

well for us to listen to any one who professes to teach us how we may rise above our present imperfection.

Mr. Oliphant thinks that it was the suppression of the mystical sects in the early Church, the Gnostics and other so called heretics, that led to the corruption of Christian doctrine and life. If we break off from him at this point, we shall be indisposed to receive his revelations. But, at any rate, we cannot deny that there is some truth in what he says of the change which came over a great deal of the teaching of the Christian Church. "Henceforward," he says, "religion in the West became, not the repository of occult knowledge of mysteries more or less divine, but a system by which men were assured of their escape from eternal torments, and their safe passage to endless joys. . . . The whole tendency of this teaching was to fix men's minds far more intensely upon the future than upon the present; and as its cardinal principle in regard to the future was the selfish attainment of everlasting bliss, it followed as a natural consequence in most cases that their object in the present life was to secure to themselves earthly happiness, or, if they feared that this might injure their eternal well-being, to lead them into asceticism."

No one can deny that there is a large measure of truth in these charges. They are repeated in various forms, the author even going to the length of declaring that "if Christ were to appear in the flesh in Christendom, He would be unable to find a follower"—a statement which we do not believe any more than we believe that Mr. Oliphant is "a teacher sent from God." He admits, however, that "the civilization which calls itself by this name has still more divine life in it than the relative barbarism of the East."

According to our author there is, for all this, a good time coming. "The processes of the divine quickening are moving steadily forward, generating vital impulses which will prove uncontrollable to those who come under their influence, and suggesting an irresistible instinct for aggregation. Upon all classes, and in diverse countries, taking no account of race, or creed, or colour, does this new life descend; and as those who are stirred by it move, do they recognize their affinity to others similarly affected, and the magnetic attraction which is inherent in the vivifying principle, draws them together, at present slowly and athwart obstacles that would seem insurmountable—for in the early ages the recipients of this life feel weak and bewildered." And so forth.

When we come to consider how the evils of the time are to be remedied and this new life is to operate, we confess that our powers of exposition are put to the stretch, nay, that they fail us, if not absolutely, yet greatly and painfully. We might say that Mr. Oliphant applies the atomic theory to the invisible world, declaring that there are psychical and pneumatic atoms and molecules, and that the union of the female principle with the male under certain conditions is the way to the redemption of mankind. But these words would convey very little notion of any actual realities to our own minds or those of our readers.

Mr. Oliphant believes that, during the lifetime of his wife, there was such an intimate spiritual union between him and her that the thought of the one passed into the other, and generated ideas which the one dictated and the other wrote down, and now that she has passed into the invisible world, he believes that the same process still goes on, and, in short, this present book is, in great measure, the result of her communications.

These bare statements are very unsatisfactory, and we cannot copy out the many pages in which Mr. Oliphant unfolds his theories, nor even the summary which he gives of them at the end of the work. To those, however, who really care to study the book, we may advise the pursuit of that summary before going through the whole work. But what will be the result? Other prophets have appealed to the conscience, or the reason of their hearers, or to the signs which they showed in token of the authority by which they spoke. But Mr. Oliphant warns us that we shall probably not be able to understand him, and we do not. When he tells us that the female principle must be restored to its rights in our spiritual nature, and even, as he seems to think, in our spiritual organism, we can guess at what he means, and we may even pitch upon a meaning to which we give a partial assent; but we shall certainly not be reaching the whole meaning which the author intends. At the same time we gladly allow that there are hints of deep truth and great beauty for which we are grateful.

Whether we can recommend our readers to undergo the no small labour of perusing nearly 500 pages of this kind of literature which we have been endeavouring to describe, depends upon circumstances. To the viewless restless man or woman, who is always seeking some new thing, we would say, By all means leave it alone, or it will probably leave you madder than it found you. To the ordinary Christian we may hint that he may better dispose of his time than by struggling with a book which, in great part, will be to him as dark as Erebus. To the student of the history and philosophy of religion in its more mystic aspects, we think, however, that this book may have something of the same interest which is found in the writings of Swedenborg and Böhme. There are all degrees of mysticism, and various kinds, and they do no harm to those who know how to use them.

WITHIN a radius of sixty miles of Nashville, Tenn., there is found a tree that is said to be the shittim wood of ark fame. Celebrated botanists from all over the country have examined the trees, and agree that they grow nowhere else on the globe. They have decided that it is the shittim wood of which Noah's ark was constructed, mention of which is made several times in the Bible. The tree is medium sized, with very dark, smooth bark, and the wood is of a bright gold colour. In early spring the trees are laden with long, white blossoms, closely resembling great ostrich plumes. There seems to be no doubt about the identity of the trees, and it is remarkable that they are found only in this small area, and so few at that.—*Scientific American*.

LITERARY AND PERSONAL GOSSIP.

MR. R. L. STEVENSON'S new novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*, will begin in *Scribner's Magazine* in November.

MISS BRADDON is fifty years old, and she has written just fifty stories. She has the most irregular methods of doing her literary work, writing, while standing up, some of her thrilling passages on torn envelopes or any scrap of paper that comes to her hand.

THE graduates in class '88 of the Chatauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, in thirty-eight different assemblies, number over 4,000 this year. Reading circles are established in Russia, Turkey, France, China, Japan, India, Egypt, Africa, Brazil, Mexico, and almost every other country.

CARLYLE'S youngest sister, Mrs. Aikens, died on the 27th July, at her residence, The Hill, Damfries. She was a woman of fine character and strong intelligence. She very often appears in the biography and letters, usually under her family sobriquet, "The Crow," given on account of her black hair.

MR. CARLETON is forty-two years of age, though to a stranger he appears much younger. He has an especially youthful countenance, and his laugh is gleeful and infectious. Notwithstanding the gray tinge that is appearing in his hair, he has the figure of an athlete, and his step is light and quick.

Othello, the next volume of the Bankside Shakespeare, is to be edited by Dr. Thomas R. Price, professor of English in Columbia College. Dr. Price will claim, in his introduction, that he has discovered an exact system of Shakespearean prosody, led up to by experimentation by Shakespeare in the earlier plays, and finally perfected in the *Othello*.

THE statement that no book has been burnt publicly for over a hundred years is contradicted by a contributor to the *London Star*, who says: "Not, perhaps, by legal authority, but plenty of books have been burnt in popular fervor of one kind or another. Mr. Froude's *Nemesis of Faith* was so burnt by High Church students at Oxford in 1848."

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL realized full cash value for his first literary venture. The expense of the book was entirely borne by Mr. Lowell, but the publishing house in which the first edition was stored was destroyed by fire. The publishers carried a full insurance, and Mr. Lowell had the satisfaction of saying that his entire edition went off like hot cakes and was exhausted in a single night.

A TIMELY and valuable reference work is the *Dictionary of American Politics*, by Everitt Brown and Albert Strauss, published by A. L. Burt, of New York. It comprises accounts of political parties, measures and men, and explanations of the Constitution, divisions and practical workings of the Government, together with political phrases, familiar names of persons and places, noteworthy sayings, etc.

ANDREW LANG, if report speaks true, spends four hours a day at "pure literature," and writes six articles a week for the *London Daily News*, two articles and two reviews for the *Saturday Review*, and two humorous sketches for the *St. James's Gazette*. For his work for the three journals named he is said to receive \$15,000 a year. And what is more to the point, he earns it by the high and conscientious character of his work.

THE Galignani memorial was unveiled recently at Corbeil. The two brothers Galignani were munificent benefactors to the town, presenting it with schools, a hospital and an orphanage. The newspaper bearing their name was founded in 1814. One of their gifts to France, which might serve as a good example to this country, is the Galignani Retreat, for authors and printers, at Neuilly, just outside Paris, which is now nearing completion.

THE University of St. Andrew's has conferred upon Hon. G. W. Ross, Minister of Education, the honorary degree of LL.D. This academic distinction is conferred by many Universities—by some of the oldest—not for eminence in letters merely, but for distinguished services in politics, public affairs and other useful walks of life not so generally recognized as they should be. Mr. Ross may wear the hood of a doctor at least as deservedly as some others bear the insignia of a rank not so universally esteemed.

Men and Measures of Half a Century, from the pen of Hon. Hugh McCulloch, a new edition of Donald G. Mitchell's (*Ik Marvel*) works, and two books of adventure for boys, *A Tale of the Indian Mutiny*, or *The Serpent Charmer*, by Louis Rousselet, with nearly seventy illustrations, and *Wild Men and Wild Beasts, or Scenes in Camp and Jungle*, by Lieut. Gordon Cumming, also numerous illustrations, are among the forthcoming books of the Scribners.

THE Aldi were very fond of Oriental effects in decorating their books; one in particular was greatly in vogue among Venetian book lovers. It consisted of a perforated leather *doublé*, the perforated work being executed after some very artistic design. This *doublé* was laid over coloured silk, so that upon opening the book the effect was most charming. Naturally it all depended upon the delicate workmanship of the perforated work, for its perfection or imperfection became very apparent set off by the coloured silk beneath it.

THE Loan Museum of autographs, rare editions, portraits and other personal relics of Pope, lately closed in England, was exceedingly successful, and the catalogue turned out to be a really valuable Pope bibliography. Austin Dobson contributed a piece of heroic dialogue, which was placed at the head of it. One precious object which appeared in the collection was Pope's own copy of *The Dunciad* of 1736, half the pages of which are enriched by corrections and annotations in the poet's beautiful handwriting. A biography of Pope by Mr. W. J. Courthorpe is announced for early publication.

HERE is Renan's opinion of Balzac, recently expressed to a friend: "I do not like this writer very much. To begin with, he writes badly, except in some of his short stories, which are really excellent; then his ideas are dangerous when they are not childish. His philosophy, when he attempts to speak on the subject, causes a smile; he has not reflected a minute on the progress of humanity. In fine, his conception of life is low and mischievous and without an ideal. He has had a deplorable and unfavourable influence upon society. How different from Mme. Sand! I admire her! What marvellous language and what stolid philosophy! She is the real novelist of our time!"

THE third volume of Prof. Henry Morley's *English Writers* (Cassell and Co.) covers the period from the Conquest to Chaucer, and takes into view the condition of literature on the Continent, the *trouvères* and *troubadours*, the *Nibelungen Lied* and *Minnesänger*, and the Italian Revival with Frederick II. and Dante. The foreign field is entered, however, only to shed needed light on the source and course of English literature, and the bulk of the volume deals in an encyclopædic way with the chronicles, romances, and Welsh tales, and more particularly with Layamon, Walter Map, and Roger Bacon. The extracts given are fewer than in the previous volumes. The three volumes now issued make a natural division of the subject of English literature, and are by themselves an admirable résumé of its least accessible portion.