

universal voice of Spain, of Italy, of Germany, awarded him pre-eminence. Of all modern English poets, he it is who has taken most hold upon the Latin mind, a circumstance perhaps largely owing to his freedom from those conventional restraints which usually fetter the 'pawky' Pegasus of British poets. In England Carlyle has headed a strong reaction against Byron as a shallow writer. 'The refrain of Carlyle's advice during the most active years of his criticism,' writes Prof. Nichol, was "Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe!" We do so, and find that the refrain of Goethe's advice in reference to Byron is:—"Nocturnâ versate manu, versate diurnâ." We may, perhaps, to some extent reconcile the conflicting authorities by allowing that Carlyle's advice was necessary to prevent that undue steeping of the mind in the superficialities of Byron's mannerism which at one time sent half the youth of England into turn-down collars and fits of despondency, while the great German desired to recommend the deep study of Byron's better works whose fresh audacity and grandeur would, he believed, prove potent aids to culture.

*Four Centuries of English Letters.* Selections from the correspondence of one hundred and fifty writers from the period of the Paston Letters to the present day. Edited and arranged by W. BAPTISTE SCOONES. New York: Harper & Brothers; Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1880.

Such a collection as this can serve a very useful purpose. We do not at present refer to that kindling of interest in our rich national collections of memoirs and correspondence which may well be caused by the perusal of these pages, although that result may, and we hope will, also follow.

But the study of this book and the three hundred and fifty-one letters it contains also lead us to grasp what we might have omitted to notice in a more extended and detailed investigation, that is to say, the great truth of the unity and continuousness of the English character. The current of life that reaches in these pages from William Paston, who wrote from the playing fields of Eton in 1478, to ask his brother for a day's holiday in London, down to Lamb or Macaulay, ever presents to us varied aspects

of the same national characteristics, so that we feel convinced that Lancastrian, Puritan, Whig, Erastian Bishop and modern Man of Letters would only need to meet as closely in the flesh as their epistles do within the cover of this book, in order that their antipathies should be forgotten and their sterling points of similarity alone remembered. We are apt to make too much of the superficial differences of manners induced by the grinding rub of the chariot wheels of the passing centuries. It is well for us now and then to recognise the fact that at bottom we are not so very different from our forefathers, and that the thoughts which fill our letters bear a kinship to those which they indited far more striking than is the external dissimilarity of circumstances, which have put a steel nib (with its point slightly retroussé) in our hands instead of the grey goose-quill with which they used to convey their ideas, squeakingly, to paper.

As a general view of English letter-writing, therefore, we must commend this book, and, to come to details, we have no fault to find with the selection it contains. Of course every student will have his especial favourites, all of which he cannot expect to find chosen. But, upon the whole, our great letter-writers are fairly represented, and it is of course an objection inseparable from the plan of the work that we are hurried away from one man's letters just as we are getting most interested in them and him. The fault we notice in the arrangement and sequence of the letters themselves was not however insuperable, and should have been avoided. We allude to the grouping of letters under their writer's name, and determining the place of each group by the date of the author's birth. Most confusing results of course follow. At page 32, Sir Francis Drake's account of the defeat of the Armada in 1588 immediately precedes a letter to Thomas Cornwell about the dissolution of the monasteries in 1535. Or we have all Donne's letters preceding Ben Jonson's; although Jonson was heart and soul an Elizabethan dramatist, and Donne (despite his one year's seniority) as certainly a writer of the school of the Stuart régime. When so few letters of each writer are published, there is little gained by keeping them together, and it would have been far better to have arranged all in order of date of writing.