

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

GRIMM'S LECTURES ON GOETHE.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GOETHE. By HERMAN GRIMM. Translated by Sarah Holland Adams. 12mo, pp. 559. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

The American reader will seek first in this excellent translation of Grimm's lectures for an answer to the question—is Goethe's influence declining? This question, asked first in Germany by sceptical people who thrust their interrogation points into everything commonly held as settled and sacred in religion, history, science and literature, naturally finds an echo in this country. It is now more than a century since Goethe burst like a meteor upon the sluggish world of German thought. It is almost a century since his greatest work was published. Nearly half a century has passed since that March day when he fell asleep at Weimar and woke no more. All the contemporaries of his fruitful years are gone. A great change, clearly foreseen by him, has come over the German people, powerfully affecting their ways of life and thought. The time has therefore come, it would seem, when the great personal influence of the poet has faded away, and when the permanency of his work may be tested to some extent, at least, by its power over the minds of a generation which knew him not and has grown up under conditions widely differing from those which surrounded him. We must ask our question as to Goethe's place in literature of his own countrymen, for we must acknowledge that the acquaintance of English speaking countries with him is by no means thorough. Since he went to Weimar in 1775, his genius, like a light-house set upon a hill, has dominated and illumined the whole sea of German thought, but it has shone upon us chiefly through the lamps of our own writers, who have borrowed oil from his great store. It would be safe to say that nine-tenths of well-read Americans and Englishmen know Goethe rather from the books and magazine articles written about him than from the study of his own works, although good translations may be had of all of them. Most cultivated people read the first part of "Faust," but how many read the "Iphigenia" or the "Italian Elegies," or the "Dichtung und Wahrheit"? and how many have any sort of familiarity with Goethe's prose writings beyond "The Sorrows of Young Werther"? Whatever theory we may hold as to the future extension of Goethe's influence, we must admit that he is the poet of one nation and one language, and not of the whole world like Shakespeare. The action of his genius outside of the Teutonic lands is reflex, not direct.

Grimm believes that Goethe stands with Homer, Dante and Shakespeare, as the poet of all times. Each generation, he says, will believe that it comprehends his nature better than any that has gone before. Opinions in regard to his work will vary: he will appear to stand nearer to or further from the German people according to the character of the times; but he will never be wholly dethroned, never be resolved into himself—never melt as a glacier of which when the last drop has run away nothing remains. "If however," Grimm goes on to say, "that should happen, which has happened to Homer, that after the lapse of thousands of years, when our German has ceased to be a living language, wholly distant generations may not be able to conceive that a single man should have created so many and such various kinds of works—then may the learned men, who will certainly for a time be believed, affirm that Goethe is to be interpreted only as a mythical name, under which the entire intellectual work of his age was comprehended."

Grimm places "Faust" far above all the other productions of Goethe. He says it is Goethe's most beautiful, greatest and most important work; that which he began the first, and which in conception reached on beyond his death. To no other can the expression *life-work* be applied with such truth. "Faust," he says, "is the poem of poems. Put not only all Goethe's other poems, but our entire poetic literature into the other scale and wait!—which sinks? The person of Faust appears to us to-day as a natural, indispensable product of German life." Further on in the same lecture he says:

Faust is to us Germans the sovereign in the host of all the creations of German literature. Hamlet, Achilles, Hector, Tasso, the Cid, Frithiof, Siegfried, Fingal—all these forms seem to lose something of their life-like freshness when Faust appears. The light which rests upon them is pale like moonlight, while Faust stands in the full blaze of the sun. Their language has to our ears something of a foreign sound, while Faust speaks so as to be understood in everyone of his faintest accents. The breath of these heroes is not the bracing mountain air which streams from the lips of Faust. Their spirit, however wide its scope, has not the expansive wing on which he soars above the world and its phenomena, that he may describe everything with his eagle glance.

The characters in "Faust," Grimm tells us, were all suggested by persons in real life. He is himself the hero of the poem. To the struggles and problems of his own life he sought to give a symbolic form. For this reason the poem was carried forward almost to the day of his death. Until his last hours, Goethe transferred to "Faust" his every thought. Faust is the incarnate spirit of Goethe, to whom no range is too vast, no experience impossible. Mephistopheles, usually identified with Goethe's friend Merck, Grimm thinks is Herder, who first made him experience the frightful power of the cold, disinterested, but merciless critic. Margaret is his first love, Frederika, the daughter of the Alsatian pastor, whose acquaintance he made during his student days at Strasburg. The idyl of the Sesenheim parsonage ran on smoothly until Goethe, becoming convinced that his love was a matter of the imagination only, rudely broke it off, bidding the poor girl good by without dismounting from his horse, and telling her to get over it as best she could. The affair was innocent enough, save for the wound it left in the heart of a sensitive, romantic maiden, but Goethe's imagination carried it forward, easily found the way from Frederika to Gretchen, and developed from the simple pastoral a tragedy of sin and suffering.

Mrs. Adams's translation was made in Berlin, and has the advantage of the cordial approval of the author expressed in a note to her. Grimm says in this note that although he grew up in the study of Goethe, and had much intercourse with those who knew him personally, he is indebted to Emerson for the historical view of the poet, which taught him to regard Goethe as the great phenomenon in the universal development of mankind. For this reason he feels very much indebted to America.