

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

I CHIDE NOT AT THE SEASONS.

I CHIDE not at the seasons ; for if Spring
With backward look refuses to be fair,
My love even more than April makes me sing,
And bears May blossom in the bleak March air.
Should summer fail its tryst, or June delay
To wreath my porch with roses red and pale,
Her breath is sweeter than the new-mown hay,
Her touch more clinging than the woodbine's trail.
Let Autumn like a spendthrift waste the year,
And reap no harvest save the fallen leaves,
My love still ripeneth, though she grows not sere,
And smiles enthroned on my piled-up sheaves.
And, last, when miser Winter docks the days,
She warms my hearth and keeps my hopes ablaze.

—Alfred Austin.

WHAT IS NEEDED IN FICTION.

VERY great skill and art may be expended in drawing people exactly like our tormented and bewildered selves, with experience like our own ; but this art will give us neither joy nor any rest. A person who is yet young enough to feel the distresses of the heart, and who is actually feeling them, will hardly be able to read a novel in which these regrets and disasters are too minutely studied, in which he sees his own tortured face as in a glass. He will want something very different, as Carlyle felt the need of Marryat's novels in the literary misfortune of his life. The course of things at present makes for disorder and unhappiness. Nobody but the stormy petrels of our race can enjoy this. We are driven, perforce, to the shores of old or new romance, and are compelled to care less for the feelings and emotions and thoughts of fictitious characters, than merely for a sequence of exciting events. We are concerned, in fiction, with what happens, if it be forcibly described, rather than with what is suffered or thought by the fictitious persons of the tale. Happily, the world is well supplied with books in which plenty of unusual events are made to happen with sufficient frequency and lack of verisimilitude. From the *Odyssey* to the *Arabian Nights*, from those to *Don Quixote*, to Sir Walter Scott, to Dumas, to Mr. Stevenson, to the *Mystery of the Hansom Cab*, if you please, or to Mr. Barnes of *New York*, there be records enough of deeds that never were done.—*New Princeton Review*.

VERSE-WRITING.

"IN our own immediate times verse-writing has become something more of the nature of a disease than of an honour. A species of rhymophobia pervades the cultivated world. Like the bite of the bitten victim, fashionable forms of construction extend. There is contagion in them. The strain for effect has become virulent. We feel, perforce, a sympathy with the half-playful but wholly earnest revolt of Dr. Holmes against the epidemic character of our debilitated verse. That overbalanced struggle for perfection of manner which stifles the spirit ; the renaissance of obsolete forms which vitiates the modernness of sympathy so necessary to healthful work ; the endless tricking and decking of little thoughts ; the apparent unconsciousness of whether one's thought be large or little, or whether it be worth thinking at all, or if worth thinking, whether worth thinking in poetry—these qualities characterize so much of the verse of our day that one may be pardoned for becoming more aware of them than of some other and better traits which undoubtedly accompany them. It may be said that there is a certain loss of the sense of proportion in our poetic power. By this I mean that higher proportion which is to proportion of form as the soul is to the human body. We do not build loftily. We do not live to last. We do not always know why we build at all. The result is a lack of architecture. But we have plenty of verse-carpentering ; done as neatly as the service of Adam Bede, who thought the world was to be saved by conscientious day's labour. But the paper cap of the workman looks over the whole job."—*The Century*.

NEW SWEDISH RAPID-FIRING GUN.

At the Copenhagen Exhibition is shown the first specimen of a new Swedish rapid-firing gun, designed by Mr. Harald Thronsen, and manufactured at the large and celebrated establishment of Finspongs Styckebruk, Sweden. This new gun attracts a considerable amount of attention. The Finspong gun is capable of firing eighteen shots per minute with one man, while with two men it has a capacity of one shot every other second, or thirty shots per minute. The gun exhibited at Copenhagen has a calibre of forty-seven millimetres ; its entire length is about fifty-two calibres, and the distance from the base of the projectile to the mouth of the barrel is forty calibres. There are five different projectiles shown at Copenhagen, viz., solid shot, steel shell, chilled point cast iron shell, common shell, and shrapnell with sixty-four small projectiles ; the weight is the same for them all, viz., about 3.3 pounds (or 1.5 kilogramme). The muzzle velocity is 2,141 feet (657 metres) per second with a charge of 750 grammes of Swedish field artillery powder ; the maximum pressure in the barrel has been 2,300 atmospheres. The mechanism is both simple and strong. The Finspong gun rests in a pivot carriage, so that it can be worked in all directions. It has a shoulder piece about the size of the butt end of an ordinary rifle, against which the man who works it places his right shoulder, and with the right hand he holds the trigger, or, if he works the gun by himself, works the lever that moves the eccentric, while the left hand rests on another lever, which, when pulled towards the man, acts as a brake, and

fixes the gun in any position and in all directions, so that several shots can be fired against a certain point without it being necessary to repeat the aiming for each shot. The gun shown at Copenhagen has a screen of plate iron, but otherwise the gun is able to produce all-round fire. The material is wrought Martin steel, manufactured on the establishment. Finspong has both iron mines, furnaces and steel works of its own, besides vast forests and ample water power. Besides the orders for guns, which Finspong steadily receives from the Swedish Government, they have orders in hand at present for about seventy guns for the Danish Government.—*Engineering*.

LESLIE STEPHEN ON NOVELS.

A LARGE audience assembled at Toynbee Hall on Saturday evening to hear Mr. Leslie Stephen's paper on 'Walter Scott'—a paper made all the more interesting by the frequent autobiographical notes scattered through it. Before proceeding to speak of Scott in particular, Mr. Stephen made some remarks on novels in general. All men of sense, he said, love novelists. Even Darwin soothed his nerves after his scientific labour with the most industrious reading of all sorts of novels. Nothing gives repose more effectually than straying into the world of fiction ; but what is it that amuses us in fiction ? Some people like reading and others psalm-singing, some a card-table and others the theatre. Others, again, prefer a quiet book by the fireside ; and among the novel-readers some enjoy imaginary bloodshed, some have a taste for wild adventures which aim at the display of human nature and social foibles, some like quiet pictures of commonplace life, very few choose the romance uncontaminated by realism. 'My own taste,' Mr. Stephen continued, 'when I retire into the world of novels, is to find myself in a pleasant atmosphere, and to feel that I am conversing in the highest sense of the word with courteous-minded people, who do not drop their good manners even in their day dreams, with people who are not too anxious to preach to me, and who know a scoundrel when they see one. I like my author to see life truly, and therefore kindly—to see it truly, for I cannot be really interested in a fiction purposing to deal with realities, unless it shows me a clear insight into men and women, unless I can feel that the observer of manners is grasping realities firmly, and that he knows what are the passions and ideas, the fears and hopes, by which human beings are really stirred. Good fiction is not simply lying, but realism seen through the medium of a perfect imagination. It will show that the really valuable elements in the world are the tender social affections, and the good, honest, simple, natural feelings which bind men together and give the true value to life. Men of genius make us think better of the race and open our eyes to their good qualities. I like my novelist to be both truthful and generous, and to have that characteristic which we term thorough manliness, and therefore I love Sir Walter Scott.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

LEGALITY OF TRADE COMBINATIONS.

JUDGMENT was given recently by Lord Chief Justice Coleridge in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice (England) in an important case, in which the legality of trade combinations was somewhat considered. The action (*Mogul Steamship Company, Limited, vs. McGregor et al.*) was brought to recover damages from a number of steamship companies and others for an alleged conspiracy to boycott the plaintiffs, and to prevent, by means of bribery and intimidation, certain merchants and others in China from sending goods to Europe by the plaintiffs' steamships. The plaintiffs were a company of shipowners trading, or desirous of trading, between Australia and England, taking China by the way. They were also desirous of sharing in the carrying of the tea harvest of the late spring and early summer months, the places for loading which were at Shanghai, the mouth of the Yang-tse-kyang river, and Hankow, a place about six hundred miles up the stream of that great river. The defendants were a number of steamship companies and private persons trading mostly to China direct, and being desirous of getting this trade into their own hands, and of preventing the lowering of rates, they entered into what they called a conference, and offered a rebate of five per cent. to shippers by conference vessels, but such rebate was not to be paid to shippers who shipped on any vessels but those belonging to the conference. The conference was commenced in 1884, and during that year the plaintiffs were admitted to share in its benefits. They were excluded in 1885, but they refused to acquiesce in the exclusion. It was for the loss which the plaintiffs say they suffered by the exclusion from, and the action of, the conference that the action was brought. The plaintiffs set up that the defendants entered into an unlawful combination against them, and bribed, coerced and induced shippers not to ship with them. Lord Coleridge gave judgment for the defendants. He said that the defendants were traders with enormous sums of money embarked in their adventures, and they had a right to push their lawful trade by every lawful means, and they had the right to endeavour by all lawful means to keep that trade in their own hands. They had also the right to offer inducements to customers to deal with them rather than with their rivals. They might, if they liked, offer inducements to customers to deal exclusively with them by giving them notice that only exclusive customers would have these exceptional advantages. It was a bargain which persons in the position of the defendants had a right to make, and those who were parties to the bargain must take or leave it as a whole. Of coercion and bribery, of this he could see no evidence in the sense in which these were used legally. As to the contention that this combination was unlawful because it was a restraint of trade, it seemed to him that it was no more restraint of trade than for two village tailors to give five per cent. off their Christmas bills on condition of their customers dealing with them and them alone. Restraint of trade in the legal sense had nothing to do with the case in question.—*Bradstreet's*.