

than its predecessor. It includes "The Story of Iris," one of the most beautiful and pathetic romances that has ever been written. "The Poet at the Breakfast Table" is usually considered to fall rather below the other two in point of merit. Intrinsically, however, there is probably little difference. It is likely that the critics, in their estimate, forgot to allow for the fact that the striking novelty of the series had somewhat worn off before the appearance of the third volume.

Briefly, then, these three books contain a record of conversations alleged to have taken place at the table of a Boston boarding-house. A large number of characters are admirably depicted throughout the series, and their various virtues or weaknesses are commented on in the author's "asides." All kinds of topics are discussed in a lively and entertaining fashion—science, art, literature, philosophy, religion, and social manners and customs. Throughout this curiously variegated web the author has woven a delicate thread of romance.

"Romance! Was there ever a boarding-house in the world where the seemingly prosaic table had not a living fresco for its background, where you could see, if you had eyes, the smoke and fire of some upheaving sentiment, or the dreary craters of smouldering or burnt-out passions?" (The Professor.)

And so we sit down with the other boarders to an intellectual banquet—an emotional symposium; and we enjoy, as the author puts it, "a feast of reason and a regular freshet of soul."

These books sparkle and glow with the most brilliant scintillations and coruscations of wit and humor; there is a perfect display of literary pyrotechnics which dazzle and amuse the reader.

Then there are some graphic and poetic descriptions of old houses, gardens and trees. Add to all this several of the author's best poems and most humorous verses, and a faint general idea may be

obtained of the contents of these delightful volumes.

The books of the "Breakfast Table" series are regarded by the critics mainly as works of humor and sentiment. But a more permanent impression of quite another character is frequently made on the minds of those who read them carefully. They really exert a very powerful influence in the direction of liberalizing religious opinion. I am not sure that Dr. Holmes' teachings would be considered sound among the orthodox doctors of our various theological halls. But as these very doctors also proverbially differ very vigorously among themselves upon these questions, it may be that a layman's decision is called for to settle the matter. At all events we need not fear to investigate a religion whose only creed is "Our Father," and whose principal commentary is the "Sermon on the Mount." Such a religion Dr. Holmes professes and endeavors to carry into practice.

The world is wiser and more charitable now than it was, or these books (and especially "The Professor") would have been burnt long ago by the common hangman, if, indeed, their author could have happily escaped the same fate! As it is, he incurred considerable odium from a certain class at the time of their first publication. The opinions expressed therein on religious questions were undoubtedly most advanced for that time, and even now there are a large number of persons who have not overtaken them.

The influence of these books in this direction is the more beneficial and powerful on account of its indirectness. If the opinions introduced here and there throughout the series were expressed in the ordinary style and collected into one volume, with all the irrelevant matter excluded, it is quite certain that such a book would not have nearly so wide a reading as this series has received. It is safe to say that it would scarcely be read at all