

LITERARY NOTES AND NOTICES.

..... Sundry jottings
Stray leaves, fragments, blurs and blottings.

—ROBERT BROWNING.

Those acquainted with the *Causeries du Lundi* of the famous French critic, M. Sainte-Beuve, cannot have forgotten the captivating "chat" wherein he professes to make an analysis of his critical method. The paper is to be found among his *Nouveaux Lundis*, and it is abundantly evident that, modest writer as he ostensibly is, he greatly piqued himself upon its value. But it is one thing to propound a theory and quite another matter to reduce its principles to useful practice. The first can be performed by anyone who is not an idiot, nor is the latter at all times disqualified. The application of a theory, on the other hand, not only necessitates the inherent trustworthiness of the hypothesis, but also calls for some ability, not to say genius, on the part of the experimenter. Theory and practice are constantly at war, more especially when they relate to the individual rule of life. Those among us who have already broken all the good resolutions we made at New Year will not deny this fact. Then, when a man undertakes to explain himself I tremble for him. Whatever much or little we may learn about our neighbours, very few of us know anything about ourselves. Nor should Sainte-Beuve, learned and observant as he was, be numbered with those few. I may say at once, then, that I do not set a much higher value on his boasted plan, when applied to the literature of the world, than, I believe, one need do on Wordsworth's laws for writing poetry. When Wordsworth wrote beautiful poetry, as we know he continually did, he did so by flinging to the four winds of heaven what he calls his laws for metrical composition. Sainte-Beuve does pretty much the same with his critical method as one may easily perceive who knows anything of the way in which he discusses the multitude of men, women and books that crowd his highly instructive pages.

But although the French critic habitually departs broadly from the letter and even the spirit of the laws he formulated for his own guidance, I find no reason to

doubt that his method, albeit not always applicable, is within certain limits, intrinsically correct. In propitious circumstances the rules of verse laid down by Wordsworth are simply invaluable. So it is also with the canons of criticism to which I refer. When I have stated the method described by Sainte-Beuve I am certain the reader will agree with me when I affirm there are books and authors which should be weighed and measured by the scales and weights prescribed by this great French writer.

As my time and space are alike narrowly restricted I must, of necessity, refer succinctly to the boasted method of Sainte-Beuve, but I hope to be able to give in a little space enough of the spirit of the whole article to do its author sufficient justice before such of my readers as are so unfortunate as not to be acquainted with the original essay. "I have often," says Sainte-Beuve, "heard modern criticism, and mine in particular, reproached with having no theory, with being altogether historical, altogether individual. Those who treat me with the greatest amount of favour have been pleased to say that I am an excellent judge, but that I am without a code. I have a method, nevertheless, and though it may have had no pre-existence in my own mind, and may not at first have arrived at the condition of a theory, it has shaped itself with me by practice, and a long series of applications of it have only confirmed its value in my eyes." This is exceedingly precise. It justifies us in inquiring what this method is. Alas! Sainte-Beuve does not set it forth with all the exactness the foregoing sentences would lead one to anticipate. But he is, as usual, thoroughly intelligible, and so I shall endeavour briefly to explain what he designates his system. Literary production, then, according to Sainte-Beuve, is not something distinct and separable from the writer that produced it and his corporeal organization. One can taste of a work, but it is difficult if not impossible, to judge it independent-