

## THE WORLD OF BOOKS.

## A New England Preacher.

To be born in New England, of native ancestry, at any time during the present century, has ensured to everyone so born a life of activity and to not a few such a career of attractive usefulness as would have been almost impossible elsewhere. It has been a period of unsettlement and of growth, social, religious, political. Radicals and conservatives have alike found fullest scope for the work of destruction and defence, and in each class both characters have been curiously blended. Like every other time of conflict this has been little favorable to those who would live in philosophic calm. That every able or honest man should "take his side" on every living issue has seemed to be a necessity as well as a duty. I may be mistaken in my interpretation of the spirit of the age, but it seems to me that the tendency has been towards a renaissance of character, if I may so speak. The great New Englanders of the last generation neglected to cultivate the social virtues that make men pleasant companions, but they diligently considered the civic virtues that made them better citizens. Strenuous needs developed strong men, keen-eyed, though rarely far-sighted, absolutely conscientious, somewhat intolerant by virtue of their excess of sincerity, men who prefaced their assertions of duty with a "Thus saith the Lord," and who wrought in the full conviction that their opponents were only negatively moral if not positively wicked—because they were opponents. Such a man was David Atwood Wasson, preacher and poet.

Mr. Wasson was born in the little seaport town of Brooksville, Maine, in 1823. In the matter of ancestry he was exceptionally favored: his environment could hardly have been less stimulating than it was; in the fragment of outspoken autobiography included in Mr. Frothingham's memoir, he tells us that his was not a happy childhood. The Practical demanded too much of him. A sensitive, imaginative boy, the things to which his earliest attention was called were Religion and Work. The former, as there manifested, was a hard, ugly affair,—"not a wing, but a clog." It, too, inspired the theory of work that drove him as with scorpion whips: "From our natures no good could come. These needed only to be kept down. That labor was not agreeable only proved our need of it." Unaffected alike by revival meetings and incitements to drudgery, he entered upon young manhood. Love of work, for the sake of its results, first possessed him when he began to dream of a career, and he helped himself to an education. He studied law in Belfast and began his practice, but soon abandoned it from conscientious scruples. The influence of Carlyle determined his after life, sending him to Bangor Theological school. To him, as to many other ingenious young men after Sartor Resartus appeared, religious belief ceased to be, as Mr. Frothingham aptly says, "a thing of tradition. Revelation was not a matter of record. There was no more an inspired book, but an inspired soul. Transcendentalism was in the air, and became the basis for a new superstition of conviction. Young Wasson, off in Maine, felt the afflatus, and was swept by it towards divinity."

When the young man entered upon his ministry, he was far from being orthodox. Somewhat against the wish of the examining council, however, he was settled over an evangelical church in Groveland, Mass. Here he labored for a year. At the end of that time a Calvinistic Goliath in the neighborhood began to preach a series of sulphurous sermons, and the liberal-thinking David—the simile is Mr. Frothingham's—took up the challenge, and affirmed his views so explicitly that there was nothing for the council to do, but dissolve the relation. His Groveland friends established him in an independent pastorate—a position involving stress and struggle, since it seemed to align him with Theodore Parker, who, a few miles away, was contending against Trinitarians and Unitarians alike. He was equal to the responsibility. Up to the year 1855, when began his 30 years' martyrdom from the effects of a boyish wrestling bout, he ministered most acceptably to his people. In that year he went abroad to rest and gain health, and the record of the decade following was one of depressing weakness, bravely struggled against, when he "spent in his effort to bear anguish an amount of power sufficient to earn fame, yet still had enough to spare for admirable intellectual work." In 1865 he was called to the charge of Theodore Parker's society, the Twenty-eighth Congregational, of Boston, but sickness severed this connection in 1867. The next 20 years, with the exception of three which he spent in study in Germany, were passed in quiet, but not in peace, at West Medford, Mass. He was never free from pain, and his disabilities culminated at length in blindness. His last essay, a review of Adams' *Emancipation of Massachusetts*, published in the *Atlantic* for February, 1887, was written piecemeal, in extreme weakness, and from the impressions of memory, the book having been read to him, as he lay unable to read for himself. He died in the same year, before the article appeared.

There is a hint of heroism in the simple story. The suggestion deepens into a reality when one studies the works of the

man—the present volume of essays\* and a small book of poems that are too thoughtful and unimagined to be popular. The invalid is never morbid. His disease is of the body, not the soul. He is never so much of an optimist as to feel that "Whatever is right," but he does believe that whatever is wrong will some day be made right. "His mind was fixed on intellectual realities." The seclusion which his ill-health necessitated did affect him, in so far that it narrowed his sympathies and dulled his perception of the motives of men. Aside from that, for all the indication that these books afford, one might never know that their author was not a man among men.

Certain of Mr. Wasson's limitations that were shared by most of his associates, have already been indicated. It remains to note that he was somewhat impatient of argument. "Logic, with me," he wrote to Dr. Clarke, "comes after, not before, conviction: it is, as far as I use it, my way of justifying to other minds the results at which I have arrived, never the road by which I travel." Naturally enough, he frequently generalized from insufficient data: to believers in positivism and woman suffrage it may even appear that he condemned their cause unheard. He said of his great predecessor, Theodore Parker, that he "preached a political economy of the soul." Wasson himself was far from any such exactitude. His was the gospel of intuition and impulse—chastened somewhat, it is true, by thought, but never greatly broadened.

But to the man who is true to his best nature we can forgive much. The key-note to Wasson's career was sounded when he left Bowdoin college in his junior year, "refusing to inform against the perpetrators of an outrage of which he had no certain knowledge, and for which he could feel no sympathy." Meanness was impossible to him. He might misrepresent an antagonist's views, but it would be done unconsciously. He might—and he often did—seem arbitrary or severe, but that was because he felt it his duty so to be. Few men have more consistently deterred to the rule of conscience. He was a Puritan with the Calvinism left out.

There is helpful inspiration in such a life for all of us, whether near or remote. Though the literary quality of these essays is admirable, their chief value is this, that they give us to understand the nature of the man; and Mr. Frothingham's chapter aids to that end by quoting his subject whenever possible. The memoir is most complete, in its way, a broad-viewed and sweet-spirited work, happily free from the tattle that mars most efforts of this kind. The choice of essays is a happy one, though those of us who have watched for Mr. Wasson's contributions to the dead but forgotten *Index* may wish that there had been room for more of our favorites. As the book stands, however, it deserves a warm welcome from a host of new readers as well as from the admirers of one who, "had he possessed health," as Mr. Frothingham truly says, "would have done great things, have left a distinguished name."

WALTER L. SAWYER.

## Notes and Announcements.

*Young Lion of the Woods*, a story of early colonial days, has been published in neat pamphlet form, by the author, Mr. Thomas B. Smith, of Windsor, N. S. It will doubtless prove interesting to many readers. The price of the book is 35 cents and it can be ordered through the Montreal News Co.

Zola has asked and obtained permission to ride on an express railway engine during one of its longest trips. He intends to introduce into his next novel his personal impressions, and also his remarks on the character of the driver and stoker which such a life creates.

The two famous French collaborators in novel writing, M. Eekmann and M. Chatrian, are said to be engaged upon a new story—an announcement of considerable interest, in view of the forthcoming publication of a new edition of their national novels by the Scribners.

*America*, the Chicago weekly, has begun the second year of its existence. The first year has been a prosperous one, and deservedly so, for *America* is one of the best publications of the entire West. A cartoon by Mr. Thomas Nast will be printed in *America* each week from this date.

A new portrait, recently taken, of George Bancroft, will be printed in the *May Book Buyer*. The same number will also contain a portrait of Ellen Olney Kirk, author of *The Story of Margaret Kent*, and Sallie Pratt McLean, author of *Cape Cod Folks*. A personal sketch will accompany each portrait.

*Scribner's Magazine* for April admirably maintains that freshness of interest for which it has won so enviable a reputation. In this instalment of "The Master of Ballantrae," Mr. Stevenson surpasses himself. It seems to us that this story suits the highwater mark of the fiction of today. Its interest is breathless, its insight profound, its style an abiding delight. Then there is another vivid and effective story by John R. Spears, entitled "A Sailor Called the Parson;" and John E. Curran contributes the opening chapters of a taking novelette called "Jeanne."

\* *Essays, Religious, Social, Political.* By David Atwood Wasson. With a Biographical Sketch by O. B. Frothingham. Boston: Lee & Shepard. New York: Chas. T. Dillingham.

Very bright and readable are Mr. Riding's paper on "The Building of 'An Ocean Greyhound,'" and the notes on "A Second Shelf of Old Books" by Mrs. Fields. In a sketch of Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, Mr. G. R. Carpenter introduces us to a representative modern of whom we should know more. The end paper is a piece of charming prose by Mr. Walter Pater, entitled "Shakspeare's English Kings." There are papers also on "The Prevention of Railroad Strikes," "Climbing Mt. St. Elias," and "The Anatomy of the Contortionist." Among the poems, we find an exceptionally fine sonnet (quoted in another column) by the Canadian poet, Mr. Lampman; and a thoroughly charming lyric by Miss Guiney. Mrs. Thaxter's lines, entitled, "Crowned," are also above the average of the verse of the month.—New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Price, \$3 a year, 25 cents a number.

A little book of great interest to all lovers of Burns will soon be published in Kilmarnock, the town which gave the poet's first edition to the world. It will consist of a *verbatim et literalis* copy of the famous holograph MSS. acquired by the trustees of Kilmarnock museum early last year, and will show all the alterations and emendations made by Burns on those documents during the time they were in his possession, together with his peculiarities of spelling. The veteran historian Bancroft does his work in the early morning. He is at his desk at 6 and leaves at 9 a. m., having done his stint. This leads the *Lounger* in the *Critic* to ask Mr. Bancroft if this was his habit when he was in his twenties and thirties, or even his forties. When they arrive at his present age, all men, or nearly all, are early risers. They do not require as much sleep as younger men; they may go to bed late but they rise with the lark. Mr. Bancroft, however, retires early. Ten o'clock finds him snugly tucked between the sheets.

In purchasing medicines, don't try experiments; the first and only consideration should be genuineness. Ayer's Sarsaparilla has stood the test of forty years, and to-day it is in greater demand than ever—a triumphant proof of popular approval.—Adet.

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