

GRIMM'S ESSAYS.

*Fünfzehn Essays.* Von Herman Grimm. Berlin. New York: B. Westermann & Co.

THE essay on Emerson, the first of this most interesting series, was written shortly after the death of our great thinker, and its appreciative tone and high estimation of Emerson's writings and influence cannot fail to win the sympathy of American readers. "Emerson desired that to his countrymen should remain the advantage of an unbiassed criticism of the Past, untrammelled by the transfer of European historical burthens." Whether he was inspired by a feeling prevailing around him, or whether his teachings have become the mainspring of American literary culture, is a question Grimm cannot determine. Emerson's essays tend to make man independent in thought and action; they invite him to self-examination, to seek his true vocation in life and to follow it. To the idealist he shows the results of practical labor; to the realist the beauty and usefulness of intellectual culture, and these lessons have borne rich fruit in various soils. Carlyle's admiration of Emerson is well known. Tyndall's words have been quoted frequently: "If any one can be said to have given the impulse to my mind, it is Emerson: whatever I have done, the world owes to him." Among his own people his influence is paramount. Our critic is struck with the clearness and simplicity with which New England professors and students develop their theme, going to the point at once without superfluous allocutions. He also finds much to praise in the function of the daily press in bringing together "those who have something to tell and those who wish to hear what is told." This remark relates to the accounts in the daily papers at the

time of the death of Longfellow and Emerson, and the mass of interesting detail they gave concerning both.

Grimm became acquainted in early youth with Emerson's writings, and describes the impression they made on him of deep understanding, of sympathetic contemplation of the world and just appreciation of past and present—an inward power no other shares with him. Nature seemed to have revealed her secrets to him, and there was no question one might not have asked him, feeling sure he must know all things. His thoughts, running in short oracular sentences, were like the verses of some never-ending poem, the plan of which he would one day unfold. All this and much more Grimm tells us. In his own words: "As the wind by night, passing through a wood or over a meadow, brings us the breath of trees and grasses and flowers we cannot see, Emerson envelops us with a feeling of things brought very near to us. This feeling of my own I now hear expressed on all sides, as if all had felt thus from the beginning." It is needless to follow our author through the account of Emerson's life, or to comment on the sketch of his works incorporated in this article.

"Fiorenza: Remarks on Certain Poems of Dante and Michael Angelo," goes far to persuade us that Dante and Michael Angelo, in several poems till now supposed to have been written to fair and cruel ladies, addressed the personification of their native city. Some critics have seen Philosophy or some unknown lady in Dante's Canz. ix., beginning—

"Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro."

Others, because the beloved is apostrophized as being of stone, have thought of Donna Pietra degli Scrovegni, a Paduan lady, to whom another poem is addressed. There is no doubt that the reproaches so liberally bestowed were merited by the poet's ungrateful Florence. In the case of Michael Angelo, Grimm argues the

point step by step so cleverly, bringing in fresh indications in evidence of his theory, that we cannot refuse to be convinced. The German rendering of several of Dante's sonnets and of the above-cited canzone are very well done. They are transcribed by Grimm with great poetic freedom, and therefore do not lose the beauty and freshness generally wanting in translations. This article is full of interesting historical and biographical detail, and deserves to be carefully read and considered.

The essay on Raphael's "School of Athens" in the Vatican follows. It is not light reading, nor have we space to examine our author's exhaustive criticisms of previous writers on the same subject, of which there are not a few. The great point of discussion is whether the central figures of the composition represent Plato and Aristotle, or Plato and Paul the Apostle. Considerable diversity of opinion exists, also, as to the identity of the groups to the right and left of the foreground. No documents of the time bear any record of this painting, or make any mention of its existence. In the succeeding essay, on the early life and works of Raphael, we are reminded how few reliable documents exist concerning his personal life. It is only within the last fifty years that, through the investigations of the priest Pungileoni in the archives of Urbino, we know the real dates of his birth, his father's death, etc. Pungileoni published his account, 'Elogio Storico di Raffaele Santi d'Urbino,' in 1829, besides another, of Giovanni Santi, his father, some years previous to this. From these it appeared how very inexact Vasari's life is, and how much more like a romance than serious biography. Seven letters written by Raphael's hand remain to us,

with 300 paintings, and more than 600 drawings. These alone suffice to reconstruct the history of his work. We cannot, for want of space, dwell at any length on this study. It may interest our readers to learn that the small picture lately purchased for a high price and sent to St. Petersburg, known as the Madonna Staffa, is considered by Grimm to be Raphael's earliest work.

The treatise on the origin of the popular story of Doctor Faustus is one of the most interesting essays of this collection. The material got together for this was originally intended for a book on the subject, but as the author has little hope of finding time for such a work he gives us a résumé of his vast stock of lore. The international popularity of the old book of 'Faustus' he ascribes chiefly to the fact that, although it treated of spiritual, clerical, and supernatural matters, it kept clear of any leaning towards the Protestant or the Catholic faith, so that the clergy of neither religion saw fit to take umbrage at its contents. The Strassburg puppet-show piece from which Goethe got the principal facts of his great creation, is generally traced back to the "Faustus" of Marlowe. The English writer had used a translation of the old book of 'Dr. Faustus' brought to England in the year of its publication, 1587, by strolling actors. The author, or rather compiler, of this book is unknown, but it is not difficult to recognize the original narrative as distinct from the innumerable disconnected adventures tacked on to it from various sources. Dr. Johannes Faust of the story is neither Catholic nor Protestant, nor has he any connection with the Reformation, while his prototype, Dr. George Faustus, is mentioned by Luther and Melancthon, and was a well-known character in his day. Trithemius, Abbot of Sponheim, considered him a swindler, yet he seems to have been received by Franz von Sickingen and clerical persons of Spires and Erfurt. He was a learned man, proficient in Greek and mathematics, and boasted that he