

LITERARY NOTES AND NOTICES.

*I have gathered me a posie of other men's flowers, and nothing
but the thread that binds them is mine own.*—MONTAIGNE.

9—In one of those startling effusions to which Mr. Rudyard Kipling, with unconscious humor no doubt, applies the misleading name of poems, a description is given of how a bard of the neolithic age equalized accounts with his primitive rivals, by the summary and Turkish process of taking their lives. He says :

"So I stripped them, scalp from skull, and ray
hunting-dogs fed full,
And their teeth I threaded neatly on a thong,
And I wiped my mouth and said, "It is well that
they are dead,

For I know my work was right and theirs was
wrong !

But my Totem saw the shame—from his ridge-pole
shrine he came,

And he told me in a vision of the night :

"There are nine and sixty ways of constructing
tribal lays,

And every single one of them is right."

Those delectable musings from *Primus Tempus* have their use, a not too common event with Mr. Kipling's, by the way. The assertion as to the great number of methods by which things literary may be done admits of a general application. No one who has taken the smallest account of the numerous and glaring mistakes committed by the critics, since their trade was invented, will fail to perceive the weighty moral of the stanza. It is not long since Archdeacon Farrar covered several pages of the *Forum*, with an artistic grouping of the mistakes of the critics, and he by no means exhausted the list. In this enumeration, we are told, for example, how Horace Walpole called Dante "extravagant, absurd, disgusting;" how Samuel Pepys, Esq., (he of the diary) thought Othello "a mean thing;" how an eminent contemporary described Milton's *Instauratio Magna*, as the "silliest of printed books;" and so on, through instance after instance. We know how public opinion and criticism differed as to the worth of the productions just named. Who now would dare affirm that public opinion was wrong? It is a fact that public opinion and

critical opinion seldom agree. The reason is not difficult to discover. A few of those blunders for which criticism has become so notorious, are sufficient to show that Ruskin spoke with absolute truth, when he said, "a bad critic is probably one of the most mischievous persons in the world." Long before Archdeacon Farrar is done with his lengthy arraignment of the critics great and small, we feel like crying out with the Totem of Kipling's tuneful savage :

"There are nine and sixty ways of constructing
tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right."

Literary criticism, as it is now practiced, is far too varied and extensive an affair to admit of being discussed in a few paragraphs. It is an unsleeping Briareus of many hands scrawling over newspaper, journal and magazine. Volumes are devoted to it and even libraries of volumes. For every ten who read those books of criticism, scarcely a single one peruses the works of which they treat. They drink from some other one's vessel, instead of going to the spring for themselves. Now, inasmuch as the destruction of all printed criticism would have a tendency to make readers deal with original works instead of depending upon the opinion formed by others of such books, I am certain it would be a blessing if the mass of criticism were forthwith consigned to the waters of Lethe. The duly recorded judgements of a few critics might be, and, indeed deserve to be, retained and treasured, but it will be observed that those reservations are rare when I add that they should be exclusively the mature decisions of persons who are critics in the proper sense of the term; that is to say, those who are literary educators and professors of literature, with a class which embraces the whole reading community. I could not undertake to state, without more time than I can at present devote to think, the names of those now