

LONDON LETTER.

NOTES BY THE WAY : AT LITTLE GIDDING.

IN how many of Ruskin's musical essays does he not speak, and admirably, on the use and value of books! Perhaps he tells us too often what we have heard before. It may be he introduces us afresh to truisms we met years ago at school, then in their plain dress hardly noticed, now tricked out by him in brocade gowns and sparkling fringes, very brilliant small figures, but truisms for all that. And perhaps (do you recollect Heine says of the Literary Woman, that she writes with one eye on her manuscript and the other on a particular Him?) it would be better if he allowed his thoughts occasionally to stray from those young girls for whose instruction he fashions these melodious arrangements of words, and for whose gentle smiles of approval he seems so much to care. Still his company is never to be despised, and indeed I think, in "Sesame and Lilies," for instance, it is to be courted. For there are honest paragraphs in plenty there, sufficiently free from "evil fragments—ill-done, redundant, affected work," and there is less of that distressful repetition of the Pharisee's thanksgiving (with which many of our critic's pages are disfigured) and there is more of that neglected virtue, Humility.

I wonder how, in a temperate mood, Ruskin would have criticised "John Inglesant," that book of which once men spoke continually, till one was weary of the sound of its name, and which nobody mentions now at all, and scarce anybody reads. There are the books of the hour, says Ruskin, and the books for all time: those that should be read as one reads a newspaper, and those that must be shrined in niches like priceless statues. Did "John Inglesant" deserve the immense amount of applause it gained, applause which included the grave compliments of that statesman who earlier discovered "Ellen Middleton," and later "Robert Elsmere"; or does the *magnum opus* of Mr. Shorthouse merit the neglect into which it has fallen? There was no justice I think in the first extraordinary success: there is no justice in the present neglect. Forget the misleading reviews then, and remember only the pleasure (for it was a pleasure, though a mild one) with which one read of Inglesant's adventures in England and Italy, and for the sake of Mary Colet come with me to Little Gidding this many-coloured autumn afternoon to see the scene, so little altered, of Inglesant's first love.

Some miles from a station, forgotten, unvisited by tourists, stands the chapel of the Ferrars among the woods and meadows of Huntingdon, with its sluggish streams. If you except the church described by Lamb in one of his letters, there is never another place of worship to be found so lonely in all the length and breadth of Great Britain. It is a quarter of a mile off the high road, in the centre of a green field. No neighbours' houses are near beyond the cottage in which the great keys are kept; no village; no life, except the dignified circling of the rooks; no sound but their cry one to another. The author of "The Temple" has been here before us, you remember, on a visit to Nicholas Ferrar: and Charles the Martyr drew rein at this wicket more than once; Isaac Watson must have come to gather materials for his charming notice of the Protestant nunnery in his life of good George Herbert. Wait only in the graveyard before we unlock the door. The woods have remained enchanted since the cruel civil wars, and and if we could see—ah! if we could only see—we should find them peopled still, I think, with those mournful Shades who once upon a time lived here their sad colourless lives—lives bounded on all sides by the grey church walls. But our eyes are not strong yet, and the fire-coloured foliage screens, mysterious paths leading away and away, screens to the figures of those young girls in their friar's habits, those saint-like lads, old before their time, those mourning widows, who passed their spring and summer, autumn and winter, wholly untouched by the sounds of the great world beyond the quiet country meadows, dreaming only of the land among the stars. Close by the porch is the stone that lies over Nicholas Ferrar, dead in 1639, before the worst of the King's troubles began. There must have been some sort of special arrangement that he should be buried at the door of the church, for the monument is in an awkward position standing across the narrow gravel path. You cannot fail to find it, though no name is cut, for the memory of "Saint" Nicholas is as fresh about Little Gidding as ever, and the tomb which stray pilgrims have visited these last 200 years is perfectly well known. Sometimes a young gentleman from Oxford University will find his way here, and, yearning after a Higher Life, will on returning to his cottage set his hours in the order which Ferrar followed, and arrange his cramped oratory (for there are private oratories: witness the humorous "Life of a Prig: by One") on the pattern of Ferrar's chapel. But generally, says my guide, of the very, very few who come, ladies form the principal part, who quote Shorthouse at the wicket, and Herbert among the graves in the grass.

Inside, the church has some sweet and interesting features. The oaken stalls in the small nave are arranged sideways like seats in a choir, so that Inglesant from his niche cut in the stone wall of the chancel had an uninterrupted view of Mary Colet in her grey gown. Then there is the finest brass font, with a crown-like cover, and a beautifully wrought foot; and you can see the original eagle from which John Ferrar daily read the lessons, and here and there you come to the little brass plates which pathetically record the death of various members of the family from Gidding Hall, and you find the name occasion-

ally spelt as it is pronounced—Farrar. The altar is decked with autumn flowers, which must be, one would think, the work of spirits, for we met no one, and saw no sign of any human being along the lanes. And there are prayer books lying about, so service must still be held here, though probably less frequently and not of so ornate and fervid a description as in the time of the nuns. But who comes now? Are the birds the only congregation? as Lamb suggested at Hollington. Does the Bull toll the Bell, as in the nursery rhyme, and when Cock Robin is treacherously done to death, is he given Christian burial by his fellows in this lonely little chapel in the woods?

The stained-glass window was destroyed at the time when the Puritans surrounded the Hall and wrecked it; but lately, when the church was put in order and repaired, a new window was set up, altogether different to the one noticed by Inglesant. Beyond that everything must be pretty much as it was when the Ferrars took their last look at the beloved sanctuary from which they were driven by the narrow, hard Parliament-party of the district. One wonders what became of the members of that large family when they were turned into a world of which they had no practical knowledge. Mary Colet, they tell you, died in Paris of a fever; but of the rest of those black-robed brothers and sisters there is no record.

Mary of Scots came by here one afternoon on her way to Fotheringay Castle, which lies ten miles off as the crow flies. There is no stone left of her prison, for James pulled it down when he came to the throne, giving away all the oak linings of the rooms, and the fittings of the great hall where she was executed, and the stalls in the private chapel, and the grand carved-oak staircase up which she went so wearily. These things are ornaments now in many an inn and rambling country house, and are preserved with the greatest care. In Fotheringay village is the old Tudor inn, very picturesque, with an inner yard, where the headman from London slept the night before the execution. They show you his little room above the grey archway. The Parish Church, which Mary never attended, boasts odd-shaped monuments in honour of two Dukes of York and their wives—monuments raised a hundred years after their death by their pious descendant, Queen Elizabeth, who was down in these parts so that she might test with her own eyes the actual strength of the castle in which her cousin Mary was to be confined. Before spending her money on the tombs Elizabeth was desirous of seeing if her ancestors were really there or not. So she had the coffins dug up; and found the local gossips had told her true. And she had one of the coffins—that of Dame Cecily of York—opened for further confirmation, and found round that body's neck, on a thin gold chain, a Pardon from Rome, written on a tiny parchment scroll, slipped into a case, and so beautifully written that every word could be read with ease, and was copied by the county antiquarian who was on the spot.

At Little Gidding my autumn wanderings end. The restful, peaceful country life becomes something of a weariness after a time—after it has ceased to be required as a medicine—and a true-born Cockney cannot be counted forever among the lakes. To-morrow will see me far from the "plaguey monotonous green of the trees," examining Barnum's Mermaid with a critical eye, or applauding the stage clouds and sunshine of "The Dead Heart."

WALTER POWELL.

UNDER THE WEATHER.

It does not really matter much, I ween,
How lower the heav'ns or what may be their hue,
Glad eyes will give the grayest skies a sheen
And tearful eyes will dim the brightest blue.

Give me a heart at rest and I'll defy
The darkest sky that e'er November lent,
The bounding of my pulse to moan
Or to abate my measureless content.

Life's path is *not* illumined from without,
Though that indeed may do its little part,
Small worth the skies that compass us about
As long as there is sunshine in the heart.

ESPERANCE.

THE POSITION OF THE PULPIT.

ARCHDEACON FARRAR, in the November *Forum*, has stated, with the frankness natural to him, the claims, or some of the claims, of the modern pulpit. His statements are in favour of positive truth, candour, and simplicity everywhere on the part of the preacher, and he thinks, rightly, that the humblest orator may yet find an unlimited sphere of activity and abundant opportunities of martyrdom in setting his face, as a flint, against oppression and falsehood, robbery and wrong, without invading, as it must be admitted too many incompetent pastors do invade, the domains of science and of biblical criticism.

That Archdeacon Farrar's paper is characterized by common sense as well as a genial and affectionate Christian warmth goes without saying. Yet, highly important as such preaching he advocates is, highly necessary and beneficial and manly, men and women of to-day require something beyond it. That Life and Death and Deity and Judgment are the great platitudes of our existence, and cannot be held up to us in relentless images too often,

that morality, and morality, and still morality, is, and must be, the proper, if not the only, theme of the preacher: that by the side of the tremendous realities of sin and consequence and responsibility and will, everything else falls away—is all true.

Nevertheless, men are so constituted that the mere dogmatic presentation of these threadbare facts, Sunday after Sunday, palls upon them till finally they lose their value. Their importance fades. The pulpit degenerates into a mere machine, warranted to run for twenty minutes, as in the Anglican Church, or for an hour and a quarter, as among the sects. In the one case, the pulpit stupefies, in the other, it excites. But rarely in either case does it interest. Now, why should not the pulpit be capable of interesting intelligent, well-read men and women, students, mechanics, workers, toilers of all kinds—those who go forth to their labour daily until the evening, and to whom the Sunday services might be made interesting, even as the Sunday rest is helpful and recreative?

In the first place, let the fact be conceded that the pulpit does not so interest and attract either the working masses or the instructed and cultivated classes as it should. The ordinance of preaching, which might, if properly and intelligently, as well as spiritually, conducted, become the sacrament of preaching, is not understood, not respected as it should be. It is entered upon by the veriest tyro at speaking and novice in knowledge of the world, and one great evil is the fact that every ordained clergyman is expected to write and read sermons whether he has ability for composition and declamation or not. A law unto himself is even the newly-fledged curate, yet it is supposed that the most enlightened congregation will listen to him with toleration, if not delight. But under such a régime as this, what mental progress can be made, nay, what spiritual progress? Are we, in truth, so constituted that while the spirit is being fed, the mind can occupy itself with something else, the body meanwhile existing in a third medium self-opposed to the other two? That we are so constituted is the pity of it, and it should be just in this dilemma that religion hand-in-hand with sense and intellect, should interpose its strongest forces. The preacher's opportunity is tremendous. So is his responsibility. He has, week after week, what other men, thinkers, poets, philosophers, reformers, would give their lives to have, only once. Yet, in face of this opportunity, this responsibility, the average preacher does more to alienate the average congregation than, to do him justice, he ever faintly realizes.

To this statement it has always been easy for the Church to make sufficient answer. The Church has no business with the State. It has no business with matters secular. It has no business with the world intellectual, the world artistic, the world of work. This is the tradition. Is it also the truth? Is it also wisdom? The question is as old as any query we can name, relative to the religious life. It has never been settled, probably it never will be. Occasionally it is revived, discussed, ventilated, only to be dropped, relegated, dismissed. There would appear to be little or no improvement in our churches. The department of the sermon is one in which the interference of the layman is not wanted, and, to tell the truth, laymen seldom feel inclined to interfere. There is still, in these latter days, much reverence and respect entertained among thinking people for the clergy—a body of men whose faithfulness to duty, cheeriness, hospitality, sincerity and good humour invite admiration from all. Many a layman, who will uphold in the vestry certain points of ritual or doctrine contrary to the teachings of his spiritual pastor and master with firmness and conscientiousness, will shrink from ever expressing any derogatory opinion of a sermon. The divinity that hedges even ordinary incumbents about precludes anything like serious discussion of these weekly homilies, some of which, however, are calculated to send the layman home in a frame of mind which only the emphatic utterances of a Drummond can adequately depict. He—the layman—a busy man all the week, working in a shop or in an office from half-past eight or nine to six o'clock every day, with hardly time for meals, certainly no time for self-improvement or culture, if we except a few hours on Saturday and an occasional half-hour in the evenings—how he would welcome on the Sunday morning a sermon which should challenge his wasted faculties, kindle his imagination, arouse his tepid emotions, and bring home to him some of the beauty, the order, the symmetry, the purity, the grandeur of the natural and intellectual world as well as of the spiritual. A sense—deep, awful, intense—of sin and his own frail nature, a sense of his own moral responsibility, a conviction of his inherited and original character, prone to fall at any moment—all this is necessary; and he should receive, by all means, this all-important impression, since, by the side of the dread reality of Sin, everything else counts as naught. But should he receive nothing else? Is there, truly, no balm in Gilead? If he ask, in his ignorance and in his hurry, for bread, must he only receive a stone? And if, instead of these presentations of sin and heredity and consequence and wrong, he be met only by antiquated and ponderous inferences, built upon isolated texts of doubtful meaning, vain theological pretensions and so-called infallibilities of rite and doctrine, who is to blame if the once familiar pew sees him less than of old and he finally becomes a backslider, and "it is well known that the recovery of the backslider is one of the hardest problems in spiritual work. To re-invigorate an old organ seems more difficult and hopeless than to develop a new one; and the backslider's