

ANALYSIS OF AUTHORS.

Not a scrap of information is wanting; we are thoroughly informed of his habits; we see him in the family circle and in society; we are told of his income and expenses, of the books he reads and of his promenades, his daily fare and his tastes, how he dressed, ate and walked; how many stories Walter Scott repeated at a single dinner; how many lobsters Lord Byron digested, the days he did not diet; and at what a pace Macaulay, with book in hand, strode through the most populous streets, what showy vests he wore, what black gloves, always new and always half-drawn on, imprisoned and made his hands uncomfortable, when, in his bibliophilist excursions he forgot himself, turning over the leaves of old volumes in a bookseller's shop.

Read the lives of Lord Byron, by Thomas Moore, and of Walter Scott, by Lockhart, of Samuel Johnson, by Boswell, of Dickens, by Forster, of George Eliot, by Crosse, and, nearer home, of Nathaniel Hawthorne, by his son, or still more particularly and serving as an example, the life of Carlyle, by Froude, with the reminiscences of Carlyle himself and the letters of his wife; I doubt if any human being could have given to the world a more exact and completer cast of himself.

We have no clearer insight into political or military personages who have been the most conspicuous, William Pitt, Wellington and Washington. For, in addition to these details, so minute and circumstantial, showing us the visible exterior of the man, we have, as regards a great writer, documents of a unique kind which introduce us to the very depths of his being, which reveal to us the limits and reach of his intellect, the secret preferences of his heart, the liveliest and most delicate touches of his sensibility, the march and flights of his imagination—in short, the entire current of his thought. These documents consist of his books.

What, indeed, do his books contain? Principally, and first of all, general ideas; without these he is only a manufacturer of phrases. To be a great writer requires an idea of the world, a personal, original, comprehensive idea, which consists in a complete summing-up of one's experience and reveries. What is life? Is it a good or an evil, or simply passable? Is it to be taken seriously or in sport? What is pleasure worth, and what is the authority of duty? Is it proper to follow law or nature? Must the individual rely upon traditions, or venture on free investigations? What is the child, the youth, the full-grown man, the young girl, the wife, the mother? What are the leading and sovereign forces which govern man, and make him happy or miserable, virtuous or vicious?

Is it temperament or imagination or imitation or habit or reason? How is character formed, on what hereditary traces, after what innate qualities, by what successive strata of intercrossed and superimposed impressions? From whence come the great shocks which stir the soul, the unforeseen disturbance of the will, the bewilderment which takes place in the presence of death or through the irruptions of love? What is marriage, and what ought it to be? Is human society approximately just, and with what degree of respect or resignation must we consider the conventions out of which it is formed, the institutions which maintain it, and the government which rules it? In the hierarchy of conditions and ranks is there a better and nobler class than others, or, at least, one more deserving of interest and sympathy? Where is it found, on top, in the middle, or at the foot of the social ladder?

INSIGHTS OF GENIUS.

The more genius a writer has, the more conclusive and precise in his answer. Swift arrives at complete pessimism.

According to him, man is a wretched, unfortunate, ugly, odious, absurd, grotesque Yahoo. Addison maintains himself in a temperate optimism. According to him, all we have to do is "to be easy here, and happy hereafter." On public right and political freedom, on society and government, on religion and science, on civilization, history and morality, Carlyle gives the answer of the Puritan, while Macaulay gives that of the liberal, both with a series of striking and multiplied illustrations, and an array of coördinate and powerful proofs.

Two ideas of human destiny, no less opposed to each other and no less fruitful, display themselves in Wordsworth and Lord Byron. On the two extremes of the soul, Fielding and Richardson each choose their own domain. What Fielding saw in man was the spontaneous and primitive forces, the irresistible impulses of temperament and of the heart, the violence of egoistic or generous instincts unrestrained by the proprieties of life or by precepts, and which impetuously and unawares leap over all barriers. What Richardson saw in man is intellectual and moral culture, the sway of religion, the ascendancy of principles and that domination of the conscience, which, developed in us by daily self-questioning, by arguing with ourselves, by habit and scruples, installs in our soul, not merely a witness, an overseer, an ever-living judge, but, again, an armed auxiliary, an almost invincible combatant which reanimates us in our weaknesses.

Even when the writer is a dramatic poet, and says nothing in his own name, even when he purposely effaces himself behind his characters, his master thought remains apparent. Three or four times Shakespeare expressed his thought, in passing, as if he were not aware of it, through some phrase put in the mouth of Hamlet or of Macbeth, of Jacques or of Prospero; but, to divine it, there is no need of seeking it there; it everywhere and spontaneously declares itself in the selection of his figures and characters.

Various as these may be, they all belong to the same family, good or bad, men and women. We detect it in the vehemence of their imagination, in the suddenness of their impulsions, in that dangerous sensibility which renders them rigid or makes them dash on, in the permanent overcharge of their nervous machine, in the inevitable rupture of their temporary equilibrium, in that inward fatality which forebodes the outward tragedy, in those springs of action too delicate or too powerful to work together or to resist a strain, in that mental and moral structure which leads them on to misfortune, to despair or to crime, and which condemns them beforehand to murder, to madness and to suicide.

THE AUTHOR'S WORKSHOP.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a great contemporary poet, says in the preface to her masterpiece, "Aurora Leigh," "I have put here my highest convictions on life and on art." Involuntarily or purposely, all superior artists do the same thing, the creators of bodies as well as the creators of souls, Rubens and Rembrandt, the same as Shakespeare.

On reaching the end of their gallery, after the twentieth or thirtieth picture, we have discovered their secret and what would be their philosophy did they deign to have one, the earliest and latest conception which prompted and guided their hand—in short, the subterranean root which constitutes the innermost fibres of their being, and which, concealed in the recesses of their soul, vegetates, externally in such a profusion of stems, branches and flowers.

Not only do we grasp their central idea, but, again, we observe them as they write it down, and with such details, with so much precision, that no intercourse is more direct and no more commerce more intimate. To be admitted to this familiarity, to follow the workings of their minds as