

and yet it is hard to believe it. Still the fact is, we suppose, but a new illustration of the law of perspective. No man, it has been said, can be a hero to his valet. On somewhat the same principle it must be, we fancy, that the man who, when in a lofty position, with power and place and armed millions of soldiers at his disposal, loomed as an intellectual and moral giant, forced to descend and take his place in the ranks, dwindles to a very commonplace personage. But who could have believed, a few years ago, that it was possible for Prince Bismarck, the power behind the German throne, to be deposed and another put in his place, and yet the affairs of the Empire and of the world go on very much as before. It is even possible that his successor, of whom the world knew next to nothing, until the young Emperor, who certainly displayed sagacity in the choice, called him to the place nearest the throne, may prove a better statesman than his predecessor—for peaceful times at least. More liberal-minded it was easy to be. It is quite possible that the outbreak of war would lead to the speedy reinstatement of the "Man of Iron." Meanwhile one can but wish, for the sake of his former greatness that he would cease to dispel the illusions created by his long and brilliant career, and no longer suffer himself to be betrayed into spiteful criticisms and complainings unworthy of the dignity of the high office from which he so reluctantly descended.

SPAIN has usually been regarded as one of the slow-going nations, whose movements are not of sufficient importance to the world at large to merit very much attention from journalists. Recent events seem to indicate that a change in this respect may come in the near future. With the first trial of universal suffrage, which will take place at the general elections next fall, the ancient Kingdom will enter upon a new career. Meanwhile the political leaders and parties are in a state of intense activity, as is shown by the recent hasty change of ministry. Both Sagasta and Canovas are regarded as statesmen of exceptional ability and integrity, and the fact that the latter has taken the place of the former does not necessarily bode evil to the cause of reform and progress. These two leaders have been alternately at the head of the Government several times during the past few years, and Canovas may no doubt again say, as he is reported to have said on a previous accession to office, "We do not come to interrupt or change, but we simply intend to continue the history of Spain." As was to be expected in the case of a country just awaking anew to a consciousness of life and power, the political questions under debate are many and serious. The Liberals, themselves, are divided on the question of protection. A new Republican party has been formed, having among its aims the abolition of the hereditary Senate, reduction of the power of the Executive in the Chamber of Deputies, reform in the Civil Service and in legal procedure, and a means of amending the Constitution. Both the great leaders will now keep their eyes fixed upon the coming election and shape their policies accordingly. As it was under Sagasta's premiership that the universal suffrage bill was passed, it would be strange if in the first exercise of their franchise the new electors should not return to power the party to which they are indebted for the right of suffrage.

LESSING'S "NATHAN THE WISE."

THE position in German literature occupied by Lessing, whether in regard to the time of his appearing, his extraordinary powers and attainments, his beautiful character, or the scope and effect of his work, is one whose importance is little known and appreciated outside of Germany. Born early in the 18th century, he entered upon his work under every discouragement of time and circumstances. Religiously, intellectually, politically, his country was barely alive. The dull torpor in which Germany had been left by the thirty years' war still lay heavy upon her. Princely absolutism, dull, grinding, petty; priestly or ministerly orthodoxy, dull, grinding, petty; these held sway over a people broken in spirit and exhausted well-nigh to death. It was for Lessing to arouse the forces of the Reformation from the torpor of a hundred years, and to set them again on their path leading toward the intellectual deliverance of mankind.

Looking around him on the religious state of Christendom, Lessing's sweet and earnest spirit must have suffered inconceivably. Heretics were still regularly burned alive in Spain before the king and court. Protestants were being, or had been, dragooned out of France. Ireland was under the hideous penal code. Scotland was just about burning her last witch; New England had hung hers not very long before. Everywhere, some cruel and stupid barbarity was being perpetuated by the Christian churches, one and all.

Lessing's writings on behalf of common sense and common humanity in religion have never been surpassed, probably never equalled in one rare and necessary feature. No trace of hate or scorn appears in them, but everywhere "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love." "Sweet reasonableness," to borrow one of Matthew Arnold's happiest phrases, pervades them throughout. Nowhere is it more conspicuous than in his last and greatest work, "Nathan the Wise."

The scene of this drama is Jerusalem, the time immediately after the third crusade. The chief characters are: Nathan, a wealthy Jewish merchant of Jerusalem; Saladin, the magnanimous Sultan of Egypt, then occupying Jerusalem; a young Knight Templar; the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem; a friar; Saladin's sister, Sittah; and Nathan's adopted daughter, Recha. Had the author's design been to rebuke the pretension of Christianity to the position of the one and only true religion, neither time, place nor personages could have been better chosen. Christianity was then, perhaps, at its worst and Islam at its best. The civilization alike of Bagdad and Cordova contrasted brightly with the barbarous condition of the great centres of Christendom. The *filioque* controversy, after lasting for centuries, had just culminated in the massacre of all the Latin Christians in Constantinople, the Papal Legate being beheaded, and his head tied to the tail of a dog and dragged through the streets. The personages, at least the three principal ones, are real figures, "Nathan" being fictitious only as to time and place. He is, in fact, the author's friend, Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish philosopher, translated to Jerusalem and to the end of the 12th century, and he needs little or no embellishing to make the beautiful character of "Nathan." Nor could the poet have added aught to the claims of Saladin upon our wondering admiration. Brave, magnanimous, "truest friend and noblest foe," merciful in a merciless age, tolerant when tolerance was almost unknown, great alike in war and peace, the Moslem hero and saint must forever stand in bright contrast to his Christian contemporaries and adversaries. The chief Christian character of the drama, the Patriarch Athanasius is, except in name, the very man who then occupied that position in Jerusalem. The young Templar is a fine fellow, and the friar has been a soldier in his youth, and still cherishes under his cowl a good share of soldier sense and manhood.

The first act opens with the return of Nathan and his caravan from one of his distant expeditions to the East. Recha narrates how, during his absence, his house has been burned, and how she has been saved, as she thinks, by an angel, but, in reality, by the brave young Templar, who immediately takes himself off and keeps out of the way. His long, white, fluttering mantle has been transformed by her imagination into a pair of angel wings. Very delightful is the simple, believing earnestness with which she tells her story, and equally so, and not devoid of humour, is the tender way in which Nathan deprecates the resort to supernatural agency in cases where natural means can be supposed. It turns out that the young Templar had been taken prisoner, along with others, in the act of seizing one of the Sultan's fortresses in violation of the truce, and that his life had been spared by Saladin, owing to his strong resemblance to a long-lost brother. Nathan uses this fact to press his argument:—

See, now, a forehead vaulted thus, or thus,
A nose bowed one way rather than another,
Eyebrows with straighter or with sharper curve,
A line, a mole, a wrinkle, a mere nothing
I the countenance of an European savage,
And thou art saved, in Asia, from the fire!
Ask ye for signs and wonders after that?
What need of calling angels into play?

In the next scene the young Templar is approached by the friar, on behalf of the patriarch, for the purpose of inducing him to forget the claims of honour and gratitude by leading a party to surprise and seize the generous Saladin, who goes about very slenderly guarded, and carry him as a prisoner, in violation of the truce, to the quarters of the King of France. This the young Knight indignantly refuses to do, and, when told that the Sultan's clemency was due solely to his accidental resemblance to the lost Assad, he exclaims:—

Ah, Saladin!
A single feature in thy brother's likeness,
And nothing in my soul to answer to it?
Or what does correspond, shall I suppress
To please a patriarch? So thou dost not cheat us,
Nature, nor thou so contradict thyself,
Kind God of all! Go, brother; prithee leave me,
Do not awake mine anger.

The second scene of the third act gives the substance of the teaching of "Nathan the Wise." The Sultan sends for Nathan, who repairs to the palace thinking he is wanted in connection with Saladin's constantly recurring financial troubles. But, after a little conversation, he is undeceived. The Sultan says:—

Since thou art
A man so wise, then tell me now what faith,
Or what religion, if thou wilt, is best.

I am a Jew.

Nathan:

Saladin:

And I a Mussulman.
The Christian stands between us. Of these three
Religions, only one is real and true,
A man like thee remains not where his birth
Hath chanced to cast him; or, if he remain there,
Dost so from insight, choice, or grounds of preference,
Share then with me your insight, let me hear
The grounds of preference, which I have wanted
The leisure to examine. . . . How you start,
And weigh me with your eye. It well may be
I'm the first sultan to whom this caprice,
Methinks not quite unworthy of a sultan,

Hath yet occurred. Speak, I charge you, freely.
Or do you, to collect your thoughts, require
Some moments of delay? Be it as you will.
I'll soon return.

Nathan:

Strange! How is this? What wills the Sultan of me?
I came prepared with gold—he asks for truth!
As if truth, too, were gold, a coin disused,
That goes by weight. Indeed, 'tis some such thing;
But a new coin, known by the stamp at once,
To be flung down and told upon the counter,
That it is not.

When the Sultan returns, Nathan craves permission to relate a tale; and, receiving a gracious acquiescence, he delivers the famous Parable of the Three Rings. Long ago, when first I read "Nathan," the beauty of this so captivated me that I sat down there and then, and turned it into English blank verse. I had seen no translation at that time, and I am still vain enough to prefer my own to any I have seen so far. Here it is:—

Nathan:

In gray old days there dwelt a man i' the East,
Who, from a hand beloved, received a ring
Of price inestimable. Opal 'twas,
Shedding soft hues an hundred in the light,
Whose rainbow radiance owned a mystic power
To make who wore it pleasant in the sight
Of God and man—if worn in that belief.
What marvel, then, if this wise man o' the East
Ne'er put it from his finger, and resolved
It should not leave his house; and, dying, gave
The ring to him of all his sons best loved,
And bade him, in his turn, to do likewise;
That so the worthiest, without regard
Of birth, might be the lord of all his house.
Thou understandest, Sultan?

Saladin:

Yea, say on.

Nathan:

At length the ring, passing from son to son,
Came to a sire of three brave boys, who all
Alike obeyed and honoured him, while he
Might never choose but love them all alike.
One day the eldest, straight in turn the next,
And then the third, as each one with the sire
Might chance to be alone, possessed his heart,
The other twain unseen. By turns the sire
Promised the ring to each, and when his end
Drew nigh at last, he knew not what to do.
What did he, then? He called a cunning workman,
And bade him make two others, like the first,
And spare nor gold nor pains to make them like.
Th' artificer succeeds, nor may the sire
Know his own ring again. Well pleased, he calls
His children one by one, and, with his blessing,
Gives each his ring, and dies. Thou mark'st me, Sultan?

Saladin:

I mark thee, Nathan, and I pray thee bring
Thy story to an end.

Nathan:

The end is near.
Scarce was the father laid in sepulchre,
When each, in virtue of his ring, would be
The prince of all his house. Search, question, rage,
Amazement follow; but the one true ring
No more might be discerned—even as now
The one true faith!

Saladin:

And is thy tale an answer
To my great question?

Nathan:

Saladin, I dare not
Say which ring is the true, seeing the father
Commanded them so made that none might e'er
Pronounce between them.

Saladin:

Nathan, play not with me!
Meseems the three great faiths I'd choose between
Are easy known apart, aye, down to raiment,
Meat, drink and gesture.

Nathan:

Yea, but to penetrate
Unto their sources is another matter.
For each alike doth rest upon some legend
Spoken or writ, and all these several legends
Hang upon faith. And who shall say whose faith
Is best bestowed? To each it must be that
Of his own blood and kin, who from his birth
Have proved their constant love, have ne'er deceived him.
And shall not I cleave to my father's faith
As thou to thine? Shall I demand that thou
Forsake thy father's paths to walk in mine?
Or that the Christian turn him from his Christ?

Saladin (aside):

By the Eternal, the wise man speaks truth,
And I am silent.

Nathan:

Turn we to our rings.
Each son, perplexed, in turn aware to the judge
He took immediate from his father's hand
His ring, and each swore truly. Each, moreover,
Did claim the sire's behest that he should rule;
And, deeming such a father never played
Him false, accused his brethren.

Saladin:

And the judge?

Nathan:

The judge spake thus: Except ye bring your father
Before me straightway, lo, I send you hence.
What think ye? Am I here to answer riddles?
Or will ye wait until the true ring speak?
Yet stay; men say this wondrous gem hath power
To make that man beloved who, happy, wears it,
Of God and man; and this must be the proof,
For this the false ones do not. Which of you
Do other twain love best? Ye're silent; each
Loves but himself, and ye are all deceived
Deceivers, none of all your rings the true;
I fear 'twas lost, and, to conceal the loss,
Your sire bestowed the three. Now, if ye'll hear
My counsel not, then go. But hear my counsel.
Let each believe his ring to be the true,
For each remembereth the hand that gave it.
Perchance the loving father might not brook
The rule of one sole ring o'er all his house,
And thus his sons may know his equal love.
Let each endeavour, then, to prove his ring