

YALE LITERATURE.

A Noteworthy Work.

"The Christ of Cynewulf" Edited, with Introduction, Notes and a Glossary, by Professor Albert S. Cook. Ginn & Co., Boston, 1900.

"If this book, by illustrating somewhat more perfectly the meaning of a noble piece of Old English poetry, should do something to remove this unfounded and unfortunate prejudice, I shall not regret the labor which, after all, has been its own abundant reward."

With this protest against the frivolous reproach urged against Old English, that it had no literature "worthy of the name," Professor Cook announces the purpose of his volume. It is a somewhat modest introduction to perhaps the most painstaking and certainly the most important contribution in this field, by unquestionably the first authority in this country. To the infinite pains, the minute and laborious scholarship, the 103 pages of introductory matter and the 228 pages of notes and glossary, as against 64 pages of text, abundantly testify. Certainly no stone has been left unturned to make this edition, if not final, at least a despair to those who may take up this particular work at any future time.

It is in a sense unfortunate that some of the most choice results published in the Introduction should have been given to the world before; namely, the discovery of the sources of Part Three, in "Modern Language Notes" in June, 1889, and the more recent discovery of the sources of the first part, published in 1897. These, if we are not mistaken, are the most important side lights yet thrown upon this poem of Cynewulf. But their incorporation in the introduction of this volume places them where they should be, side by side with the text and interpretative of it. These contributions are, however, not the less important because heretofore published, and especially, as thus collated, they throw an important light upon Cynewulf as an exponent of mediæval Christianity.

To Professor Cook's estimate of Cynewulf, the layman will certainly demur, although it is certainly not unqualified, as witness the following: "The fault of Cynewulf is in harmony with the tendency of the Old English poets in general, a tendency to dwell too much on details, and to neglect the architectonics, and the perspective of the whole. The more intensely a poet feels, the greater is this danger, especially if a sufficient outline has not been provided for him by an author on whom he is dependent." (Introduction, page xc.) The positive assertion which follows will be a revelation to the uninitiated, and will be challenged by those very critics against whom, according to the preface quoted above, the protest is made: "So much may fairly be said without challenging for Cynewulf a comparison with Dante, which he would be unable to sustain. In grasp, in variety, in narrative skill, in development of a difficult thought, in architectonic power, Cynewulf is absolutely inferior; but in compunction, gratitude, hope, love, awe and tenderness, he belongs to the same order; and in his sense of the sublime and the ability to convey it to his readers, he need not shrink from a comparison with either Dante or Milton,—in other words, with the very prophets of the sublime among the poets of Christianity." The careful reader will doubtless admit that Professor Cook has left nothing undone to make out his case.

Of the Notes and Glossary little need be said and all of it in praise. No one at all acquainted with the condition of Old English scholarship here and abroad can help praising the more than German thoroughness. Not less re-

markable is the English luminousness. It is one thing to do a laboriously complete piece of research; it is quite another to present the results of it in an orderly and lucid form. It will be interesting to note how nearly Professor Cook's followers in this series of Old and Middle English texts can approach to this standard of excellence.

Following Professor Lounsbury's monumental work on Chaucer, Professor Beer's "History of Romanticism," and Professor Cross's "Development of the English Novel," this volume will add, if that were necessary, to the reputation of the English Department at Yale.

A Good Story.

"Some folks," Calhoun used to say, want to know everything before they've done anything. Why, Bennie, you don't know two and two make four till you've put 'em together. Why? Because they don't make four till you've put 'em together.

"But you know they will make four," I would answer for the argument.

"Well," he would say, "I've known a two and two that was as good as a dozen. And I've known another two and that two was worse than nothing."

"That was an odd man whom I never understood."

"But I think if I were to choose one man to go with into the wilderness, it would be Calhoun and no other; and I suppose that is one kind of friendship as the old poets declare. For the matter of knowing and doing, it is good arithmetic for a man to know how to put two and two together so as to make whatever he needs. That is Ben Cree's saying, the sense of which he learned from

[Continued on page 318.]

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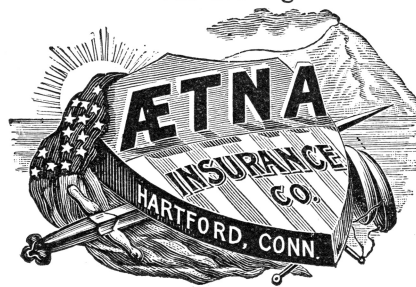
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