

A REVIEW OF THE LITERARY WORKS OF CARDINAL NEWMAN.

It has been said elsewhere in these papers that scarce any more striking example of a life lived with exclusively religious aims does the history of the world afford, than that given to it by the illustrious man who is now spending his eighty-seventh year in the Oratory at Edgubaston. And his writings are the reflex of his life. Whatever might be the branch of literature upon which his pen was engaged, his treatment of it tended always to that one object which has been the object of his life,—namely, the making clearer the relation between us, children of earth, and the Omnipotent Being who created the earth; the duties involved for us in that relation, and the means of fulfilling them. He has written historical works; and the most extensive of them treats of the famous Arian heresy which in early times divided Christians into hostile camps; others of later crisis in religious affairs; others, again, of nations outside the Church, whose influence has nevertheless been at times strongly felt within it,—the Turks, for example, and the early Northmen.

He has written poems; and they are almost all hymns and prayers, save one which follows a Christian soul from its severance from the body on its death bed, to its arrival in charge of its angelic conductor at the purgatorial "bed of sorrow"; philosophy, and through it he teaches that, mixed up with the very conditions of our being is the great fact of our dependence upon God; that having been formed by His hands, we tend again towards Him by our unaided, it unobstructed nature.

When he takes up his pen to give a sketch of his own life, it is to show how he was compelled in his forty-fifth year, if he would obey the voice of conscience, to quit the Anglican communion and become a Catholic; and in his works of fiction we have ideal representations of the internal struggle he himself experienced before taking that important step.

To the great task of his literary labours he has brought a knowledge alike remarkable for its variety and its profundity. So intimately connected, he tells us, are all branches of human knowledge, forming a whole as do the segments of a circle, that he cannot know any one branch thoroughly who ignores any other; that so far from any two being antagonistic in their principles, it is simply impossible, without making allowance for the facts which one in its peculiar province teaches us, to attain to a just estimation of the facts brought forward by the other. There is between every two sciences a debatable ground, where each has a claim to have its peculiar principles considered; and to take a view of it in the light of one set of principles only, would be to obtain a prospect not partial merely, but false.

True to his own theory he has, in maintaining the claims of theology, or the science of what we know about God, passed by the claims of no other science, but rather pressed into his service the evidence supplied by those others. Mr Gladstone has referred to him "as the greatest theologian now within the pale of the Church of Rome." Had he omitted the qualifying phrase the compliment would have been equally well deserved.

The purity and beauty of Cardinal Newman's language has been so often discarded upon by competent critics, that it is almost unnecessary to speak of it here. Mr. Earle, in his "Philology of the English Tongue," has the following tribute to his standing as a judge of the fitness of language: "From an early friend of Dr. Newman's I learnt that he had long ago expressed a strong dislike to the cumulate formula *is being*. I desired to be more particularly informed, and Dr. Newman wrote as follows to his friend: 'It surprises me that my antipathy to "*is being*" existed so long ago. It is as keen and bitter now as ever it was, though I don't pretend to be able to defend it.' After giving certain reasons (which are omitted, because this is a point in which reasons are secondary and a good judgment, when we can get one, is primary) he continues: 'Now I know nothing of the history of the language, and cannot tell whether all this will stand, but this I do know, that, rationally or irrationally, I have an

undying, never-dying hatred to "*is being*," whatever arguments are brought in its favour. At the same time I fully grant that it is so convenient in the present state of the language, that I will not pledge myself I have never been guilty of using it.'"

In a foot-note Mr. Earle adds: "Every one sees that these hearty words were not measured for print, and I am the more obliged to Dr. Newman for allowing this use of his undesigned evidence."

One of the most striking characteristics of Cardinal Newman's style is its wonderful clearness. We do not simply *understand* his meaning; we *see* it rather; as if some powerful illuminating medium were brought to aid our own imperfect sense of perception. This clearness it does not owe to what is generally termed simplicity—that is the making use of only commonly used words. Indeed, a student of Newman will often find his vocabulary enriched. He meets in the course of his reading with a word new to him; or of which he knows merely the dictionary meaning; but so admirably here is it adapted to the place in which it occurs that its exact value as a factor in the language becomes clear in the "self-emitting light" of the whole sentence. And just therein does his clearness consist—in using the word which in general means the *only* word—suited to the need of his idea. For, after all, how many synonyms have we in our language? They are hardly worth counting, in spite of the formidable lists of so-called synonyms which adorn the pages, and increase the bulk of our spelling-books.

A recent writer on English, Mr. Angus, has remarked that, when a word is introduced into our language from any source, if the meaning it conveys in its own tongue has already a precise exponent in ours it either speedily becomes obsolete or, if retained, is soon found used in a sense differing it only by a shade from its original one.

It is a talent by no means universal to be able to catch always those precise shadings of meaning; but it is one possessed by Cardinal Newman in an eminent degree. "No man," most truly said Canon Kingsley, "knows the meaning of words better than Dr. Newman."

But, after all, the chief charm of Cardinal Newman's writings is that they *are* his writings. The beautiful soul of the man shines out in every sentence, making us feel that far beyond even the privilege of learning what he has to teach is the privilege of being brought into contact with such a nature. "His words," says Mr. Gladstone, "are the transparent covering of the man;" and this is true. To read his writings is to become intimately acquainted with him; it is to be taken into his inner confidence; it is to admire, it is to honour, it is to love him. As he tells us St. Philip Neri did with his disciples in his cell, so does he with his readers:

—"Unveil the lustre bright
And beauty of his inner soul,
And gain them by the sight."

To describe the character thus revealed seems too much like enumerating the virtues which go to make a perfect man. When we have spoken of the purity of his thoughts, his candour and humility in speaking of himself, and his all-embracing charity, we are only beginning upon a long list. Without attempting to exhaust it, let us just quote from his own picture of the ideal gentleman, a sentence that fitly describes his conduct in the difficult matter of controversy:—"He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out." Though his style is in general grave it is never heavy. Froude said of him, as a University lecturer, "He was lightness itself—the lightness of elastic strength." The same is true of his written style. He can at need make use with consummate skill of the lighter weapons of sarcasm, irony, and humour. His reply to Kingsley, already quoted, proves this; while his description in "Loss and Gain," of Charles Reding's visitors on his first arrival in London, is almost comedy. But we must confess he is dearer to us when in his higher, serener, more earnest strain. We shall close this paper with a short specimen of his prose, where it touches in its rhythm and beauty upon the borders of poetry: