

THE LITERARY WORLD.

1881

[DECEMBER 17,

*The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action of Worms, with Observations on their Habits. By Charles Darwin. [Am. Ed.] D. Appleton & Co. \$1.50.

MR. DARWIN ON WORMS.*

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Mr. Darwin's book, like all able and thorough books relating to any branch of natural history, will serve to give interest to many a country walk, which, apart from such means of quickening and cultivating inquiry and observation, might prove dull and desory. The volume reminds us that those who penetrate ever so short a distance into the great realm of Nature, in the true spirit of wisdom of the truth, will surely be rewarded and will often meet with surprises; and readers of these chapters will find themselves led to the conclusion that worms are not, after all, the despicable creatures which they have been commonly supposed to be.

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Next to the agriculturist the archaeologist should be thankful to these creatures which at all times were thought to be serviceable only to the angler. For,

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Mr. Pyle has repeated the story in a series of about thirty page-cartoons, drawn in the manner of the story's period, and illuminated with great ingenuity of design and wealth of color, writing the text stanza by stanza across the face of each cartoon, and also duplicating it in old type upon each opposite page. It makes a novel book, not only of poetic sweetness and artistic beauty, but of historical suggestion. One may guess from it what missal-painting was half-a-dozen centuries ago; and one may measure from it, too, the advance which color-printing is making just now in the great art establishments of the great cities. The cover, in blue and black and red and gold is a little dazzling. [Dodd, Mead & Co. \$6.00.]

Owen Meredith's *Lucile*.

This choice volume is late in reaching us, having been published some weeks since, but is worth waiting for, and stands the closest examination. The poem, which is by no means new, may be described as a novel in dramatic verse, and is full of a foreign scenery which invites the best artistic skill. Stedman has called *Lucile* not only the best work of its author, but "the most popular; a really interesting, though sentimental, parlor-novel, written in fluent verse,—a kind of production exactly suited to his gift and limitations. It is quite original," continues Mr. Stedman's estimate, "for Lytton adds to an inherited talent for melodramatic tale-writing a poetical ear, good knowledge of effect, and a taste for social excitements." The author, "Owen Meredith," will be remembered as the Hon. Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, now Lord Lytton. In its present form the intrinsic traits of *Lucile*, whatever they may be, are left quite in the background by the chaste elegance of the typography and the rare beauty of the engravings,—engravings than which we recall none finer in all the range of illustrated work of the present year. Their one common characteristic is *finish*. Their unflinching refinement and delicacy, whether of the full-page cuts, or of the vignettes that are scattered through the text, we have not seen excelled. The impressions are uniformly clear and brilliant, and equal to the best work in the American magazines. The cloth cover also is in the best of taste. [James R. Osgood & Co. \$6.00.]

Poe's Bells.

Poe's poem of *The Bells* strikes one at first as a good subject for the pencil, but the book before us shows that the treatment has its limitations. Darley, Fredericks, and Perkins are among the artists who have furnished it with its twenty or so illustrations, and most of them are of a fair quality, taking what advantage of the text is possible. But there are incongruities. In the picture of "the sledges with the bells," for example, the sleigh is drawn without any reference to fact; and in "the mellow wedding bells," a bridegroom in Puritan dress and a bride in a Fifth Avenue trousseau are seen coming out of a carved gothic church porch. Other of the work, particularly the fanciful panels of birds and flowers which enclose some of the lines, are more successful. The paper and presswork are good. The silver on the cover we do not like; the purple book-marker we do. [Porter & Coates. \$1.50.]

—The Russian government has been pleased to authorize the formation of a new Pushkin Club, "which is intended," says the *Athenaeum*,

"as a medium of intercommunication among men of letters in Russia. The club also proposes to assist necessitous members; to ensure the publication of works of merit by young writers; and to organize at its own expense excursions to the interior of Russia for the purpose of discovering and preserving specimens of the ancient popular literature."

CHILDREN'S BOOKS.

Sketches and Scraps.

Laura E. Richards and Henry Richards have coöperated in the production of this pretty picture-book of the modern school, in which nursery rhymes of a very respectable merit are fitted to color-illustrations that are often very clever. The rhymes have not much meaning, but jingle is what is wanted in a book like this; and the pictures are sufficiently grotesque to match. There is one little poem, however, which is so purely a gem in its way that we must quote it entire:

Phil's Secret.

I know a little girl,
But I won't tell who!
Her hair is of the gold,
And her eyes are of the blue.
Her smile is of the sweet,
And her heart is of the true.
Such a pretty little girl!
But I won't tell who.

I see her every day,
But I won't tell where!
It may be in the lane,
By the thorn-tree there.
It may be in the garden,
By the rose-buds fair.
Such a pretty little girl!
But I won't tell where.

I'll marry her some day,
But I won't tell when!
The very smallest boys
Make the very biggest men.
When I'm as tall as father,
You may ask about it then.
Such a pretty little girl!
But I won't tell when.

This is well-nigh perfect. There is nothing better in the book; but the tale of "The Seven Little Tigers and the Aged Cook" is not bad; and "The Little Cossack" may go with it. [Estes & Lauriat. \$2.00.]

Yankee Doodle is a silly ballad, the best that can be made of it; the music to which it goes being the redemption of the words. Mr. Howard Pyle's illustrations of it do not lift it above its natural level, showing neither pleasant sentiment, true humor, nor particularly skillful execution. The book belongs to the lower order of picture-books of 1881. [Dodd, Mead & Co. \$1.25.]

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HARPERS' OYOLOPEDIA OF UNITED STATES HISTORY.*

THIS work is made out of Mr. Lossing's reputation, and considering what that reputation is, it falls very far short of what it ought to be. It is large, imposing, attractive looking, externally methodical, and obviously compendious; but in reality it is an immense mass of materials, ill-digested, ill-arranged, and provokingly disfigured and injured by omissions, mutilations, fragmentary treatments, and inadequacies which a beginner in cyclopædic work ought to have avoided. How such a veteran as Dr. Lossing ever allowed himself, and how such publishers as the Harpers ever consented to his allowing himself, to execute this work on such a plan, we cannot conceive. The contents are those of an extremely useful work of reference; the form is bungling and impractical.

To begin, Dr. Lossing has no proper conception of the art of indexing. The following entries instance his most vicious habit in this respect: "Minor Events of the Civil War," "Monument on Bull's Run Battle Ground," "Mortality at New Plymouth," "Proposed Amendments to the Constitution." Who would ever think of looking for the subject of constitutional amendments under the word "Proposed," or for New Plymouth mortality under "Mortality," or for a chronology of the Civil War under "Minor"? These are specimens of his way throughout; and it is unaccountable. Next to this gross fault may be mentioned the compiler's fashion of splitting up a topic under half a dozen wholly insignificant subtitles, the alphabetical order of which puts the cart before the horse in the most absurd fashion, over and over again. Take, for example, the life of Washington, which is presented, not in one consecutive logical sketch, as it ought to be, but in a series of disjointed and disorderly paragraphs alphabetically arranged as follows: "Washington Abused;" "Washington a Dictator the Second Time;" "Washington, Adopted Children of;" "Washington a lieutenant-general of France;" "Washington and Mary Phillipse;" "Washington and Rochambeau;" then come accounts of Washington Benevolent Societies, of Bushrod Washington, and of the capture of Washington City; after which again "Washington Commander-in-Chief;" "Washington, Death of;" "Washington, Diplomatic Mission of;" and not till then "Washington, George;" with "Washington in Supreme Command of the Army," and "Washington in the Virginia Assembly." After another interruption we reach "Washington, Parting of, with his Officers," and so on through a dozen or more arbitrary heads. This is the way subjects are chopped up all through the work, and how anybody but the

compiler can find what he wants to find it would be hard to say.

The strength of the work lies in its descriptions of battles and battlefields of American history, which are elaborate and good. Military history is well provided for. Biography is pretty well represented. On other points the treatment is often deplorably inadequate. American Antiquities and American Literature have little attention. The two-inch paragraph on "Farms" should certainly have been extended so as to contain some account of the mammoth farms of the Northwest and of California. We look in vain for any account of American grape culture and wine manufacture, though that important subject may be treated under some obscure head. What is a "Cyclopædia of United States History" without some account of Newport, Saratoga, Long Branch, and Coney Island as centers of summer social life? Nothing is said of either. We find no account of the Swedes' development of the Arrostook, in Maine; none of New York City, Philadelphia, or Boston as seen at the present time; no connected narrative of the late Civil War, or of the Revolution, or of the War of 1812; nothing of the Poncas; nothing of "Black Friday"; nothing of the public school system; nothing of Amherst, Wellesley, or Smith Colleges; nothing of Bishop Whipple, who has done more to solve the Indian problem than any other one man, living or dead; nothing of the woman suffrage movement; and so forth and so on. The establishment of Harper & Brothers, the publishers, is noticed to the extent of about a page, which is certainly proper enough; but if American publishers are a part of American history, one wonders why such names as Appleton, Ticknor, Fields, and the Riverside and University Presses are not so much as mentioned.

The pictures are numerous, but there are no maps, and almost no statistical tables. Some of the portraits, like those of General Scott, Mr. Bancroft, Prof. Draper, and Peter Cooper, are excellent; others, like that of Albert Gallatin, are about as poor as they can be. There are many cross references, but often these are not fulfilled. Queen Anne may have a place in such a work, but there is nothing in the sketch of her to justify her claim to it. We notice some inaccuracies of statement.

This work is, in a word, an assemblage of articles, long and short, on topics related to United States history; fragmentary, heterogeneous, often thrown together under an arbitrary alphabet, with little or no sense of proportion, perspective, or partnership; containing a great amount of instructive reading in a form very poorly adapted for quick and sure reference. It is a pity that so costly an enterprise could not have been advanced one or two steps further, as it might easily have been, to the degree of perfection. A competent editor, in a year's

* Harpers' Popular Cyclopædia of United States History. From the Aboriginal Period to 1876. By Benson J. Lossing. Illustrated. Two volumes. \$12.00.