

MISCELLANEOUS.

A NEW HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE.

There are few signs more indicative of wholesome intellectual progress than the increased interest taken nowadays in the history of national development. The writing of history in the correct sense is a thing of very recent times, it may be said to be a product of the nineteenth century. What passed for history in the good old times was mainly the repetition of stories which might or might not be true. It is only in our days that scholars have been accorded facilities for critically examining state papers and testing in a proper manner the statements of contemporaries.

Herodotus and Tacitus passed for great historians in their time, and so they were in the sense that the man who sets out to tell a story must be able to make it readable, but no historian of to-day would be tolerated who would dare to take up into his pages the yarns which in the days of our fathers passed unchallenged.

It was a German, Niebuhr, who first taught Europe how to write history, and it is to another German, Alfred Stern, that we are indebted for the excellent history of modern Europe which is now appearing (from the press of Wilhelm Herz) in Berlin.¹

The value of critical historical research is particularly manifest in Alfred Stern's third volume, for it is the period when by the consent of the average reader Europe was outwardly uncommonly dead. The great Napoleonic era had closed,—war had apparently come to an end from sheer disgust of fighting, to say nothing of national poverty on all sides. The Holy Alliance had organised a secret trust for the purpose of suppressing every manifestation of public sentiment,—it was a period, throughout Europe no less than America, of internal improvement, of strictly minding one's own affairs.

It is a tame period to the reader who seeks in history only bloodshed and personal monstrosity,—but it is a most precious period to those of us who delight in tracing the growth of an institution or of a national sentiment through the many stages of its evolution. It is in those silent years after the Napoleonic wars that Germany laid the foundation of that Customs Union which has since developed into the Empire of 1871. It was in years of great national distress and poverty that the universities turned out professors and administrators who have enriched their country no less than the world in general by the copiousness of their knowledge.

¹ *Geschichte Europa's seit den Verträgen von 1815 bis zum Frankfurter Frieden von 1871.* Erste Abtheilung. 1815-1830. Vol. III.

It was in just those years of police dullness that liberty was born in the mind of the German public; while history was still, the people had time to think, and the revolution of 1848 followed naturally in the wake of a government which thought that benevolent despotism would reconcile a cultivated people for the loss of civil rights.

The history of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century is one of the most suggestive studies we know of,—principally because questions of administration are so constantly discussed,—because the public mind of Europe is constantly debating the relative merits of republican and monarchical methods. Monarchy had triumphed in appearance,—but in reality its triumph had been purchased at the price of a substantial concession to the spirit of civil liberty.

Europe and America had little to say to each other in those days. In 1818 Spain sought to secure the aid of the Holy Alliance for the purpose of bringing pressure upon the Government of the United States, to prevent us from recognising the independence of the Spanish American republics, but in general Europe little dreamed that across the Atlantic was growing up a vast republican empire which was to serve not merely as a refuge to millions of oppressed subjects but to become in time a force with which every European power would have to reckon sooner or later, whether it wished to or not.

There is no romance like history, if you learn to read between the lines,—and therefore we render this tribute to Alfred Stern.

POULTNEY BIGELOW.

SOME RECENT FRENCH BOOKS ON PHILOSOPHY.

We have recently received from the large publishing house of Félix Alcan, of Paris, several books on philosophy which may contain materials of interest to our readers. The first is by M. Albert Leclère, professor of philosophy in the College of Blois, and is entitled: *Essai critique sur le droit d'affirmer*.¹ The book, which is of course not one intended for unlearned philosophical readers, is an attempt to establish a critical but dogmatic system of metaphysics on the basis of logic alone, by the use of the principle of identity. The author has modernised the doctrine of Parmenides and enumerated all the contradictions inherent in the idea of phenomena and in science considered as a knowledge of objective reality. He has drawn up in this manner a sketch of a system of metaphysics absolutely distinct from science,—a spiritualistic metaphysics which he contends yields directly a system of formal ethics and reconciles all the disagreements of philosophy, science, and religion.

The second work is by the well-known author, M. Félix Le Dantec, lecturer on embryology in the Sorbonne, Paris, and is entitled: *L'unité dans l'être vivant: Essai d'une biologie chimique*.² M. Le Dantec has made a considerable name for himself by his researches in chemical biology, which he has endeavored to raise to the rank of an exact science, eschewing all such theories as those of Weismann, which he claims are now discredited, and developing biological laws from the known facts of physics and chemistry. He remarks that if we were called upon to choose between two astronomies, one assuming the single but comprehensive principle of Newton and the other attributing to each planet the specific property of

¹ Pages, 263. Price, 5 francs.

² Pages, 412. Price, 7 francs 50.