

gestive throughout. If the author raises more questions than he can settle, his mind is in this respect the image of that of his age. His feelings are what the feelings of every hater of wrong and longer after truth ought to be.

J. F.

3. — *History of French Literature.* By HENRI VAN LAUN. Vol. I. From its origin to the Renaissance. Vol. II. From the Classical Renaissance until the end of the reign of Louis XIV. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1877.

MR. VAN LAUN is already well known to the reading public as the translator of Taine's "History of English Literature." He now appears as an author also, and two volumes of his work upon the history of French literature have been published. The first of these brings the narrative down to the time of the Renaissance. The greater part of the second is devoted to the literature of the reign of Louis XIV. We presume that one more volume will complete the history to the present time.

In an introductory chapter to the first volume, Mr. Van Laun explains at some length his opinion as to what the history of a literature ought to be, and the method which he believes should be adopted in preparing such a history. To this introduction one naturally turns to learn what characteristics the author intended to give to his work, and what new results he hoped to accomplish. In it, he intended, without doubt, to give to his readers a clew which would explain why, in his opinion, previous histories of the same subject have failed, and why his work has a reason for existing. "The history of a literature," he says, "is the history of a people; if not this, it is worthless. To know merely what books have been written and who wrote them is to know a number of dry facts which may encumber the mind, but cannot inform it." We cannot comprehend what our predecessors have thought and written, without being familiar with the circumstances of the age in which they lived. A book is a part of its author, as he is a part of his time and generation. We cannot understand the literature, unless we also understand the history. "The literary productions of an individual writer cannot be thoroughly studied and mastered apart from the history of the race and of the epoch." But it must not be forgotten, he suggests, that such a literary production is, when once created "an active organism having a distinct and independent energy of its own, whereby it forthwith begins to react upon its creators, and to a

sist in the development of the race and of the epoch from which it sprang. It is important also in all cases to connect an author and every literary production with the country in which he or it has been produced. We cannot read the work of a German in the same way in which we read that of an Italian. The central idea which he seeks to impress upon the student and reader is that "the literature of a country is, in a genuine and very important sense, the history of that country, and that it is, in all events, quite as much as the chronological annals of wars and dynasties, of politics and sociological facts, the sum and product of a national energy." The political, social, economical, religious, or intellectual history of a people would be incomplete, even for its special purposes, without the combination of all. We cannot cut off the intellectual records from the rest, and call the residuum history. Neither can we eliminate all except the literary productions, and, out of these alone, make up a history of literature. No account of the literature of a people worthy of the name of history "can afford to pass by in silence the dynastic changes, the national and civil wars, the growth of the Constitution, the progress of law, the gradual conquest of personal freedom, the steady amelioration of social habits and institutions, amidst which its own triumphs have been gained, its own monuments erected." So, the leading facts of sociology are indispensable to any serviceable literary history. "The progress of civilization in its thousand forms; the advancement of art, science, commerce; the development of the ideas of self-government, equity, subordination of ranks, colonization, and the like; the interdependence of material prosperity and mental culture; the refinement of satire, and the vagaries of popular caricature; the history of manners and conventions, of courtly dress and national costumes, of sumptuary laws and no less imperative fashions, — all these in their several relations have an important bearing upon the evolution, as upon the exegesis, of a literature, and cannot be overlooked without the infliction of a distinct and irreparable wrong." The influence which the political and social history of a generation exerts upon an author and his works, and the reflex influence which literary productions have upon political and social history, are not only vast and mutual, but to a large extent they "balance and compensate each other." "A book is the offspring of the aggregate intellect of humanity, which, issuing mature from its parent mind, becomes henceforth itself a fertilizing agent, and has its part in all future generations. It gives back to the world of thought that which it took therefrom."

"Of the influences which combine to produce a writer, that of race is fundamental and preliminary." This influence in France is as marked

and as strong as in any other country. The *esprit gaulois* is sharply defined and easily recognized. Its prominent feature is satire, "the tendency to catch in the first instance, quickly and clearly and comprehensively, the incongruous elements of a composite fact, and to receive them, not as an Englishman might, with a broad grin, but with a gay, mocking smile, which hides the shock of offended truth under a show of indifference." Rabelais displayed this mocking characteristic as completely as any of his race, and typified it. Rebellion against tyranny and religious domination is another prominent feature which enters largely into the character of Frenchmen. They are possessed with a passion for social freedom and for the social equality of man. To sum up other characteristics, the French are "irreverent, sceptical, rash in theory, fiery and impatient, rather than persistent in action; easily susceptible of emotion; overflowing with animal spirits; self-indulgent; not incapable of, but disinclined to, long endurance; triumphing rather by fitful enthusiasm than by painful adherence to duty, restraint, and obedience. Their reasoning faculties are strong; they are quick-witted, logical, philosophical; but, with little perseverance, they are liable to inaccuracy, and make comparatively small use of experience."

The political influences which act upon the development of literature are, he says, many in number and powerful in action. The most powerful are the nature and form of the government, and the uprightness with which it is administered. Frenchmen are peculiarly sensitive to manifestations of injustice on the part of their rulers. And many have been the occasions for sensitiveness. "Their literature is studded over with the traces of this external suffering, and with the marks of a spirit of fiery impatience and revolt." The *Chansons de Geste*; the pamphlets of the Ligue; the writings of D'Aubigné, and those produced at the time of the Fronde; the denunciations of Rousseau and Mirabeau; the verses of Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, and Barbier, -- are evidences of this continuing rebellion against existing injustice. The tone of French literature has been always affected by the spirit of independence: in earlier times, by the perpetual struggle for popular freedom; in later, "by the direct rivalry between the rule of the people and the rule of the monarchs."

Although France has prided herself upon being the patroness of Christianity, and has called her king the "eldest son of the Church," yet it is with the important factor of religious influence as with other incidental influences; it has acted upon literature through the characteristics of the fundamental influence of race. The habit of satire and the love of independence, with other peculiarities, have secularized

religion and shaken off religious fetters, "until at last the negation of religion has become a prominent feature upon the face of French literature."

In considering philosophical influence, that of race will also prominently appear. "A quick-witted perception of cause and effect, combined with an extreme fertility of the logical faculty, has served to produce, not only great triumphs in the field of mental exertion, but also great originality or even eccentricity in the conception of novel philosophical systems." Descartes and Comte are cited as instances, though widely differing in their methods and results. This excess of the logical capacity is worthy of special attention. It is one of the race characteristics, which appears constantly in the literature. With it appear *finesse* of expression, gifts of rhetoric, sprightliness of style, individuality in thought, independence in manner, and great adroitness of *repartie*, for all which the French are distinguished. And it is coupled with a power of passing rapidly to an inference or conclusion from a fact or a premise. These few considerations may suffice to show how largely the literature of France, as well as of every country, has been influenced by external circumstances, political or social. "No less striking is the effect which the literary man produces upon the circumstances in which he moves, upon the institutions and the history of the age."

The reason, then, why this history is undertaken, he says, is that no history which deals philosophically with the subject exists in the English language. Hallam's plan prevented him from drawing a complete picture. The various handbooks of French authors are practically unknown to English readers. No Englishman has attempted to do for French literature what the Germans have done for it. This is strange, since the intellectual history of France is certainly unique. "It is the history of a race which has ever been in the van of modern European thought, which has conquered more by its mind than by its arms, which has conferred upon the world gifts whose value is not to be calculated by any material standard. It is the history of a nation to which the supremacy of the soul has always been as dear as the supremacy of the sword, and which has more than once asserted that supremacy at the very moment when its military and political influence has been most in dispute." "We have to deal with a people essentially spiritual and intellectual, whose spirit and intellect have been invariably the wonder and admiration, if not the model and mould, of cotemporary human thought, and whose literary triumphs remain to this day amongst the most notable landmarks of universal literature." Setting aside the mister minds of England, "it is to France that we

must look for the great lights of modern days, the great pioneers of modern thought, the great leaders of modern intelligence." "To her, above all, we owe the orderly and logical discrimination of ideas, arrangement of thoughts, clearness and severity of expression, readiness of deduction, and elegance of diction, without which a literature can appear at the best but a splendid heap of unknown and unclassified gems."

France is the land of *Chansons de Geste*, of romances and legends. Her *troubadours* and *trouvères* filled Europe with their songs. From her events came that religious philosophy which was the first mature offspring of Christian thought. She quickened the first germ of religious reformation. She was the cradle of the Renaissance. She revived religion, language, and literature. She gave to the world the brilliancy of the age of the Pliade and of the Ligue, of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and the Port Royal, of the Satire Ménippée and of the Précieuses, with poets like Ronsard and Du Bastas, purists like Malherbe, romancists like D'Urfé, historians like De Thou and D'Aubigné, philosophers like Descartes and Pascal, and scholars like Joseph Scaliger and Casaubon. Then follows the Augustan Age of the reign of the *Grande Monarque*, a period of the greatest splendor, with such names as Corneille, Molière, Racine, Rochefoucauld, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Massillon, Boileau, La Bruyère, Fénelon, La Fontaine, and Malebranche. In the dawn of another and greater renovation of intellect during the eighteenth century, we meet with Le Sage, Turgot, Montesquieu, Voltaire, D'Alembert, Diderot, Helvetius, Condillac, Buffon, and Rousseau. The revolutionary age which followed was a time of literary as well as of political and social ferment, evidenced by such men as Mirabeau, Maury, Sièyès, Desmoulins, Saint Just, Volney, Necker, and Joseph de Maistre. From Madame de Staël and Chateaubriand, we pass on "through the brilliant age of Louis Philippe to the giants of modern history, the wizards of romance, the pundits of criticism, the novelists, dramatists, philosophers, who restored their country to something like its old supremacy and ushered in the teeming mental activity of the present day."

The result of this review of the course of French literature is the opinion that "the intellectual history of France is the history of a nation which, though Gallic or Celtic in its origin, is the legitimate heir of the ancient Latin race." France represents, more than Italy, the development of the Latin civilization, and its literature will be found to be more fully a reflex of its history than any other literature except that of England.

We have given this summary of the opening chapter, and for the

most part in the author's language, for several reasons. The chief among these is that it contains not only his view as to what a history of literature should be, but also the argument by which he sustains his view and supports his claim that the book which he is to produce is to be unique in its method and new in its results. But while there is no doubt that Mr. Van Laun is correct in his view of the close connection between the history of a nation's literature and its political and social history, and while he is to be praised for the emphasis which he places upon the closeness of this connection, it may be questioned whether this view has the degree of originality and newness which he is inclined to ascribe to it. It is true that in former times histories were produced, from the contents of which it might properly be inferred that the authors supposed that accounts of battles, court intrigues, and the rise and fall of dynasties made up the history of a nation. But that narrow conception of the scope of history has long ago passed away. It is now common knowledge that the history of a people must embrace all phases of that people's activity. The interdependence of social, political, and intellectual movements has also become a well-established principle with those who deal with matters of history. We cannot describe and account for the progress of affairs in one department without taking into account antecedent and contemporaneous movements in other departments. The growth of a nation is looked upon as organic. It is assumed that the different members and parts act and react upon each other, and that the development of one part cannot be described without considering the development of all. We cannot accord, therefore, to the author that he has made a notable discovery in the theory which he explains at so great length. But we are glad that he has placed emphasis upon it. Yet it is true that most histories of literature have been written with greater or less reference to such a view, though in most cases with too little regard to the demands of the principle in the details of the narrative. But no historian has been able to escape from it entirely. If the present history is to be praised, it cannot be because its method is new, but because that method is more thoroughly and logically carried out than in previous works. An examination of the two volumes already published will, we think, justify praise for this latter merit. In both, and especially in the first, he treats his subject in close relationship to the political and social history of the nation, and to a greater degree than has previously been attempted. And in this respect his work is praiseworthy. But it is not worthy of the fulsome praise with which it was heralded, and with which some have received it. It is not a great work, nor a masterpiece, nor do we think it is or ever will be the standard work upon the subject. It lacks sim-

plicity. The quotations we have made show a style far too rich in ornament, and far too elaborate and verbose, to be adapted to the purpose of history. Throughout, his tendency is to use ponderous or high-sounding words and phrases, which would have warmed the heart of the great lexicographer. Instances where this tendency has become extreme are scattered through the chapters. Thus he says, "the wife of Henry VI. of England seems to have *accapitated* the spirit of her father." A few pages later, he speaks of the sunny south "where the heart thirsts for poetry and love, and the palate for alliaceous condiments." Instances as marked as these, it is only fair to say, are rare, but the tendency of the style is always in the direction of such faults. The narrative also lacks clearness. The outlines are frequently given with unsteady hand. The drawing is in many instances indistinct and hazy. He does not always seem to be in complete mastery of the special subject which he is describing. In dealing with some of the great names in French literature, his account, though stated in philosophical terms, seems inadequate and commonplace. An instance of this will appear to any one who will read the pages which he devotes to Descartes. Other instances where his grasp of the subject is lacking in firmness could easily be cited. But while this work cannot be the standard work which its admirers have claimed it to be, it certainly will keep a prominent and creditable place among works on French literature.

The volumes appear to have been carefully published. There is, however, a lack of running dates, catch-words, and page headings which are of so great convenience in all works of a historical nature, and in others which are to be in use as books of reference.

T. F. B.

4. — *The Scientific Basis of Delusions.* By GEORGE M. BEARD, A. M., M. D. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1877. pp. 47.

IN this pamphlet, originally read before the New York Medico-Legal Society, the author presents us with what he terms "A New Theory of Trance, and its Bearings on Human Testimony." By the term "trance," he evidently intends to designate all that he admits as real in those human experiences out of which have grown the various systems of religion, whether true or false, of all ages and lands.

The theory by which Dr. Beard proposes to unify and account for these phenomena in their every form and feature is, that trance "is a functional disease of the nervous system, in which the cerebral activ-

ity is concentrated in some limited region of the brain, with suspension of the activity of the rest of the brain, and consequent loss of volition." The hypothesis on which this theory is based is contained in a series of propositions running through the argument, very few of which are either clearly or definitely stated. Whether this is a result of carelessness in the method of expression, or whether, having formed his opinions, he has endeavored to satisfy himself of their correctness by careless and inaccurate methods of investigation, and, hence, cannot be definite without exposing his own want of exactitude, it is impossible to say. Certain it is, however, that, if he is familiar with the subject of which he treats, he could hardly have made that familiarity less apparent. With a strong sense of the absurd in any theory that attributes these phenomena to a supernatural origin, or to the agency of disembodied spirits, he has endeavored to find their source in the more probable and better understood conditions of the human constitution. A worthy effort, had he been ready to eliminate from his own method the errors which he condemns in the methods of others. But since, by denying the occurrence of the more important of the alleged phenomena, he confesses the inadequacy of his own theory, provided the phenomena occur, the question becomes one of *fact versus theory*; and, as such, demands demonstration of the one, or proof of the other. Denying that the demonstration is possible, he attempts the proof; but the first step in this effort is to set aside all human experience that in any way disputes his conclusions, to rule out all testimony in evidence of the so-called facts. This is not a matter to be lightly considered in forming any estimate of his theory. What theory, indeed, might not be proven by such a method? Let his own common sense answer. Human testimony is at best but a portrait of human experience. But because the experience is misunderstood or misinterpreted, and consequently misrepresented by the testimony, shall he who would arrive at a correct understanding of human nature, human powers, and human possibilities reject the testimony as altogether worthless? As well might the astronomer throw aside his telescope, or the geologist refuse to study the fossils and strata of the rocks. Who dreams that the testimony of the telescope is truthful as regards the actual condition of "the orbs around us;" or that the testimony of the fragmentary, distorted, and petrified remains imbedded in the rocks at our feet is truthful as regards the actual appearance of the living, breathing inhabitants of that primeval world to which they belonged? Yet, as is the testimony of the telescope in regard to "other worlds than ours," or of the fossils in regard to the ancient forms of life on our planet, so is "average human testimony," however much he may deride it, in re-