

and slashing at an old red coat which belonged to another costume, and borrowing Myles-na-Coppaleen's breeches, and how he played the part with great success, notwithstanding, was amusing, but it did not point the moral that the costume does not matter. If Mr. Boucicault had played the part of the Shaughraun with perfect success in the first old coat that came to hand, the argument would be a strong one; but he had to play it in a red coat, and so it is no argument at all.

When the "old actor" talked as the "old dramatist," he was supremely entertaining; he told charming stories of actors whom we have all seen, but shall see no more; also of some who are the favourites of the present time; and he illustrated in a slight, but exquisitely comic way, the manner of the "grand old" school. [It was noticeable that, in alluding to the famous actors of the past, he did not mention Garrick.] There were frequent flashes in his address of that indescribable humour which makes of Mr. Boucicault's acting a thing apart, a thing which one sometimes thinks it is impossible for any but Irish people to take in thoroughly—to "feel in their bones," as Dickens says of the violoncello,—so completely is it racy of the soil that bears such varied products as *Arrah na Pogue* and *The O'Dodd*.

BIOGRAPHY.

AMID the shifting interest which makes a library so different a place to different readers, one department, we presume, will always keep its predominance. The "Biblia-abiblia" which, for all but the most omnivorous, make up a large proportion of those creamy folios, russet, red-labelled regiments, or heterogeneous contemporary publications, in their crude red and brown cloth;—will include very few biographies. Under whatever name—memoirs, letters, journals, or reminiscences—the books that aim at revealing an individual character to the world, will always number most readers. Their pre-eminence is not, indeed, undisputed. We have known misanthropes who declare themselves to have more than enough of the company of their fellow-men and fellow-women in actual life, and if they must meet them in literature, prefer to have them thrown into masses, so that any further investigation may be repaid by the sense of merit inseparable from the study of history. But these are remarkable specimens of humanity. For most people, the taste for biography is almost the same thing as the taste for reading. To accompany an individual life through its varying phases of blossom, fruit-bearing, and decay, sitting in one's quiet arm-chair; to pass with the boy to school, with the youth to college, to mark the gradual growth of his fame, his early disappointments, his gradual recognition; to share in his friendships, sympathise with his aims, speculate on the causes of his success or of its limits; and then listen to his last words, and join the company of mourners round his death-bed,—this is to taste some of the pleasures alike of friendship and of fame, with absolutely none of the disadvantages of either. We know a great man, but we have not intruded upon his time; we have not approached him with unreasonable demand or unworthy flattery, nor have we earned his attention by any laborious exertions on our part; we have had his best, and expended nothing of our own in order to gain it. There is something soothing, too, in following out, on a small scale, the different seasons of life. To pass from the flush of hope and the pride of first achievement, through the often disappointing stage of active maturity to the autumn of falling friends and failing powers, and to the yet deeper pathos of the brief winter of repose,—Nature meanwhile recording on a small arc of her dial, the progress our own life has made to that same goal, showing us a skeleton tracery of dark boughs where autumn's gold and amber tempted us from the opening page, or setting the legend to an inverted music, and introducing us to our hero's brilliant career under black skies and driving winds, while we carry out the volume to read of his death-bed among the bloom and scent of spring flowers,—this is a mental excursion, helpful in many obvious and some unexpected ways. Some calming influence all must have felt from the reflected interests of a large life, mirrored on this small fragment of their own; the lesson, trite as it may seem, of the comparative importance of what is exceptional by the side of the supreme value of its common elements, comes home with undimmed freshness, to the mind of one who reviews it by the light of a completed career. We feel our own heart-beats, as it were, set to the rhythm of a larger measure, we have

quitted the limits of our own individual incompleteness and explored a wide domain; yet, as we return, the conviction is borne in upon us,—“The things we shared are more than the things that divided us.” “When you are my age, my dear,” said Sir Walter Scott to his daughter Anne, who had called something vulgar not in his opinion deserving the stigma, “you will thank God that nothing that is much worth having is not common;” and his life preached the lesson more eloquently than the touching words. The appanage of genius, when it is largest, seems a small thing, beside the inheritance of humanity.

We have spoken of this as the lesson of a larger life, but we are far from believing that it needs colossal powers to set it forth. Indeed, we are by no means inclined to echo a common complaint of the day, that “every name which has ever appeared on a title-page is considered a fit subject for a biography.” How far a life is suited for a biography appears to depend on circumstances to some degree independent of the scale of its achievements. It is possible that a great career had better be left unportrayed. Sometimes its own interest is of a kind that should not be revealed, sometimes there is little to say about it but what it has said for itself. And some lives that are anything but great are full of interest in the hands of a worthy biographer. No doubt, in this respect, affection and sorrow are liable to delusion; yet even in their feeblest effort, where it is perfectly sincere, we find so much of value, that we should have no heart to discourage any fresh addition to the stores. The only question we would ask a biographer, even of an obscure life, is, “Can you tell your story?” Every one who aims at setting forth another life to the public, unless from some low motive, has probably within him something that others would be thankful to receive, could he really transfer it. What he thinks it worth while to write they would think it worth while to read, if they really read what he aimed at writing. The truth is, that what is needed for a Biography is not so much exceptional power or exceptional beauty, as exceptional illumination. The most ordinary life, could we really see it, would be full of interest. Could we penetrate the thick fog which enfolds the true history of each one of us, and witness the drama of wish, hope, and effort which goes on behind that opaque curtain, we should not miss the interest of remarkable incident, or even remarkable achievement; the ordinary vicissitude of aspiration and disappointment, love and grief, would be quite enough for us. But it is not even those who have thus penetrated who can lift the curtain for others. The lessons drawn from the joys and sorrows of an average life can be reproduced, for the most part, only on the pages of fiction; and if we are to have light enough to paint an individual career, we must generally seek our subject on the heights. And yet exceptions will not fail to occur to most readers, and there is none who would assert that the interest inspired by biographies bears any proportion to the value of that which their subjects have bequeathed to us through other channels. What should we remember of Johnson, without Boswell? The biographer there created the interest for every generation but his own. The rugged and massive individuality which has become familiar to so many thousands of readers, is endeared to them by qualities of which elsewhere than in that biography they have no glimmer. From Johnson's writings we should know nothing of the man whose uproarious enjoyment of his own very small jokes affects us as the finest wit, whose tenderness towards the poor and the despised, peers out amid his roughness like Alpine flowers, whose very rudenesses are remembered as the preliminaries to what might be taken for the model of a manly and simple apology. And if the most famous delineation in all biography is thus, as it were, only accidentally connected with any pre-eminence but that very strength of individuality which is its own object, one does not see why such delineation should not at some time dispense with all independent eminence, and reveal through its loving portraiture a character for the knowledge of which we were dependent on the painter alone. But as a matter of fact, such a portrait has never yet been, and it is not very probable that it ever should be painted. We are reminded of the possibility only by seeing the very different degrees in which lives equally important in every other respect lend themselves to the art of the narrator.

It is in the interest of what we feel the most instructive and delightful of all forms of literature, that we would protest against a growing tendency which, originating in the desire to enrich this fairest parterre in our garden, seems to us to bid fair to

choke it with weeds. We have, on several occasions, called the attention of our readers to what we feel to be one of the great dangers of our time,—its increasing disinclination to reserve. There is no department of life which does not seem to us to have lost something of its dignity by this tendency, but that which it has most hurt is that in which we have all the keenest interest,—the narratives of life, either revealed by those who are the subjects of the narrative, or by others. Do not let us be misunderstood. Biography, which is but a part of history, if it is to have any value must contain the materials for moral judgment; and if it is not a transcript from fact, these materials are worthless. We would not only concede, we would urge, that the biographer should give a complete portrait; and it would not be difficult to point to instances where an interesting and valuable biography loses something of its interest and its value, because the biographer has resolved to see only that part of his subject which was noble and memorable. If we are to represent a man's character, we should represent it fully. But the question is whether you do represent a man's character more fully by putting every scrap of information about him on record. We can imagine a literary condition in which we should protest against the timidity which would curtain round a great man's character from any breath of censure, and the untruthfulness which would retouch the copy of some actual features from a cast of the Apollo Belvidere. Only this condition, surely, would be the very opposite of ours. It is possible to fall on the right hand, but when we are so far to the left, it would be better to get nearer the ditch on that side. We should make a great step, as things are, if we conceded that we are not miraculously guarded against any infringement of the sphere of silence when we meddle with print. Nobody questions that, while truth is always valuable, it is yet possible to tell one person what should be left unspoken, and we urge no more than that it is possible to do the like by several hundreds. There is no magic in printer's ink, that it should filter away whatever would be felt unsuitable for ordinary ink. Every one will agree with us when we say that Rousseau should not have published his "Confessions," and if "decency," in the ordinary sense of the word, is to be the only limit to a justifiable literary frankness, we do not see why it should not be the only limit to frankness that is not literary also. Surely, there are several grounds on which true things should be left unspoken. We should go so far as to allow that there are some biographies, and some of much interest, which ought not to have been written, though probably this would never be the case with the biography of a great man. The proportion of objection changes altogether, when it is a question of revealing more clearly to the world the character of one who has already opened the door to such revelation. Byron's profligacy, for instance, would have been a reason against undertaking the biography of a man of lesser fame. And there are other reasons why we should be proportionately more careful, as we unveil the lesser lives; the life of a great man needs no adventitious interest, but it is often possible to put a more private career in a picturesque light, by some hint that unveils a vista which it is not legitimate to explore. This is a kind of cheap effectiveness which reviewers are quite as much in danger of pursuing as are authors; and indeed, the tendency we deprecate takes in the field of personal remark and narrative in the periodical literature of the day quite as much as that of literature properly so called.

It is interesting and instructive to note the connection of this tendency with what many would consider the most valuable influence of our day. Physical Science, colouring the speculations and moulding the dialect of those who are ignorant of all in it but its most obvious and rudimentary laws, has gradually absorbed to itself that ideal of *orthodoxy* which belonged, in the days of our fathers, to a wholly different region. In the world of literature, this influence has told, among other ways, in setting up a standard of what is generally called truth, but what we would rather call accuracy, which must perforce somewhat blunt and deaden that instinct which demands, not that information should be given accurately, but that it should not be given at all. In itself, this scientific standard is most valuable. If we accustom ourselves to remember and record the facts of experience and history with the accuracy needful to any scientific record, we are materially helped on our way to that moral virtue which we know as truthfulness; and we should suppose, as a matter of fact, that a man of science would, except under some temptation to which he might give a plausible

aspect, be rarely untruthful. At the same time, we think that both the duty of accuracy and the duty of truthfulness will be better observed, when they are seen to be distinct. It is possible to convey an absolute falsehood through the most perfect accuracy. We have known a friendship ended by an accurate repetition to an accused person of part of his friend's indignant defence of his conduct. It may be objected that in such a case a partial repetition was not accurate. But to pass by the consideration which surely the imagination of every reader will illustrate, that even the complete repetition to a man of what is said by another of him, in defending him from a grave imputation, would rarely fail to betray some concession the true bearing of which he could not but misunderstand—to pass by all this, it is still true that, to identify completeness and accuracy in moral narrative, is to concede the difference we are urging. Who shall say when he has the whole account of any moral transaction before him? And, on the other hand, who would feel any perfectly accurate account of some physical experiment misleading, because he knew that he had more to learn about it? The "whispering tongue that poisoned truth," in the case we recall, was not incorrect. Even in cases where there is no blame of any kind, do we not often feel, after some accidental betrayal of the kind, such as a letter read by a person whom it blamed, that the interests of truth would be best consulted by oblivion of whatever has been seen? Human imagination does not suffice to translate the moral effect of censure from the third person to the second. In such a case, and in many others, truth on the lips is falsehood in the ears. Truth about things is capable of no such duality, and a standard of accuracy cultivated by the search for it is not indeed *useless*, as applied to the personal world—we could mention more than one biography in which this kind of accuracy was all that was needed to obviate grave disaster—but is so small a part of that regard for moral truthfulness which we need in order to give a picture of character, that if we here depend upon it as adequate, it becomes wholly misleading.

Even in the mere question of proportion, how different are the two regions! In the outer world, you can mention no single fact, however trivial, which is not valuable, as far as it goes. This plant, which I find described as bearing only blue or pink flowers, was in a single specimen found by me perfectly white. That is a piece of information about the flower. But how much accidental knowledge of human beings is misleading? You met an eminent man at dinner many years ago, and remember nothing about him but that he looked very much annoyed at having to carve a haunch of venison, he being, meanwhile, one of the most generous of men. At least, it might be said, that proves him to have cared too much for the pleasures of the table. True, but how much else you must tell, to put that fault in its true proportion! You would never require thus to surround any mere physical fact with a mass of apparently contradictory facts, in order to reduce it to its proper insignificance. A trifle is a trifle, in both regions. But a trifle does not put us on a wrong track in the world of physical science, as it may in the moral world. And yet, how often it brings in some picturesque or humorous element, which adds readability to a narrative! It is not every one who is above profiting by this questionable source of flavour to his style.

The change in the conception of Biography (in which, be it remembered, we would include Autobiography) on which we are remarking is mainly this,—that in former days, a biography was consciously and avowedly an account of that part of the life, and of that only, with which the public was supposed to have any concern. It was in one sense a more partial ideal. And yet in another sense it was a more complete ideal, for it proposed to narrate nothing that could not be narrated fully. It set its object further off, but for that very reason it could give the whole figure. The new ideal, that everything that can be told about a hero should be told, is really a much more fragmentary conception, for it takes in much that it is impossible to give completely. We now know much about him that in former days we should not have known, but probably, in many respects where formerly our minds would have been a blank, they are now filled with misconceptions. It is true that the change is as much in the subject as in the medium; life is less draped altogether. If life be also better understood, perhaps the gain may be worth the loss. But the theory that reserve is hostile to truth, is the very thing we are protesting against. We are far from

thinking this change of feeling an unmixed loss. Some of the most interesting and some of the most popular books of our time owe their existence to an instinct which our forefathers, probably, would never have felt; and if we owe it to this, that two brothers have told us, in independent narratives, how they parted on the watershed of thought, and dwell beside oceans separated by half the world, while the same instinct has made the Sovereign more known and beloved by the humblest of her subjects, we must allow that there is something to be said for the new fashion. Still, it is well to recognise the dangers of a growing taste, which provides its own nourishment. The belief that all a biographer has to consider is what his readers will receive with interest, tends to develope that which, on a small scale, we call a love of gossip, and which, in its fullest development, is the very antithesis to modesty, to refinement, to all that gives dignity and softness to human relation. Some people will think this not too heavy a price to pay for all that it gives us. We think that here, as elsewhere, it might surely be possible, to some extent, to separate the good and the evil; and the first step towards this is to recognise the disadvantages, even if we feel, on the whole, that they are overbalanced by the gain.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

SOLICITORS AND THE PUBLIC.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR,"]

SIR,—In your article on this subject, you have raised a very important question which well deserves the attention of the Incorporated Law Society. The Society, you say, "might do very much more than it does with regard to the qualifications, moral and professional, of its own members. What, for example, is there to prevent it from instituting a special examination for admission into its own ranks?" If the Society and the profession were coextensive, such an examination would, I think, be very desirable; but so long as they are not co-extensive, the question is rather one of raising the standard of qualification for entrance into the profession at all. Happily, during recent years, the Society has done much to raise the standard of the Law examinations, but the standard of the preliminary or entrance examination remains so low, that there is no guarantee that a man when admitted to the Roll of Solicitors possesses even the rudiments of a good education. The Society has lately done good service to the profession by encouraging University men to enter its ranks, and the number of Graduates admitted to the Roll continues to increase. It is not, however, to be expected that the ranks of Solicitors will be largely recruited by members of the Universities; nevertheless, the efficiency of the profession would be much raised, if it were ordered that no one should be admitted to practice until he has passed an examination similar in degree to the Oxford Responsions, the Cambridge Little Go, the London University Matriculation examination, or one of the examinations of the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board of Examiners. The Law examinations of the Incorporated Law Society have, indeed, an appearance of being severe, but it is an appearance only, as every University man who has passed them will not have failed to perceive. In these days everybody has a son, a brother, or a cousin who is or is about to be a solicitor, and there is really no obstacle put in the path of unfit candidates for that which is a most responsible and which should be a learned profession. It cannot be denied that the work of a solicitor is much more onerous and requires far greater skill than, for instance, that of an inspector of schools. Yet, whilst a man would have a poor chance of being made an inspector of schools unless he had obtained a first class in honours at the University, he can rise from the position of a mere copying clerk or from a law stationer's shop to the Roll of Solicitors, with wonderfully little difficulty. In saying this, I am not in the least underrating the members of the profession to which I belong, for my experience is that solicitors are, in general, an upright, hard working, and I may add, a much-abused body of men. I only say that the qualification for entrance to the profession is far too low.

Your correspondent, "A Solicitor," has maintained the somewhat common thesis that the success of a solicitor depends upon the reputation which he ultimately acquires as a man of business. We are told that "the excellence of a solicitor lies in his practical knowledge of the world, his common-sense, his tact, and his administration, so to speak, of his client's affairs. Such

excellence only comes by experience, and a certain talent or aptness for the profession." These qualifications (except the last) are possessed, in a greater or less degree, by every man who succeeds in life. And it may be safely affirmed that common-sense does not come by experience. If by administration of clients' affairs is meant the promotion of joint-stock companies, railway schemes, building societies, speculative purchases of land or shares, &c., I deny that these are the legitimate subjects of a solicitor's duties. His success should depend on the reputation which he acquires as a man of integrity, and as a man skilled in the practice of law. His business is to conduct litigation and to prepare deeds, and his duty is to discourage unnecessary litigation. The solicitors who in the exercise of their profession are "men of business" in any other sense than this may get themselves or their clients into a bankruptcy, and, as sometimes happens, into a gaol. In short, the less a solicitor has to do with "business," in the commercial sense of that word, the better for him, and the better for the public. The good, old term "attorney-at-law" has been abolished by a recent Act of Parliament, simply because it carried about with it a pungent flavour of smartness, or, to again quote your correspondent's phrase, "aptness." Let us hope that the newer term "solicitor" will connote some qualification more consistent with the dignity and honour of a learned profession.—I am, Sir, &c.,

Sheffield.

SIDNEY O. ADDY.

TENNYSON AND PETRARCH.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR,"]

SIR,—In your review of Dr. Gatty's key to "In Memoriam," it is said that the poet cannot be identified who sang,—

"That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

Permit me to attempt the identification, in the following lines from Petrarch's canzone beginning, "Quell' antiquo mio dolce," &c.:—

"Ancor (e questo è quel, che tutto avanza),
Da volar sopra 'l Ciel gli avea dat' ali
Per le cose mortali,
Che son scala al Fattor, chi ben l'estima."

And again, one having a supreme hope,—

"D'una in altra sembianza
Potea levarsi all' alta cagion prima;
Ed ei l' ha detto alcuna volta in rima."
(Roland's "Petrarch," 1828, Vol. II., p. 119.)

Obviously, we may not find here mere coincidence of expression, but in Petrarch the original singer of Mr. Tennyson's reference.—I am, Sir, &c.,

A. S.

THE GEORGE WILSON FUND.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR,"]

SIR,—It may interest those of your readers who contributed to the fund for George Wilson, the pit lad, to know that though he failed in the diocesan examination in July, 1881, he has since November been a student at St. Andrew's University, where he has attended the lectures on English literature, humanity, and mathematics. The reports from the professors are highly satisfactory, including one from the principal, who says,—"His (G. Wilson's) conduct is excellent, and he is much respected by his professors." His expenses, including journeys, books, clothes, fees, food, and rent, for the time he has been at college, amount to £30 8s. 11d. He has worked at Latin 305½ hours, at Greek 42 hours, at English 101, at French 15, at mathematics 210, at writing 6, at Roman history 65, at lectures 20. Though I have not seen him for some time, I continually receive letters from him, in which he expresses his gratitude to all those who, as he expresses it, released him from slavery, and enabled him to fulfil the wish of his heart, which is to become a scholar.

Of the sum of £166 10s. received on his behalf, £67 7s. 6d. has been expended, leaving a balance of £99 2s. 6d. By the kindness of his friends at St. Andrew's, a small bursary has been given to him.—I am, Sir, &c.,

EDWARD LIDDELL.

"WHAT IS JINGOISM?"

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR,"]

SIR,—In your illustration of the characteristic tendency of Jingoism "to exalt material interests over moral obligations," you have omitted what was, perhaps, the worst offence of all committed by the late Government, after Lord Carnarvon and Lord Derby had left them,—viz., the handing-back the great province of Macedonia to Turkish lust and oppression, after it had been