

Reviews.

Poems. By DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI. Ellis. The Book of Orm. By ROBERT BUCHANAN. Strahan. Portraits. By AUGUSTA WEBSTER. Macmillan.

Whatever sweeping censures are launched at our contemporary poetry by irritated and despondent criticism, it would be strange indeed if in all the variety of modern life, the vast play of thought, the constant progress of discovery, the terribly magnificent clash of contending interests, imagination were pining for want of her necessary food.

Mr. Rossetti's poems are a happy example of the virtue of artistic imitation. If we said of them, that they were full of great longings, deep questionings, bold interrogations of the past, present, and future, we should say the truth indeed, but in a form which might quite mislead the unwary. Mr. Rossetti's sense of the greatness of his ends is practically tempered by calm judgment in the choice of means. He never pursues vague ideas through a long and tedious labyrinth of perplexed words.

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.

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.

Ah, knew'st 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?—

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.

Consider the sea's listless chime: Time's self it is, made audible,— 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.

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 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.

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.

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.

Dusk-hated and gold-robed o'er the golden wine She stoops, wherein, distilled of death and shame, Sink the black drops, while, lit with fragrant flame, Round her spread board the golden sunflowers shine.

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, Glow 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.

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.

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 hardness 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

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 dew—Ah, silly one, You love those muslin roses better far Than those that wear the natural dew of heaven.

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 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 charm 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.

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 progeneritiveness.

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.

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.

\* 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.