

LIBRARY TABLE.

ESSAYS FROM REVIEWS. By Dr. George Stewart. Second Series. Quebec: Dawson & Co. 1893.

We cannot wonder that the publication of Mr. Dawson's most interesting Essays on the American Poets should have led to the wish that he would give some more of his literary work to the public. In response to this wish he has re-published, from various magazines, the four essays contained in the present little volume—on Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Emerson, the Thinker, Adirondack Murray, and the History of a Magazine. The magazine is a quarterly periodical which Mr. Stewart created and managed about twenty-five years ago, and the story of it has much interest, if not great encouragement for such enterprises. The article on Adirondack Murray will tell most readers a good deal about a writer concerning whom they will be glad to have more knowledge. The papers on Emerson and Tennyson are excellent. The account of Dr. Stewart's visit to the great English poet, although telling us little that is not already known, is fresh and living, and therefore welcome. These essays are a good specimen of our best Canadian literature.

SWEETHEART GIVEN.—A Welsh Idyll. By William Tirebuck. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1893.

To every man is given now and then the vision of youth—indeed, to some, retrospection becomes the chief solace of life. The innocence, the bliss, the bright and buoyant spring time of early life, with what a subtle and beguiling charm do they not now and then revisit the hackneyed toiler in his later years? sweet as the breath of a spring tide flower or as the music of a far off chime they bring to the weary one a momentary joy that scarcely seems of earth, and is indeed suggestive of heaven. In "Sweetheart Given," Mr. Tirebuck has no doubt given us a picture, an idyllic picture it is, of perhaps the brightest memory of his early boyish life. The simple pastoral incidents of the quiet life on the old Welsh farm, and the joyous and pathetic memories which were associated with it shine out from the pages of the book with the verisimilitude of life itself. It is not every day that we are again brought face to face with the tender life of our early youth—nor are we often privileged to read such pure and altogether excellent English as this author has at his command.

NATURAL SELECTION AND SPIRITUAL FREEDOM. By Joseph John Murphy. Price 6s. London: Macmillan. 1893.

These essays have, for the most part, appeared in magazines and reviews, and are in every way worthy of being thus collected and preserved. They are characterized by clearness of thought and expression, and by a very fine critical discernment of spiritual questions, and will be distinctly helpful to those who take a living interest in the religious problems which are continually emerging. The first three are devoted to a criticism of Professor Drummond's famous book, and takes exception to his mechanical conception of human action. We believe that we have already in these columns offered a similar criticism of Mr. Drummond's opinions. In his fourth chapter the author discusses in a very interesting manner two parables, or rather portions of two parables, the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the Labourers in the Vineyard. In the next essay we believe that the writer has gone too far in his criticism of the statement of Origin which Butler takes as the starting point of his Analogy. We believe that whatever is true in Mr. Murphy's remarks would have been accepted by Butler. In his sixth essay Mr. Murphy comes rather nearer Universalism than we like; but it is well that this mysterious subject should be fully discussed from every point of view. We would further direct attention to his essays on Predestination and on the Reality of Knowledge, and conclude by a cordial recommendation of the volume.

MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

art—naturalistic in being objective, and objective because impersonal.—*M. Ferdinand Brunetiere, in the "Revue Bleue."*

Why is it that so many novelists, ignorant of music, though otherwise clever, will not leave it alone, but insist on inflicting on us opinions and descriptions they would not dare to venture on in other arts? Here is a piece of clotted nonsense we have come across in Mr. Marion Crawford's "Witch of Prague." This is how that popular author describes an organ prelude (cap. 1, p. 2):—"Suddenly the heavy vibrations of a single pedal note burst from the organ upon the breathing silence, long drawn out, rich, voluminous, and imposing. Presently, upon the massive bass, great chords grew up, succeeding each other in a simple modulation, rising then with the blare of trumpets and the simultaneous crash of mixtures, fifteenth and coupled pedals, to a deafening peal, then subsiding quickly again and terminating in one long sustained common chord. Organists will please note this peculiarity. Music, especially as to its technical terms, when described in fiction—English fiction—is indeed a fearful and wonderful thing.—*Musical News.*

The following caustic remarks on Mr. de Lara's new opera are from the pen of the *Times* critic. In dealing with this work, it would be manifestly absurd to institute comparisons with the music of other dramatic composers. The melodies of "Amy Robsart" are a little less incoherent than those in Mr. de Lara's "Light of Asia"; now and then a "figure of accompaniment" is carried on through several strains, and it would seem that much of the ordinary stock-in-trade of the operatic composer has been acquired whether by unconscious assimilation or by deliberate study. From Mascagni extensive quotations have been made, not, of course, note for note, but with such palpable indebtedness that the resemblance is evident to the veriest tyro. "Romeo and Juliette" lends some of the more pleasing passages in the love music, and, by a curious coincidence, scraps of the Hungarian march, incorporated by Berlioz in "La Damnation de Faust," play an important part in the Kenilworth revels, as though to remind subscribers that one of the promised novelties of the season has had to be dropped. In this music there is neither colour nor character of any kind whatever, and the orchestration is often clumsy, and not seldom quite absurd.

The following interesting remarks on the subject of "Music and Words" we cull from the London *Musical News*: "Listening lately to the revival of 'La Fille de Madame Angot,' one could not but be struck by the conviction that no amount of genius in its representation could make or prove the music to be anything beyond charming. Here at all events was a burlesque operetta, in which the music did not go beyond the words. It brought to mind the interesting and ever open question, whether it is right that the music should be better than the words, or whether the illustration here given was the better thing. Many who have a strong feeling that music of a really high and pathetic order (say of the above kind,) is not a proper concomitant of comic opera where the words do not rise to that music, but are really only a pretty and trifling play upon the high mood which the music portrays. It is in the incapacity of the libretto-art (to put it that way) that the offence lies. Were the truly comic of comedy reached, a certain good and delightful music would be in place; but good comedy, although so often aimed at, is so rarely achieved—what happens is, that it is always and everywhere gravitating to the burlesque. Happily, the records of music present some examples to the contrary. In Mozart's 'Nozze di Figaro' the music has the exact tone that Beaumarchais's delightful comedy demands for its due illustration; the sentiments expressed, the situations, and even the play of the composer in writing his music. He has exactly caught the spirit of the play, and his genius has given us music which, though old at this day, still charms us by its grace and appropriateness. And much the same may be said of

Rossini's immortal "Barber of Seville," though perhaps here the humour is more boisterous and pronounced than in the score of Mozart. But it is genuine comic music, far removed from the burlesque type that the latter French school has—may it be said—inflicted on us. Some have maintained that it is impossible for music *per se* to have a pronounced comic tone, as apart from its association with words. But there are certainly instances to the contrary, one must be content with mentioning Mendelssohn's "Pedlar's song," and Bottom the Weaver's grotesque march, Rossini's "Largo al Factotum," and the list of conquests in "Don Giovanni," all irresistibly comic, irrespective of their words and associations. The conception and text of these true comedies is of the best, and they are properly mated to the best music; the life representation is real, and so is the music. What shall we say, however, when the music is better than the words? Surely better music does not raise worse words, but practically leaves the level of the "play" where it is. This, perhaps, is not the general view. Take Gilbert and Sullivan's operas. Many have maintained that in these examples the music is on the whole better than the words. But the supporters of these works say, "perhaps it is, but the better the music is, the more we like it." It is clear therefore that they do not touch the real issue. What we want is good comedy to fit good music. It is hardly too much to assume that the literary ability is generally so low that every attempt at good comedy produces a result that is really full of burlesque; or that (regarding Gilbert) is only extravagant and witty. Are we to take that as a true representation of comedy? There is much of Sullivan's art in connection with these works that suggests a truer comedy, rather than a mere accompaniment to an unreal or feeble play. Where you have a frivolous level of life, and its representations and amusements are similarly suggestive of burlesque, let music and words be of the same level. It may rightly be argued that in life, as it is, there is much burlesque. But in these "operettas" we have music which, being repeatedly better than what it represents, is liked all the more by the generality. That is the situation tersely expressed. You have briefly a low libretto raised by better music. Is that the best thing, all considered? If it is, it means that music is tending to raise our life and morals; that the emotion it inspires is the only refresher in a frivolous age. If this is so, it is either relegating all other things to a lower level than has hitherto been admitted as theirs, or that these things are but temporarily low, and that music is temporarily only in the ascendant. It shows how very unequal our composition is, when we cannot get words and music to fit each other except in some exceptional instance. Of late a good deal of attention has been directed to the condition of comic opera, and by "comic" is meant that portion of the opera realm in which something below the grand, heroic, or tragedy type is dealt with. It is certain that no works of this latter character hold the stage, nor does there seem any special demand for them. Manager after manager tries the experiment of giving them in London, and it seems never with success. Does not the fault lie chiefly in the librettos given to our composers to set! Never was musical scholarship, technical skill, and fancy in a more advanced condition than it is now. Rarely is a work produced without its book being immediately pounced upon; its impossibilities, the weakness of its construction, and the poor-ness of its diction all afford food for the critics. It is time for the authors of opera librettos to re-survey the position, and to make a fresh endeavor to produce fitting tales with natural situations and appropriate lines, which our composers can with better success illustrate in music.

Speech of a man's self ought to be seldom and well chosen. I knew one who was wont to say, in scorn, "He must needs be a wise man, he speaks so much of himself." There is but one case wherein a man may commend himself with good grace, and that is in commending virtue in another, especially if it be a virtue whereunto himself pretendeth.—Bacon.