## Mebielos.

Posts. By DANTE GADREEL ROSSETTI. Ellis.
The Book of Orm. By ROBERT BUCHANAN. Strahan.
Portrails. By Augusta Webster. Macmillan.

Whatever sweeping consures are launched at our contemporary whatever sweeping consures are launched at our contemporary whatever sweeping consures are launched at our contemporary by irritated and despondent criticism, it would be strange indeed in all the variety of modern life, the vast play of thought, the contemporary in all the variety of modern life, the vast play of thought, the contemporary in a life is too mach, rather than too little, before the mind of the poet, there is too mach, rather than too little, before the mind of the poet, there is too mach, rather than too little, before the mind of the poet, and the practical man; but poet and practical man alike, by exercising as the practical man; but poet and practical man alike, by exercising and indicated with a portion of the sights, and sounds, and ideas, which, if they rushed upon the consciousness at once, would overwhelm which, if they rushed upon the consciousness at once, would overwhelm

it like a torrent. Mr. Rossetti's poems are a happy example of the virtue of artistic mr. nossett we said of them, that they were full of great longings, dep questionings, bold interrogations of the past, present, and future, dep questioning, truth indeed, but in a form which might quite misme snowary. Mr. Rossetti's sense of the greatness of his ends is ma the thought tempered by calm judgment in the choice of means. He pacturally vague ideas through a long and tedious labyrinth of perpexed words. He is often obscure, but his obscurity is rounded, perpend and graceful, and seems always to have a hard nucleus of meaning at its core. As a writer he is sensuous, perhaps sensual; that he is a lover of beauty, and feels the connection between beautiful thoughts and beautiful forms; he dwells instinctively on the intimate mion, not on the contrast, of soul and body. He is by turns mystical. descriptive, amatory, political; yet he is always himself. because he is always artistic. Not that he falls into the snare which islaid for him by his own skill as a painter, and attempts to produce with his pen word-pictures which shall vie in brilliancy with vermilion and emerald green. Language is with him the vehicle of thought, not another contrivance for rendering effects of colour. His cultivation gan artist helps him as a writer by leading him almost always to detelop his ideas with a definite reference to the concrete. A fair woman, whether a saint in heaven or a sinner upon earth, a winged beast from Nineveh, the Virgin Mary, a modern Italian ablaze with passion, Dante with lips which are bitter as well as stern when fresh from tasting the unlovely cup of exile; the glow of young desire; astrange weird legend of the bowers of Eden, in which Lilith, the first vife of Adam, invokes the help of Satan to poison Adam's love for Eve,—such are some of the subjects which supply Mr. Rossetti with the clothing but not the substance of his thoughts; such are the themes on which he composes brilliant variations, which in all ther involutions preserve the original air. At times, he seems in langer of going off into the vague and indefinite; but he pauses in is apward gyrations, and, unlike the skylark, sings more sweetly han ever when he is on the point of once more touching his mother with How accurately he can make, when he pleases, his words moduce a visible effect, like that which we expect from his pencil, the ollowing poem, which is otherwise quite one of his least important, may show. It is called "The Wood-Spurge":-

The wind flapped loose, the wind was still, Shaken out dead from tree and hill:
I had walked on at the wind's will,—I sat now, for the wind was still.
Between my knees my forehead was,—My lips, drawn in, said not Alas!
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.
My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon;
Among those few, out of the sun,
The wood-spurge flowered, three cups in one.
From perfect grief there need not be
Wisdom or even memory;
One thing then learnt remains to me,—
The wood-spurge has a cup of three.

This is just a vivid picture of a common mental incident. Passion stereotypes something in the mind, but not always that which is of most account. As we write we recollect the pattern of the buttons on the jacket of a schoolboy with whom, on one of our school-days, we had a very considerable quarrel. Mr. Rossetti's wood-spurge records a like phenomenon in a much more poetical way. There is less sunlight, and more repose, more quiet meditative depth, in the following extract from the poem called "Ave." The person addressed is, of course, the Virgin Mary:—

Ah, knew at thou of the end, when first The Babe was on thy bosom nurs'd?— Or, when He tottered round thy knee Did thy great sorrow dawn on thee?-And through His boyhood, year by year Eating with Him the Passover, Didst thou discern confusedly That holier sacrament, when He, The bitter cup about to quaff, Should break the bread and eat thereof?— Or came not yet the knowledge, even Till on some day forecast in Heaven His feet passed through thy door to press Upon His Father's business? Or still was God's high secret kept? Nay, but I think the whisper crept Like growth through childhood. Work and play, Things common to the course of day, Awed thee with meanings unfulfill'd; Awea thee with meanings unjujul a; And all through girlhood, something still d Thy senses like the birth of light, When thou hadst trimmed thy lamp at night Or washed thy garments in the stream; To what white bed had come the dream That He was thine and thou wast His Who feeds among the field-lilies.
O solemn shadow of the end In that wise spirit long contain'd! O awful end! and those unsaid Long years when It was Finished!

The passage which we have italicised on our own authority has a wonderful charm of sentiment and expression. That charm, so far as we can analyse it, depends on the introduction, in complete and harmonious cadence, of a number of visible and, so to speak, dimly luminous images. Light, as it were, is born out of a whisper. The lamp burning dimly in the night, the wet garments shining in the stream, the glimmer of the white bed, the half-seen beauties of the lilies of the field, come, each in its turn, and then—a solemn shadow. Another remarkable example of the manner in which Mr. Rossetti can make things material mirror and apparently magnify the spiritual is found in his song, "The Sea-Limits":—

Consider the sea's listless chime: Time's self it is, made andible,— The murmur of the earth's own shell. Secret continuance sublime
Is the sea's end: our sight may pass No furlong further. Since time was, This sound hath told the lapse of time. No quiet, which is death's,-it hath The mournfulness of ancient life, Enduring always at dull strife. As the world's heart of rest and wrath, Its painful pulse is in the sands.
Last utterly, the grey sky stands,
Grey and not known, along its path. Listen alone beside the sea, Listen alone among the woods; Those voices of twin solitudes Shall have one sound alike to thee: Hark where the murmurs of thronged men Surge and sink back and surge again,— Still the one voice of wave and tree. Gather a shell from the strown beach And listen at its lips: they sigh

The same desire and mystery,
The echo of the whole sea's speech.
And all mankind is thus in heart
Not anything but what thou art:
And Earth, Sea, Man, are all in each.

We might search long either in book or memory for a poem which excels this little song in touching our sense of mystery without departing far from the sights and sounds of ordinary earth. Mr. Rossetti's volume affords many more striking specimens of his power as a poet; but nothing, perhaps, which bears a sharper and more distinctive impress. We have here his simplicity of manner, his directness of expression, his sensibility to impressions from without, and that peculiar skill in blending facts of sense with each other which gives tone, keeping, and moderation to his treatment of the harmonies of thought.

We wish that on the present occasion we could give Mr. Buchanan praise for merits akin to those of Mr. Rossetti. Mr. Buchanan is now a poet well known and deservedly esteemed. When some seven years ago he made his appearance as the author of Undertones, he had been, under very disadvantageous circumstances, a student of classical models, and had learned from them some, though by no means all, of the lessons they are fitted to teach. In later volumes he has shown himself a skilful and sympathetic delineator of human nature—a nature essentially the same, whether it is developed in solitude by the side of a Scotch burn, or in the crowded lanes of a great city. A change has now come over him, and he is attempting to deal in verse with those mighty questions which dwarf humanity by their grandeur, making us feel that if we are strong enough to ask them, we are far too weak to answer them. He writes of Earth as of a blind mother, and of God as of a veiled Father; unlike Mr. Rossetti, he insists on the contrast rather than on the connection of the soul and its corporeal dwelling-place; he is a seeker, a doubter, a seer of heavenly visions, an explorer of infernal mysteries. As the mouthpiece of his enigmatical poems he employs an enigmatical person-Orm the Celt, at once real and imaginary, at once old and young, at once Mr. Buchanan and somebody else. So far as The Book of Orm is associated with any particular place, its scene is one which we trust the Skye Railroad will not divest of its ancient and impressive loneliness-the craggy, cloudy, gleamy, misty Loch Coruisk. It is on its shores that Mr. Buchanan, who is also Orm the Celt, has watched, prayed, struggled; asserted, recanted; interrogated his own spirit and also the Spirit of the Universe. It may be partly in consequence of these stormy experiences that Mr. Buchanan is ill: he has not been able to give his ideas the completeness of form which he desired; among the omissions he regrets is what he calls "the allimportant Devil's Dirge." The result of his genuine but often illdirected efforts is a volume of wailing, broken, and intermittent aspiration-interesting to the student of thought as the record of an inner history which has too many parallels, but not to be submitted to untrained readers as a commendable work of art. To make things worse, The Book of Orm is, as we are told, a prelude to an epic. In that epic, if its writer's mind continues in the same frame, we can no more hope to find the unstrained and continuous music of a fully developed thought than we could expect a regular melody supported by consistent harmonies from the strings of an Æolian harp when strained to the point of breaking, or beyond it, by a strong, rainy, and fitful wind from the south-west. In these days, reviews are written to form the judgment of readers, not to correct the taste of authors: and we cannot assume that these remarks will ever meet the eyes of Mr. Buchanan. But if they should have that honour, we would ask him to consider whether as a poet, and perhaps as a man, he is not in danger of removing himself too far from

> The still sad music of humanity, Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power To soften and subdue.

There are times at which society is better than solitude, and the soft warmth of the lowland valley more favourable to health of body and mind than the chilly and austere desolation of the mountain-top. Or if Mr. Buchanan is obliged to move among the solitary peaks of thought, he would, if we are not mistaken, employ himself at present more wisely in drawing, petal by petal, some of the flowers that bloom in the crevices of the rock, than in trying to climb higher and higher at the risk of injurious tension of limb and lung. The work of life, we know, must be done; and we should be sorry to discourage Mr. Buchanan in his course of habitual literary activity. But it is seldom or never a matter of plain duty to write an epic; and Mr. Buchanan had better abstain from proceeding with such a task till his nerves are more firmly strung, his strength re-established, his command of form more complete, and his thoughts and feelings in a state more capable of satisfactory condensation.

We can recommend most cordially Mrs. Webster's Portraits as answering in the fullest and most genuine manner to their title. They show us ourselves as our children and grandchildren will see us. with our peculiarities and faults neither extenuated nor exaggerated. They are studies, not always of modern subjects, but essentially of modern thought; no one, we feel, could have written in this manner twenty years ago. Yet they are far from being mechanical iterations of recent but already familiar models. Mrs. Webster gives every theme she touches, whether it has been handled by others or not, a happy tinge of her own subjective vein. Mr. Morris, for example, at the close of his Life and Death of Jason, describes in his own leisurely yet vivid manner the decay of the good ship Argo; how it rotted slowly away, dropping a timber here, and there an oar, till at last the stempost fell, and crushed Jason, who was lying asleep close by. Mrs. Webster takes up the thread where Mr. Morris drops it, and, having previously translated the Medea of Euripides, now depicts the feelings of Medea on hearing that the father of her children is deadthe father of the children whom she slew. Mr. Burne Jones not long ago painted a striking picture of Circe; and Mr. Rossetti has made this picture the subject of a sonnet, which runs as follows:---

Dusk-haired and gold-robed o'er the golden wine
She stoops, wherein, distilled of death and shame,
Sink the black drops, white, lit with fragrant flame,
Round her spread board the golden sunflowers shine.
Doth Helios here with Hecate combine
(O Circe, thou their votaress!) to proclaim
For these thy guests all rapture in love's name,
Till pittless night give day the countersign?
Lords of their hour, they come. And by her knee
Those cowering beasts, their equals heretofore,
Wait, who with them in new equality
To-night shall echo back the unchanging roar
Which sounds for ever from the tide-strown shore

Where the dishevelled sea-weed hates the sea.

Mrs. Webster, on the other hand, lets us into the very heart of Circe, who, like other ill-doers, has her own way of justifying her own proceedings:—

Too cruel am I? And the silly beasts, Crowding around me when I pass their way, Glower on me, and, although they love me still, (With their poor sorts of love such as they could) Call wrath and vengeance to their humid eyes To scare me into mercy, or creep near With piteous fawnings, supplicating bleats. Too cruel? Did I choose them what they are? Or change them from themselves by poisonous charms? But any draught, pure water, natural wine, Out of my cup, revealed them to themselves And to each other. Change? There was no change; Only disguise gone from them unawares: And had there been one right true man of them He would have drunk the draught as I had drunk, And stood unchanged, and looked me in the eyes, Abashing me before him. But these things-Why, which of them has ever shown the kind Of some one nobler beast? Pah, yapping wolves And pitiless stealthy wild-cats, curs and apes And gorging swine and slinking venomous snakes. All false and ravenous and sensual brutes That shame the earth that bore them, these they are.

Again, that form of sin which people call the "social evil" now receives, at the hands of both men and women, a more thoughtful, more systematic, more merciful, and, we would hope, wiser treatment than was possible some time back. Mr. Rossetti gives quite an elaborate poem to the painful subject; he courts (in print, of course) the society of a certain Jenny who, as people say, is no better than she should be, and when she goes to sleep during his moralising, leaves a gold piece or two lying in her golden hair. Mrs. Webster, on the contrary, with considerable skill and delicacy, makes one of Jenny's frail sisters speak for herself, and disclose her own inner and outer history as a "castaway." But the best drawn of the portraits, in our judgment, is that which has the title of "Tired." In this poem, a man of ability, who has passed through the stage of youthful enthusiasm, and sighed at the failure of his many plans for improving society, reflects with some sorrow though without the least anger on the mistake he made in his choice of a wife. He took her from her cottage home, for he was charmed with her unconventional ways, and thought she would continue playfully defiant of all that is hollow in our usual social forms; but he finds that when she was in her village she really followed its fashions, and is now not only willing but anxious to conform to the ways of her new world. But the mistake was his, not hers. So, when his Madge is absent, he discusses the case very calmly:-

If I, my theory's too eager fool,
Mistook the freedom of blunt ignorance
For one with freedom of the instructed will,
And took yours for a nature made to keep
Its hardiness in culture, gaining strength
To be itself more fully; if I looked
For some rare perfectness of natural gifts
Developing not changed, pruned and not dwarfed;
If I believed you would be that to me
So many men have sung by women's names,
And known no woman for, where is your fault,
Who did but give yourself as you were then,
And with so true a giving? Violet,
Whose blame is it if, rooted from your place,
Where you grow truly to your natural law,
Set by my hand in artificial soil,
Bound to unwonted props, whose blame if you
Are not quite violet and not quite rose?

This is part of the soliloquy in which our social philosopher indulges while his wife is dressing for an evening party,—to which, by the way, he has no intention of accompanying her. When she comes down dressed, he is quite prepared with his salutation:—

Ready, love, at last?

Why, what a rosy June! A flush of bloom
Sparkling with crystal dews—Ah, silly one,
You love those muslin roses better far
Than those that wear the natural dew of heaven.
I thought you prettier when, the other day,
The children crowned you with the meadow-sweets;
I like to hear you teach them wildflowers' names
And make them love them, but yourself—What's that?
"The wildflowers in a room's hot stifling glare
Would die in half a minute." True enough:
Your muslin roses are the wiser wear.
Well, I must see you start. Draw your hood close;
And are you shawled against this east wind's chills?

In bidding farewell to these three volumes of poetry—for poetry, and not common verse, even the least attractive of them is, in spite of its shortcomings—we cannot help feeling that they augur well for the ultimate poetical success of our age. They are true, honest, and broad in their aims, and when they venture into dark places, try to carry light with them.

## HONEY AND MUSHROOMS.\*

It is impossible to welcome too cordially a little volume like this Handy Book of Bees, the genuineness of which is guaranteed by its proceeding from the pen of a real working man. Mr. Pettigrew has an hereditary claim to be heard on the subject. His father, he tells us, was a labourer, residing at Carluke, in Lanarkshire, and perhaps the greatest bee-keeper that Scotland ever possessed. "The Old Bee Man," as he was called, made a good deal of money out of his hives, and his sons naturally inherited his predilection for a pursuit which they found so pleasant and so lucrative. The author tells us that he is a working gardener, having passed regularly through the stages of apprentice, journeyman, and foreman, till he was able to set up as florist and bee-keeper on his own account.

The first part of Mr. Pettigrew's book is devoted to a very interesting account of the nature and habits of his favourite insects. Though so much has been written already on this subject by more scientific observers, yet he records many things, as the fruits of his long experience, which, to a great part of his readers, will have the char of novelty. Bees, as they are presented to us in his pages, appear to have somewhat pertaining to them, not only of almost human cleverness and foresight, but of that contrariety which is distinctive of the human character. To the extraordinary intelligence which can manufacture a proper supply of queen bees from ordinary workers, and determine, at their will, that the food they eat shall exude from between their scales in the form of wax, is occasionally united an unintelligible fatuity, which will injure the welfare, and even peril the existence of the hive, for the sake of accumulating an utterly useless quantity of what is called bee bread. In one particular hive, which did not increase satisfactorily, Mr. Pettigrew found that four-fifths of the breeding cells were choked up with this "bee bread." Altogether, though little is understood about this bee bread, it seems a remarkable exception to the wonderful and exact economy with which the resources of a hive are proportioned to its requirements.

A striking instance of this power of exact calculation and provision for future wants is found in the strange manipulation by which queen bees are produced, when required by the exigencies of the hive, out of the eggs of workers, by enclosing them in cells filled with a peculiar kind of jelly. In the Handy Book there is a very interesting correspondence on this process and its results. The usual, and most natural, explanation is that the workers are imperfect bees, and that the stimulating nutriment administered in their infancy has the effect of developing the organs of progenitiveness. Mr. Pettigrew is not convinced, however, that is the true solution of the problem. He is rather inclined to believe that the eggs have no sexes, and that the bees are drones or workers according to the cells in which the eggs are placed. He tells us that he has been informed of two instances in which bees manufactured queens from drone comb. But he does not give it on his own authority; indeed, the crucial experiment whether queens or workers can be produced from drone comb does not seem to have been satisfactorily tried. The chapters given to this description are full of curious facts, and well repay perusal.

The practical part of the *Handy Book*, as might be expected, is full of useful matter. Mr. Pettigrew is an advocate for simplicity and frugality in all matters connected with bees. He utterly disbelieves in the superior excellence of the costly Ligurian or Etrurian stock. He does not even take the trouble to enumerate the various kinds of wooden hives which are so very ingenious and so extremely expensive. He puts his own faith in the old straw hives of the simplest form, if only they are large enough and thoroughly well made. After comparing the ordinary dimensions of the hives used in England with those adopted in Scotland, he says—

Now come back to the parish of Carluke, and tell us if you think that the great success of the bee-keepers there is owing altogether to the use of large hives. No, not altogether; a great measure of their success comes from good management. But good management, without large hives, will not end in great results, large hives being the foundation or basis of success, and good management the superstructure. . . A queen bee lays about 2,000 eggs every day in the height of the season. She lays as many in a small hive as she does in a large one; but in a small one there are not empty cells for 500 eggs a day, and therefore 1,500 eggs are destroyed in some way or other. The bees

\* The Handy Book of Bees. By A. Pettigrew. One Vol. Blackwood. Mushroom Culture: Its Extension and Improvement. By W. Robinson, F.L.S., Author of "The Parks, Promenades, and Gardens of Paris," "Alpine Flowers," &c. One Vol. Warne and Co.