

"Why do you print no book reviews?" I asked the editor of a leading journal recently.

"People don't care about them, and it interferes with advertising," was his truly Philistinish response. And the first reason must have a certain amount of truth in it; for if it were not so, public spirit would never tolerate the withholding of such matter for the contemptible—in this connection—consideration of "advertising." Our French compatriots have not this spirit. But they have their Frechette and their Garneau.

A SPIRIT of depreciation of such faint stirrings of literary life as we have amongst us at present has often been remarked in Canadians, a tendency to nip forth-putting buds by contemptuous comparison with the full blown production of other lands, where conditions are more favourable to literary efflorescence. This is a distinctly colonial trait; and in our character as colonists we find the root of all our sins of omission in letters. "In the political life of a colony," writes one of us in the *New York Critic*, "there is nothing to fire the imagination, nothing to arouse enthusiasm, nothing to appeal to national pride." Our enforced political humility is the distinguishing characteristic of every phase of our national life. We are ignored, and we ignore ourselves. A nation's development is like a plant's, unattractive under ground. So long as Canada remains in political obscurity, content to thrive only at the roots, so long will the leaves and blossoms of art and literature be scanty and stunted products of our national energy. We are swayed by no patriotic sentiment that might unite our diverse provincial interests in the common cause of our country. Our politics are a game of grab. At stated intervals our school children sing with great gusto, "The Maple Leaf Forever!" but before reaching man's estate, they discover that it is only the provincial variety of maple leaf vegetation that they may reasonably be expected to toast. Even civil bloodshed in Canada has no dignity, but takes the form of inter-provincial squabbling. A national literature cannot be looked for as an outcome of anything less than a complete national existence.

Of course we have done something since we received our present imperfect autonomy in 1867. We have our historians, our essayists, and our chirping poets. And in due time, we are told, if we have but faith and patience, Canadian literature will shine as a star in the firmament. Meanwhile, however, we are uncomfortably reminded of that ancient and undisputed truism, "Faith without works is dead."

SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.

### BALDWIN.\*

THE "views and aspirations" upon which this really remarkable book is constructed are with regard to "The Responsibilities of Unbelief," "The Consolations of Belief," "Honour and Evolution," "Novels," "The Value of the Ideal," "Doubts and Pessimism,"—a range certainly extensive enough for the boldest essayist in the realm of social philosophy. The book takes its title from its chief character. Baldwin is a person whose conclusions are formed unalterably, apparently, upon every subject, with the author's full consent and approval; for while the remaining burden of each dialogue is borne by different characters, Baldwin appears in every one, and always with the most final and most forcible argument. Vernon Lee devotes an introductory chapter to Baldwin's personality, half critical, half laudatory, with a flavour of gentle compassionate self-ridicule that gives one the shrewd suspicion that she is talking of her own, that Baldwin is but Vernon Lee in a masculine masquerade. The result of what are vaguely indicated as Baldwin's severe psychical experiences makes him an agnostic-humanitarian, an anti-vivisectionist, a critic of all schools of fiction, an idealist, and an optimist in so far as he is not a pessimist.

Notwithstanding the indisputable logic of his views, and the evident stamp of the author's approval which they bear, we get a little tired of Baldwin. He is rather unpleasantly aggressive, and one resents his constant patronage and suppressed amusement at the mooting of ideas which the centuries have not yet disproven, with half a disposition to distrust somewhat the easy security with which his convictions ride.

The all-prevailing characteristic of "Baldwin" is its extreme modernness. It is modern in subject, modern in treatment, modern in atmosphere. Especially does this characteristic show itself in the exclusion from all part in the debate of any hypothesis or conclusion of yesterday. One might fancy that Vernon Lee and her conversationalists approached the topics that engage their attention in the attitude of discoverers, so completely do they ignore all postulates of the past in discussing them. The book is to-day's monument to the ideas of to-day, and it bears no decipher-

able confession of having been chipped out of a block as old as the pyramids.

Another extremely modern feature of the book is its forced æstheticism. Every dialogue transpires in the midst of scenes so improbably appropriate, the "light effect" even shifting sometimes, with the spiritual progress of the talkers, darkening down weirdly with a single strip of sullen, yellow light across the horizon, or brightening into a moist rift in the lowering weather, as to give one the involuntary idea that the scenes were painted first and the people are merely talking up to them. Equally modern is Vernon Lee's habit of searching for extraordinary modes of speech, of antagonism upon the least pretext, and of endlessly dwelling upon the same theme with the most infinitesimal intellectual variations. Her people, too, are of the phantasmal popular kind, impalpable, illusory, like "Olivia," a "tall, slender figure in a white, vague dress, her pale face and pale, blonde hair looking diaphanous, almost transparent, in the bluish moonlight, as if she were herself but the embodiment of one of these shifting moods, herself a mere momentary apparition." They are not people, these of Vernon Lee's; they are ghost-like conceptions with remarkable intellectual attributes. With the exception of Baldwin, who talks so much that one unconsciously invests him with a pair of lungs and a physical organisation to correspond, the various personalities are no thicker than the paper they are printed on. The weird and peculiar landscapes through which they invariably walk while they discourse, may be partly responsible for this. The conversation is never by any chance carried on indoors. One is frequently possessed of an irreverential desire for a roast beef episode to rest the carnal sole of one's foot upon throughout the somewhat lengthy flight from cover to cover, but one soars perforce to the end. And the desire brings with it its own rebuke for the lack of sympathy with the lofty, intellectual aims of the book which dictated it.

Having said all this disparagingly of "Baldwin," the number and importance of the things that remain to be said is astonishing. The defects which we have specified might be reasonably expected to accompany weak work, but Vernon Lee's writing would stand alone in any hall of philosophy. Her reasoning is keen and subtle, her divination wonderful, her tolerance, being a woman, most wonderful of all. Her scholarship is deep and broad and serviceable. She takes rather too much pains with her ideas, but the result is that there is no doubt about her meaning. And her thought, while it has the defects of modernness, has also its virtues. It is vital in every part, and full of a vivid individuality. We would not dispossess her of even her æsthetic weather-phases, she seems, oddly enough, to draw such inspiration from them.

SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.

### MUSIC.

#### HAMILTON.

A year ago our favourite 13th Batt. Band was engaged to go to St. Louis this week with St. Bernard Commandery, Knights Templars of Chicago. When some patriotic Canadians, resident in Chicago, learned that Canada's best band was to be in Chicago, they arranged for two concerts in Central Music Hall on the afternoon and evening of Saturday week last. The concerts were largely attended, and the audiences were delighted, but the Chicago press showed a jealousy that was amusing. The average American does not care much for a band that is not supplied with plenty of brass, especially cornets. He likes to hear the "tune" blaring out high above everything else. The 13th band is properly balanced, the wood wind, as is not often the case with American bands, being unusually strong and brilliant; consequently it was amusing though rather saddening to read in one Chicago journal the criticism that either the brass of the 13th band lacked tone, or the band was not properly balanced.

The Hamilton Philharmonic Society has begun the rehearsal of Villiers Stanford's recent oratorio—"The Three Holy Children"—under Mr. J. E. P. Aldous, who is to be Mr. Torrington's assistant this season. There was a very good attendance of choristers, but the financial prospects of the Society are not very bright. The work chosen is unknown, but requires little intellectual effort to comprehend it, and is of the order of musical composition which may be designated as being, for the most part, pleasing, and it will no doubt meet with the approval of the general public. Whether it will hold the attention of choristers and musicians is more doubtful.

Mr. Aldous has announced the abandonment of his proposed scheme for a series of orchestral performances by the Orchestral Club, of which he was last season the conductor, owing to lack of the financial support which he deemed it necessary to secure before beginning work this season. This is much to be regretted both by musicians and citizens.

Mrs. Harrison, for several years solo soprano of Centenary Methodist Church here, is leaving the city and has resigned her position. It is a good opening for a competent soprano.—C. Major.

MATERIALISM is the auxiliary doctrine of tyranny, whether of the one or of the masses.—Amiel.

\* Baldwin: being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations. By Vernon Lee. Boston: Roberts Brothers.