

may see the end of all things. This may have been suggested to him by the many earthquakes and volcanic eruptions in Italy and Sicily at the time. Whatever be the reason for his pessimistic forecast, certainly no description could be more graphic than that of the consequences he draws from the stoppage of the supply of atoms by which hitherto the world has gone on: "Swift as a flame the walls of the world would suddenly break up and fly asunder along the mighty void, and for the same reason all other things would follow; all the heaven from its inmost quarters would tumble down, and in an instant the earth slide from beneath our feet and wholly pass away along the boundless void, amid the ruins of the heaven and of earthly things all wildly mixed, and the atoms unloosed from their bonds of union, so that in a moment not a wrack shall be left behind, nought save lone space and the unseen first beginnings; for on whatever side atoms shall first be wanting, this side will be the gate of death for things in being."

FOR FREEDOM'S SAKE.*

A note on a book by a master is not a difficult matter; so many critics have had a word of praise or blame for his books that the way is made easy for the reviewer; but to be just to a comparatively unknown writer is not so easy. It is, therefore, with a little misgiving that we undertake to examine "For Freedom's Sake," a historical novel by Mr. Arthur Paterson, who, although he has published several books, has yet to win his public.

This book aims at giving a faithful picture of the great prelude to the civil war in the United States—John Brown's struggle to teach the people of Kansas the need of beginning against slavery a crusade "such as no abolitionist, not even Garrison himself, had dreamed of.

At the outset the novelist faces a grave difficulty. The year 1856 is but a short remove from the year 1896, and the historical novelist in attempting to portray a period so near his own time must have the touch of genius, the eye that can see and the hand that can truly shape, or his portraiture will become photography or caricature. As we read this book we feel that the author has often given us faithful photographs of the society he deals with, but little more. The book is lacking in individuality. We do not feel that there is back of the characters a strong man who is breathing the breath of life into men and women alike. This is the mark of dramatic genius; not to make men act as you saw them act, or speak as you heard them speak, but the ability to make them speak and act as you yourself

would have spoken and acted with their souls and under like circumstances; and only the chosen few have this gift; the myriad-mind is needed.

An author may not have this power and yet may be able to attract by his mere writing, by the fineness of his thought and of his style. Sometimes the opening paragraph grips the reader, and he reads page after page under the spell of the word. But Mr. Paterson's opening paragraph repels; we feel as we read it that the writer has not the gift of phrase and word that covers a multitude of sins.

"It was March, the month of rain and sleet, of snow and dust, of hot sun and icy wind;" (A happy opening, but there it ends!) "when people, even those who lived regular lives in comfortable places, and were not exposed to the scolding of the elements, complained of sore throats and rheumatism, and doctors had more work than they could do. As for those who were obliged to meet the weather on its own terms, chronic colds and an intense irritability were the least of their sufferings. It was a terrible month for families where the head of the house was of uncertain temper."

One, and only one word describes this—the commonplace. And the style of most of the book is of the same kind.

But despite this we find that we read the book with interest. Two things compel our attention. One is the time depicted; the struggle in Kansas, the feelings that were beginning to stir in the hearts of men and women, the awakening of heroes and heroines, the abomination of slavery—all keep our minds riveted on the page.

The book has yet a deeper interest. There is but one character in it, all the others are mere puppets. The novel was evidently written for John Brown, and all the author's strength seems to have been reserved for him. The portrait is, perhaps, a little too exact and detailed; but a sentence such as this lets us see into the heart of the man: "One full of head-strong violent passions, with infinite capacity for love or hate, intense sympathies and narrow prejudices—all held in the grip of a tremendous will." Again such striking work as this rouses the mind: "At the word abolitionist a light shone in his eyes, his lips parted, and the stern face was almost beautiful for a moment."

Indeed whenever Mr. Paterson introduces John Brown to his pages his pen has a fire that is not found when he is delineating his other characters. The following paragraph alone is enough to save a book from being absolutely neglected:

"They parted almost in silence. Robert's heart was too full to speak much, he could only echo the 'God bless you' as he gripped the old man's hand. He looked back as he reached the edge of the

*For Freedom's Sake, by Arthur Paterson. London: McMillan & Co.; Toronto: The Copp, Clark Co.