

The publication of early letters of men, who have been eminent, and made their mark in the world, is generally looked forward to with interest. Nor will Stanley's home letters, written from his school at Rugby, disappoint the reader. They are simple, earnest, and unaffected out-pourings. They give a life-like description of his school experiences, and will go home to the hearts of many parents. His aversion to games, which he constantly endeavoured to overcome, was insuperable. His short stature and slight frame were against him. Yet, notwithstanding these defects, and his shyness and reserve, his moral and intellectual qualities procured him the respect of his school-fellows—much to their credit—and appears to have safe-guarded him, even in his early school-days, from anything approaching to bullying and ill-treatment.

Of course, his companions sometimes poked fun at his defects, which he is by no means ashamed of recording. "Oh," said one of them on a speech-day, when Stanley had to deliver a speech, "Stanley must have a stool to stand on, and a wheelbarrow to wheel away the prize."

In curious contrast with Stanley was his younger brother Charlie, who was also at Rugby, and who only alludes, in his letters home, to school work, in order to say that he has got no prize, but rejoices greatly in describing a wild beast show, giving a full account of the dress of the monkeys.

Arthur Stanley had a reverence for his great headmaster, Dr. Arnold (whose life he afterwards wrote), amounting almost to idolatry. The religious convictions of Stanley's whole life must, to a great extent, be attributed to that earnest teacher. Whatever may have been, in some people's eyes, Stanley's dogmatic errors, they were, undoubtedly, all owing to his hatred of exclusiveness and narrowness of views, to his preference of moral excellence to all outward forms and restricted views of religion, and to his earnest desire that no good man should, if possible, be excluded from the pale of the Christian church.

He was ever ready to recognize whatever was best in any earnest thinker, and, though most decidedly Anti-Puseyite, he was by no means blind to the merits of that party, and even blamed Dr. Arnold for the bitter words used by him about the Puseyites. He greatly admired the late Dr. Norman M'Leod of the Scotch Church, and said, indeed, that he knew no one like him in the English Church, and would gladly, if it had been in his power, have made him a bishop in England.

Stanley, no doubt, gave great offence to both the extreme parties in the Church; but, on the other hand, he enlisted the sympathies of the great number of those who, having religion at heart, yet could not subscribe to the whole of the 39 Articles, the Athanasian Creed, and diverse difficult dogmas.

Stanley's appointment to the Deanery of Westminster took place in 1863. It was given to him by Lord Palmerston. Congratulations, of course, poured in from numerous quarters. His life-long and, perhaps, greatest friend, Professor Jowett, who has just passed away, objected to the appointment, "for a very slight

addition (he wrote) to possible influence in London, you give up the eminent success which you have had at Oxford"; and he even thought "that if it were properly represented to the Queen, neither she, or any other true friend of your's could wish you to accept the Deanery of Westminster."

We cannot think, however, that if he had never emerged from Oxford, his powers for good would have been so great or so lasting.

Let us hope, that in time to come, his errors in dogma, if they were errors, will be forgotten; and that his influence for good, in moderating the bigotry and intolerance and exclusiveness, which still, to so great an extent, prevail in the English Church may long continue.

"ASHTOREL AND OTHER POEMS." *

ONE finds in Mr. W. E. Brockbank's new book a couplet to the following effect:—

"A man must be a man to work,
A fool can criticise."

Therefore, while endorsing the sentiment, it is not surprising that some of those who presume to sit in judgment upon their fellow-men, find that "their strength is to sit" "still," very still, indeed, and prefer to do it behind the protecting screen of anonymity, whence, in a cowardly security, they can deliver their views on contemporary literature, according to the light that is in them!

But faint illumination is necessary to discover the manifold charms of these recently published poems, and if one, who has studied them line by line, and traced their inspiration to its rightful source, should venture to regret that two of Mr. Brockbank's numbers have found their way into print, it is only because the rest are too admirable to be suitably associated with anything less wholly meritorious.

The author's reputation does not, however, depend on whatsoever verdict is passed upon examples like his "London Town" and "The Last Waltz of a Madman"; and to judge his work by the weakest link in its chain, is as manifestly silly as to assert that in this, his maiden effort, he is incapable of any weaknesses at all.

In "Ashtorel," the first fruits of this writer's pen, the sweetness of his singing, from the dedicatory inscription to the little volume's close, provides ample indemnification for any want of vigour that is obvious here and there within its pages.

Mr. Brockbank's few shortcomings are but the faults of youth, inevitable while the bit between his teeth is unrestrained by the curb of experience, for one may assume, from the morbid tendency of a couple of poems, respectively entitled "The Teacher" and "The Tarn," that their author has not yet attained the time of life when the delights of gruesomeness begin to pall!

His troubles, like the realization of his "dream," are in the distance still, and the gentle pessimism and melancholy that ripple along the tenour of his way, are more suggestive of a young man's discontent with certain well-established aspects of life (at

* "The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, D.D., late Dean of Westminster," by Rowland E. Prothero, M.A., with the co-operation and sanction of the Very Rev. G. G. Bradley, D.D., Dean of Westminster. In two volumes, with portraits and illustrations. John Murray.

* "Ashtorel and other Poems." By William Edward Brockbank. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Limited.

previous page

next page