

ARTICLE V.

"THE TWO LORD LYTTONS."

[Extract from the *Thirty-fifth Century* for March, A.D. 3405.]

THROUGH the courtesy of the publishers we have received an "advance-copy" of a book which is expected to be issued in a short time, and which is likely to make a sensation in literary and scholarly circles. The book is entitled "The Two Lord Lyttons," and its author is Professor Peter Nisbet, who worthily fills the chair of English Literature in the University of Kilmarnock.

We understand that Professor Nisbet intended, at first, to devote his life to the criticism of the Old Testament. With this object in view he studied for some years at the University of Leipzig, where, indeed, he took his degree of Ph.D., and where he acquired those vigorous, remorseless methods of Highest Criticism which he is now applying to the study of English literature.

Though Professor Nisbet has now deserted the field of Old Testament criticism for the wider plains of English literature, still he did not leave that well-cultivated Oriental field without taking from its teeming bosom some fruits of his toil. The monograph which he published on "The Five Jeremiahs" was regarded, at the time it appeared, as showing great critical ingenuity and skill.

Since Professor Nisbet was called to fill his present post in the University of Kilmarnock he has made a special study of that somewhat tangled and perplexing period of English lit-

erary history — the nineteenth century. And this book on "The Two Lord Lyttons" is the first-fruits of his labours in that field.

Now five novels have come down from the nineteenth century under the name of Lord Lytton, — "Paul Clifford," "Eugene Aram," "The Caxtons," "My Novel," and "What will He do with It?" Professor Nisbet has examined these novels, and he says, decidedly and without hesitation, that the same man could not possibly have written all these books. There must have been two hands at the work. One hand wrote "Paul Clifford" and "Eugene Aram"; another hand wrote "The Caxtons," "My Novel," and "What will He do with It?"

The Professor gives detailed proof in support of this verdict. He shows how utterly different in conception and in execution are these two sets of novels. "Paul Clifford" and "Eugene Aram" are lurid tales of crime and retribution. "The Caxtons," "My Novel," and "What will He do with It?" are quiet stories, full of a placid ease, a calm contentment, an innocent guilelessness.

Professor Nisbet, having first shown that it is absolutely certain that two authors have been at work in the composition of these tales, then goes on to show who these different authors were. He decides that they are both entitled to the name and title of Lord Lytton. One is the father, the other is the son. The father wrote "Paul Clifford" and "Eugene Aram," the son wrote the other three novels.

The Professor holds that the first Lord Lytton was a London police magistrate. He shows conclusively that only a man who had an intimate knowledge of crime and of its detection and punishment could have written "Paul Clifford" and "Eugene Aram." And who more likely to have acquired such

a knowledge than one who had sat on the bench of a London criminal court? But the Professor has an indubitable proof from "Paul Clifford" itself that the author of that sensational tale was a London police magistrate. At the end of the preface to "Paul Clifford" is the word "Knebworth," just as in the same place in "Eugene Aram" there is the word "London." Of course any untrained eye can see this word and say, "Ah, 'Knebworth.' No doubt that is the name of the place where Lord Lytton wrote this preface." But now comes in scholarly insight, trained in the school of the Highest Criticism. Professor Nisbet examines this word "Knebworth," and lo! there looms out of the unsuggestive-looking dissyllable a bright light which reveals the secret of the profession of the author of "Paul Clifford." "'Knebworth,' the Professor repeats to himself, "'the worth of a kneb.' Now, what is a 'kneb'?"

Then from the fullness of his archæological lore the Professor shows us that in the slang of the London criminal classes in the nineteenth century a "beak" meant a police magistrate (cf. Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, chap. viii.). The Professor also points out that in the Scottish vernacular of the same period the nose of a human being or the beak of a bird was indicated by the word "neb"; and as, further on in his book, Dr. Nisbet shows that the author of "Paul Clifford" was of Scottish descent, it is certain that he would be quite aware of the significance of the word "neb." With a playful translation of the London slang word into its Northern equivalent, the police magistrate named his country house by a word which indicated the professional source of the money by means of which he acquired this residence, the "k" being prefixed so as not to make the origin of the name too obvious.

We have just mentioned that Professor Nisbet shows that the author of "Paul Clifford" was of Scottish descent. He also points out that Bulwer Lytton was the family name, and that Bulwer and Buller are evidently forms of the same name. Then he claims for his authors that they are descended from the well-known Northern family, the Bullers of Buchan — a family which, as a family, is now quite extinct, and survives only in the name of the curious archway of rock in the Northeast of Scotland, whose origin has afforded endless discussion to antiquarians, though we understand that there is now a general consensus of opinion among these erudite gentlemen that this singular structure was cut out of the solid rock in order to celebrate the homecoming of a bride whom one of the heads of the Buller family brought from over the German Ocean.

As regards the second Lord Lytton, the Professor shows, in a very conclusive fashion, that in his circumstances and manner of life he was the exact antithesis of the author of "Paul Clifford." For while the first Lord Lytton was a man in actual contact with the ugly facts of criminal life and character, the author of "The Caxtons" must have been one who led a peaceful, retired life in some sleepy English village. Indeed, the Professor thinks it likely, though he does not absolutely insist on this point, that the second Lord Lytton was a clergyman.

One of the most brilliant parts of this brilliant book is where the author gives us a graphic picture of this nineteenth-century writer as he sat in his quiet study, penning the tranquil chapters of "My Novel" or "Kenelm Chillingly." This is one of the most impressive scenes in any book we have ever read. The actuality of the picture is almost overpowering. One seems to hear the sound of the old novelist's pen

as he sets down those mellow descriptions of English life, which make up so much of "The Caxtons" and the other stories from the same hand.

A trained critic like Professor Nisbet is always quite conscious of the objections which may be made to his theories, and the critic is usually as ready with his answers to such objections as he is alive to the likelihood of their being brought forward. So when the Professor is contending for his thesis that the second Lord Lytton was a man who lived out of the turmoil of active professional or public life he anticipates that some reader of "The Two Lord Lyttons" may say, "But are not 'My Novel' and 'The Caxtons' and even 'Kenelm Chillingly' full of portraits of politicians and statesmen, and is it not likely that the writer who drew these portraits was himself engaged in public affairs?" But in answer to this objection the Professor, though he allows that it is quite true that the second Lord Lytton writes of public life and public men, yet shows in the most convincing fashion that the author of "The Caxtons" writes of prime ministers and statesmen with the far-away, distant respect, and even awe, with which, from the calm monotony of his rustic study, a shy scholar would look at the great world of politics and its leaders.

In fact, in the descriptions of public life in the novels of the second Lord Lytton, there is, Professor Nisbet points out, a distinct tone of wistful envy, as if the country writer looked with longing on the stirring life of the Senate.

As one studies the Professor's pages, when he comes to treat of the author of "The Caxtons," one wonders that any reader of ordinary intelligence and of average discrimination could ever have imagined that "Paul Clifford" and "My Novel" could possibly have come from the same brain. But incredible is the credulity of the human mind, at least if it has

not been enlightened by a course of training in the school of the Highest Criticism.

Professor Nisbet does not consider that a pure text of the Lytton novels has been preserved. As an instance of this textual corruption, he gives an example from "Kenelm Chillingly." In Book VI. Chapter xii. of that novel this passage occurs (the speaker is Mr. Emlyn, the Vicar): "Not acquainted with Maclean's 'Juvenal'?" said the reverend scholar; "you will be greatly pleased with it—here it is—a posthumous work, edited by George Long. I can lend you Munro's Lucretius, '69. Ah! we have some scholars yet to pit against the Germans."

Now the ordinary, untrained reader, coming across this conversation in "Kenelm Chillingly," would be apt merely to say: "What is the meaning of this sentence in the middle of a novel? It has nothing to do with the progress of the story. It looks like padding."

But a critic like our Professor sees a great deal more in this passage than merely a random filling out of a conversation. In the first place, the Professor discerns distinctly that this passage never had a place in the original text. "How then," the unsophisticated reader may ask, "did the passage get into the book?" The Professor shows in the most convincing fashion how the sentence originated. It was interpolated by some subsequent editor of the volume, in order to advertise the claims of the, evidently, Celtic scholars, judging by their surnames, who are mentioned by the Vicar. Indeed, the Professor goes on to show that this same Editor is not content merely with inserting this sentence in order to push the claims of his Celtic friends. For in this same chapter of "Kenelm Chillingly" the Hero himself is dragged in to glorify some other unknown Northern scholar. Kenelm is made to say to

the Vicar, "But it is by special grace that a real scholar can send forth another real scholar, and a Kennedy produce a Munro."

We are glad to know that Professor Nisbet, having now cleared up the question of the authorship of the Lytton novels, intends to set about giving to the world a purified text of these tales.

Though "The Two Lord Lyttons" treats in detailed fashion of a special group of literary works, still there is scattered through this remarkable book some brilliant generalisations of Highest Critical wisdom. We cannot refrain from giving to our readers some of these gems:—

"The Highest Criticism is not a means, but an end. For the important thing in literature is not the literature itself, but theories and speculations as to its origin. For instance, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are in themselves rather profitless reading. But the criticism of these ancient Greek works is of perennial freshness and of permanent edification.

"Whatever else is right, Tradition must be wrong."

"In matters of historical literary criticism contemporary, or nearly contemporary, evidence is not only valueless, it is positively misleading. The Jews were absolutely ignorant as to the actual origin of their Sacred Books till, twenty centuries or so after these Books were composed, the labours of German and British critics showed how this Semitic literature came into existence."

"In matters of literary criticism the untrained mind cannot see the trees for the wood. To this class of mind a sonnet is merely certain feelings or ideas put into measured language. But to the trained, critical mind a sonnet is instinctively resolved into the nouns and verbs and clauses of which it is made up."

"The great desideratum with regard to ancient literature is a purified text of the various works. That once accomplished it is a relief to know that for literary culture one does not need to go any further. One does not need to study the purified text itself. The important, the edifying and refining, part of the matter, is the process of purification."

But we must not linger longer on this brilliant and enlightening book. We take leave of the author with feelings of

respect and gratitude and hope. He is one of the noble band of devoted scholars who have dedicated their lives to the task of cutting down that foul jungle of prejudice and tradition and ignorance in which are entangled the footsteps of the inexperienced traveller through the realm of ancient literature. All honour to these brave, intrepid pioneers across the desert of the literature of the past. Through their labours the masterpieces of ancient wisdom and beauty are made to stand before us in almost more than their pristine purity, set free, through the cleansing fires of the crucible of the Highest Criticism, from the accretions and corruptions of the intervening centuries.