

A LITERARY LETTER.

From George Warrington, Adelaide.
To his friend,

Arthur Wendennis,

Wilbaroo Station, Coojalong.

Dear Arthur—So "Diana of the Crossways" was really the joke it has often been said to be. The admission seems to have been made by Meredith to M. Photiades, a French journalist, whose appreciation of the English novelist has just appeared. And the same is true of some of Meredith's other stories. "I slyly offered the critics 'Diana of the Crossways' and the novels which followed that book; and nothing more upset them than 'One of Our Conquerors.'" Many have found the opening pages of this unnamed work a veritable *pons asinorum*, but once they have passed the "strip of slipperiness," which overthrew the "gentleman housewifery" for a queer countenance and a waistcoat to match it, they have found their course tolerably clear. One doubts whether, as M. Photiades more than hints, Meredith intentionally made himself unpopular, acting on the principle that a certain amount of labor ought to go with novel-reading. For though his later works are more difficult than the earlier, the style is Meredith's from first to last, and is revealed in the leading articles he contributed almost in youth to the "Ipswich Journal." He is represented in this volume as envying Tennyson his capacity to make music "with our monosyllabic language," which suggests that his own defective, labored, and obscure utterance was not deliberately cultivated.

Meredith, as the jargon of the day goes, had a "mission." What was it? In the view of his latest critic it was to "recall us to our origin, to dam up our egoism, to canalise it, and dig a big, deep channel for it." To vary Gambetta's famous phrase, the novelist might have said, "L'egoisme, voilà l'ennemi." Meredith was steeped in Shakespeare, and perhaps more indebted to the dramatist than any other modern writer, especially for his delineations of women. As M. Photiades pregnantly observes, "Both visionaries, Shakespeares and Meredith, obey obsessions of equal intensity. They regard the world, the human race, as a traveller by night regards the landscape illuminated by flashes of lightning. Making allowance for the differences of place and circumstance, Meredith presents his Sir Willoughby Patterne as Shakespeare his Richard III. The discomfited egoist who demands at any cost a place in order to preserve his self-esteem is no less striking a figure than the royal assassin who cries, 'A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!'" It is a great achievement to have learnt well the Shakespearean lesson. To perform that task one must have some share of Shakespeare's qualities, his subtle insight, and magical utterance.

What is the mystery of Nietzsche? What is the meaning of his hungry craving for "strong men" who are

What is the meaning of his hungry craving for "strong men" who are to be the outcome of the "survival of the fittest" theory, as practised by nature in her most marvellous moods? To Nietzsche it was a source of unquenchable anguish that he should live, move, and have his being among the weak and commonplace, who preponderate in every community. It was not enough that they should be given the cold shoulder by this would-be superman. He wanted them crushed out of existence. Well, there are a good many of us who have as keen a sense of our own intellectual, if not physical, superiority to our neighbors as ever Nietzsche; but we don't generally bear them any grudge on that account, at least when we are in the enjoyment of tolerable health, and free from "nerves." When our condition is otherwise and we are victims to the blues we have not much time for anyone, strong or weak.

Reading Mr. Hone's translation of M. Halévy's "Life of Friedrich Nietzsche" (isher Unwin), the only biography of the philosopher that has yet appeared in English print, one is confirmed in the conviction that Mr. Chesterton was not far out when in his "Heretics" he said of Nietzsche that his aristocracy of "strong-wills" was after all rather an aristocracy of disordered nerves. He was a victim of mental and physical torture, and how his ravings ever came to be taken seriously is one of the literary problems of the time. He was a colossal egotist, not less because he suffered for his egotism. When dared by his school-fellows to emulate the Spartan boy who hid the wolf that was gnawing at his vitals, he plunged his hand into the stove and, seizing a burning coal, held it till the flesh received a wound the scar of which remained till the end of his life. He was, says M. Halévy, at times "perfectly miserable" because his writings met with such scant attention. Being a superman, he should have been proof against weak repining, or, at all events, should have had sense enough to see that, with the vulgar herd around him, there was very little chance of his brutalitarianism going down. His glorification of war was only part of his disparagement of the "slave creed" Christianity, and of his belief that every man ought to be his own saviour, even to the point of the crucifixion of the finest instincts—those that make for the brotherhood of man—in our nature.

Mr. A. G. Hales, formerly of Adelaide, and now a distinguished London litterateur, is said to be busy with a scheme for a "biroscope novel," which means an attempt to realise Mr. H. G. Wells' conception of a novel in living pictures, accompanied by a brief explanation of the plot. Having half an hour to spare, you go to a shelf, take down a cylinder, fit it into a machine, press a button, and there you are! Before your delighted gaze the drama of the story is enacted upon a little screen, with phonographic dialogue to match, and without the difficulty of mastering some

without the difficulty of mastering some 300 odd pages of print. If Mr. Hales should bring his scheme to perfection he should have a good many patrons. But what will the printers do?

Mr. Hales is a poet as well as novelist, war correspondent, &c., and has produced lately a volume of more than passable verse. But I have searched its pages in vain for the prize poem produced for the literary societies' competition in Adelaide many years ago, of which three lines remain in my memory—

Shaded by a touch of sadness,
As the poets mingle madness
With the gifts that we revere.

When some months ago Mr. Edward Cooper, the novelist, raised a lamentation in the "Westminster Gazette" over the deluge of novels, and suggested one year's stoppage of the flow so that the deluge might subside, Mr. H. G. Wells asked what the novelists were to do in the meantime. With all the terse directness of his scientific style he enquired whether there would be ample strike pay during the cessation of operations. It is the fear of starvation therefore that leads Mr. Wells to decline the blessed period of recuperative inactivity proffered by Mr. Cooper, and to apply himself, as he has long been doing, to the production of a fresh novel every six months. His latest, "The New Machiavelli," is no better and no worse than his "Ann Veronica." That work rather scared his publishers, judging from their assurances that the present is untinged by eroticism. Methinks they do protest too much. It is true that the long arguments on the sex question that inflate the book are unimpeachable in their decorous dullness; but the author has not thought it necessary to provide a hero for their exemplification. In no other of his stories has Mr. Wells recorded such a selfish abandonment to passion on the part of a man of mature years as is the climax or anti-climax of Remington's career. The main interest of "The New Machiavelli" lies in its speculations on the future of politics. Remington is the socialistic "Young Liberal" of our own day who, like Chamberlain, finds ultimate salvation for his country in a new "Young Imperialist" wing of the Conservative Party. Someone suggests that the portrait in its political aspect is a proleptic presentment of Churchill; but Churchill's Liberalism has all the appearance of something that will wear. His mannerisms grow on Mr. Wells. His colloquial "isn'ts" and "hadn'ts" are a weariness to the flesh.

Faithfully yours,

GEORGE WARRINGTON.