

The same popular bias in favour of earnestness has clipped the wings of clergymen and jurists and, at least since Carlyle, of writers. To the wearers of the surplice and the ermine, only a sly, sedate humour is allowed. Mr. Augustine Birrell and Dr. Robert Collyer have illustrated the exquisite possibilities of that subdued chuckle which is believed not to be derogatory to clerical and parliamentary dignity. But the moment some one like Dr. Joseph Parker or Dr. Talmage lifts up his voice in lurid jocularity, or a Mr. Haweis gabbles like a tinker or slumps hilariously into incoherence, the sober, sensible people who constitute the great body of readers and listeners assume that he is a square peg in a round hole, and express the fear that he is overworked and needs a vacation.

There is a general disposition to regard the humourist in literature as "an amusing kind of 'cuss' who writes puzzling little stories that make you smile." So "Q," says Mr. Stockton, is esteemed in England; and it may be questioned if either he, or Mark Twain, or Eugene Field is taken much more seriously in our own country. We love them all, but it does not occur to the average reader that they possess a wonderful insight or, primarily, the distinction of the artist. "Foolery does walk about the orb like the sun," and by the apparent ease and ubiquitousness of its shining one is led to deny serious consideration to "the fools." It is true that with them life is no laughing matter; but as long as their books continue to be, they are permitted to wear only the cap and bells. To be versatile is to be distrusted.

Now Mr. Jerome is versatile. His fellowcraftsmen are vaguely aware that he is an editor and a playwright as well as a humourist. But his readers, on both sides of the Atlantic, have already accepted him as a humourist. They expect from him "the idle thoughts of an idle fellow," and if they don't get them they feel cheated. These *Sketches in Lavender, Blue, and Green* possess an emotional interest, and are not prevailingly gay. Their lavender is washed-out blue or green; at any rate, indifferent lavender. The tears they elicit are crocodile tears, in which one sees reflected the face of Balaam's ass. "What have I done unto thee," she saith, "that

thou hast smitten me these many times? Thou knowest that I am not thine ass." There is a little Chicagoan doggerel, an echo from the *Sabine Farm*, which has a pertinent, and I trust not an impertinent, application to Mr. Jerome's colour scheme:

"Should a patron require you to paint a marine,
Would you work in some trees with their
barks on?
When his strict orders are for a Japanese jar,
Would you give him a pitcher like Clarkson?"

George Merriam Hyde.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY STUDIES.*

Mr. Gosse's delightful work, published fourteen years ago, ran through two editions, and thereby made one think admiring things of public taste at last; and we have to thank Messrs. Dodd, Mead and Company for its present reissue in our country. A happy book, beautiful to look at and to handle, it starts once again on a career. It would not be rash to say that it ranks as the first of its class in English, and that it would rank among the first even in French, where are to be found many like literary estimates, made with authority, and carried out in a manner sympathetic and final. Mr. Gosse has always shown a most sensitive knowledge of the history of *belles-lettres*, and he has written at least four other volumes which illustrate it. But the *Seventeenth Century Studies*, which came earliest, are still the best. With nameless grace and a certain quiet force, every one of these "maimed and broken poets" is painted. Here Lodge, Webster, Herrick, Crashaw, Cowley, Otway, stand in line as in a dynastic gallery, and only here are the charming faces of Rowlands, Orinda, and Etheredge preserved at all. Each chapter well fulfils the author's purpose, inasmuch as it is "truth told definitely and exhaustively," and presents "an exhaustive critical biography in miniature." Mr. Gosse's touch is sure and concrete enough. To turn against it a few of his own exquisite adjectives, it is full, clear, suave, bright; and about all the

* *Seventeenth Century Studies: A Contribution to the History of English Poetry.* By Edmund Gosse. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. \$1.50.

work he does after his own heart is a largeness of perspective, a balance, a depth, a relativity which it were hardly possible to overrate. As Thoreau said of Raleigh's prose style, "a man can ride on horseback through the openings." Or like some crowded harmonious high-relief of the Renaissance, his page gives pleasure so far as one cares to search; behind the major heads, in their chaplets, standing forth almost in the round, are others hardly less in aggressive beauty, and still farther back one perceives a tier or two of strangely interesting faces, vague, but individual, vanishing accidents which the artist finds not unworthy of his compassionate thought.

Exactly as noteworthy in Mr. Gosse as this rare sense of values and proportions, which by itself is as much a matter of intellect as of culture, is the quality of human sympathy. So perfect is his temper as he picks his way among conjectures and controversies, that to match it we must revert to no annalist less sweet than Walton, and to no advocate less great than Newman. He appraises, in the pathetic names which he chooses to rescue from the *Limbus Patrum*, the unuttered forces by which, no less than by their achievement, they live. Some little tyranny of his own understanding has driven him into narrative and expatiation; and therefore, for his satisfaction of conscience, and our very great profit, we have, in every case, the memoir inwoven with the criticism, vines in blossom along the whole length of the stone-wall. No other English scholar and antiquary has been so generously troubled by the hectic passion of Ford or Otway, the shadow of mysticism deepening over Crashaw, the denied lyric opportunity of the dead soldiers and publicists who should have been "allowed to sun themselves unmolested about the fountains of Whitehall." Having ever in mind the important distinction between a man's nature and his art, with a wide survey of his subject, Mr. Gosse sets to work on the analysis of a single folio or the impartial appreciation of a memorable minor muse. More fully than Stevenson in the *Familiar Studies*, or Vernon Lee in a unique gift to musicians, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (books which in scope, though not in treatment, are somewhat similar to this), he has

"looked before and after" in the by-gone world of which he writes; he is acquainted not only with his hero, but with that hero's good angel and his link-boy. In a hundred irradiating phrases, topics not dwelt upon gleam and pass; the mention is sufficiently characteristic of the Shakespearean Hesper and Phosphor: "Marlowe in the pride of his youth, Sidney in his posthumous glory." Such suggestive parentheses prepare one for later illuminations from Mr. Gosse, for the difficult, subtle, and very splendid exposition of Donne in *The Jacobean Poets*, or for almost the first just word of Rochester's noble genius in ruin. Truly here is one who knows his seventeenth century, were it picked up, "anonymous, on Pitcairn Island!"

Again, in the matter of interpretation of the literary temperament Mr. Gosse has no peer. Other experts have succeeded in ranking writers; he chiefly must fulfil the ideal of Mr. R. H. Hutton, by ranking and portraying them at a stroke. Indeed, the extraordinary felicity of his portraiture distracts the eye from the more serious business in hand. Witness the sketch of Lord de Tabley in *Critical Kit-Kats*, where every wizard paragraph victoriously says the unsayable, and where imagination cannot help on a synthesis, as with Mr. Henry James. But in these spirited pioneer essays prior to 1883, the affectionate labours of a young man, we have the maiden evidences of a power now in its prime, and disposed, let us hope, to enrich us further. Kind, true, unprofessorial, they are "as good as clotted cream" to the general. They are also a lasting treasure to the few who keep their regard sacred to pure literature, to golden learning modestly sheathed in easy, almost gay reading, and to themes so magical and old that they seem to their lovers

"Above the light of the morning star."

Louise Imogen Guiney.

A HISTORY OF CANADA.*

In Canada, at least, has been long felt the need of a shorter history of the northern half of the continent. For

* A History of Canada. By Charles G. D. Roberts. Boston: Lamson, Wolfe & Co. \$2.00.