

BOOKS

POETS THE INTERPRETERS OF THEIR AGE.

The notion that poets are a mooning, impractical lot, is a queer contradiction of the real fact. There have been numberless mooning versifiers who may for a time have been taken for poets; but the real poet is a man every day in the year. True, the real poet is a seer, and as such is ahead of his day in seeing truth. True, that in stating the larger truth as he sees it he may appear to little souls to be a mere dreamer. But the very fact that he sees ahead enables him all the more truly to understand and interpret the relations of his own time both to the past and to the future.

In the literatures of the past—all that are known to us—the names that stand out as the best interpreters of their age are poets. To study these is to learn the intellectual and moral history of the world. Each of them has a burden to deliver, and their greatness and their value to us—let us remember in our reading—depends not upon this or that fine, oft-quoted passage, but upon our grasping the thought as a whole, the substance of the burden which each has to deliver.

This is the reason why books of extracts and compilations of "best literature" are usually so inadequate. The value of any great production lies in the underlying thought that is worked out in the whole, and this cannot often be got by taking any number of pieces less than the whole. There are whole dramas, for example, which are still incomplete, though they may have reached the conventional length. Faust, to take a definite instance, is quite incomplete as we see it on the stage, and as we generally read it. Goethe recognized this, and gave us the second part. The Greeks, as we know, frequently required three successive plays to work out the complete action; just as Wagner has shown, in our day, with the greatest of his music-dramas.

To go a step further in this thought, just as each production of one of these supreme poets is a complete whole wherein is worked out the poet's idea of some problem, so the whole body of the poet's work, when taken together, will disclose his attitude, as a whole, towards the problems of life as he saw them in his day.

This is just what we want with these great masters, and a book which holds our attention to this, that is, to the real value—what the man really thought and how he looked at life—such a book, we say, which holds our attention to, and helps us to grasp, the main issue of the poet's work, deserves our warmest welcome. Such a book is Anna Swanwick's "Poets the Interpreters of Their Age" (George Bell & Sons, London and New York, \$1.50).

Miss Swanwick, who is known to many as a gifted translator, has taken in this book the few greatest poets of the litera-

tures of the world, and has endeavored to show us how they interpreted the time in which they lived. She has taken, for example, from Greece: Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes and Plato (who, she claims, was a true poet); from Roman literature: Plautus, Ennius, Lucullus, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace, Lucan, Persius; from Italian literature, Dante, Petrarch, Aristo and Tasso, and so on.

It must be acknowledged that, considering a task so great and so varied, she has succeeded admirably, and no one will read her book without a grateful feeling that his knowledge of literature and its meaning has been increased.

As an example of her method, let us take this extract from her appreciation of Robert Burns: "It was Burns," she says, "himself a son of toil, who, through the medium of his verse, brought home to the hearts of his contemporaries the great truth that all the capacities and powers inherent in human nature are the heritage alike of high and low, of rich and poor, and that our primary passions and affections, our common sufferings and our common joys, irrespective of external circumstances, constitute the poet's highest theme. As recognizing the great principle of equality, Burns may be justly regarded as one of the earliest poets of democracy."

Or take this of Shelley. Doubtless to many her admirable account of the important contribution of this poet to social thought and of his thorough understanding of his times, will be a revelation. "In a selfish and reactionary age," she says, "he cherished unswerving faith in the ultimate triumph of freedom, justice, truth and love, and with a prophet's fervor proclaimed the future reign of righteousness and peace."

Without other instances, these may suffice to give some idea of her effort to sum up the essential value of a poet's work. And yet the book is not one of dry summaries. It is tonic; it whets the reader's appetite for reading or rereading the works of the masters of whom she writes. And here let it be said that one who wishes to study any of these great masters need not be deterred by ignorance of the language in which he wrote. Something, of course, will be missed from the delight of art and style; but for grasping and appreciating the essential thought and spirit of the writer, it is mere pedantry to hold that published translations do not suffice. There are, indeed, translations of most of the great classics which, like some of the translations of the author of this book, may be said themselves to have become classics.

J. H. DILLARD.

BOOKS RECEIVED.

—"Republics versus Woman." Mrs. Woolsey. New York: The Grafton Press. To be reviewed.

—"The Monarch Billionaire." By Morrison I. Swift, author of "Imperialism and Liberty," "Is it Right to Rob Robbers?" etc., etc. New York: J. S. Oglivie Pub-

lishing Co., 57 Rose street. To be reviewed.

—"The Great Apostasy of the Twentieth Century." Rev. Dr. T. S. Bacon, Buckeystown, Md.

PERIODICALS.

Samuel E. Moffet's judicious and interesting appreciation of Mark Twain, in the September Pilgrim, will appeal to all admirers of the great American humorist, whether they like the democracy that is the life of his humor or not.

The July number of the Edinburgh Review has a long and learned article on English Deer Parks, with many details about the Deer family and how they are hunted. It seems that there are now in England about 400 parks with deer in them. The largest is over 4,000 acres, six are over 2,000 acres, and a large number over 1,000 acres. The King and the Duke of Devonshire have four parks each. Fifteen other persons have more than one. Thirty-odd millions have none—not even a cabbage patch! J. H. D.

Mrs. Eliza Stowe Twitchell, in the Nebraska Independent of August 13, replies in excellent spirit to certain questionings of Mr. J. S. Paton, in a previous number of the same periodical, about the single tax. As to his difficulty about "capital," in addition to the citations given, the new book by Lewis H. Berens, "Toward the Light," will doubtless interest Mr. Paton and others, in its discussion of that unhappy, ill-used and much-abused term. In this number of the Independent Mr. John S. Crosby also has a brief contribution on the single tax, dealing with its effect on wages. J. H. D.

Under the heading "Common Sense," Mr Leggett has for some time been contributing to the San Francisco Star a series of thoughtful and pithy essays on social problems. In a recent article, speaking of mistaken acts of philanthropy, he says: "The only true philanthropy is that which earnestly and intelligently seeks to conform our institutions to the demands of justice and righteousness, and to bring them into harmony with our increased knowledge." Strange to say, this ideal of true philanthropy is almost as little known in our midst as are the contents of the sacred books of Tibet. J. H. D.

No reader, especially if he is a citizen of a city, can afford to miss an article in McClure's for August entitled "Col. Lumpkin's Campaign," by John McAuley Palmer, with illustrations by Dan Beard. Many will guess who it is that Col. Lumpkin's general features resemble in real life, but no matter who he is, the colonel gives us practical instruction about the Westport Consolidated Traction company which each of us can translate into his own Westport. The story is told in the plainest possible terms, and it will be recognized as true, even to the conclusion, where we read that "the chief asset of these corporations is the stupidity of the public." J. H. D.

In an interview with Mr. James S. Zachary, a prominent citizen of New Orleans, the Picaune, of that city, recently gave the substance of an interesting conversation which this gentleman had with President Diaz. Among the subjects discussed was the desirability of extending land ownership among the peons. "The President is reported as saying: 'Yes, it is true, and that question will be gradually worked out satisfactorily, but the system of taxation would have to be changed, and in the course of time the question will be solved without trouble.' It would be interesting to know what changes in the system of taxation the President had in mind." J. H. D.

The Outlook of August 29, in an excellent editorial on Lord Salisbury, speaks of the "purity, privacy and beauty" of his married life. It is in this word privacy that we find one of the Statesman's highest distinctions. He utterly despised and regretted the increased loudness of modern society and the petty devices for popularity and notoriety. In the latter half of his life, as the writer says, his words were "markedly unjingoish and unbellicose." He was certainly not enthusiastic over the Boer war. "In that," says the Outlook,