

To the EDITOR of THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEW.

SIR,—In *The Contemporary Review* for October, there is an article upon my knowledge of the land and the people in which and with whom I dwell. The article is written with the avowed object of telling and teaching the public that instead of knowledge I am possessed by an absolute ignorance of both the country and the nation. The name appended to the article is unknown to me, but the methods of warfare used are very hackneyed ones, and it would not be worth while to say a word about them, were it not that when an obscure writer takes it upon herself to attack and correct a well-known author, the former should be at the least careful of and very sure of her weapons of offence.

I pass over the offensive personalities of the paper, and also the stale device (so often favoured by reviewers who have nothing else to say) of attributing neglected typographical errors to the ignorance of the creator of a book. But when, beyond this, your contributor proceeds to put forth her own mistakes as superior culture, it seems to me time to undeceive her as to her own qualifications for the office she has assumed.

Your contributor considers that she has proved my want of accurate knowledge of the people with whom I have lived for ten years, when she discovers the provincialism *Ferragosto* spelt with two r's, and put in the mouth of a modern speaker. Now *Ferragosto* occurs in the "Village Commune," only in an ancient ballad quoted there—the sweet and tender *rispetto*, which begins *Al piè d'un' faggio*, and which my humble heroine sings on the eve of her bridal. No less an authority than Professor Tigri spells the word with two r's. When the maiden of the ballad says her lover will give her the nuptial ring at *Ferragosto*, she uses the expression as meaning the first day of August, not the August fair.

*Stenterello* is not the Tuscan Punch, as your contributor states; he is one of the mimes who, with Punch, Harlequin, and others, made the laughter of Italy for so many centuries, until Goldoni crippled their omnipotence. *Stenterello* is still the jest-maker of the Florentines, but he is not the Punch: miserliness is his chief feature, and the satirists of Florentines quote him therefore as their type. I certainly do know how his name is spelt, as it stares me in the face, in letters a foot long, on all the theatrical announcements of every Carnival.

Your contributor quotes *strombetti* as an impossible word, and triumphantly conjectures that I printed it by some confusion of mind with *stornello*, with which, she proceeds to add, it has no resemblance. Now, *strambetti* is a very old troubadour's word, which is still in use amongst the peasantry of the Tuscan mountains to designate any sort of amorous poetry, even as it did in the Middle Ages. Therefore, not only is the word entirely correct, but it has an affinity with the *stornello*, or any other kind of Italian love-lay. Professor Tigri, by whose authority I am again content to abide, derives it from *strani motti*.

These three examples will serve to show how your contributor's zeal in detraction has outrun her wisdom. As regards the municipal forms of administration, she denies the accuracy of my description of them, without giving a tittle of evidence that she has been in any position to study them. She speaks of a syndic as of a functionary solely elected by the will of his community; whereas a syndic's appointment must be submitted to the prefect (nominally to the king), and, as a matter of fact, the prefects interfere with and influence these nominations all over the country, so that the men of whichever ministerial party is uppermost should be chosen. In the winter of this year I became acquainted with the most disgraceful facts of prefectorial interference whereby a Tuscan noble, who had been syndic of his district for twenty years, and universally beloved, was turned out by intrigue, that he might be replaced by a new man who held the politics of the ministry, whilst the Marchese had belonged to the Conservative side.

This is but one instance of a system of ministerial pressuro which prevails throughout the land.

I cannot understand how any woman can applaud conscription. Had she sons to be torn from her she assuredly would not do so. At its best, it can only be a stern and sad necessity, and I believe the results here to be unmitigated evil. I believe that every object of training might be obtained by a volunteer system like that of England; but though the young men desire this, the Government is afraid of it, and refuses permission for it. The loss of their sons to the army falls most cruelly on the agricultural classes. A contadino, whilst his son is away, has to pay a labourer to replace the lad. I doubt very much myself whether a *butlero* on the Campagna, a sheep-herd on the Maremma grasslands, a Pistoiese woodman amongst his chestnut woods, is any the happier or better for learning to read indifferently and write a serawl. Reading and writing, even if the unmixed book and legal birthright of man that a certain school declares them to be, may be too dearly bought, and are not worth the sacrifice of homely virtues and cleanly living, and sage contentment with a humble lot. In Italy, as in France, the newly-acquired power of reading is chiefly used for the perusal of inflammatory and communistic newspapers. Here, as in France, the peasantry are sensible, peace-loving, and averse to agitation; it is the towns which are the centres of eagerness for unconsidered war and foolish credulity of bombastic Radicalism. Myself I prefer the unlettered mountaineer of the Luchese hills who can recite the "Gerusalemme Liberata," learnt by ear, and has as fine a sense as Mendelssohn of true melody in music, to the "educated cad" of the Turin or Florence streets, who has just heard enough of