

CURRENT LITERATURE.

1.—*Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*. Edited by MARIA WESTON CHAPMAN. Boston: Jas. R. Osgood & Co. 1877. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 594, 596.

COMING so late to the consideration of a book of which so much has been already written, well and ill, I am still compelled to choose whether I will write principally for those who have not read the book, or for those who have. I choose the first of these alternatives. Those who have read the book are hereby warned away from this review, unless they wish to refresh their memory of it by a half-hour's reading. My opinion of the book would avail them very little; whereas a brief compendium of it may be of real service to those who have not yet read it, especially if it shall lead them to procure and read as soon as possible what is certainly one of the most interesting autobiographies that was ever written. The opinion of a London critic that it is to autobiography what Boswell's "Life of Johnson" is to biography will hardly seem extravagant to those who have read it carefully.

The autobiographical portion of these volumes covers the first, and one hundred and twenty-five pages of the second. The remainder of the second is made up of Mrs. Chapman's "Memorials" of her friend. These memorials contain much that is valuable, but they are very poorly put together. The style is in fearful contrast with that of the autobiography, the chapter headings are highly transcendental, and the adulation of Miss Martineau is so sickening that one can but hope that, if she is immortal,—contrary to her hope or expectation,—she is at least unconscious of all sublunary things. "Do not I hate them that hate thee, O Harriet?" might well be the motto of these memorials. Even those who did not wholly like her friend, or always approve of her, fare about as ill. The painful difference between Harriet Martineau and her brother James, which in the autobiography is barely mentioned, is here expatiated upon at length.

The most important statement that the review by James, which caused this alienation, was purely voluntary on his part, unsought

by his co-editors of the "Prospective," has since been nailed by one of these as a total misrepresentation of the facts. But these memorials contain much that is a real addition to the autobiography; many side-lights upon its author's character; many beautiful testimonies to the lovableness of her domestic life at Ambleside, her radiant cheerfulness, her thoughtfulness and helpfulness. Best of all, they contain the sketch of herself which appeared in the "Daily News" at the time of her death. Though written by herself, it is so modest and upon the whole so just,—erring, if at all, upon the side of under-estimation,—that I am tempted to reprint it here in place of any thing I can myself abstract from the completer history of her life contained in the autobiography. That Harriet Martineau should have chosen a person of Mrs. Chapman's intellectual character to do her this important service is one instance out of many of a habit of idealization which sometimes warped her judgment fearfully. A good judge of persons who were beyond her atmosphere, this had a distorting influence on all who came within it. Hence her conclusion that Mrs. Chapman was the person to make "Memorials" of her, and that her friend Mr. Atkinson was the greatest philosopher since Bacon, though to this day he is a planet which only her telescope has discovered.

Miss Martineau divides her autobiography into six periods, and I shall follow her division. The first is "To eight years old." She was the sixth of eight children. James Martineau, the most gifted of all living Unitarian preachers, came next after her. As her name indicates, she was of French descent. Her ancestors were Huguenot refugees. The first Martineau in England was a surgeon and one of a succession of surgeons ending with Harriet's eldest brother, unless it has since been resumed. Harriet was born in Norwich, June 12, 1802. She made a bad beginning, being nearly starved to death by a wet-nurse who had no milk for her. Her health was miserable all through her childhood, and nearly till her thirtieth year. She suffered every thing from nervousness and indigestion all through her childish years. At three she was a famous preacher. Her sermons were short and practical: "Never ky for tyfles;" "Dooty first, and pleasure afterwards." Her recollections of her childhood have a very painful interest. She was given over to be tormented by all manner of morbid fancies. Her jealousy was a consuming fire. Afraid of every one but God, she longed to die and go to Him. Suicide was often in her thoughts. One day she went to get the carving-knife to cut her throat. It is evident enough, she says, that her temper was very bad; "that it was down-right devilish;" "I must have been an intolerable child, but I need not have been so." She had a passion for justice, and

justice was what was least understood in the Martineau family. It is quite possible that this was so to a less extent than she afterwards imagined. Her memory was not of the best, as she herself allows, and as has been amply proved by some of her reviewers since her death. But, making every allowance, Harriet was evidently dealt with in a very hard, unsympathetic way; continually "taken down," when taking down was not what she needed, but reinforcement of her self-respect. But what the parents did was to practise every kind of self-denial in order to educate their children. The father was a manufacturer. Convinced that he was more likely to leave his children poor than rich, he resolved to make them capable of earning their own living. The literary life began during this first period; first, with making a book of maxims; second, with writing out recollections of the minister's sermons.

The second period is to the age of seventeen. This period was as unhappy as the first. The sickness and the jealousy went on. The deafness steadily increased. Trying to tabulate the morals of the Bible, she found great difficulty with the New Testament, and so made the discovery (this at the age of eight) that Christianity is not a preceptive religion. Exceedingly religious, and getting from her religion a world of comfort, she was still gloomy, obstinate, and cross, though always placable,—breaking down at the first word of tenderness. Enforced companionship with a crippled child afforded a constant opportunity for self-denial. A natural romp, her romping was henceforth at an end, the self-detestation accompanying one attempt to break away making any further attempt impossible. A new baby in the family, when Harriet was eight, gave her an object upon which to lavish all her pent-up passion of tenderness. Now came a few years of happy schooling in Norwich. At twelve, the consciousness of deafness first became painful. How well in course of time she turned to account this infirmity! It drove her in upon herself; forced her to stay at home in her own mind; made her thoughtful for all those who were similarly afflicted, and anxious to impart to them her secret of endurance. Her senses were an imperfect set. She had no sense of smell, and next to none of taste. Her eyes were of the best, though once at the seaside she could not see the sea; and when everybody else could see the comet "as big as a saucer," she could not see that. Meantime she was afraid of everybody, most of all of her own mother. At fifteen she met the first human being she was not afraid of,—her "dear aunt Kentish." This was at Bristol, where she went for fifteen months' schooling. On her return she was "still very frowning and repulsive-looking; but with a comparatively open countenance." She

had learned a good deal, and was in the way of learning more. She had conceived a boundless admiration for Dr. Carpenter, the Unitarian minister at Bristol, and taken from him an ascetic turn, which evinced itself in a fanatical sabbatarianism and hyper-industry. The wonder is that such a girl as she describes could ever have developed into the strong and brave and hopeful and self-centred woman of her later years.

The third period of the Autobiography is from seventeen to thirty. It synchronizes with her first literary ventures and successes; with the beginnings of that divergence from her brother James which culminated in 1851; with her acceptance of the Necessarian theory of morals,—to her a great event, though just what it imported to her is nowhere made entirely clear. Certainly it never allowed her to hold herself or others any less responsible for conduct than she would otherwise have done. Her first appearance in print was in 1823 in the "Monthly Repository," a Unitarian magazine of that time. The attempt was made at the advice of James, who saw how she was eating her own heart and what need she had of some engrossing occupation. Her subject was, "Female Writers upon Practical Divinity." It came out in the next number; was read and praised by her eldest brother, she sitting silent. Why did she not praise it? he demanded. The reason came out; and he, calling her "dear" for the first time, advised her to devote herself henceforth to literary work. That evening made her an authoress. It is only fair to say that several of the details of this matter have been seriously corrected by an English critic. Miss Martineau repeatedly confesses to having quite forgotten about certain transactions, but they are generally such as she was willing to forget about. It is to be feared that her memory frequently deceived her, and that "Truth and Poetry" would describe her autobiography almost as well as Goethe's.

Her first book, written in her twentieth year, was a volume of "Devotional Exercises." She had herself much need of such, for calamities were thickening about her. "A sort of accident" increased the deafness; her oldest brother died; the financial crash of 1825 ruined her father's business, and hastened his death. Saddest of all, a college friend of James, to whom she was betrothed, became insane, and died after a few months of bodily and mental suffering. This at the time was hard enough to bear, though Harriet came, in time, to rejoice that she had never married; apparently for valid reasons. Other books soon followed the first. The one of which she was least ashamed in later life was "Traditions of Palestine," uncritical enough seen from our present stand-point, but thoroughly alive. Then came

a very lucky hit. The Unitarian Association advertised prizes for three essays addressed to Catholics, Jews, and Mohammedans. She competed for them all, and took them. Some of her little stories had foreshadowed her "Illustrations of Political Economy." But the conscious impulse to write these "Illustrations," which were to make her truly famous, came from Mrs. Marcet's "Conversations on Political Economy." While reading these, groups of personages arose from the pages, a procession of action glided through the argument, and her resolve was taken. Political Economy should be illustrated in a series of stories; the natural workings of its principles exhibited in selected passages of social life. James, being consulted, approved, and the prize money earned the leisure necessary to mature the plan. The prize essays were her last work in connection with official Unitarianism. Her withdrawal from the body now began, as she says, "through those regions of metaphysical fog in which most Unitarian deserters abide for the rest of their time." But certainly for some years after she was a better Unitarian than the majority of Unitarians at the present time.

The fourth period of the Autobiography, from thirty to thirty-seven years old, was the great period of her life, and occupies three hundred pages of her book. Letter-writing from Dublin, whither she had gone to visit James, not securing her a publisher for the "Illustrations," she went up to London to see what could be done; resolved that something should be, and that, whatever the discouragements, she would not lose her temper. Very pathetic is the story of her efforts there in London, dragging herself about through the wet December days and going home to write till midnight, and to bed to cry till morning. A publisher was got at last, insured from risk by a subscription, very galling to her pride. On February 10, 1832, a tardy letter from Fox (her publisher) informed her that it was necessary to print five thousand copies. From this time forward, with one brief exception, her life was free from all pecuniary care. The sale of the series ultimately increased to ten thousand. Though it brought her only a little over two thousand pounds in money, it gave her an immense celebrity. Fresh from the perusal of some of these tales, it is very hard for me to understand how they could be so famous. They are extremely simple, and the political economy sometimes sits very loosely on the story. But it so happened that they exactly hit the need, and even more the fancy, of the time. Everywhere read and discussed, "the little deaf woman of Norwich," as Brougham called her, became the rage of London dining and drawing-rooms. She took up her residence in London, taking her mother and aunt along with her. Work-

ing eight hours a day; dining out six times a week, and after each going to one or two evening parties; sitting up late, and getting up early; carrying on an immense correspondence,—she must have had a very busy time of it. But she enjoyed it mightily. Even the outrageous insults of the "Quarterly" did not seriously trouble her. We could have spared the story of her real sorrow,—the mother's jealousy of her immense social distinction. Everybody who had a "cause," a crotchet, or a science, came to her to get it put into a tale. At the request of Brougham she wrote two other series,—one upon the Poor Laws, one upon Taxation,—which were hardly less successful than the "Illustrations." Statesmen were happy to consult her, and adopt her practical suggestions.

Those who have thought most kindly of Miss Martineau must honestly regret that the second section of this chapter ever saw the light; must wonder that with twenty years to ponder it—all of this having been written and printed twenty years ago—she did not burn the sheets or have the plates destroyed. Not but that it is exceedingly bright and interesting; it is the brightest portion of the book. But Miss Martineau appears in it in a very unamiable light. Scores of distinguished people whom she met in her great London days pass under her censorious eye. A few, Joanna Baillie notably, receive a generous "Well done!" but in nine cases out of ten the verdict is, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" One can but think how she would fare under an equally unsympathetic judgment. Doubtless there is a great deal of truth in these delineations, and still I can but think that they are often partial and, by consequence, unjust. Macaulay here, as in her "Biographical Sketches," is treated with conspicuous contempt. His own "Life and Letters" show him in a very different and in a much truer light.

Before the last number of the three series of tales had gone to press she was on her way to America, where she remained two years. Her fame had gone before her, and everywhere she was received triumphantly, until, being invited to attend an anti-slavery meeting, she went, and in a brief address expressed her ardent sympathy with the principles of the Abolitionists. Henceforth her friends were few, her enemies many. But it may be doubted whether she was ever in as much danger of physical violence as she imagined. Some of her friends deserved better of her than they got. Even Dr. Channing is damned

¹ *Apropos* to Dr. Furness, the story recited by his "little Willie," now of blessed memory (Vol. 1, p. 387), was not Miss Martineau's story of "The Wandering Child" at all, but Mr. Alcott's famous "Story without an end."

with faint praise, and by Mrs. Chapman with utterly false and stupid representations. Indeed, one would suppose from Mrs. Chapman's account that the Unitarians were the most backward of all the sects in the anti-slavery struggle, when in fact they took the lead. Dr. Channing was a Unitarian, and therefore Miss Martineau was unconsciously obliged to take him down. To this end she shares with Mr. Child the credit of Dr. Channing's letter to Henry Clay on the Annexation of Texas, and assumes almost solely for herself the credit of his action in the Abner Kneeland matter, three years after her visit, though Dr. Channing's conduct in this matter was as characteristic as any thing he ever did. That Harriet Martineau should teach him any thing about religious liberty is an unqualified absurdity.

Returning to England, the publishers contended for her expected book upon America with ludicrous, though flattering, zeal. It came out very quickly,—the best book upon America written by a foreigner up to that time except Tocqueville's, and in some respects much better than his. The title was, "Society in America." Another followed, "Retrospect of Western Travel," which many thought an improvement on the first as being more concrete,—descriptive more of men and things than institutions. From this time forward Miss Martineau was the most intelligent and sympathetic critic of the anti-slavery cause we had in England. "The Martyr Age of the United States," an article in the "Westminster Review" which she wrote in 1837, was a thrilling account of the sufferings of the early abolitionists. And now the first novel, "Deerbrook," was soon under way, written almost too wilfully to be a great success; but, fresh from its perusal, I can but think her own judgment of it too severe, though in some respects remarkably just. Like all her work, it was done in an incredibly short time.

Of course she was sure to break down under this constant intellectual and social strain. The last straws which broke the camel's back were "Deerbrook," "How to Observe Morals and Manners," and a few volumes of the "Guides to Service." She broke down in Venice, whither she had gone with an invalid cousin. Brought home to London on a couch, she went in June, 1839, to Tynemouth, and never afterward made her home in London. At Tynemouth she remained for nearly six years apparently a hopeless invalid, but not an idle one. From her sick-room issued "The Hour and the Man;" the story of Toussaint L'Ouverture, eagerly and passionately told; four volumes of the "Playfellow," one of which, "Feats on the Fiord," is generally agreed to be her most successful piece of fiction,—a book of real genius in spite of her own judgment that she had only talent;

"Life in the Sick Room," a book which she came, in time, to dislike very much, but which others will persist in liking for some time to come; and many contributions to the "Weekly Volume." Her recovery was sudden and remarkable. She gave the credit to mesmeric treatment. Doctors insisted that she was not well, or that she had not been sick. But, if she had not been very sick, they had been much mistaken. That she was well again she gave sufficient proof by going to the East, riding to Mount Sinai on a camel and on horseback to Damascus, climbing the great pyramid, and doing various like things. During her sickness a pension had been offered her by the Government, which she refused, fearing to lose her independence. To the kindness of friends she was more hospitable, and accepted from them a testimonial fund of fourteen hundred pounds. The years at Tynemouth cover the fifth period of the autobiography.

The sixth and closing period is "To Fifty-three Years Old,"—that is to say, to 1855, when, being convinced that she was sick with an incurable disease, she began to put her house in order, wrote her autobiography, and saw it through the press and stored away against the event which was delayed for twenty years, till on the 27th of June, 1876, she made a peaceful end. Her experience of Eastern travel and her views of the religions of the East she embodied on her return to England in a book called "Eastern Life," to her mind the most successful of all her literary ventures. As a record of what she saw it is entirely satisfactory. As a study of Eastern faiths it is less valuable. Her sense of its radical character is really comical in view of later studies. The Moses of her view is as substantial as Michael Angelo's; the Moses of our latest criticism a shadow on the utmost verge of history. In 1851 appeared a book about the radicalism of which there could be no mistake, "Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development." Most of the letters were written by her friend Atkinson. Douglas Jerrold's criticism was: "There is no God, and Miss Martineau is his prophet." James Martineau reviewed the book in the "Prospective" under the title, "Mesmeric Materialism." There was little reference to his sister, but there was one fatal passage which made for both of them life-long sorrow. Almost every reviewer of Miss Martineau to this day calls her an Atheist. She "died in a rapture of Atheism," says the "Atlantic Monthly." But she denies that she is Atheistic. She affirms her belief in a First Cause. Nor did she deny immortality. She did not affirm it, and she did not hope for it. If it must be, she hoped to be resigned. In short, she was what we now call an Agnostic. To her new position she attributed the steady cumulative peace which bathed her like a river during all the

closing years of her laborious life. Certainly the end was very unlike the beginning; but other causes had been at work besides the change of her opinions to produce so great a difference.

A "History of the Thirty Years' Peace" appeared in 1850, written so quickly that the reader, hereafter, will be apt to wonder whether it can be written well; and yet no doubt it is. In 1853 appeared her last considerable work, an admirable condensation of Comte's "Positive Philosophy," itself sufficiently voluminous. In 1852 she became a regular contributor to the "Daily News," and up to 1866 wrote for it sixteen hundred articles! Some of these, the "Biographical Sketches," are widely known. Better were never written. While all this work and more was going on, she had built a house and made a home at Ambleside in the Lake Country, with Windermere and Wordsworth not far off. Never apparently was happier life than hers here. Many were the visitors, and warm the welcome that she gave them. Her different portraits, taken at thirty-three and forty-eight, of which we have engravings in the volumes, tell of her growing peace and calm. A photograph taken at seventy appears to indicate a still more imperturbable serenity. How could such Rhadamanthine judgments hide behind so lovable a face? Great was the love she gave in these last years, and great the love that others gave to her. Embosomed in affection, she awaited the mysterious end. Was it the end of her? I cannot think so. I cannot make her dead. I can but think that she has found already other work to do, and that she is already reconciled to live.

Few will pretend that every thing in this autobiography, or in the life which it delineates, is as they would have it. There is many a passage in the book which ought never to have been written. There are judgments here which are ungenerous, if not unjust. And in the life and character there are some things to blame, and many to regret. Never overrating her intellectual ability, but rather underrating it, apparently she did greatly overrate her personal influence and importance. It is not strange, but it is pitiful. The wonder is that she was not utterly spoiled by the attentions lavished upon her. Again the wonder is that she ever attained to any "sweetness and light," so much bitterness and darkness were her portion till she arrived almost at middle age. In the spectacle of her self-mastery there is abundant consolation; and I, for one, cannot reconcile it with her Necessarian ethics. Her industry was something marvellous, and ought to be a lesson to us all. Largely through it she won her peace at last. If hers had been an idle or an aimless life, how miserable it would have been! She wrote, she says, to satisfy the need of utterance. But we can see

that in almost every thing she ever wrote she had in view the advancement of the world. How she loved truth, and how she hated ignorance! If she was a harsh judge of her equals and superiors, she was a very kindly judge of "the little ones." She was an idealist of these in the best sense; saw what good there was in them, and laid hold of it with overmastering sympathy. She was no sentimentalist; but all injustice and oppression roused the passion of her life into a searing flame. Atheist, was she? I think not, seeing that she conceived the world to be advancing "under a law of Progress," and so believed not in a First Cause only, but in a Final Cause; in "one far off divine"—not "Event," nor consummation—but society still gradually unfolding. Infidel, was she? As not *believing* many things which others do believe, she was. But not as *faithless* to her friends or to humanity at large. Doing much, her doing was not the measure of her being. She was a character, a force, a presence, whom it was good to know; whom it will long be well to study and remember.

J. W. C.

2.—*Imaginary Conversations*. By WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR. First, Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Series. Boston: Roberts Brothers.

THE best books, when first they are written, command but a very small circle of readers. Though warmly cherished by these, and much delighted in, they are, so far as the great public is concerned, put upon the shelf, where sometimes they remain until it seems they are forgotten. But they really go into the niche of literary immortality, and generation after generation are taken down by a growing class of interested readers, who ponder them with ever new delight; until at last they become classics, which no really cultured person can afford to leave unread or unstudied.

Among these immortal books the "Conversations" of Landor are sure to obtain a place. Forty years ago a few of them first saw the light, when they immediately challenged the attention of the best minds in Europe, and were read and admired by a select number on this side of the Atlantic. But at that time the author personally was exceedingly unpopular, and for several years had been an exile from England on account of private and public difficulties and animosities. He was an avowed enemy both to the State and to the Church of his native country, being a republican in politics and a rationalist in religion. He had quarreled numberless times with various great and