

Reviews.

Lays of the Land of the Maori and Moa: By Thomas Bracken, author of "Flowers of the Freclands," "Golden Foundations," "Asleep in the Forest," etc.

The volume of poems now before us will certainly add much to the reputation of their author, who has long been favourably known as a writer endowed with no small measure of the poetic faculty, and this not only in the lower sense of being able to write smooth verses not altogether devoid of meaning (which is about all that in many minds attaches to the term "poetry"), but in the higher sense of one susceptible above ordinary men to the influences of nature on the senses, and more responsive to their suggested emotions. It has been said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing, because its object is truth, not individual and local, but general and operative. In one sense this is perfectly correct. Poetry is the image of man and nature, and therefore true in the same sense as a picture is true, that is, it is entirely false except in relation to the standpoint from which it is taken. More than this, while truth is the aim and end of philosophy, pleasure is the principle direct end of poetry; has in view, and truth to nature as it appears to man as man, and not as philosopher or moralist, is one of the means the poet takes for its attainment. But language being the medium by which the poet conveys his impressions, both sensuous and emotional, to other minds, just as colour is the medium by which the painter conveys his, he must use it subject to all those associations by virtue of which words give rise to ideas of pain or pleasure. Consciously, or more likely unconsciously, working upon this principle, Mr. Bracken, like the vast majority of our popular poets, writes as if he accepted the ordinary religious and moral ideas of the day as true, but deals with them in so broad and liberal a spirit that some of the southern papers have supposed that he wrote "from the Agnostic point of view." Considering that the preface to the "*Lays of the Land of the Maori and Moa*" is written by the Rev. Rutherford Waddell, M.A., and dated from St. Andrew's Manse, Dunedin, and that he says the poems "exhibit a high faith in God and Nature," this supposition was somewhat hasty and unwarranted. The volume, which is dedicated to Sir George Grey in some graceful verses, very appropriately begins with "The March of Te Rauparaha," which is described in a spirited poem full of local colouring, the historical facts being taken from Mr. Travers' excellent paper in the "*Transactions of the N.Z. Institute*, 1872," on the "Life and Times of Te Rauparaha." The second poem, "Waipounamutu," shows Mr. Bracken at his best, as a describer of natural scenery in language at once poetical and exact.

Up northwards, near Waikato's spreading plains,
A crystal mirror shimmers 'mong the hills,
And sunbeams dance upon its breast to strains
Of forest music; bell-birds, tuis, rills,
All blend their voices with the magic sounds
The whispering reeds and rushes softly make.
Where playful wood-sprites have their pleasure grounds,
When Spring is young and Summer is awake.

The melody of these lines is extremely pleasing, and not less so is the impression they convey that their author has gone to the fountain head for his inspiration, and describes what he has actually seen and felt, not merely echoed the words of others. Equally happy is the description he gives of the tragedy of which the placid lake is the scene, and if his Maoris are considerably idealised, they are at least as true to life as Fenimore Cooper's Red Indians. In "M'Gillviray's Dream" an incident of the Maori war is related with much power and pathos, while "Old Bendigo," as Mr. Waddell truly says, "reminds one of the best of Bret Harte's" poems. In a "Christmas Reverie," Mr. Bracken shows that he is not quite contented with the facile explanations theology and metaphysics give of God, man, and Nature. As in Tennyson's "Two Voices," he discusses the two sides of the question more or less, and asks:—

Did God send Jesus down to die
A felon's death on Calvary?
The sacrifice was made in vain,

"Ah! why

For wrong still triumphs over right,
And pleasure still succumbs to pain,
And day is shadowed by the night,
And Sin, the tyrant, is not slain,
And Justice staggers in the fight.

That he was satisfied by the answer, which is weak even for a spirit, does not appear. That similar answers have satisfied a great many excellent persons is perhaps more to the purpose. "Annihilation" is a sort of paraphrase of a good deal that passes for argument in sermons addressed to the nerves. Such appeals to egoistic sentiment must have far more than their due weight now, because people have been taught for generations to look upon personal immortality as certain, when the feelings now centred on the individual are now transferred to humanity at large there will be no sense of loss, as it were, of a natural right, and the fact will be realised "that where we are death is not, and where death is we are not." On the whole Mr. Bracken is most successful when dealing with simple themes, and though there is much breadth of thought and richness of language in such pieces as "The Golden Jubilee" and in the "Addresses," on various occasions, he excels in lyrical poetry. Here he has not to trouble himself with the deep things of science and philosophy, but to express some intense feeling, passion, or sentiment, such as love, devotion, or friendship, which appeals to the sympathies of learned or unlearned alike. What he feels deeply he expresses clearly in words which go direct to the heart. The reader of "Not Understood" will derive more moral benefit from it than from most sermons, and in "Away With Regret" good advice is given in the spirit and with the music of Tom Moore. Deeper chords are struck in "George Eliot," "Mrs. George Darrell," and "Kaitangata," and on the whole the impression produced by this volume of Mr. Bracken's poetry is very favourable. As one of our minor poets Mr. Bracken may claim a fair place in English literature, and a very high one in Australasian.

R.P.

FUNERAL OF MRS. G. J. HOLYOAKE.

Mrs. Holyoake, of Sudbury, Harrow, whose death occurred at Brighton, was interred at Highgate Cemetery. Rev. Stopford A. Brooke would have officiated at the chapel, —the views of the deceased being mostly in accord with those which characterise his ministry,—but he was prevented being present by an unavoidable engagement. As Mr. Holyoake had often spoken at the graves of others, his wife had a wish—the only public one she ever expressed—that a few words should be said at her own. That this might be, Mr. Holyoake himself spoke in the chapel, first reading a letter sent by Mr. Stopford Brooke, which, from its beautiful sympathy, was of the nature of a service. After that, he read from the second book of Esdras the remarkable dialogue between the Prophet and the Angel Uriel upon the knowledge and duties of this world, following the words by a short oration upon the three qualities which distinguished Mrs. Holyoake,—that of service of others, in which she never thought of herself; that of truth, not of speech only, but of conduct, of which she had so clear a sense that the absence of it in others was not concealable from her; that of pride, which was more than self-respect,—it was debtlessness,—an independence of obligation which was not a second nature,—it was her first; and she had no other. Though called upon early in life to confront alone the death of her first child, to be the sole watcher, the sole sympathiser, and sole mourner at an unattended grave, she brought away no murmur. During more than forty years, she never forgot it, and never complained. It was written of her:

The martyr's cross without the martyr's cause,
The grief, the wrong, without the self-applause;
A round of homely duties nobly done,—
These were her life, who sleeps beneath this stone.

The service in the chapel being ended, relatives, sons and daughters, and early friends proceeded to the grave, where Mr. G. D. Collet sang the fine hymn of Harriet Martineau, beginning

Beneath this starry arch
Nought resteth or is still;
But all things have their march;
As if by one great Will
Moves one, move all,—hark to the footfall!
On, on, forever.

--London Daily News.