

*Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, by GEORGE ELIOT. New York : Harper Brothers ; Toronto : James Campbell & Son.

Grave indeed is the task of the critic whose duty it is to appraise the works of George Eliot. When the book to be noticed is so important, the public expects the review itself to contain something out of the common ; and, as a rule, the expectation is wofully disappointed. In fact George Eliot has arrived at that pitch, not of *absolute* greatness (for she attained that long since), but of *recognised* greatness where all glory and honour are forestalled and lightly taken for granted. To us, petty men of the press, who scrawl her praises upon her margin spaces, appreciation seems so easy and natural that some of our race are almost tempted to think their applauding bespeaks them kindred spirits ; but a little more, and they could have written 'Middelmarch' or 'Daniel Deronda' themselves. To this is attributable that flood of reviews, presumptuously undating George Eliot with praise, or more venturously daring to compare her earlier with her more recent works to the disadvantage of the latter,—a species of criticism which enables the writer to show at once the requisite amount of admiration for the great novelist and his superiority to her foibles.

It is hard to tell which of these types is the more nauseous, but certainly they have been both followed in most of the critiques that have appeared on 'Theophrastus Such.'

The indiscriminate praiser may be set down as a human parrot, repeating what he has heard others say, *because* others say it, not from any internal conviction of its truth. A number of years have passed since George Eliot first laid the result of her researches into the depths of human nature before the public, and, as is always the case with the leaders of thought, her views have become, to a considerable extent, familiarised among most ordinarily intelligent readers. But for this slow process of infiltration we may well doubt if some of her votaries who now prate about her 'keen and subtle insight into character' would have had wit enough to know it was either keen or subtle. Appreciation of this class is at best but the sharpness imparted to a dull knife by quick friction against one with a better edge ; the

blade owes all to its contact with the finer steel, which passes on to its real work unmoved by the thought that its blunter comrade is watching its movements critically. We suppose all minds that leave their impress on the age they live in have to endure this indiscriminate admiration. Its real worth may be easily tested. These oracles of the Book Column are every whit as loud in their praise of the far commoner spirits, who take their form and pressure from their generation instead of leaving their mark upon it. An unimaginative Trollope is to these men as big a Triton among the minnows, as George Eliot herself. He is popular, so is she ; he has the choice for voluminousness and general fecundity. These writers of profuse panegyrics on both authors would be puzzled if asked to foretell the relative position of Eliot and Trollope fifty or a hundred years hence. Both seem to them to be admirable. But they have not the grace to discern the inward difference between them. George Eliot would sketch you the character of a bore in a single chapter, leaving the whole man limned distinctly on your mind's eye, and opening up to you new vistas of meaning in the subject and strange misgivings as to the hidden strain of boredom that has lurked hitherto unsuspected, in your own heart. Trollope will paint you the like character, and will take three volumes of more than Pre-Raphaelite detail to do it in. *His* bore will button-hole you, and prose on and on with even flow of very life-like words. You will hear his daily and hourly talk, his endless repetitions and senseless tales till you are sick to death of him. As you throw down the third volume with an intense feeling of relief, you see that Trollope's writing is to Eliot's what a photograph is to a picture, or a travelling panorama of Greece is to Childe Harold. It is not too much to say that there are studies of character in 'Theophrastus Such' each of which a photographic novelist would have watered down into a shelf-ful of volumes.

If these sayers of smooth things without discrimination are offensive, as they must be, to our author, what must she think of those others who, appealing from 'Philip drunk to Philip sober,' affect to admire the later work, but only to find in that admiration ground for regretting earlier productions.

These are the men who complain that Theophrastus does not appear to have