

WE AND OUR NEIGHBORS

The latest book issued in the "Longman's English Classics" series is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," edited with notes and an introduction by Herbert Bates, A. B. instructor in English in the University of Nebraska.

The introduction contains a list of Coleridge, with an account of the origin of the poem, its form, purpose and method of study, besides a page or two concerning poetry in general and the place given the "Ancient Mariner" by famous critics, a bibliography and suggestions to students. The chronological table presents Coleridge's life works, and contemporary English and American writers comprehensively and clearly. The forty pages is the work of careful scholarship and appreciation. Mr. Bates' sympathies have aided him to analyse the poem without destroying its effect as poetry. The footnotes on every page in the form of questions make of the reader a discoverer instead of a jostled traveller on the highway. Thus the poem is as new as a first edition. The questions reveal the depth of poetic meaning in words and phrases previously overlooked.

It is an ancient Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three  
"By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stoppeth thou me?"  
Why is glittering better than shining or flashing?  
And the coming wind did roar more loud,  
And the sails did sigh like sedge;

And the rain poured down from one black cloud:  
The Moon was at its edge.

Sedge the figure is faint to us, since the word is strange. Recall the sound of wind in rushes, tall grass, or corn.

The loud wind never reached the ship,  
Yet now the ship moved on!  
Beneath the lightning and the Moon  
The dead men gave a groan.

Suppose the wind had reached the ship—would the story have been so effective?

The upper air burst into life!  
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,  
To and fro they were hurried about;  
And to and fro, and in and out,  
The wan stars danced between.

Examine the construction of the second line. Fire-flags is the subject. Sheen is an adjective modifying flags.

Even when the reader does not accept Mr. Bates' reading as in this case where Coleridge clearly means Sheen as a verb, the debt of gratitude for increasing the stimulating effect of a great poem is not lessened.

The footnotes are welcome interpretations of lines which heretofore have been imperfectly understood. They show a knowledge of English poetry that justifies the selection of Mr. Bates by the publishing house as the editor of perhaps the most important long poem in the English language.

Can it be that the water has been rising in the wells and streams of Nebraska every spring, rainless or otherwise, since the creation of the world, or since this part of the country left its desert estate and settlers are just now recognising the phenomenon? Lord Bacon directed man's attention to the study of nature and advised him to proceed from the results of that observation to conclusions. I supposed that everybody except Bushmen, Central African and Chinamen had followed his advice for hundreds of years. Nebraska in a statistical table has less illiteracy to the square inch than any other state in the union. Probably Senator Thurston made up those tables in an uncontrollable ecstasy of patriotism, when he felt that the time had come to increase the debt of the state to him. Otherwise it

is impossible to comprehend the ignorance of real estate agents and bankers who live off of farmers, who subsist on the soil which yields a return only after it has had enough to drink.

The ways of water in Nebraska would not be so mysterious if the height of streams, surface and underground, had been noted and recorded for twenty-five years. The meteorological records and conclusions are valuable of course, but the rainfall is dependant on so many things; comets, the moon, twists in the earth as she rounds a stormy cape in her course, vacuums and such that only the professor of philosophy at the university understands. The streams are to be counted on because they are fed by the snow in the mountains, and there is always snow in the mountains. Part of the melt is meant for Nebraska, but the "pig-dog" of a Colorado shuts the gates and keeps the surface water all to herself in the summer time. There are two ways in which to circumvent our unpleasant neighbor. One way is to slip around (meteorologically) and get between Colorado and the mountains so that we shall be, so far as moisture is concerned, west of Colorado. The other method is to learn the ways of the underground streams, and if the volume of water be sufficient, make reservoirs or lakes which shall supplement or take the place of the rainfall as the weather compels.

The paternal character of our government will be strengthened by republican victory. The people will begin to pay for the privilege of buying what they want, the government will have more money and it may be induced to help Nebraska dam the two ends of a draw to make a reservoir out of. If congress knows beforehand that a national dam will stop Senator Thurston's flow of words Nebraska will surely get it and John Currie can go to work at once on the senator's statue to be set up forever before a grateful people. As John Currie's portrait monuments cannot be said to be speaking likenesses of their models he is the sculptor par excellence for Mr. Thurston.

Eleonora Duse has decided to go to Chicago. She will appear there about April 6. She swore on her crucifix last year that she would never again play there. No one so great has ever snubbed Chicago before. It let her words go but determined that Duse should appear in the "Auditorium" before she left the country. Chicago is like Athens—ancient Athens. Every citizen is proud of living there, wherever he is, his city worship is apparent. The citizens are a unit of devotion to the city's interest. Ridicule or disparagement of its intellectual or artistic ability is a reflection that the rich men have given millions to make undeserved. The spirit of Chicago has decided to be bigger, cleverer, more beautiful than New York. Duse, with her crucifix to help her, cannot overcome circumstances such as Chicago has made to force her to take back what she said about it and the Italian comes.

"In the Fire of the Forge," by Georg Ebers, translated from the German by Mary T. Safford, is a romance of Nuremberg in the thirteenth century. Nuremberg was one of the famous "free cities" of Germany, where the burghers formed the habits of mind which developed in Germany into constitutional thinking and in England and America into free institutions.

The translation is a poor one. The construction of the sentence in many places is obscure. The verb lingers

perilously near the end of the sentence at times and sometimes even falls off the edge into hopeless, obscure Teutonica.

Ebers' romances of German life are heavy—for romances. As essays on the rewards that virtue wins, or as a historical comment on the comparative comfort of the XIX and the XIII centuries they are instructive, and so far as I know accurate. Also he may have written a novel of contemporary domesticity. German young ladies speak of his novels as delightful, exciting, though forbidden romance. He is the Zola and Daudet to their sheltered imaginations. If he had written a "romance" of modern German life it is only maedchen that can read it. Armor, jousts, the torture chamber, linkboys, robber knights are fascinating in themselves. Plain Frau Schmidt and her man, as nobody's vassals and only desiring to settle Fraulein Schmidt comfortably in life can not be made interesting. Therefore it is safe to say Herr Ebers has not told a tale where he could not use the "properties" of the middle ages.

"In the Fire of the Forge" is too long. The action is impeded by the author's explanations, applause, remonstrances. He is a guide that gets in front of that which you have crossed the ocean to see. He is afraid his own eloquence may be unnoticed. A course of Tourgenieff or Dostoiivsky might make Ebers' style less opaque; though the transparency of the Russian seems to be unattainable by any other nation. A German novelist is a contradiction in terms. A towering egotist can not write of another's life from the inside. Fancy Emperor William writing a romance! There are real Germans, perhaps, who are not obstinate egotists. To be sure the Emperor is an exaggeration of the national character. But the literature of the unselfconscious German is not familiar to American readers.

The book under consideration is without humour, without "the light that never was on sea or land," without style, nor has it much plot. It has interesting historical incident, costume, topography and an occasional clever touch of masculine characterization. The women do not move themselves. A man has made them to suit himself so they please no one else. S. B. H.

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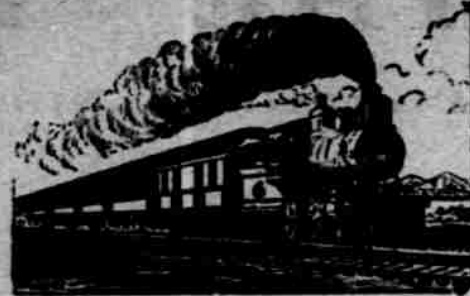
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