

closures as the Siloam inscription, accidentally discovered in June, 1880, in a tunnel leading from the Kedron to the Valley of Siloam; or that of Mesha, King of Moab, found in 1868, which, after having defied the waste of time for 2,700 years, was only partially recovered in fragments from the jealous Bedouins, by whom it had been broken up, in consequence of the suspicions awakened by the intemperate rivalry of French and German consuls, and the Turkish governor, to secure possession of this precious relic of a long forgotten history.

The Abu Simbel record is another early inscription of supreme importance, graven by the leader of some Greek and Persian mercenaries of King Psammetichus, who undertook an exploration into Nubia; and halting at Abu Simbel, engraved the inscription which preserves for us the most primitive specimen of Ionic Greek, in the actual alphabetic characters in use in the seventh century before the Christian era. They are still little less perfect than when they were chiselled two hundred years before Herodotus, the father of history, employed the same characters in composing his great work. It is startling to realize the fact that we have thus in existence a literal inscription, with historical names and incidents, belonging to the half-legendary era of the Draconic code.

Our space will not admit of reference to interesting discussions bearing on the Hittite and Cuneiform writing; the Phœnician and Aramean Alphabets, or those of India. As to the Palenque inscriptions of the ruined capital of the Mayas of Yucatan, Mr. Taylor favours the idea of their being rendered in phonetic signs. In this, however, we believe he has allowed himself to be misled by evidence which has been discredited by recent investigators of Maya MSS. The work, as a whole, is replete with interest, and embodies the well digested results of long and careful research in a very comprehensive field of study.

D. W.

MONTE ROSA: THE EPIC OF AN ALP. By Starr H. Nichol. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

This poem has been praised by the critics too unreservedly. Its great beauty and freshness, its modernity of thought, its majesty of diction, and the strength which has enabled its author to triumph over the difficulties of so strange and new a subject, have blinded even watchful eyes to innumerable technical defects and evidences of careless or hasty composition. No one can read the poem without admiration, without being compelled to acknowledge genius in its author. But there is little excuse for such lameness and lack of a sense of rhythm as are displayed in the following lines, which, it must be remembered, are intended for complete blank verse lines, in iambic pentameter, of the pattern of Shakspeare's

"After life's fitful fever he sleeps well."

We gather these specimens at random, finding them on nearly every page:—

- "Whose white battalions wound the gorge"—
- "Like Medicean tombs, half-finished, twice sublime"—
- "Here mass their force the Alpine monarchs,
Kingly all, and like great kings companionless."
- "Which they who ran have read, scrawled large"—
- "Round her pallid brow; or, lifting, climb the cope"—
- "A soundless cascade, death-struck Niagara"—
- "—Is written, when but degenerate broods"—

It would be easy to multiply instances of such infelicity. The last line quoted will puzzle any readers except those who are unhampered by a prejudice for correct pronunciation. It is equally easy to quote lines remarkable for felicity, aptness and interpretive power. What can be better, in reference to the action of rains upon the bare rock-face of the mountain, than:

"The stealthy depredations of grey rain"—

Or this of the mountain brooks:

"That smoke along their course with rocket speed"—

There is exquisite music in the following extract, which at the same time contains a specimen of a line which is not blank verse, being one time-beat short:—

"The dash—the soft innumerable dash
Of the sun-waves' foamless surf, in which the stone
As gently broke as break the close-sealed buds
Of dauntless violets, when young March
Hunts pallid winter from the greening fields."

In the section entitled "The Glacier" occurs an echo of Goethe's

"Wie das Gestirn,
Ohne Hast
Aber ohne Rast"—etc.

in the line:—

"Which, like calm planets, knows nor haste nor rest."

The same section contains the following passage which proves that Mr. Nichol, in spite of his occasional artistic sins, has a capacity for delicious and skilfully woven verbal music:—

"But sunrise brings the pulse of life to it;
For rustling through its pores like wind in corn,
Millions of new-born rills begin to drip
With myriad morning-murmur musical."

The defect of this section is that too much stress is laid upon the rather obvious fact of the glacier-surface not being very well adapted for agricultural purposes. Another too frequent fault is the admission of rhyming couplets, unpleasant in blank verse. But it is easier, and more fitting, to praise the great beauties of this work than to call attention to its comparatively secondary blemishes. It is a triumph of which Mr. Nichol may well be proud to have succeeded in making true and beautiful poetry out of modern scientific facts and theories. Evolution is well sung in the following lines:—

—"And that unlettered time slipped on,
Saw tropic climes invade the polar rings,
Then polar cold lay waste the tropic marge;
Saw monster beasts emerge in ooze and air,
And run their race, and stow their bones in clay;
Saw the bright gold bedew the elder rocks,
And all the gems grow crystal in their caves;
Saw plant wax quick, and stir to moving worm,
And worm move upward reaching toward the brute;
Saw brute by habit fit himself with brain
And startle earth with wondrous progeny;
Saw all of these and still saw no true man.
For man was not, or still so rawly was,
That as a little child his thoughts were weak,
Weak and forgetful and of nothing worth;
And Nature stormed along her changeable ways
Unheeded, undescribed, the while man slept
Infolded in his germ, or with fierce brutes,
Himself but brutal, waged a pigmy war,
Unclear as they, and housed with them in caves,
Nor knew that sea retired or mountain rose."

And what a strong passage is this:—

"A wall so sheer no snow doth cleave to it;
Barely the many-fingered mosses cling;
So deep its plunge, that half a measured league
Of reeling air not brushes to its base,
Where spire-tall pines as grasses seem to wave:
And from its dizzy brink the traveller,
Swooning with fear, plucks back his hasty foot,
As if a mottled snake had stung it suddenly,
Or skulking death, in ambush 'neath the brim,
Caught at him sharply, calling loud his name."

Forcible, new and imaginative beyond question is this of the Monte Rosa herself, who

"Joins in the loud illimitable tumult,
And while the scowling rabble of low cloud,
Spits out its snowflakes to confederate winds,
Plucks in the fleecy waste to every cleft,
And craftily with shuttles of the blast
Weaves a new surface to her seamless robe."

We can find space for but one more extract, which describes in chaste and perfect verse a glacier lake:—

"Whose depths untenanted
See never minnow herding in its pools,
Nor swift-finned pike dart on the silly dace,
Nor painted trout surprise the gilded fly,
But peacefully the prisoned waters smile
Within their sea-green bowls of carven ice,
Fit goblets for great Thor and Odin great
When wandering from dim Asgard in the north
They raised the hunt amid Archaic hills;
Pellucid meres, whose baby wavelets low
Break softly on the sharp unpebbled marge,
Where grows no sedge, nor music-making rush,
No cress, nor water-loving flag, nor mint,
Nor odorous lily brave in white and gold."

MESSRS. COPP, CLARK & Co. have issued their valuable "Canadian Almanac and Repository of Useful Knowledge" for 1884. It contains "full and authentic commercial, statistical, astronomical, departmental, ecclesiastical, educational, financial, and general information"—to quote from its title page. It also contains a map of Ontario.

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