

Comparative Value of Current Literature of 69 England and America

In the past we have looked to Europe and especially to England for our best literary productions but we believe the time is soon coming when we need look no farther than the boundaries of our own country for the most talented writers of the world.

Although America's literary career comprises over a century little of value was written until during the last fifty years when the standard has been steadily advancing. A comparison of the leading current writers of the two countries may surprise some who have not made a study of the subject by showing that while America has been progressing so rapidly in other directions she has not neglected her literature.

If we take as our first comparison the magazines of the two countries we find very little difference as quite clearly demonstrated by the publication of the same magazine in New York and London at the same time. The principal difference is that our magazines have a greater abundance of short stories, but this is easily explained when we know that in that line of literary work American authors are the acknowledged leaders. An Englishman says that in beauty of engravings in excellence of paper and print and in their general attractive appearance the American magazines are in

advance of theirs.

In England the scientific writings are better than ours for at the present time the American scientists are engaged mostly in research. There are three great English scientists Huxley, Tyndall, and Wallace for whom we have no equals. Among those not so prominent are Von Muller, C. B. Clarke, S. W. Johnson, and others.

America's most noteworthy ones are Dana, Lea Conte, Winchell, Cope, Reuss, Marsh Prescott, Chandler, Wentworth, Robt Lynch Garner and Dr. W. S. Woodhead.

Herbert Spencer is a great English sociologist with whom we have no one to compete. These lines as admitting of ^{but} little exercise of literary talent we will pass with but a hasty glance.

Poetry and fiction as giving to the imagination a wider range, to the expression a greater elegance, and a better opportunity for pathos and humor afford the truest field for the comparison of literary merits and it is chiefly upon these that we will fix our attention.

The list of English poets is headed by Ruskin who upon May 8th was appointed laureate. He has written a few poems but is better known by his prose works which only lack the rhythm of poetry, the beauty of description, depth of imagination and delicacy of touch of the true poet being plainly visible. Swinburne, William Watson, William Morris and Jean Ingelow were all candid

ates for laureate. Swinburne is Englands greatest poet but by his avowed hostility to the aristocracy lost all chance of appointment. William Watson's latest poem is, "The Eloping Angels". It is the story of two angels who descend from Heaven and take up their abode upon earth. William Morris and Jean Ingelow are known throughout both countries for their many beautiful poems. Sir Edwin Arnold is best known by his "Light of Asia" but has written several others of value. Of the poems of Rawnsley we have "The Ballad of Cleopatra", "Sister Rose Gertaude" and others all of which are good. The strong poetic mind of Alfred Austin is shown in his "Prince Lucifer" and "The Tower of Babel". Frederick Tennyson, brother of Alfred the great poet, has an altogether different style from his brother. He is rather inclined to be scientific and although not nearly so good as his brother is much above mediocrity. In America we have many poets, but few who stand out distinctly from the rest. The line of great American poets ended with Whittier. Our best living poet Holmes reveals two phases of his character in "Old Ironsides" and "The Last Leaf" but he also has another, the humorous, in which he has equal excellence. Some one has said, "He has a portion of every gift belonging to a true poet. Steadman and Stoddard are two other of our best poets. The judgment of men of letters has bestowed upon the latter that which does not always follow

common reputation, - the promise of fame. Among others most worthy of mention we find Thomas Bailey Aldrich the author of "The Sister's Tragedy". The poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox abounds in sweetness as coming directly from the soul. Louise Chandler Moulton has written many short poems. James Whitcomb Riley writes for both old and young and is very successful in each line. There are few children who are not acquainted with his "Raggy Man". Miles I'Anson in his "Visions of Misery Hill" and "Final Rebellion" shows the strong mind and ready voice of a real poet. Others are J. T. Crowbridge Mrs. Landridge, Mrs. Deland, Hutchinson, and Rose Terry Cooke.

A writer who has some theory to advance, some phenomena to explain, a history to write or a story to tell almost invariably does it through the medium of fiction. Many appreciate the fact that more novels than any other kind of literature are read and the would be author usually devotes himself to this branch of literature helping to increase the number of poor novels.

The sparkling golden goblet from which the English quaff their best fiction is in the hands of Robt. Louis Stevenson. Walter Besant's many novels deal mostly with psychological fiction. He contrasts the clear-headed man of the world with the benevolent

theorist with justice to both. Another very imaginative writer is William Black. He is also a very prolific writer, his best work being "The Princess of Thule".

N.E. Norris and Grant Allen are both worthy of mention. Among lady novelists are Mrs. Cliphaut, Ada Cambridge and Rosa N. Carey, all very pleasing writers.

Turning now to the American novelists we have as our greatest Henry James, Marion F. Crawford and Mr. Howells. Mr. James latest novel, "The Real Thing" is well named. His style is modest, richly tinted with the curious and he hides well his plot until he is himself ready to unfold it. Marion F. Crawford is an American although he spends most of his time in other countries. His style is simple, yet glowing and interesting to all by its sparkle of imagination. His travels give him many subjects of which he takes advantage. Mr. Howells it is said has written the best and the worst American novel. His best work, the principal actors of which are Italians, is very good. Lew Wallace is best known by his "Ben Hur" in which he opens a new field of literature. Others have been quick to follow but none with such success.

The historical novels of Jane A. Austen have brought us into closer communication with our Plymouth grandfathers. Her works are instructive as well as entertaining.

A London critic in speaking of another of our New England writers says, "Miss Wilkins is another example of the superiority of the average American popular writer over the average popular writer of our own country." Mrs A. L. Whitney has written several books for girls, the heroines of which, by their example, have helped others to live truer and better lives. Of the southern writers Annie Rivas Miss Murfree and Octave Phant are among the best. Miss Rivas is equalled by her contemporaries by Blackmore alone. Miss Murfree writes under the nom de plume Charles Egbert Craddock. The discovery of her identity caused a greater sensation in literary circles than that of any other woman since George Eliot. Her works, while they resemble George Eliot's, lack their morbid tendency. Among the more humorous writers we find Joel Chandler Harris with whom we have become acquainted through "Uncle Remus" in whom he shows such power of character painting. Bret Harte in his description of rough camp life might be called a "Dickens with a difference." He compresses into a few lines the story of a life and makes his pathos deeper by its repression. Frank Stockton has, until the last few years, written only short stories but has commenced writing novels showing that his literary talent is not confined to one line. Another writer of short stories is J. T. Knowbridge whom we know by his connection with the "Youth's Companion."

Some well known authors of children's books are Frances Hodgson Burnett, author of Little Lord Fauntleroy, and Mary Mapes Dodge.

The opinion which the English hold as to our novelists is shown by the remark of one as found in a leading magazine. He says, "No one I venture would offer to transatlantic readers the slop and twaddle that fills five-sixths of our own novels and novellettes." It is felt across the waters that a published story must have point about it and in addition must be well told.

If then we acknowledge the writings of English scientists, sociologists, and poets as superior to those of our own country we must also admit that American magazines and novels are at least equal to those of the mother-country. This they have already acknowledged. When we consider the many political strifes against which the literary element has had to contend and the almost marvelous success it has attained may we not predict for it a brighter and a more glorious future?

America is fast building up a literature of her own of which she may some day have as much reason to be proud as she now is of her national independence.