

that sort. His first chapter on "The Chanson" opens well, and contains a good promise. Mockery, mischief, and lightness of heart are the characteristics of French literature that Mr Besant brings into most prominence in his gossiping essays; and, in accordance with that view of his subject, he, perhaps rightly, refuses to see in "The Romance of the Rose" any of the subtle allegorical meanings that, from the times of Molinet and Clément Marot, have been ascribed to it. To that quaint old poem, with which many readers are familiar through Chaucer's broken translation, Mr Besant devotes a long chapter, in which he fairly discriminates between the styles and tempers of the two authors, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, and shows that, though there may have been no religious allegory in their production, it was a rich storehouse of wise thought and honest satire, and, at the same time, a brilliant preface to the later humour of French literature. "An hour before the dawn you may hear the birds in the forest twitter in their sleep: they dream of the day. Europe, at the close of the thirteenth century, was dreaming of the glorious Renaissance, the dawn of the second great day of civilisation. Jean de Meung answered the questions of the times with a clearness and accuracy which satisfied, if it did not entirely explain. Five generations passed away before the full burst of light, and he taught them all, with that geniality that is his greatest charm. His book lasted because, confused and without art as it is, it is full of life and cheerfulness and hope. Charles of Orleans, Villon, Clément Marot, Rabelais, La Fontaine, Regnier, Molière, Béranger, all come down from him in direct line, and are his literary children and grandchildren." Marot and some others are excluded from Mr Besant's present volume; but others, again, especially Montaigne and Boileau, are included in his list. Mr Besant is generally most at home with the lighter humourists. He has a delightful chapter on Scarron, the first master of burlesque, and one yet more welcome on La Fontaine, the butterfly *par excellence* of French literature.

We have endeavoured to indicate Mr Besant's ways of thought and writing, and to show that, though his book might have been better, it is yet a very good one. Though in rather a disjointed and incomplete way, it does help to define what has been one of the prevailing moods of the French character, one of the threads of disposition that have made the French people what we now find them to be. These humourists, it is true, were hardly of the people. They were courtiers only, hangers-on of gay ladies and licentious lords, priests or monks or friars who had mistaken their vocation, and found their heaven in singing songs and leading dances that were altogether in keeping with the pomps and vanities of this fleshly life. Very few of them sprang from the common folk; fewer still tuned their pipes for the common folks' delight. But just as in England the whole national character has been influenced, though but slightly, by poets and playwrights who catered only for their betters, so in France the nation has been moulded far more thoroughly into sympathy with the spirit that prompted its courtly poets, and yet more its popular dramatists. Molière represents France as much as Shakespeare represents England, and the different tempers of the men reflect the different tempers of their countries. We in England claim moral superiority for ourselves. But the French are happier and more tender; and happiness and tenderness are surely no small items among the means and ends of the highest morality. H.

ETHNICAL SCRIPTURES.

The Sacred Anthology. Collected and Edited by Moncure Daniel Conway. In One Volume. Trübner and Co.

This book is in every sense a classical Anthology, containing as it does flowers of devotion culled from the sacred literature of every race of men. The compiler has exercised his judgment in the selection with what appears to me to be a most scrupulously catholic spirit; and the result is a volume which may be put into the hands of every man, woman, and child, with the confidence that it must prove incalculably serviceable to the cause of true piety and morality. Extracts from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, from the Talmuds, from the Koran,

from Hindu, Persian, Chinese, Singalese, Turkish, Scandinavian, and other devotional writings, are here placed side by side, and arranged systematically under more than seven hundred comprehensive headings. The book may fairly be described as a Bible of humanity; and as an ethical text-book it might well be adopted in all schools and families where an attempt is made to instil the highest principles of morality apart from religious dogma. Mr Conway does not state in his preface whether he had this aim before him in the compilation of his Anthology. If he had, he has succeeded admirably. If he had not, he has unwittingly produced a work which a great number of people have long been desiring to possess, and which is likely to mark a distinct epoch in the progress of ethical culture.

It is beginning to be much more generally admitted that there is no such thing as a monopoly of morality within the pale of any church or creed. In every nation and under every sky, equally amongst Christians and heathen, God has found out those who love Him; and the words used to or of God by men penetrated with the desire to be drawn nearer to Him are the interchangeable prayers and praises of humanity, which nothing but an extreme lack of charity would condemn as worthless or profane. Mr Conway clearly proves, in this popular form, what has hitherto been familiar principally to the learned, that the most sublime morality has been professed and practised in every age, and that the more modern phases of religious belief, overlaid as they have been by dogmas and interpretations of purely human origin, have rather declined from than advanced upon the lofty standards of the world's earlier devotion. As illustrating this fact the 'Sacred Anthology' is extremely valuable, and we may hail it as one of the few books of theological or even of general literature which comprise a genuine fulfilment of an indisputable want.

Mere quotation would give a very imperfect idea of this remarkable compilation; and it is to be hoped that the book is of a sufficiently interesting character to induce a large number of readers to discover for themselves the many gems of thought scattered over its pages. The following anecdote, given as an illustration of "Pure Intention," is from the Persian of Attar, and may serve to show how very varied are the contents of the 'Sacred Anthology':—

One night Gabriel from his seat in paradise heard the voice of God sweetly responding to a human heart. The angel said, "Surely this must be an eminent servant of the Most High, whose spirit is dead to lust and lives on high." The angel hastened over land and sea to find this man, but could not find him in the earth or heavens. At last he exclaimed, "O Lord! show me the way to this object of thy love." God answered, "Turn thy steps to yon village, and in that pagoda thou shalt behold him." The angel sped to the pagoda, and therein found a solitary man kneeling before an idol. Returning, he cried, "O master of the world! hast thou looked with love on a man who invokes an idol in a pagoda?" God said, "I consider not the error of ignorance: this heart, amid its darkness, hath the highest place."

I do not know how far Mr Conway is responsible for several blemishes of expression and translation which might be pointed out in his book; nor is it clear that the arrangement of subjects which he has adopted is the best that could have been devised. But as the object of this notice has simply been to direct attention to a characteristic book of the present age, it would be useless to dwell upon the few minor points in which it seems capable of improvement.

HERBERT WILSON.

THE DISCIPLES.

The Disciples. By Harriet Eleanor Hamilton King. H. S. King and Co. 1873.

A white heat of enthusiasm, maintained from the first page to the last, is the prominent characteristic of this very remarkable poem. Dedicated to the memory of Mazzini, the lives or deaths of some of whose "Disciples" it commemorates, it was written at his bidding, and—for we take the writer's words to be literal—was never seen by him, though some of the unfinished pages arrived at Pisa,

"LITERARY." Examiner, 17 Jan. 1874. British Library Newspapers, link.gale.com/apps/doc/BB3201024359/BNCN?u=warwick&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=7063e3f5. Accessed 27 Oct. 2021.