so human, so convincing, and, as we read the very words of the great Admiral, it all seems so near.

Then came the great tragedy,—one of the most terrible in history. The man who gave a new world, not only to Castile and Leon, but to mankind, and who changed the world's history, was sent back to Spain in irons, the victim of plots and intrigues. Here we have the famous letter to Doña Juana de Torres in which he cries out against his wrongs and demands justice. Thus it begins:

“Though my complaint of the world is new its habit of ill-using is very ancient.”

It is a sad sentence, and yet the wit and the melancholy philosophy of it make one feel as if literary quality was of value not only in history, but even in original sources. The letter is a bitter cry which sounds now across the centuries, and here and in the last journal of the fourth voyage, which follows, we get a vivid picture of the man. His profound faith, his trust in Heaven, his turning to the Bible for inspiration and finally his vision, the voice that spoke to him out of the darkness uplifting his spirit in the midst of his most dire misfortune, all is here set down. Nothing can make us understand the man like his own passionate words, and the man who discovered America is worth realization. If any one wishes to wrestle with the endless questions and controversies of the Columbian voyages, it is easy to plunge into the

countless books upon the subject. Meantime the general reader, little concerned with dates and identification of places, but profoundly interested in the fact of America's discovery, can find in these letters and journals the man himself, and live over with him the triumph, one of the greatest ever won, and the tragedy, one of the most piteous ever endured.

There are no Sagas, no journals or letters comparable to those of Columbus, which tell the story of the discovery of the Cabots. So the editors have turned very wisely from Acts of Parliaments, dry reports and modern controversies, to the letters from certain Italians to their masters in Milan and Venice, showing how the discovery of a new continent struck its contemporaries. Thus we get again the feeling of the time. It is only a brief, quite loose account from hearsay, of what had been found, but it brings us near to the event and makes it real. It is really not very vital to know whether John Cabot made his landfall in Labrador, Newfoundland or Cape Breton, although we are indebted to the patient learning of the scholars who have discussed and settled the question for us. But to all men the fact that, sailing in the service of the English King, John Cabot found North America and thus giving the title to England made it an English-speaking country, is of the deepest interest.

Here we find the story as men told it to each other and wondered over it from day to day just as the fifteenth century was dying. It makes us realize the event which is, after all, the best reason for reading any history. We read in these letters of the great discoverer attired in silk with vast honor paid him, and "these English running after him like mad people." He stands out a gallant figure, this daring sailor and Venetian citizen, with the wild Norse blood of his seafaring Jersey ancestors coursing in his veins, as we catch here a glimpse of him in the streets of London. But that single glimpse, with his brave attire and the shouting crowd, brings the man near to us, and with the man a better understanding of the lasting work he wrought. After all there is nothing better than this that history can do for us, and very few histories can do it quite so well as an original narrative with all its errors and imperfections on its head, if we are only fortunate enough to possess one which has both literary quality and real human feeling.

H. CABOT LODGE.

"LEW WALLACE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY."*

NOTHING I have read, except, perhaps, "Ben-Hur," has so filled my heart and mind and thrilled me as this autobiography of General Lew Wallace. He thus begins his last review: "Before distractions overtake me, I wish to say that I believe absolutely in the Christian conception of God. . . . The Jesus Christ in whom I believe was, in all stages of His life, a human being. His Divinity was the Spirit, and the Spirit was God." That was characteristic of the man in all relations of life.

Wallace was very young when his mother died, herself but twenty-seven. As he describes her, she had a large, loving Christian heart. She was greatly puzzled by the restless, wayward boy, and repressed his truancy by many rigorous expedients, such as tying him to a bedpost, dressing him in girl's clothing, and the like. His devotion to the ferryman, whose aid he became in crossing and recrossing the Wabash, at last began to relieve her intense anxiety about him. His strong, military father, a graduate of West Point, used the rod to obtain obedience; so did most of his teachers. After speaking most tenderly of his mother, respectfully of his father and doubtfully of his early teachers, Wallace writes with feeling:

"I simply plead for discrimination, for forbearance, for teaching, for sympathy. Whoso lays his hand heavily on a boy of spirit . . . is himself an offender in far greater degree than his victim. The school-master who cannot discriminate between pupils lacks the first essential to perfection in an honorable calling."

Again and again his heart cried out, "Mother, mother!" as it did when "the alabaster tinge was on her face," and she never again could respond to his call. I cannot help feeling that, had she lived, the Christian fellowship which she so much enjoyed would have been his in his early days, with its gentle discipline and moulding power, and given him in his youth a happier life.

His reference to that strong and abiding love which knitted him and his life-companion together is wonderful. Who could express it like Lew Wallace?

"The promises were in her face when next I saw her in plain daylight; and after all the trials of years, come and gone—now—the same promises are as bank-notes redeemed, and there is no need of them more. . . .

* "Lew Wallace: An Autobiography." New York: Harper & Brothers.