

UNLITERARY PEOPLE.

"Is it not said that George Eliot was a woman?" inquired a young lady of more than average intelligence and refinement, at a social gathering the other evening. The gentleman addressed looked rather shamefaced, and said "Yes," in a low voice. Not that he was ashamed of parading his certainty over another's doubt, but it seemed to him that every board in the house was shrieking in the affirmative, and he was afraid that she might hear them, and feel hurt about it. It is strange and pathetic that a worthy member of society, a successful teacher, of irreproachable antecedents, grammatical and otherwise—in short, one of those persons who are respected by all—should, by an innocent query, touch the springs of that sort of pity which is closely allied to contempt. No other branch of ignorance can be relied upon to produce this effect of half-pitying scorn in the mind of a person who is not unliterary. Frankly expressed uncertainty with regard to well-known geographical, political, or historical facts may make no impression on the literary mind, but an inquiry as to whether Chaucer really did or did not know how to spell, sinks deep—sinks deep. Alas! it is too true that he who is doubtful of the sex of George Eliot and George Sand, and has never heard of Charles Egbert Craddock, who believes Henry James to be the son of G. P. R. James, and gets Black and Blackmore "mixed up,"—such an one is in imminent, deadly danger of unwittingly confessing that he has never moved in the best society—that very best society which, from our bookshelves, continually woos us with its myriad voices of authority and insight, of thrilling eloquence and tender beauty.

An unliterary person is one who has a confused idea of the difference between the ephemeral and the permanent in literature, between the best thoughts of the best minds and the idle imaginings of those that are feeble or impure. He reveres facts, and sees no reason why the oils with which a great picture is painted are not as valuable as the completed picture. If he hears you spoken of in general terms as a writer, he may suspect you of being at work upon an almanac, a book on horse-medicine, or a dime novel. In any case, you sink in his estimation to the rank of an impractical sort of person. He tells you that the last work of fiction in a sensational story paper is "just splendid," and your own less pronounced praise of it is set down to professional jealousy. A visit from him is one of those calamities that cannot be averted. He takes down your choicest books, glances superciliously at their contents, and tosses or bangs them upon the table. All this he can do with entire self-possession, though you are never able to view the process without an inward shudder. He reads aloud a sentence from Carlyle, and asks you what you suppose the writer is "driving at." Unwilling or unable to enter into explanations, you briefly reply that you don't know, whereupon, spinning the book disdainfully from him, your visitor doesn't believe that Carlyle knew either. He turns the leaves of "Paradise Lost" with his thumb, occasionally moistening it to facilitate an operation that fills you with horror, and says he never could see any sense in Milton anyway. He evidently thinks it would be in bad taste to criticise Shakespeare, so is content to glance over the pages, and guess that it's a "real nice book." On going away he borrows some volumes of John Stuart Mill, and returns them next day with the remark that they are first-rate. Next time you chance to meet him it may be in company with others, and he puts you to confusion by suddenly inquiring, apropos of nothing, your opinion of Aristotle, or Zola, or "Bingen on the Rhine"—some person or subject esteemed literary. Unable to deliver yourself of valuable original opinions at a moment's notice, you make a few ineffective remarks, at which your auditors, who had hitherto cherished a lofty appreciation of your critical powers, regard you with marked contempt.

There are humbler representatives of the unliterary tribe, who are less offensive; worthy folk, who generally move their heads and their lips when reading, and always mark the place where they leave off—a precautionary measure that reminds one of the fond mother, who was accustomed to kiss her numerous family all around every morning, but occasionally, being too much hurried to complete the task, she marked the one at which she left off, so as to know where to begin again. These people may be trusted in your library, for they at least respect what they do not love. Not with rash presumptuous hand, but with tender if indiscriminating remorse, do they venture to touch your idols, and you bless them unaware. They have the highest opinion of your literary ability, and believe that you receive fabulous sums for each of your published works. On this point they differ from their unliterary brother quoted above, who is very certain that you have gained nothing by them save the comparatively inexpensive luxury of seeing your name in print. Blessed souls! though they are almost certain to regard a book as valuable or not according to

the number of pictures it contains, and, indeed, to look upon reading as a task rather than a delight, still they bear continually about with them that sweet inward grace of humility without which the highest literary gift or taste lacks its most potent charm.

At first sight it would seem that the unliterary person suffers the sorest of deprivations, but the law of compensation is active, and heaven has decreed that for every susceptibility granted to mortals they must barter a portion of their slender stock of serenity. You who sit under the ministrations of an unliterary pastor, are never able without a pang to hear him declare that "all this was done for you and I; for such unthankful creatures as us. Shame on you and I that it should be so!" In a half sad, half satiric way you reveal this source of suffering to a fellow parishioner, who joins you at the church gate, and are met, not with the expected laughter or tears, but with a cold uncomprehending stare. This is bad enough, but it is not your only grief. By accident you discover that your fourteen-year-old daughter can point out with glibness and accuracy the faults of "The Ancient Mariner," but she has a very vague idea of its excellencies. She will tell you in an off-hand way that some passages are extremely weird, and others show great powers of imagination, but in her secret heart she has never thrilled and trembled before that immortal picture of desolation and despair outlined in six small words:

"Alone, alone, all all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea."

Her teacher is thorough, painstaking, and conscientious, but he has a fault; he is not in love with literature. This in its final analysis is perhaps the greatest point of difference between a literary and an unliterary person.

A. ETHELWYN WETHERALD.

A NEW SCANDAL ABOUT MISTRESS ANNE
SHAKESPEARE.

THE old scandals about Shakespeare's wife are well-known. On more or less convincing evidence, we have been constrained to believe that the great poet was ill-mated, and that Mistress Anne was so far from making his home happy, that he escaped from it as far as he could by living nearly all his life in London, while his wife and family remained in Stratford. The slight and incidental mention of her name in his will, in which she receives only the shabby bequest of a second best bed, looks as if he did not hold her in much esteem, and nothing to contradict this inference has been recorded. We may, however, assume that she held her husband's memory in honour, as, either from affection, penitence, or pride, she expressly desired to be buried by his side, where she now lies.

In spite of all the years that have gone by since she was laid in her grave, scandal still pursues this poor Mistress Anne, whose greatest fault, perhaps, was that she was unequal to the honour of being Shakespeare's wife. To-day we learn that she was a stingy housekeeper, a bad cook, and kept a miserable table. The proof is to be found in the wondrous cipher story which Bacon concealed in the plays usually attributed to Shakespeare, the clue to which has been discovered by the ingenious Mr. Ignatius Donnelly, of Minnesota, who is now engaged in unravelling the mystery, and giving instalments of it from time to time to the world. In one of these new "Ignatian Epistles" it is related that Robert Cecil, Francis Bacon's treacherous cousin, privately told Queen Elizabeth that the plays of which Shakespeare was the reputed author were full of cleverly concealed treason, and that he suspected them to have been really written by Bacon. On hearing this the Queen ordered Shakespeare's instant arrest, and commanded that if he did not at once reveal the real author he should be racked till he did so. Fortunately Bacon heard of the danger that threatened him in good time, and sent his faithful friend-servant Harry Percy, to warn Shakespeare, to fly the kingdom before the Queen's officers could find him.

"The interview between Percy and Shakespeare," writes Mr. Donnelly, "takes place at Stratford in the presence of Shakespeare's wife and daughter. It is told with the utmost detail. The whole Shakespeare family is described; his young brother Edmund, his daughter Susanna, his wife, his sister. The very supper bill of fare is given, and a very mean one it is—'dried cakes mouldie and ancient,' roast mutton far advanced in decomposition, the odour of which perfumed the room, bitter beer, and worse Bordeaux stuff. The smell of the meal took away the dandy Percy's appetite."

This "mean supper" must certainly convince every reader that Shakespeare was a vulgar fellow who had never been used to better fare. Such a *ménage* reflects as much discredit on him as on his wife. In the same passage Percy calls Shakespeare "the foul mouthedst rascal in England," and says that "transformed in new silk and feathers, he bore his blushing honours which Bacon had put upon him through all the disreputable houses in London."

From this we plainly see that the cipher story justifies the description which Mr. Donnelly gave of Shakespeare's character and career, in a lecture delivered before the Boston Classical Society a year or so ago. He told his audience that the man who had so long been the supposed author of "Shakespeare's plays" was the untutored son of a butcher, himself apprenticed to a butcher; the veritable cowboy and outlaw of Warwick-