

It has often occurred to us that the numerous societies which are devoted to the worship and study of Browning, have been rather a drawback than an aid to the popular appreciation of their idol. With their lengthy discussions and elaborate treatises on the works of their poet, they have almost frightened people away from a closer acquaintance with him. By those who appreciate Browning for the true poetry that is in him, and not for his involved eccentricities. Mr. Andrew Lang's article on "Esoteric Browningism" in a recent number of *The Forum*, will be read with especial pleasure. He rightly impugns the societies for squabbling about "texts and meaning like scholiasts or Biblical commentators," and for valuing the poems as problems which they alone can solve. He admires Mr. Browning for that part of his genius which delights the heart and fancy, and which dwells with human interest upon human emotions. He is not blind to the faults of the poet, which he sums up as "subtlety, eccentricity, and the besetting sin of considering too curiously," while he is keenly alive to the beauties which the fire of genius finds in the depiction of "love, tenderness, imagination and energy." Mr. Lang warns young readers against the intricate meshes of "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangan," and "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," against the grotesqueness of "Ferishtah Fancies," and the bewilderment of the later poems. But he directs one with kindly hand to those poems which win our affections, like "Paracelsus," "One Way of Love," "Men and Women," and many others. It is especially delightful to meet with a fair estimate of Browning in these days when one halts bewildered between the blind worship of his professional devotees and the cordial hate of those whom they regard as Philistines.

In a paper in the January number of the *North American*, Edmund Kirke pleasantly discusses "Wit and Humor—Old and New." Man, unlike any other animal, is endowed with the gift of laughter; his first utterance is a cry, he next "tries his untrained risibilities with a snile, and then when he has got the muscles of his glottis well under control, he breaks into a laugh." The antiquity of jokes is very great, and many of the jokes of the present are adaptations and variations of older witticisms. This fact becomes the more apparent when one reads his Horace, Aristophanes, or Plautus. Diogenes and Hierocles appear to have been some of the earliest writers of "jests." The latter wrote in the sixth century a book which he called "Asteia," containing twenty-one jests, most of which are now alive, and, as Mr. Kirke remarks, "passing themselves off as real original Jacobs." Instances of resemblance in jokes where the illiterate

author of one could not possibly have read or heard the jest of his predecessor, lead one to the conclusion that the sense of humor which exists in every man finds similar expression under similar circumstances. The value of a *bon mot* is greatly increased by its originality and freshness. The witticisms of Sheridan are all said to have been worked out like Parliamentary speeches, and the saying of this famous Irish wit in regard to a political opponent "who generally resorts to his memory for his jokes and his imagination for his facts," was truer of no one than the author of it. The writer accounts for the opinion, which is now generally adopted, that in America genuine wit and humor exist to a greater extent and in greater variety than in any other country by the fact that the American population is more varied in its components than any other. But we must remember that the Irish form a very large part of the inhabitants of Uncle Sam.

THE special attention of the students, and indeed of all the readers of the REVIEW, is drawn to the many attractions set forth in the pages devoted to our advertisers. The business firms who have chosen the medium of the REVIEW for advertising will in turn, we are confident, be chosen as a medium for procuring the articles which these reliable and well-known firms announce.

OBITER DICTA.

SOMEBODY in England who wrote something which nobody would publish, partly for a joke, partly for revenge, took the trouble to copy Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, gave it the title of "Like a Giant Refreshed," and sent it the rounds as an original poem. It was sent to publisher after publisher, and not once was it recognized. Publisher No. 1 said the market was flooded with sensational stories, and that he must decline to publish it, although a work of considerable promise. No. 2, in declining, said the poem was clever, but its reflections trite, and the meaning here and there obscure; it might be improved by revision. No. 3 said it was bright and clever, and that he would publish it if the author would take half the risk. No. 4 said he would publish the poem, but at the entire risk and cost of the author. No. 5 said the work was not without merit, but he had so many important books coming out that he had no room for anything not of the first class. Then the magazines were tried. One editor said the poem was suggested by Rider Haggard's works! Poor Milton! The general opinion of the various editors was that the poem was too long, and the gentleman who was sending "Samson" about, came to the conclusion that in some magazines you could get in anything if it was