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THE LITERARY DUEL AND ITS LESSONS.

IT is a long time since any controversy has excited so much interest in the literary world, and even outside it, as that which has centred for the last fortnight round the *Quarterly Review's* article upon "English Literature at the Universities." To many people it has seemed a case of much ado about nothing—of a storm in a purely literary teacup—or even something "more fragile far" than that. This is no doubt a perfectly accurate estimate of the personal element which was inevitably brought into the discussion, but which may now be profitably dismissed from it. Judgment has practically gone against Mr. GOSSE by default. The *Quarterly Reviewer*, it will be remembered by those who have read his article, exposed in the volume of inaugural Clark Lectures a larger number of blunders than has probably ever been detected in a book of equally small size and large pretension. Of these Mr. GOSSE very frankly admitted several. With regard to the remainder, he selected a few test cases wherein to defend himself, but his defence in all, or nearly all, conspicuously broke down. The only three allies of any distinction who stepped in to help him did not mend matters. Mr. BUCHANAN confessed to not having read either the book or the review upon which he proceeded to pass judgment. Mr. RALSTON, declining to discuss them, contented himself with asserting, on the authority of all Rejkavik, that Mr. GOSSE was "a sound Scandinavian scholar," and with insinuating on his own that the *Quarterly Reviewer* was guilty of an impertinence in criticising a gentleman who was at once a friend of Mr. RALSTON and the elect of Mr. RALSTON'S college. Finally Mr. WILLIAM ARCHER was exercised to know whether or not the *Quarterly Reviewer* was a gentleman—a question of which it is only necessary to say that it has no connection with the accuracy of Mr. GOSSE'S data, or the trustworthiness of his conclusions. Other disputants wished to waive all such discussion as mere pedantry, a plea, however, which could only be admitted by demolishing Mr. GOSSE'S claim to be a specialist and not merely a dilettante. And there the personal matter may lie. Even the thunders of the *Quarterly* blow over in time. Whether they will leave Mr. GOSSE a sadder or a wiser man we cannot say; but they can hardly fail of making him for the future a more accurate writer and of improving such portions of his essays as may survive for future editions.

But there are far more important matters involved in the dispute than the reputation of one of the lesser lights of ephemeral literature. The *Quarterly Reviewer*, it is only fair to point out, was not attacking Mr. GOSSE as Mr. GOSSE at all; he was attacking Mr. GOSSE, first, as the darling of the literary journals, and secondly, as a teacher of the most important college in Cambridge. When we published some articles a few months ago on "Log-rolling in English Letters," our statements were received here and there with scepticism by those who had not the same opportunities as journalists enjoy of seeing behind the scenes. But he must be proof against conviction indeed who denies those statements any longer after following the ins and outs of this controversy. If any one wants to gauge the value of the criticism which a certain clique of *littérateurs* pass upon each other's work, let him read first the review of Mr. GOSSE'S book in the *Quarterly*, and then the reviews, say, in the *Athenæum* and the *Saturday Review*. Neither of these journals had a single hole to pick in Mr. GOSSE'S work, which the *Saturday* welcomed back "like good Madeira wine from across the sea," and which the *Athenæum* advised the student of English poetry to "read twice and consult often." It is not, however, Reviewers or Editors alone who are responsible for the fatuity of such "friendly criticism." The present controversy has unmistakably shown what deep root the log-rolling idea has taken in contemporary literature. It is here that the defence offered on Mr. GOSSE'S behalf from the outside is so significant. Mr. GOSSE himself gave the clue. The *Quarterly Reviewer*, he said, was once my friend. "Was he, though!" was at once the cry; "then out on the fellow who has broken the golden rule of peace among the brethren for a malicious knave!" and straightway they fell to and discussed, not whether the Reviewer's criticisms were true or false, but what the malice was—for no other hypothesis occurred to them—that actuated him. Could anything be more absurd? When Mr. GLADSTONE tramples on some political adversary, it is not

thought an adequate, or even a pertinent, reply to say that Mr. GLADSTONE had eaten his opponent's salt. On such terms political life would be intolerable, for either private friendships would be impossible, or public criticism insincere. Exactly the same dilemma occurs in literature. By the log-rollers' code a man must either forego his friendships or forget his conscience. Happily the present dispute may do something to remove such an unnatural choice—by opening the eyes not only of the public but of those within the charmed circle itself to the hollowness of the thing. Mr. GOSSE has during this controversy denied the existence of any such literary coterie as we have described; and really there is some reason for his scepticism. He has powerful friends, people say, in the most select literary circles. Distinguished men have favoured him, he tells us in the preface to his book, with "friendly criticism." Where are they all now? The oracles are dumb; and not one of the great men has spoken with his enemy in the gates. For the fact is that log-rolling is an occupation for fair weather only, and in rough times every man hies him to his own tent. After such an experience the log-roller may well reflect that, though it is well to have eminent friends, it is even better at a pinch to have right on your side. It will be a good day for English letters when the small men take up the maxim which has in all times guided the great men: *Amicus Plato, magis amica veritas*.

Nor is that the only good thing that one may look for out of this business. The Clark Lecturer's blunders have been spoken of as trivial, and Mr. RALSTON has assured us that the man who makes them is quite good enough for Trinity College. Be it so; but imagine a similar series of blunders being pointed out in a treatise on Latin literature by Professor NETTLESHIP or on Greek by Professor KENNEDY. The thing would be impossible; or if it were not the lecturer would be. But, since the subject is only English literature, who cares? Who, indeed, knows any better? In other words, whereas Greek and Latin literature are regarded at the Universities as matters in which thoroughness and accuracy are taken for granted, English literature (which one need hardly say is a very different thing from philology) is treated as a kind of schoolgirl's accomplishment, in which smattering will do instead of scholarship, and gracefulness of manner atone for all defects of matter. And this idea, which reacts in ever-widening circles throughout the field of literature, must inevitably prevail until English is recognized by the Universities as a subject of serious study, and is subjected to the same teaching and the same tests as are applied to Greek and Latin. As Sir FRANCIS DOYLE wrote in our columns a day or two ago, an English university without any real school of English literature is a disgrace to us as a nation. They say abroad that the Englishman knows no language except his own: is it not worse that he should study every literature except his own?

WHERE THE MONEY GOES.

A STORY OF THE PLAYFAIR SCHEME IN THE CIVIL SERVICE.

IT is not as generally known as it ought to be that in 1873 Mr. Childers presided over a Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to make an inquiry almost identical in scope with that now proposed into the public establishments. This Committee did its work exhaustively and it made a remarkable Report—remarkable in the light of what has since been brought about through the instrumentality of the party in the Treasury of which Lord Lingen was the head and most influential member. The first great feature of the Report was that the Committee found that the cost of the clerical establishments was unnecessarily great, and that the numbers were "decidedly in excess of requirements;" the second feature of it was their dissatisfaction with the existing organization of the staff and the system upon which it was recruited. Two years after another Commission was appointed. This was composed principally of officials, although it was known as the Playfair Commission, and in it the Treasury influence was supreme. The recommendations of the Playfair Commission having been applied to the departments, they stood in 1883, numbers 4,241, cost £1,374,029, and a comparison with the estimates for the current year shows that even the last mentioned figures must be considerably added to. An explanation is due to the public, and there is no doubt that no satisfactory explanation will be forthcoming. The increase is due largely to mismanagement, consequent in the first place upon the want of a proper grasp of the problem before them by